# John Erwin Ramsay, FAIA

## Portrait Of An Architect

By
Juanita Bouser

Dedicated to Susan, Eric, Carter, Kerr
and John--and to grandchildren yet unborn
who perhaps will know "Papa John" best
through the pages of this book.

# Foreword

We, his wife and children, feel and believe that John Erwin Ramsay is something of a legend in his own time. Many of his long-held dreams, aspirations and plans for his hometown of Salisbury, N.C., have not been realized because of a combination of complex forces and dynamics, including economics, personalities, municipal and governmental realities. He, however, continues to work for the same goals with whatever opportunity happens to be at hand.

We want others, particularly future generations, to know architect John Ramsay, the planner who happened to be "ahead of his time." That's why we have opted for a living "portrait," done by Juanita Bouser, who is an artist with words. She has taken JER's words and added her own genuine interest in her subject, perceptions and sensitivity to paint a profile that we find both interesting and exciting.

We hope you will, too.

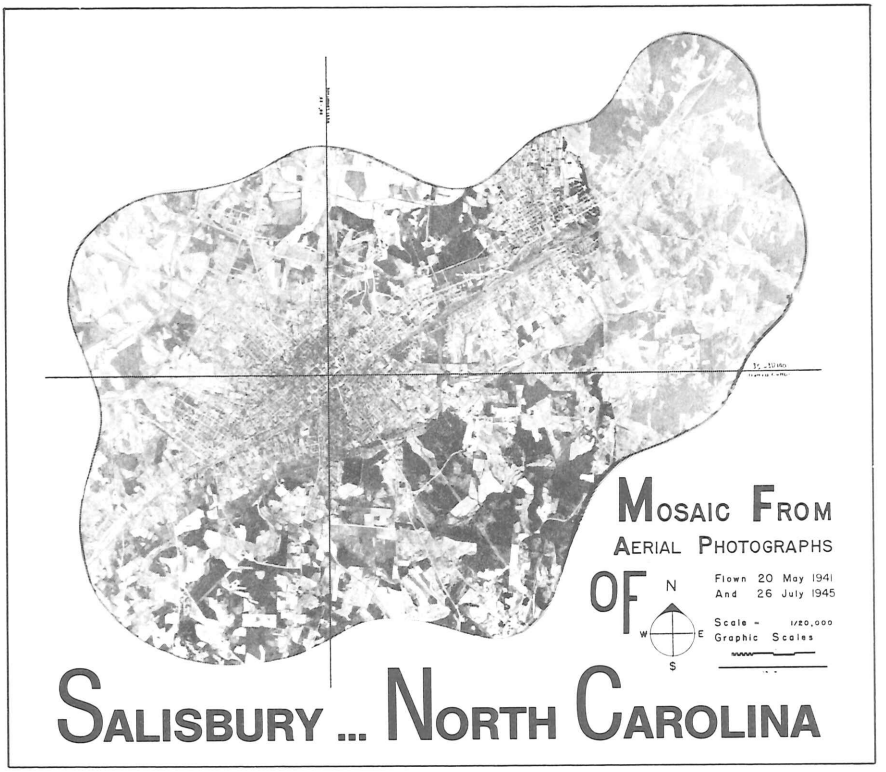
Jean Anne Ferrier Ramsay
Anne Ramsay Saunders
John Erwin Ramsay Jr.
Kerr Craige Ramsay
George Bard Ferrier Ramsay

John Erwin Ramsay

# Introduction

Architect John Erwin Ramsay stands at his desk, holding a mosaic he brought back from World War II--a mosaic made not of tiles laid in Byzantine patterns but one made from aerial photographs of his hometown. Salisbury as seen by air. Salisbury in the early 1940s.

It is quartered by lines running along the 35° 40′ N. Latitude and the 80° 29′ W. Longitude. To the uninitiated, it seems arcane. But to one schooled in the interpretation and intelligence that springs from reading aerial photographs during wartime, it is a sparkling-clean window through which visions of the future can be seen.




"When Johnny came marching home," Ramsay says, speaking of himself in the third person, "he brought aerial photos of his hometown rather than artillery." He brought them for a purpose. He had a dream. Plans for a bypass around Salisbury, plans for logical growth, plans for progress.

Now, nearly 40 years later, he steps back a few paces. He is ready to view his life as a hometown architect from a different perspective.

He continues at age 68 to look forward, but now he can also look back. He can engage in what poet Adrienne Rich calls "revision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."

It has been the best of times and the worst of times. It has been agony and ecstasy. It has been the dream of what could be and the disappointment of what is.

The principal of Ramsay Associates refers to himself as "the architect" or "this architect." He is wedded to his profession. "You will not have to worry about any mistress except architecture," he told his wife-to-be, Jean Anne Ferrier, in the early 1940s.

"John loves buildings and tolerates people," she says.

