



OCULUS

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M E R R Y C H R I S T M A S

FRESH MEADOWS

At an after dinner meeting sponsored by the Committee on Architectural Criticism and Aesthetics on November 22, Fresh Meadows, the New York Life Insurance Company's latest housing development, was presented to a large group of Chapter members by Perry Coke Smith of Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith, architects for the project.

With the aid of sixty Kodachrome slides and prompted by numerous questions from the floor, Mr. Smith explained the reasons behind the design of this huge project which includes apartments for 3080 families, garages for more than 1300 cars, a theater, a nursery school, a boiler plant and a comprehensive shopping center.

The apartment buildings are of three types, bar shaped two story duplexes, U shaped three story walk-ups, and double cross shaped thirteen story towers, to provide a variety of accommodations and rent levels. The taller buildings provide the lower rental accommodations and free some 18 acres for playfields and parks. The pleasing effect of the project as a whole results from a well studied interrelation of the masses of the various types of buildings, which are in general constructed of red brick in graded shades with casement windows, white trim and occasional random limestone ornamentation.

On the whole there was more curiosity than criticism in the discussion period, although considerable controversy arose as to whether the thirteen story buildings could not have been improved functionally and aesthetically by separating the two double cross buildings into four single crosses. Other points criticized, such as the location of the nursery school on the main artery, were shown to be the results of practical or site conditions not within the control of the architects, such as the location of the main city traffic artery through the middle of the project. Emphasis was made that the project was not planned theoretically in a vacuum, and that perhaps even the crossing of a busy street by school children is not an unmixed disadvantage as they must sooner or later learn to cope with many such hazards, which are in fact normal parts of their environment.

Chairman Schwartzman, of the Committee of Architectural Criticism and Aesthetics, asked for comment on whether such meetings in the future should stress aesthetic and philosophic criticism more than the technical aspects which were the primary subjects of this meeting. Suggestions will be welcomed as to the type of project and the nature of the discussion which Chapter members would like this Committee to conduct in the future.

FEE CUTTING

"I have just read through the November, 1949, issue of OCULUS, and note with considerable interest the article on "Ethics, or Good Business?"

I have been fortunate, on a number of occasions, to be able to convince clients that the minimum fees as prescribed by the A.I.A. Code of Ethics, and as requested by me, were justifiable, as against a much lower scale of fees as requested by some of my colleagues.

I find, however, that the offenders who cut their fees are definitely not confined to non-members of the A.I.A. On the contrary, I have encountered competition among the A.I.A. members which was entirely criticizable along the lines of the article.

I certainly feel something should be done to eliminate this practice, at least among the members of the American Institute of Architects and the New York Society of Architects.

Your very truly,
(Signed) S. Brian Baylinson".

The statement, expressed in the above letter, that competition through fee cutting is engaged in by some A.I.A. members, despite our Code of Ethics, is undoubtedly all too true.

What can be done about it? The minimum fees scheduled by the A.I.A. are recommendations only, and cannot in fact be mandatory without violating the law. The suggestion has been made that it might be possible to exert moral pressure for adherence to the recommended minimum fees, but what sort of pressure would be effective, or legal? Would it be desirable to make public specific examples of fee cutting, and if so how would such examples become known unless perhaps some procedure for recording contracts were established.

Perhaps it would be advantageous if more cases of adherence to the recommended schedules of fees were given wide publicity, as suggested in the November OCULUS. Many skeptical architects are surprised to learn that their fellow architects get full fees. They are, strangely enough, more prone to listen to those who whisper that the A.I.A. Schedule is a joke. This educational approach might even be carried further if reputable architects were willing to make the reporting of their fees a common practice.

If there is to be any progress made in eliminating fee cutting, with its inevitable lowering of the quality of professional services rendered, every possibility should be explored. To this end contributions of practical examples or theoretical suggestions will be welcomed by the OCULUS.

SPECIALIZATION

On November 10 President Kilham conducted another of a series of roundtable meetings with groups of new members. Aside from the obvious function of acquainting the new members with various phases of the Chapter's organization, this meeting, like the President's previous roundtable meetings reported in the OCULUS, was most successful in developing informal discussion of a number of problems of vital concern to all chapter members.

Of perhaps greatest interest was the feeling that there is building up in the public's mind the impression that architects should be classified in group according to their specialties.

