

# OCULUS

NEW YORK CHAPTER AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS



JANUARY 1962

## ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION IN NEW YORK

*Is it possible . . . Is it worth-while?*

by W. KNIGHT STURGES

The destruction of historically and architecturally significant buildings may indeed be short sighted from a civic point of view and even from the point of ultimate financial return. The basic trouble today, as always, is that patriotic sentiment is slow to take shape and artistic awareness is often hard to arouse when buildings only a few decades old, such as the Pennsylvania and Grand Central Stations, are threatened.

If we look for a moment at what Williamsburg, Virginia was 40 years ago—when street cars ran down the middle of Duke of Gloucester Street and telegraph wires disfigured what vistas remained—we get some idea of what historic preservation can mean to a community.

But how does this apply to a great city like New York? Here a metropolis is forced by economic pressures virtually to rebuild itself every 40 years. It is precisely this activity which makes our city such a fascinating one to live in and such a hard one to preserve. However, when we look at the rebuilding cycle more closely we begin to appreciate the peculiar anatomy of our urban milieu and realize that in spite of wholesale destruction many areas have survived from former eras. It is imperative that these be recognized for what they are, and should not be allowed to deteriorate through slow erosion.

The best known of these, of course, is Greenwich Village. In addition several Squares, including Washington, Stuyvesant, Tompkins, and Gramercy Park, have at least retained something of a neighborhood character. Less known is the fact that the entire area from Washington Square as far south as Barclay Street, today a wholesale area, has scarcely changed since Civil War times. Many fine examples of cast iron fronts are to be found in this area, and the recent refurbishing of Worth and

Thomas Streets bears testimony that this architecture, so important in a technological sense and so markedly nineteenth century in character, is beginning to be understood. Another area overlooked in the city's northward march is that between Twenty-third Street and Union Square. Still another, at the north end of Lafayette Street, includes the old Astor Library Building, the Seabury-Treadwell house and, in semi-dilapidated condition, A. J. Davis' elegant Greek Revival Colonnade Row. Above all other areas in the city this one cries for renewal and preservation.

We have spoken thus far of neighborhoods. Individual buildings like the old Tiffany's and Russek's on Fifth Avenue at 37th St. have suffered shocking disfigurement. In the case of the latter the entire effect of the building has been spoiled by worthless "improvements" at street level. This is admittedly a small matter when we consider the over-all picture but one wonders if a new fashion or trend in merchandising might not emphasize the positive value of our landmarks and instill pride in their new occupants without destroying their merchandising value.

Now, what can be done about all this? First of all, and basic to

any action, is public interest. Neighborhood associations have sprung up throughout the city. The recent action to prevent the splitting in two of Washington Square by a depressed roadway is indicative of what public pressure can do towards preserving a neighborhood. Another example is the action taken in Murray Hill to prevent the widening of 36th St., a casualty which would have entailed moving back or totally removing the fence in front of the Morgan Library. At the present moment citizens' groups are attempting to save the Jefferson Market Courthouse in The Village.

In spite of what has been done in the past, actual accomplishments have been tragically few. Individual groups of "alarmed" citizens have been unable to stem the overpowering tide of progress. Let us hope that the Mayor's newly appointed committee of 13 which includes among others **Harmon Goldstone, Geoffrey Platt, and Frederick J. Woodbridge**, will be able to stiffen the resistance to the wholesale destruction of the few remaining residential neighborhoods and of those isolated but outstanding examples of the architecture of a bygone age which still remain.

To quote Justice Frankfurter, "*Tradition is not a barren pride in a dead glory. Tradition is something that provides refreshment for the spirit; it is something that gives us deep assurance and a sense of destiny, and a determination to hold fast to the great things that have been done through valor and imagination by those who have gone before us.*"



# OCULUS

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AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS  
NEW YORK CHAPTER

MARGOT A. HENKEL, *Executive Secretary*  
115 East 40th Street  
New York 16, N. Y.  
MUrray Hill 9-7969

FREDERICK J. WOODBRIDGE ..... *President*  
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## LETTERS

Sirs:

Your matter-of-fact description of "Fallout Shelter Analysis" in the November issue is a most depressing note in an otherwise revitalized Chapter newsletter.

The basic moral question of whether shelters should be built by individuals or groups, or at all, has not even been touched upon. I am personally so violently opposed to all forms of shelters, that it shocks me to see this kind of off-hand publicity for their construction. The construction of them in any appreciable number is an aggressive act which might become, in effect, the trigger to the ultimate war.