So John Ramsay is first an architect. Even his physical appearance seems to suggest the structures he designs. He is all angles and planes. He is an ectomorph, cerebral and sensitive. His hands seem exceedingly long. They are the hands not of a laborer, but of an artist. An aesthete's hands.

Of blue-stocking Scotch heritage, he is a formal man, who wears white shirts and three-piece suits. His trademark is a red vest made from the Ramsay plaid. He is a Presbyterian with an Episcopalian streak, a believer in the Christian ethic, a man of granite integrity. He is the father of four children, two of whom have also become architects, and the grandfather of five.

Working as an architect has brought him concrete pleasures few other professionals can enjoy. He can--and does--eat, sleep, attend church, play racquetball, borrow books and view performances in the buildings he has designed.

Salisbury is punctuated with his work. But his architecture reaches far beyond the Salisbury city limits to other cities in the state and to other states in the South. Pride cannot help but creep into his voice when he talks about the Catawba College-Community Centre, the First Presbyterian Church, or the two single-family dwellings on West Innes Street he resurrected for use as an office for Ramsay Associates. He has made a brick-and-mortar mark on the town he loves.

But it hasn't all been ecstasy. He cares so deeply for his town, the home of his forefathers and the home of one of his children, that he

has suffered pain and disappointment when others failed to embrace his visions of what Salisbury could be.

The love he harbors for the community has been unrequited at times and stormy at others, perhaps because of the strong personalities involved. And if JER is anything, he is a strong personality. He will stand firm for what he believes is right. He will refuse a job before he will compromise his principles.

He speaks of *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand, the story of architect Howard Roark, who steadfastly refuses to bow to convention, and he scoffs at the character of Peter Keating, who designs what the consumer wants without regard for the truth and beauty that should emerge naturally from a piece of art.

"I was always intrigued with the fact that Mr. Howard Roark could blow up a building and get away with it," Ramsay says.

While he cautions that he has never looked upon the book as a model for life, it obviously made an impact on him. A quotation from *The Fountainhead* hangs framed in his office and stands starkly alone on the back of his most recent professional brochure: "An architect uses steel, glass, concrete, produced by others but the materials remain just so much steel, glass and concrete until he touches them."

Ramsay's portfolio bulges with multiple prizes. He has held positions of honor within his profession, in his church and in his town. Drawings hang three-deep on his office walls. An atmosphere of success surrounds him at the office, at home, at city council meetings where he is an elected official.

Yet he speaks guardedly of his accomplishments. "I haven't achieved anywhere near what I hoped I might achieve when I laid down the game plan after returning from World War II," he says. "There are experiences and efforts that I would have liked to have accomplished that were not accomplished."

Were his expectations too high? "Could be," he says. "One of the philosophies I've always had in life is, 'Hitch your wagon to a star.' But the next phrase is 'an achievable star.' Perhaps I have tried to hitch onto stars that were not always achievable."

Hindsight has taught Ramsay that a man of dreams cannot work alone. "I think you could take any one of these efforts," he says, "and

had I been able to assemble enough momentum in terms of wealthy, persuasive, aggressive and respected people, my modest little goals would have come to fruition, not so much because I had the idea but because the motivating influences in terms of financial support and leadership in the community made it work."

He learned that a man who has ideas and concepts is not going to achieve great things unless he or his friends have the leadership and financial resources to persuade the other decision makers that it is a worthy project and an achievable project. "Investors are going to look at it very carefully," he says. "Before they get excited about a lot of cloud nine ideas, they'll say, 'Is this an achievable project? Could we invest in it without losing our shirts? And even more so, could we invest in it and buy a dozen or so shirts, not just two or three?' "

So many ideas he has wanted to guide from conception to birth--First Presbyterian Church, Heritage Square, the Catawba College-Community Centre, a paramedical complex adjacent to Rowan Memorial Hospital. Some emerged healthy and vigorous. Some were stillborn.

While his voice and his demeanor emanate a logical, detached presence, his sentences, so carefully articulated and so grammatically perfect, hint that he is no stranger to disappointment.

In a letter to his sons in 1972, Ramsay wrote philosophically of the individual who is willing to risk censure for a cause. "Fortunately for the world, each generation, all the way back to Joseph and the Egyptians, has produced men who were not satisfied with following all of the other silly sheep to the slaughter house," he said. "It is such men who make good architects, and if they are smart, they will remember also that missionaries, pioneers and innovators die poor--not that it is any disgrace to die poor, but I hope you will also remember that money is power and that far more can be achieved for posterity if you control it than if you are controlled by those who control it.

"The trick is to keep one eye on the star and the other on the method and forces necessary to get there. With that second eye focus on the fact that it is no disgrace to be tired and it is no disgrace to be hungry, but the man who is both tired and hungry may also be classified as stupid."