It was felt that every effort should be made to put across the idea that the architect is a person trained to do almost any type of building and that breadth of practice, in itself, tends to result in better architecture throughout an architect's entire range of practice.

This has long been the contention of many thoughtful architects who have deplored the all too common emphasis upon specialization. It brings up the question of why has so much specialization occurred. Certainly specialization is easier for the architect who may be tempted to reuse for many jobs the detailed knowledge and perhaps even the solution developed for one, with consequent saving in time, money and brainwork. But in solving the same type of problem over and over again doesn't an architect run the danger of losing the fresh analytical approach and the balance resulting from studying and solving a wide variety of problems?

Why has the public come to expect, even to demand specialization? Is it not largely because the specialists have "sold" the idea as a way of creating and retaining an advantage in a particular field? How often every architect is met with the statement that he cannot be considered for a job unless he has recently done a similar one, although his studies of the latest developments in this and other fields may qualify him admirably for the job, perhaps much better than a specialist who may have fallen into a rut.

Architects who feel strongly that their training and practice fit them to solve a wide variety of problems should become vocal in educating the public in this matter, as vocal in fact as are the specialists whose philosophy they oppose.

They should be watchdogs to see that the listing and cataloging of skills, however necessary for practical administrative purposes, does not result in limiting our fields of activity, or still worse in having the public think that we are endorsing such limitation. For financial satisfaction let them take heart in the fact that a specialist whose field dries up is worse off than the architect with a varied practice. And lest they despair of selling the public on the value of a broad non-specialized analytical approach, whatever the problem, let them remember that one distinguished architect recently was awarded the commission for a large job because he had never before designed a building of that kind, and accordingly his analytical faculties would be unhampered by preconceived ideas!

GOLD MEDAL

Sir Patrick Abercrombie, M.A., Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and internationally known British architect and town planner, is to be awarded the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects.

Ralph Walker, President of the A.I.A., said that Sir Patrick was selected to receive the Gold Medal by unanimous vote of the Board of Directors at its November meeting. The Gold Medal, highest honor The Institute can bestow, will be presented at a ceremony following the annual dinner held in connection with the 82nd A.I.A. Convention in Washington, D.C., next May 10-13.

The award to Sir Patrick Abercrombie was made in recognition of his distinguished contribution to the profession of architecture and regional planning. Sir Patrick, who is the sixth foreign architect to receive the Gold Medal of the A.I.A. since it was established in 1906, is an outstanding architect, town planner, writer, and teacher. He is internationally known for his leadership in civic design and urban planning in England. He was the Royal Gold Medallist in 1946.

When making the announcement of this award, Mr. Walker said: "By his teaching and the publication of numerous books on city and urban planning, Sir Patrick has exerted an influence far beyond the confines of the British Isles. His plans for replanning Dublin, Bath, and Greater London have especially been noteworthy for their understanding and development of human scale in relation to life in great cities."

NEW STATE BUILDING CODE

The Commission, recently appointed by Governor Dewey to draft a modern building code, is empowered to adopt rules and regulations which will constitute a new code for the State of New York, relating to the construction of all buildings, the installation of equipment therein, the standards or requirements for materials to be used, and to provision for safety and sanitation. The code may be used by builders as an alternative to the requirements of local building laws and ordinances, unless expressly rejected by a particular municipality.

Governor Dewey, in announcing the appointments, said: "Regardless of inflation or deflation, of periods of prosperity or depression, the one cost in our living which has risen steadily, and stubbornly resists lowering, is that of housing. Modern revamping of ancient building codes will permit the creative imagination of our people to be turned loose to reduce the cost of homes."

The importance of the work of this new Commission cannot be over-emphasized and architects may look forward to some blue sky through the present cloud of conflicting laws and confused terminology of ancient and obsolete local codes. Members of the Commission are: Edward J. McGrew, Jr., Chairman, former Commissioner of Public Works for New York, George Bain Cummings, A.I.A., William Lescaze, A.I.A., Walker S. Lee, former Superintendent of Buildings of Rochester, and Ralph A. Lehr, County Attorney of Erie County.

PARTNERS BEWARE!