You must realize that the mere announcement of this course in the official organ of the New York Chapter, is a back-hand endorsement of the "principle" of fallout shelters. Is it so intended?

Norval White

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In printing "Courses Available in Fallout Shelter Analysis," OCULUS had no intention of taking a stand on any aspect of fallout shelter protection. It was merely reporting a program which is and will be taking place on the initiative of the Defense Department in Washington.

While we realize that some members are morally opposed to the program, we are also mindful of others who warmly support it, and, of course, of all our members who wish to be informed of what is taking place.—ED.

## BOOKS

"Architecture and the Esthetics of Plenty" — by James Marston Fitch. Columbia University Press, 1961. 304 pp. Illus. \$7.50.

In discussing the dilemmas of the American consumer of today, Professor Fitch proposes that he apply some of the spare time made possible by today's labor-saving machines to a "mastering of the broad and general" rather than the "narrow and special" of this world. Only thus, says Fitch in the last of eighteen essays in this book, can life gain meaning from the human experience, which, in earlier ages, "made wise and competent adults of the simplest peasant and fisherman."

The emphasis on man and his well-being is deliberate, emphatic, and typical of this careful analysis of American architecture, its quantities, its qualities, and its conflicts. Even in tracing the "paradox of plenty" back to Greenough and Jefferson, Fitch relates design to the human being, whether it is in Jefferson's labor-saving machines at Monticello, Catharine Beecher's study for a movable storage wall, or Frank Lloyd Wright's combination of the new labor-saving ideas into a unique architectural expression.

The eighteen essays, which were published separately in the past few years, are combined in this book as though they had been planned together. Fitch groups them under four basic headings.

I. "As The Twig Is Bent" analyses the dominant qualities of our architecture—the most unique of which is the capacity to mass-produce a *modified* version of an item or system to meet the esthetic standards of the American people—and stresses the importance of handling our modern technology in a rational manner.

II. "Giants in the Land" describes the individuals of the past and the present who have contributed most to the development of American architecture, from Greenough and Jefferson through Sullivan and Wright to Mies and Gropius.

III. "The Field of Vision" focuses on four challenges to the

architects of today: the pleasure garden, the skyscraper, the city, and a most interesting challenge of completing "The Unfinished Church" of St. John the Divine.

IV. In "Problems of the Day" the engineer, historian and architectural critic fall under Fitch's verbal fire. "Structural inventiveness" says Fitch "is the captive of the handbook and rationalized mass production." Banister Fletcher's "History of Architecture on the Comparative Method" is not only obsolete, it is "actually harmful." In a similar vein he states that some contemporary architectural critics "handle the materials of history with the standards of the society gossip columnist." The last essay of this group, "The Esthetics of Plenty" is a call for not only the "reconstruction of human society to conform to the new realities of industrial abundance" but also the reconstruction of "human consciousness as well."

Well researched, well written, with a plentiful supply of good photographs well related to the text, this book should prove rewarding to the layman and thought-provoking to the professional.

Robert Beattie

## MATERIAL NEEDED FOR CHAPTER PR FILE

In late November, all Chapter members were requested by Chapter Public Relations Counsel Jack Bernstein to help build up a file of material that can be drawn upon in publicizing the activities of the Chapter and its members.

All or any of the following is required: 1) brief data on your firm — building type specialties, current and future projects, unique design and structural developments; 2) copies of papers written or remarks delivered on any architectural subject (whenever possible prior to the event); 3) an indication of availability for interviews regarding your building-type specialty or general topics of architecture.

No information will be used without your clearance. Data and papers should be sent to Jack Bernstein Associates, Inc., 37 West 57th St., New York 19, N. Y.



## BRUNNER APPLICATIONS DUE JANUARY 15

Deadline for Brunner Scholarship applications is January 15. Subject titles of previous Brunner awards are listed on page 62 of the 1961 Membership Directory; to illustrate further the scope of subjects which have also been eligible for the \$5,000 grant in the past, OCULUS herewith lists proposals that have been runners-up and/or alternates in recent years:

"Designing for Human Safety"; A revised version of the "Planning and Community Appearance" study bearing on legislation, relation of design plan to master plan, and zoning; "The Practice, Teaching, and Learning of Architecture"; "Office practice: is architecture to be a profession of a business?"; Architectural Site Planning; Design and Criteria of City Planning: another look at the city at its well-spring in Italy; Principles of Composition essential to the creation of architecture; Public Education in Architecture and Planning: a book for high school students on the esthetics of the urban scene and the problems of shaping environment; A laboratory approach to the subject of structure in the architectural curriculum; "A Method of Analysis and Synthesis for Architectural Design"; An investigation of structural and design advances that have contributed to the progress of U. S. architecture.