Long-time friend Mary Messinger gave Ramsay the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull.* It is a story, he says, "about a seagull who wants to soar and about the other seagulls who said how stupid he was. They stood on the ground cackling about this odd creature who wanted to fly higher than anybody else."

Jonathan Livingston Seagull. John Erwin Ramsay. Any parallel? Perhaps, although JER hardly mirrors the simplistic and saccharine qualities of the bird in the allegory.

But, yes, he has wanted--and still wants--to soar. And, yes, he has felt on occasion that others stood on the ground cackling about this odd creature who dared to dream not of what is but of what could be.

# CHAPTER I

John Erwin Ramsay was born in a time both turbulent and tranquil. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand the year before had sparked declarations of war in Europe. But the family that lived at the corner of Bank and Fulton streets in Salisbury, N.C., knew no more of war's carnage than they read in the evening paper. Life to them seemed quite serene.

"In those days mothers scarcely ever went to hospitals to have babies," Ramsay says. So it was in the master bedroom at 329 W. Bank St. that John, the second son of Elizabeth Erwin Craige and John Ernest Ramsay, was born Sept. 23, 1915. Both parents were native Salisburians of Scotch-Irish descent who traced their heritage in Rowan County to 1766, through five generations.

Portraits of forebears hang today above the Ramsay fireplace and from ceiling to floor in the kitchen: Ninian Beall, father of Margaret Beall Ramsay, his paternal grandmother; L.O.B. Branch, father of Josephine Branch Craige, his maternal grandmother; Burton Craige, the great-grandfather who is credited with drafting the Articles of Secession for North Carolina before the Civil War.

One portrait depicts his mother, known affectionately as Miss Bessie, sitting on a piano bench with her two sons. Kerr Craige, the older by four years, resembles his mother. John Erwin, dark-complexioned with a hint of curls, wears a shirt with a lace collar and button-on pants, the kind of outfit in which doting mothers of that era were wont to dress their darlings.

The portrait of the first John Ramsay, JER's grandfather, emanates a rare presence. His patriarchal white beard has prompted the current generation of Ramsays to refer to him as "Yaweh." He became mayor of Salisbury after his return from the War between the States. During his tenure a tax was levied to provide funding for the first public schools. He used his talents as a civil engineer to design the Frank B. John School. Now used by the Salisbury Board of Education, it still stands on North Ellis Street.

Young John knew his grandfather's widow, Margaret Beall Ramsay. She lived to be 101. Stories that have survived her indicate she was a cultured woman who had a keen sense of life's drama. She

wrote an account of her experiences during Stoneman's Raid near the end of the Civil War, when soldiers came to her house and asked her to play the piano for them. She declined their invitation, writing: "There was no music in my soul that day."

JER remembers his grandmother as an artist. "When I was a little boy," he says, "she would walk up to our house, and I'd say, 'Paint me a picture, Grandma.' And she'd say, 'We don't have anything to paint pictures with.' " Ramsay, who rarely reveals emotion in his voice, speaks of those early years with obvious affection.

He recalls presenting his grandmother with a child's watercolor set for paints and a shirt cardboard for canvas. "She had a splendid sense of humor," he says, and while she "couldn't produce anything of much quality," she captivated her young grandson with scenes of mountains and streams.

Ramsay speaks of his early childhood, with one notable exception, as a period of "no significant episodes." The exception occurred early on. "It was fashionable," he begins, "for men to sharpen straight razors on a leather strap." His father's custom was to attach his strap to his brass bed for easy access. One morning, 18-month-old John was having a glorious time, jumping up and down on his parents' bed, while his father sharpened his razor. The child lost his balance. His father, trying to stop his fall, inadvertantly cut his son's face from ear to mouth in a slice that took 21 stitches to repair. Ramsay finishes his story. "Hence scar," he says, matter-of-factly. "I've lived with it essentially a lifetime."

Ramsay recalls his mother as "a marvelous woman, a great mother who had an uncommon love for her children." She made sure she was always available when he and his brother came home from school. "I never remember seeing her other than fully dressed at the breakfast table," he says. "She felt a great part of her responsibility in life was to set a good example--and she did."

Miss Bessie instilled in her sons the need for integrity. Ramsay remembers her telling them time and again, "Oh, what tangled webs we weave, when first we practice to deceive." He speaks of her as a straightforward sort, outspoken, uncommonly honest. "We used to kid her by saying she couldn't park in a space downtown with a running meter," he says, "because somebody else had already paid for the space."

His father, the second John Ramsay, was an architect, engineer and principal in the granite industry in Rowan County. He attended A&M College in Raleigh, now called N.C. State University. "I am more like my father," Ramsay says, whom he describes as "a solid sort of person, totally predictable and dependable." He was a staunch prohibitionist, as was his wife, but Ramsay recalls stories of his father's days as a young architect in Mobile, Ala., that involved dancing on tables. "Those stories led my brother and me to believe he was not always a prohibitionist," Ramsay says.