The Chapter's attorney, Nathan Walker, has called our attention to a recent case in New Jersey involving a New York architectural firm of two partners, both of whom were licensed to practice in New York but only one of whom was licensed to practice in New Jersey. The contract for architectural services, which was in the standard A.I.A. form, was executed in the State of New Jersey by the owner and the two architectural partners doing business under their firm name. The project for which the architectural services were performed was located in New Jersey.

Presumably as a result of action brought by the architects to collect their fee, the owner contended that since one member of the firm was not licensed in New Jersey, the action should be dismissed. The architects contended that inasmuch as one member was licensed in New Jersey, the failure of the other partner to secure a license in that state was no bar to a recovery, particularly since the latter was qualified and licensed to practice in New York. Furthermore, while they conceded that the partner not licensed in New Jersey performed certain services within that state, the architects maintained that such services were performed at the request and under the supervision of the partner who was licensed in New Jersey.

The New Jersey law provides not only that any person who shall pursue the practice of architecture in the state, or shall engage in the state in the business of preparing plans, specifications and preliminary data for the erection or alteration of any building... or use the title of architect or registered architect or advertise or use any title, sign, card or device to indicate that he is an architect without a certificate thereof... shall be liable to a penalty, but also provides that any single act or transaction shall constitute engaging in business or the practice of architecture within the meaning of the law.

The court dismissed the action, ruling that the client was entitled to the services of each member of the architectural firm since he had retained the partnership, and construing the law to mean that since one partner was not licensed in New Jersey, the contract for architectural services, being joint, was unenforceable. As a result the architectural firm, though acting in good faith, suffered a substantial loss.

The licensing question in the case is of great importance to the entire architectural profession since, in the opinion of the Chapter's counsel, there is reason to believe that other courts, when called upon to decide similar cases, may reach the same conclusion as the New Jersey Court. Repetition of this case can be avoided by concerted action on the part of all A.I.A. Chapters to bring about the amendment of the laws in their states to provide that if a client retains two or more architects as partners or associates it is sufficient if one of them is licensed in the particular state provided that the others are registered in some other state. After all, the argument that such an amendment would not protect architects of the state in question against "outsiders" works both ways!

CATALOGUE FILING SERVICE

Members' attention is called to the catalogue filing plan offered by Architects & Engineers Service, 101 Park Avenue, New York 17. This is a complimentary service to architects, financed by the manufacturers of building materials and equipment, and consists of regular periodical visits by representatives who bring complete sets of the latest catalogues to architects' offices and file those in which they are interested, using the A. I. A. filing system except where a different system is preferred.

On their calls, the representatives also file material which the architect has received through other channels and replace any that has been taken out to use on the drafting boards or to give to a client. All material is dated and numbered, and no catalogues of any age are thrown away without the architect's permission.

The Service has been in effect in southern California for over fifteen years and is endorsed and subscribed to by 1200 architects and engineers. About 200 manufacturers, many of national reputation, support the Service.

OPPORTUNITY

Under the date of October 21 and over the names of the Chairmen of the Public Relations and Speakers Committees, a circular requesting information as to their availability as lecturers was sent to all members of this Chapter. A certain number of answers has been received, but it is obvious that the great majority of us fail to appreciate the tremendous range of opportunities for self-expression and for instruction of the public inherent in the broadly-sketched program for talks before civic groups and for radio and television appearances or in the minutely specific list of suggested subjects.

Surely some architect among us must be willing, if not actually eager, to explain the fine points of difference between Corset Stores and Lingerie Showrooms. Is there no one in all our large membership yearning to proclaim the story of his experiences in Bars and Taverns or in Mortuaries and Mausoleums? If you specialize in the design of Conservatories for Homes costing less than \$10,000, now is the time to give the world the benefits of the knowledge you have acquired. Animal-lovers throughout this state are crying for more Fisheries and more Stables. Has no one any ideas on the subject of attractive low-cost housing for our homeless horses?

The mimeographed list accompanying the circular under discussion is by no means exhaustive. The present writer recently encountered an architect who has for many years confined himself exclusively to the design of enclosed tennis courts, and another field not mentioned is that represented by the exquisite pavilions at the corners of the garden of the Governors' Palace at Williamsburg. What else can you think of? This is your chance to force a helpless audience to listen to your favorite architectural theories. Do not hesitate; this may be the turning-point in your progress to fame and fortune. Perhaps you will find that you are ideal radio or television material.