## LeBRUN TRAVELING SCHOLARSHIP FOR 1962

The Chapter, trustee under the will of Napoleon Eugene LeBrun, awards every second year a stipend of \$3,000 for travel outside the U. S. for the study of architecture.

Qualifications: U. S. citizenship and residence, Age 23 through 30 years, Architectural office experience of at least 1½ years, Beneficiary of no other traveling scholarship, Nomination by a Corporate member of the AIA.

Subject of Competition: Architects' Headquarters Bldg.

Program available January 15—Rendu March 7, 1962.

Requests for nomination forms are now being received by: Chairman, LeBrun Committee, N. Y. Chapter, AIA, 115 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.

## COMING EVENTS

JANUARY 16	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Technical Committee Lecture: "Steel"
JANUARY 25	Thursday, 12:30, Gallery A Nominating Committee Luncheon
JANUARY 30	Tuesday, 4:30, Gallery A Topic: "Architectural and Engineering Aspects of Dual Use Community Shelter Construction" Speaker: Neal FitzSimons, Department of Defense Washington, D. C.
FEBRUARY 7	Wednesday, 7:00, Gallery A Hospital & Health Dinner Meeting
FEBRUARY 13	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Technical Committee Lecture: "Aluminum"
FEBRUARY 21	Wednesday, 7:30 95th Anniversary Dinner Dance, Plaza Hotel
FEBRUARY 21	Wednesday, 5:15, Gallery A Hospital & Health Discussion Group
FEBRUARY 28	Wednesday, 5:45, Gallery A Younger Architects' Meeting
MARCH 6	Tuesday, 5:30, Gallery A Membership Cocktail Party
MARCH 13	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Technical Committee Lecture: "Concrete"
MARCH 14	Wednesday, 5:15, Gallery A Hospital & Health Discussion Group
MARCH 27	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Lecture by Nathan Walker, "Legal Pitfalls in Architecture"
APRIL 3	Tuesday, Full Day Conference Plaza Hotel arranged by Design Committee
APRIL 10	Tuesday, 12:30, Gallery A Pre-Convention Luncheon
APRIL 17	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Technical Committee Lecture
APRIL 18	Wednesday, 5:15, Gallery A Hospital & Health Discussion Group
MAY 7-11	A.I.A. Convention—Dallas, Texas
MAY 16	Wednesday, 5:15, Gallery A Hospital & Health Discussion Group
MAY 22	Tuesday, 5:15, Gallery A Technical Committee Lecture
JUNE 6	Wednesday, 12:30, Dining Room Annual Luncheon
OCTOBER 10-13	N.Y.S.A.A. Convention Whiteface Inn, Lake Placid, New York

## NEXT MODERN MUSEUM PANEL FEBRUARY 8

"The Laws of the Asphalt Jungle," third in a series of panel discussions on New York's building boom, will be held at 8:30 Thursday evening, February 8, in the auditorium of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd St. Speakers will include Author Jane Jacobs ("The Death and Life of Great American Cities") and representatives of other city-planning points of view. The panel will be moderated by Peter Blake, AIA, Managing Editor of Architectural FORUM.

Tickets are available through the Museum and the Architectural League, 115 East 40th St., at \$2.25 for members of either organization, \$3.00 for non-members. Checks should be made payable to the Museum of Modern Art.

## ERRATA

The AIA Educational Advisory Subcommittee is working on a project to systematize material of the 51 (not 11, as reported) N. A. A. B. schools into a loose-leaf reference guide in which data on each school will be condensed on one page as a convenience.



### Young Architects

President Woodbridge addressed the Chapter's newest committee briefly at its meeting on Dec. 6, with congratulations from the Chapter for its excellent handling of the New York State Architect's Convention at Saranac Lake last September. Special commendation went to the panel discussion groups. The President also extended an official Executive Committee promise of full backing for any worthwhile future projects emanating from the Young Architects Committee.

Committee Chairman Norval White sketched the formation and history of the committee to date: 215 Corporate members of the Chapter were contacted and 87 returned completed information questionnaires. 269 Associate members also received questionnaires. Chief reason for the formation of the committee was to seek possible activities and courses of action to stimulate architecture in the New York area and in the country in general.