Young John inherited from his father perseverance, resourcefulness and a belief in the importance of integrity.

Ramsay's parents lived to see their son develop his architectural talents and launch his own practice in Salisbury. They died within a year of one another, Ramsay's mother in 1956 and his father in 1957.

"We had always made it a pattern to go to my mother's church on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday because Episcopalians do a much better job with those particular occasions than Presbyterians do," he says. "But just before Palm Sunday in 1956, my mother died. My father and I went to the Episcopal Church, and before the next Palm Sunday came around a year later, he had died."

## CHAPTER II

Ramsay's parents discerned early that their son had a penchant for building. "Drawing and building and putting things together held my interest," Ramsay says. "There is a picture of me at about age five stacking one nest of block-type toys on top of the other."

The elder Ramsay bought wooden piano boxes as creative playthings for his sons. "We'd put these piano boxes together," JER says, "and cut holes in them for doorways. We'd nail boards here and nail boards there and have a glorious time imagining ourselves building houses."

The brothers worked together to build their piano-box homes, but they approached the projects differently. John was interested in getting the details straight while Kerr Craige felt that getting the job finished was more important. "I claimed he was more inclined to get the nail driven," not caring what the back side looked like. "I was inclined to get it driven exactly right. If it had to be bent on the opposite side, it had to be with the grain."

The sons were without a doubt different personalities. Kerr Craige was a Craige in looks and temperament. John Erwin was a Ramsay. But they were, in Ramsay's words, "pretty good friends," and he admired his older brother right up to the day of his untimely death. Kerr Craige died of a heart attack at age 40, after becoming a successful lawyer and speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives.

"He and his wife had just had friends from Raleigh visit them," Ramsay says. "They had straightened things up around the house and gone to bed and, bang, he had a massive heart attack, the first one and the last one."

He speaks in measured tones about the tragedy and his reaction to it. "You don't really focus on what has happened when you first hear news like that," he says. "You focus on, 'What must I do?' and 'I must get down there in a hurry.' You suspect that it has been fatal, but you are not sure, and then gradually you learn from the doctor that it is fatal and there's no need to even go to the hospital. You're caught up with preparations for the funeral. And then a few days later, you begin to realize what the loss really was.

"Among other things, I suppose you ask, 'Why is it that the good Lord has taken this talented person at age 40 and left me? Why not

the other way around? What could be my mission in life?' "

Ramsay finally acknowledged that there was nothing he could do to alter the situation. "You think, well, you can't change these things," he says. "The Great Architect of the universe has decided what it will be and He has decided that you know all you're going to know about what the master plan is, so your job is to do the best you can."

But Ramsay still thinks of his brother and the close relationship they had. "Many people thought he would be the next governor," he says. "To this day I frequently run into people who say, 'Oh, you must be Kerr Craige Ramsay's brother. Great person. If he had lived, he would have been governor.' "

Ramsay understands the effusive praise. "He had success painted all over him," he says. "He was a good student, popular with his peers, had a splendid record in school both at UNC-Chapel Hill and at Yale University."

While Kerr Craige was a strong student of Latin, John studied the language relunctantly. He illustrates the point with the tale of a teacher named Miss Pauline Harris.

"She seemed to have some compassion on my lack of enthusiasm for Latin," he says. "After two years of it in high school, she said, 'John, your grades in Latin are not to be desired. You're right on the borderline of passing or failing. If you won't ever tell anybody that I was your Latin teacher, and if you will promise me you will never take another course in Latin, you will pass.' I said, 'Miss Harris, that will be no burden at all.' "

He tells the story with a straight face, but a suppressed chuckle escapes his lips and his eyes betray a delight in the story. "So now I'm telling about it 50 years later," he says. "That caused me to believe that the law was not my cup of tea."

Ramsay considered grammar school an obligation that involved more commitment than it did fun. Yet he remembers distinctly some moments of enjoyment. A seventh-grade teacher named Miss Gaston felt that he had something to offer as an artist. "She felt there was a reason why my mind seemed to wander away from memorizing 'Hiawatha' or 'The Ride of Paul Revere,' which all the other kids were having to memorize and recite by heart," he says.

She called upon Ramsay to design a model two-story colonial home that the boys in the class would build and the girls would de-

corate. It was Ramsay's first design effort. "I drew something on the back of a piece of notebook paper," he says, "two rooms up and two rooms down and a hall in the middle and a stairway that would have been impossible if it had actually been built to scale."

"All the mothers came and told us it looked like a real one and everything was perfect. But I knew it wasn't. It didn't seem really right. Now I know what was wrong with it. The furnishings were not in scale with the room, and the rooms and the doors were not in scale with the human figure."

It was obviously a high point in his school career, but he blunts the peak a little with a laugh. "I'm not sure what I enjoyed most," he says, "designing the building or not having to memorize the poem."