STATE ASSOCIATION

The New York State Association of Architects, of which this Chapter has been a member since the inception of the Association, has now been recognized by the A.I.A. as its Statewide representative. This is an added reason why our members should become more familiar with the work of the Association and the advantages of unification within the State.

The prime function of the Association is to represent the architects of the State in matters of State-wide concern to architects, and particularly to speak before the Legislature with one strong unified voice.

In order to cooperate as closely as possible with the Association, the Executive Committee of the Chapter has appointed one of its own members, Harry M. Prince, to serve as a Director of the Association, representing the Chapter until the close of the 1950 Convention. It has also appointed Richard Roth, Chairman of our Legislative Committee, as a member of the corresponding group in the Association. As a further effort to strengthen our relations, the President of this Chapter has suggested to the President of the State Association, Henry V. Murphy, that we be represented on its other major committees during the coming year.

This Chapter pays sizable dues to the State Association and, by reason of its large membership, could be the most influential unit, but it is felt that most of our members are insufficiently aware of the affiliation, and they have hitherto shown less interest than those of other chapters. Any members having in mind suggestions which they feel should become the subject of resolutions suitable for presentation before the next convention are urged to submit their ideas to the President as soon as possible. In the past such action has often been put off until too late for many worthwhile proposals to reach the floor.

SMALL HOUSE COMMITTEE

The Small House Committee of which John Hancock Callender is chairman, has undertaken the consideration of the following subjects:

1. Clinic: Study methods whereby architectural services can be made available to the individual who wants to build a low or medium cost house. Review history of other attempts to solve this problem. Make recommendations to the Chapter for action, accompanied, if possible, by detailed plans for the organization and operation of a "small house clinic".
2. Speculative houses: Study means of convincing speculative builders that they should employ architects (good architects) and pay a full fee. Study means of convincing public they should demand architect-designed houses.
3. Economics of small house practice: Study methods used by financially successful offices in small house field.
4. Criticism: Consider desirability of organizing a seminar or other informal discussion meeting on small house design, perhaps including visits to some of the actual houses.
5. Cooperation with other committees, particularly Public Relations and Professional Practice Committees in regard to point one and two above.

The work of the Committee thus far has been con-

finied to the first of these subjects. At the first meeting, it was generally agreed that an effort should be made to make available to the public architectural services on small house work which is below the economic limits of the normal office practice. Various stock plan and limited service proposals were discussed.

At the second meeting, it was unanimously agreed that no scheme based on stock plans would be considered further. The general sentiment of this meeting favored the setting up of a panel made up of any Chapter members who wish to participate, the preparation of a book of samples of the work of each panel member, and the offering of general consulting service at a stipulated hourly fee. The specific details of such a scheme are now being worked out.

REGISTRATION LECTURES

Three of the series of talks to draftsmen preparing for their registration examinations have been completed to date. This branch of the Education Committee's work has proven one of the most popular activities of the Chapter. Arthur S. Douglass, Jr., who has taken charge of the lectures this year, reports a large and enthusiastic audience, joining in healthy discussion periods following each speaker's talk.

This service is offered free to any and all draftsmen in the metropolitan area and the Committee has spared no efforts to get top-flight speakers on each subject.

We hope you still have the announcement of these talks on your bulletin board for the benefit of your unregistered draftsmen or their friends who may be interested in coming to the remaining talks in the series.

CANDIDATES

According to the By-Laws of the Chapter, names of candidates for membership shall be submitted to all members before consideration by the Committee on Admissions. Information received regarding the qualifications of the following candidates will be considered confidential:

Corporate Membership

Thomas McLain Boyd

Sponsors: Santiago Iglesias & Henry Klumb (Puerto Rico)

John M. Hodgdon

Sponsors: John H. Bennett & James R. Thomson

Leo Kornblath

Sponsors: Robert I. Carson & Charles F. Mink

Edgar A. Tafel

Sponsors: Henry S. Churchill & Leonard Scheer

Associate Membership

Norman De Santes

Sponsors: William E. Kohn & Nathan A. Seiderman

Richard F. Eggers

Sponsors: Daniel P. Higgins & George S. Holderness

Jose Louis Sert

Sponsors: Jacob Moscowitz & Paul Schulz

Edward Leroy Sheldon

Sponsors: Max H. Foley & Perry Coke Smith

John G. Steinle

Sponsors: Jack B. Basil & William H. Sypher

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