Initially, five study groups have been formed to study ideas and formulate programs. It is planned that members of each group will, after formulation of a program, join the official Chapter committee which relates to their specific study, and work to create interest and action within that committee. The five groups and their chairmen are: 1) Office Practice (White), 2) Civic Design (Rowan), 3) Legislation (Klein), 4) Public Affairs (Maione), 5) Speakers (Oppenheimer). Two further study groups were suggested: House Consulting, and Education.

It was also resolved to issue minutes of the Young Architects Committee to the Chapter at large to keep it informed of the committee's thoughts and actions.

### Fees and Contracts

A study of the overhead of architectural offices has been undertaken. Five offices agreed to serve as subjects of the study—Kelly & Gruzen, Pomerance & Breines, Brown & Guenther, H. I. Feldman, and Holden, Egan, Wilson & Corser. Records for the years 1958 through 1960 will be examined by

the accounting firm of Ernst and Ernst. William F. R. Ballard, Committee Chairman, and Frederick G. Frost, Jr., will act as a subcommittee working with the accountants to determine exactly what items will be included as overhead.

A new approach to City Mitchell-Lama fees was discussed at the November 17 meeting. George C. Shimamoto reported that his firm had negotiated a fee with the City which was very close to that recommended by the Committee. The Committee Chairman and George D. Brown have since met with William Davis of the State Division of Housing to discuss possible revisions of the State Mitchell-Lama architects' contract.

### Technical

Subjects have been established by the committee for this year's series of lectures. The three lectures on "Advances in Conventional Structural Systems" is now scheduled to include: "Steel" on January 16; "Aluminum" on February 13; and "Concrete", March 3.

### Hospital and Health

Mr. John D. Thompson, Associate Professor and Director of the Hospital Administration Section of the Yale University School of Medicine, will deliver the second in a series of talks on health facilities, on Wednesday, January 10, 1962 from 5:15-6:30 P.M.

Mr. Thompson is well known in the hospital field for his original research on hospital planning, and development of the Yale Index—probably the best method yet devised for measuring the efficiency of the relationships of the various architectural design elements within the Inpatient Nursing Unit.

Mr. Thompson's talk should be of vital interest to all architects engaged in hospital planning and to others who may be interested, generally, in methods of planning analysis. He will discuss "Recent Developments in the Four Design Determinants of the Inpatient Unit" (an extension of the development of the Yale Index) and "Computer Simulation of the Activity in a Maternity Suite."

*Roberts Bujac, John Dixon*

## URBAHN CRITICIZES DESIGN IN RADIO INTERVIEW

As guest speaker on a recent "Bob Dixon Show" over radio station WCBS, Chapter Member Max O. Urbahn assailed the "cardboard architecture" that makes today's cities bland and uninspiring.

A former professor of design at Yale and a partner in the firm of Urbahn and Brayton, Urbahn stated that a good part of the blame falls on the greed and shortsightedness of many real estate investors. "They exploit the building code to squeeze the most profit out of their investment, without care for esthetics or social responsibility," he said. He added that this stress on profit above everything else did not allow architects time or funds for architectural research.

### MEMBERSHIP

#### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The New York Chapter extends its warmest welcome to the following new members:

#### Corporate

David N. Leslie (Transferred from the Florida South Chapter)  
Leonard Scheer (Transferred from the Southern California Chapter)  
Owen L. Delevante  
Norman L. Hoberman  
Robert J. Schwinn  
Leonard E. Trentin

#### Associate

Bolivar A. Sucre  
John A. D'Angelo

#### CANDIDATES

Information regarding the qualifications of the following candidates for membership will be considered confidential by the Admissions Committee:

#### Corporate

Charles William Dry  
Matthew L. Przysup  
Lawrence Sinclair Braverman  
Anna M. Halpin  
Arnold Stanley Rinaldi

#### Associate

Edward M. Dweck  
Myron S. Sigal  
Jules Seiden

#### Sponsors:

{ Roger Burton  
{ Richard C. Clark  
{ Allen R. Congdon  
{ George H. Buterbaugh  
{ Serge Klein  
{ Victor M. Villemain

#### ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Hospital and Health Committee  
Metropolitan Builders Association

Roger D. MacPherson

Roger G. Spross

## OCULUS DIRECTORY

OCULUS is grateful to the following contributors who helped sustain the costs of this issue.

### Stephen M. Olko Consulting Engineers

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