The first habitable structure he built was located on nearby Dunn's Mountain. He and student friends--Emmette Thompson, Arthur Meinus, Elmer Hoke and Maynard Newman, among others--built a log cabin. "We literally cut down the trees with an ax and dragged them up the mountain," he says. "When we started, one of the natives said it looked like beavers had gnawed the tree down. But by the time we finished, it looked like woodsmen had done it."

The youngsters equipped their cabin with a table, a cook stove and icebox. "We had a glorious time hunting rabbits and gigging frogs and roaming all around the countryside," he says, "appropriating a watermelon or cantalope here or there."

## CHAPTER III

Ramsay spent his junior and senior years at McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tenn. He dismisses the experience with few words. "I came away from McCallie with a certificate saying I had graduated and a dose of basic principles," he says.

Did he view moving away from home as a joyous or wrenching experience? "A little of both," he says candidly. "Any preparatory school where a student goes for the last two years runs into cliques of students who have been there since the seventh or eighth grade. The syndrome of being the new man on the block comes off a little stronger there than it does just moving into a new neighborhood. By the time I was getting adjusted pretty well to peer group and life at McCallie, I had finished there."

The McCallie graduation led to UNC at Chapel Hill, where Ramsay entered the School of Commerce in 1934. "It's called business administration now," he says. "It didn't fit my personality."

He rocked along, working hard, taking exams and experiencing the joie de vivre along with it. He counts his involvement in the Sigma Nu fraternity and his stint as chairman of the Dialectic Senate, a debating society, as definite pluses during his Chapel Hill years.

"We felt we were accomplishing things" as fraternity brothers, Ramsay says. "We got the debt on the fraternity house paid off the years I was there. It was not just a matter of frivolity. We were really an industrious group of young kids."

Then he came to a fork in the road. He explains it this way: At the close of a course in business administration, the professor, Dr. Gustave Schwenning, admonished the group, "If you young men forget everything else I have told you this quarter, I want you to think through all the areas of commerce and try to find employment in a place for yourself that is of greatest interest to you. If it's personnel, if you are the gregarious-type person, pursue that. If you like making things work, possibly time and motion studies would be the area. Or maybe it's public relations. After all, you've got to sell it."

Ramsay pauses. "He went through the whole list and wound up with accounting. When he related all these opportunities, I thought

about the multiple choice question in which the last answer is 'None of the above.' I said, 'That's me.' "

At that point, Ramsay decided that architecture was what he was really interested in. He had been guided away from it by a mathematics teacher at McCallie because he could see little logic in algebra. But he followed his interest and switched to the School of Fine Arts.

The dean of the School of Mathematics and Physical Sciences apparently felt he had the ability to complete any math requirements he might need. "That has been a big influence on repeated occasions," Ramsay says, "when people have encouraged rather than discouraged me. He talked me into the fact that I could do it. My prep school instructor had told me I couldn't."

Architectural history held a special fascination for Ramsay as an undergraduate. He was particularly intrigued with Gothic cathedrals. "Men back then in the 12th and the 15th centuries could stack one stone upon another and without any reinforcing rods or steel, build a building that we could put the total First Presbyterian Church inside of--steeple and all," he says incredulously.

"I was also intrigued with the fact that there was leadership adequate to divert the energies of a total city in building one building, not for five, 10, 15 or even 20 years, but for as many as 300 years. Compare that to the interest you can generate with the public now towards any kind of building."

This intense interest, plus his natural inclination towards artistic design, served him well in the School of Fine Arts. He graduated in 1938 with a bachelor of arts degree. "I had heard all along of other friends taking their comprehensive examinations in the law and in other disciplines and how frequently they failed after having a brilliant record," he says. "When comprehensives came along for fine arts, I had my moments about that."

He, however, made a splendid showing. "My brother complimented me on passing them the first time around," he says.

The undergraduate degree from UNC-Chapel Hill paved the way for Ramsay's entry into Yale University's School of Architecture. "I had at last found what I was interested in," he says. "The worst grades I ever made were in elementary school. They were a little better in high school, a whole lot better in preparatory school, good in

college but top-flight in graduate school."

Ramsay managed to complete four years of work in three years, graduating in 1941 with a bachelor of fine arts degree and a master's degree in architecture, plus a scholarship for leading his class in design.

"I worked hard all the time," he says, "morning, afternoon and night." He credits perseverance and dogged determination with bringing him successfully through that period. "There were about 100 in our class when we started, and about 20 when we finished," he says. "Ten years ago there weren't more than three or four in active practice out of that class. All the rest found it was easier to make a living in some other way."

As part of his education at Yale, Ramsay mentions visiting professors like Wallace Harrison and Max Abramovitz, both of whom were involved with the design of Rockefeller Center. "I was fortunate indeed to have that exposure," he says.

When he entered graduate school, he envisioned himself becoming a great Georgian colonial architect, but he soon learned that architecture was not a rehash of the past. "Yale and every other major school in the country at that time had recognized that the old Beaux Arts system of architecture was passe," he says. "We no longer had princes and popes and kings to pay for all of the embellishments at the expense of the peasants who lived in hovels."

Students were urged to use their creative talents, not emulate traditional work. Ramsay rose to the challenge. He relished the logic and aesthetics that the architect had to consider when designing a building. "If you're going to build a building, you've got a certain number of functions that you must resolve," he says. "You have to decide how best you can arrange it so that the activities take place with the minimum of interference and most efficiently and with a pleasant sense of space."

Those questions must first be resolved, Ramsay says, "before you can say to yourself, 'How do we put walls around this and how do we put a roof on it? How do we enclose it or how do we develop an envelope to aesthetically contain its functions?' "

Out of his design experiences he has established his credo: "Significant architecture comes only from the aesthetic application of logic

to housing the needs of man."

Ramsay found that he admired Frank Lloyd Wright, whom he describes as "an uncommonly gifted architect," as well as three representatives of the International School of Architecture--Le Corbusier, Meis van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. The last three were masters of planning and space relationships. "They could produce uncommonly efficient spaces," Ramsay says.

But he was also drawn to the warmth and character that came from the designs of Wright. "Some of his plans are not totally efficient," he says, "because he'd get off on a tangent and reason, for example, that everything had to be a hexagon because a bumblebee built his house with a system of hexagons. It was poetic but not very practical."

Ramsay adopted the planning skills of the International School of Architecture and the warmth of Wright, deciding that neither one was totally right or totally wrong.

While at Yale, Ramsay won second place in the Warren Prize, a Beaux Arts competition. He calls the Beaux Arts the fountainhead of national competitions and the Warren Prize second in prestige only to the coveted Paris and Rome prizes.

Competitors were required to design a fictitious military camp. "It was an expanded sketch problem," he says. Participants spent an entire day in a room with only drafting equipment, no reference material. "They said, 'Here's the problem. Turn it in by midnight, and that's it,' " he recalls.

Ramsay approached the competition with no expectations. "I figured with all these people there was no chance of winning," he says, "but a few weeks later I was advised that I had won second prize."

## CHAPTER IV

Architecture was foremost in Ramsay's mind during 1941, but world affairs kept encroaching on his consciousness. "I read about the Austrian corporal who had taken over the government of Germany," he says. While Franklin Delano Roosevelt told mothers he would not involve their sons in a foreign war, Ramsay felt he could see the handwriting on the wall. "I thought if I could get a commission in the Navy, it would be far more attractive than wading around through the mud and in the trenches," he says.

He tried to join the Navy but found that branch of the service none too eager to take him at the moment. So, upon graduation from Yale, he accepted a position with Carr and J. E. Greiner Co., an associated professional team of architects and engineers who were retained for government contracts. One of their projects was the construction of Camp LeJeune, N.C.

Shortly thereafter, Ramsay was drafted into the Army to serve as a private second class in the Army's 110th Division. He went through basic training during July and August 1942 at Fort Bragg, N.C., and Camp Livingston, La. "It was plenty hot," he says.

Just as he was becoming accustomed to being addressed as Private John Ramsay, a letter from the U.S. Navy ordered him to report to Cambridge, Mass., for a probationary ensign's commission.

A chance friendship with Admiral and Mrs. Charles Brand led to another pivotal experience. Mrs. Brand, apparently something of a matchmaker, invited the young ensign to look them up when he got to Washington, D.C. "She said, 'Do you have a girl or are you playing the field?' " Ramsay remembers. "I said, 'The latter is generally the situation.' "

The Brands introduced Ramsay to Jean Anne Ferrier, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George B. Ferrier of Washington, D.C., formerly of Moorestown, N.J. Ferrier's company, Foster Wheeler, sold boilers and condensers for Navy ships being built.

"Mrs. Ferrier had dressed Anne in long hose and black dress and high heels and fixed her hair up so she wouldn't look too youthful," Ramsay says, "but I think she was 16. She looked very good to me."

In the months to come, Anne would receive letters from New

Caledonia, Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal as Ramsay's ship maneuvered throughout the Pacific.

She eventually left Sweet Briar College after he returned to the states and they married Oct. 1, 1945. Ramsay, who served to lieutenant, was mustered out of the Navy in February 1946.

He was one of about six officers with architectural and city planning backgrounds who were offered a boost in commission if they would stay in the service a bit longer to replan Guam. But Ramsay didn't want to replan Guam. He wanted to replan Salisbury. "I elected to come back home," he says.

A yellowed clipping from the Salisbury Evening Post is an early indication of the visions Ramsay had for his hometown. In an open letter to then Mayor Reginald Ramsey from his station in the South Pacific, he wrote: "I just received a clipping in a letter from my mother, of your post-war development plan for Salisbury. It, to me, is the best local news our Salisbury Evening Post has carried during my lifetime. After a 100-year siesta our little old town is opening her eyes to her place in a changing world.

"Sound planning has long been neglected and because of that neglect our progress has been very, very slow. Salisbury is, potentially, one of North Carolina's great cities and with a little sound planning and a lot of hard work we can make that greatness into a reality."

Ramsay closed his letter with, "Your visions and my visions are not just dreams. They can become real."

## CHAPTER V

John Ramsay marched into Salisbury a young, aggressive idealist. He opened the town's second architectural office in 1946. "I thought all these profound truths that I had learned, when explained to local friends, would be accepted," he says. "I didn't anticipate that anyone would look over the top of his glasses with a big question mark in his mind."

But Salisbury was a traditional town. Progressive ideas and aggressive idealists were not embraced eagerly.

Ramsay met reality head on when he tried to sell the idea of a paramedical complex to the Salisbury establishment. The complex, which would have housed doctors' offices and support facilities for minor operations, was to be built adjacent to Rowan Memorial Hospital on land that is now used as a parking lot on Henderson Street.

Ramsay surmounted one obstacle after another, trying to realize his dream. "I went to see the local agent of the Henderson family, Mr. Henry Hobson, and said, 'I'd like to purchase that land,' " he recalls. Hobson discouraged the young architect, telling him that the hospital had been trying to buy the land for a number of years and that John Henderson chose not to sell it.

Not easily put off, Ramsay wrote to Henderson in Sewickley, Pa. "Mr. Henderson wrote a terse note back saying the property was not for sale," he says. But Ramsay still refused to abandon the idea. He traveled to Pennsylvania to talk to Henderson in person. "He seemed a little bit amazed," Ramsay says, "that out of our town of Salisbury, which many of the old-timers thought was moving so slowly, there was a young man with enough grit to come up here and want to talk about this thing."

Ramsay explained his multi-floor concept with the central core of elevators and two or three levels of parking. "For Salisbury it was tremendously radical," he says, "but in major cities it was not at all radical."

The upshot of the visit was that Ramsay did indeed purchase the property. But the obstacles he had to negotiate were just beginning. He had to get lawyer's title insurance on the property, which re-

quired clearance from area property owners. Not everyone signed.

"I had just about spent my total resources to buy the land, and the forces that were not enthusiastic about this thing said they would go along with it if it could be done in the space of a year or 18 months, a rather limited amount of time. I realized that they could keep that up for years, and I'd be broke financially if I kept resisting them, because I was a single individual with no major financial resources. I couldn't resist a total organization."

Kerr Craige, then on the hospital board, persuaded his brother to sell the land to the hospital. Ramsay is philosophical about it now: "I said, 'Well, it was a good idea. But I don't have the financial or political strength to pull it off. I have bitten off a bigger bite than I can digest. OK, I don't want to throw a stumbling block in your political career. I'll sell it to the hospital.' And I did."

Ramsay's plans for his hometown encompassed more than just structures. He felt a bypass should be built around Salisbury in the late 1940s to lessen traffic congestion on Innes Street. After studying the aerial mosaic he brought back from the war, he decided it was illogical to construct a bypass around the east side because U.S. Highway 52 was the only major highway on that side of the city. But a bypass around the west side would intersect U.S. Highways 29, 601 and 70 as well as N.C. Highway 150. To a mind steeped in the logic of planning and design, that was the obvious solution.

"I was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and thought my idea would be accepted by decision makers," he says. It wasn't.

Ramsay, the idealist, was beginning to learn. "You don't plan cities and you don't plan major additions or adjustments to the cityscape," he says, "unless you have a major part of the population and certainly the decision makers as advocates as opposed to adversaries."

Even small projects required the approval of financial institutions. He designed a modern house for Mrs. Mike Thomas during the early years that proved too avant-garde for traditional financiers. "She thought it was a marvelous little house because it was different from any other house that had been built in these parts," Ramsay says. "It solved a lot of problems that the traditional house could not have solved."

But when she requested a loan, the project derailed. "The response," says Ramsay, "was, 'Have you ever seen anything like

this in Salisbury before?' I said, 'No, there's nothing in Salisbury like this.' " Nor was there anything in Charlotte or Greensboro. It was radically different from anything this area had seen. The house did not get built.

Ramsay, in hindsight, sees a contradiction in what he feels his hometown expected of him and what he expected from the town. "They thought, 'Johnny's been well educated,' " he says. " 'He's home from the war. He's back to help us do what we are accustomed to doing and certainly with this education he has had at Yale University, he will understand how to build beautiful colonial homes and continue with the patterns to which we have become accustomed.' "

But Johnny didn't fit that mold. "I was certainly overly aggressive for our town," he says. It was difficult for him to accept the mind set that seemed to prevail in Salisbury. He discovered that people were accustomed to calling a general contractor, not an architect, if they wanted to build a structure. "They weren't in the habit of thinking 'architecture' or 'architect,' " he says. They reasoned that going straight to the contractor would save them an architectural fee.

Ramsay thought they were being penny-wise and pound-foolish. "No matter how much money you spend or how well you finance it," he says, "or what fine materials you use to put it together, if the basic design concept is bad, the most you can wind up with is mediocrity. But relatively few people understand how poor design can increase the cost rather than reduce it."

Ramsay quotes John Ruskin: "There is hardly anything in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper, and the man who considers price alone is this man's lawful prey."

He also found, upon his return home, that most people were not attuned to modern architecture. "This particular architect came to a small town and tried to introduce progressive architecture to people, a large portion of which were thinking 18th and 19th Century so far as architecture was concerned," he says. "Obviously, it was not an ideal circumstance for sales. I was trying to sell a product that not only was not in demand; it was being rejected. It was too avant-garde. I had been told that if you build a better mousetrap, people will beat a path to your door. But I learned that if people don't have any mice, or if they don't think they have any, they don't need mousetraps."

## CHAPTER VI

Ramsay has been called a man ahead of his time, perhaps because he could not abide standing complacently in the past--or even in the present. He wanted to plunge into the future.

Dreams for the central business district propelled him to the drawing board again and again. On three occasions he presented ideas to Salisbury burghers that would transform the downtown. On three occasions he met debilitating resistance.

"It's part of the agony of being an architect," he says. He proposed two-level sidewalks in the main shopping block to the Merchants' Association in the 1950s. The concept would have made second-floor store space generally used for warehousing accessible for primary activity, much like a two-story mall. "We could have bridged Main Street," he says, "and we could have had escalators to move the people up and down, which has since become accepted and a fact of life in almost all mall-type merchandising areas.

"But, there again, people seemed to say, 'Where has that been done before?' and I said, 'Well, it was done in Pompeii and in Paris. It's been done in Rome.' But then they say, 'Has it been done in Charlotte or in Greensboro or in Winston?' And I have to say, 'Not yet.' But now the fact is it has been done in Charlotte and there are bridges that cross Tryon Street and Trade Street and connect second levels."

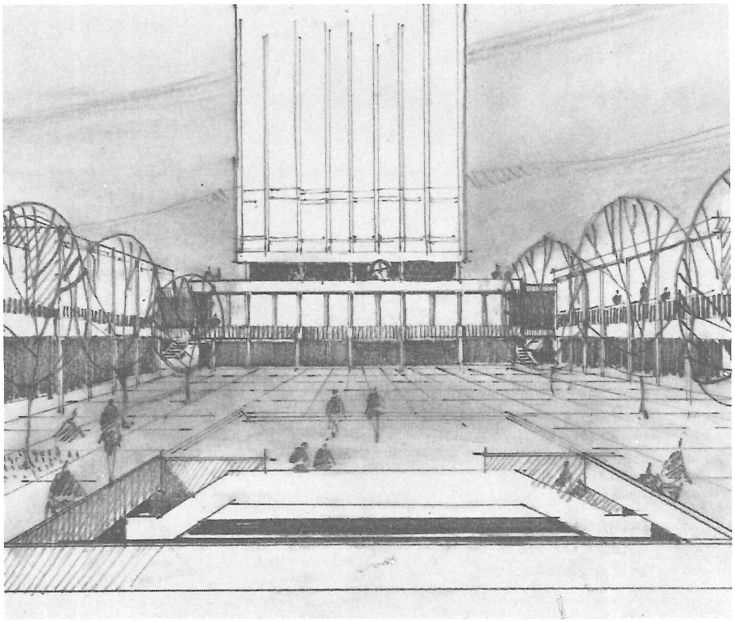
In 1964, Ramsay tried to persuade agents and trustees of property destroyed in a downtown fire to band together in rebuilding their businesses. "Downtown Salisbury can come out of its ashes with the most significant shopping center within hundreds of miles," he told them.

He explained that they could save 4,300 square feet of floor space and $45,000 in fire walls if they built together. He proposed a two- or three-level shopping area from Main Street to Jackson Street with underground parking in two blocks, which would be linked with a tunnel under Church Street.

An editorial in the May 17, 1964, issue of the Salisbury Post spoke of the idea and its chances for fruition. It read: "Everyone at the meeting was keenly interested in what Mr. Ramsay had to say. Perhaps none can see as big a development as he envisions; yet

everyone could see that his plans, at least modified, made good common sense....The key to success--or defeat--is, as always, leadership. What's needed now is a take-charge guy."

No one stepped forward to take charge. The idea died a natural death.



**Heritage Square**
**Salisbury, NC**

JER's biggest dream for downtown Salisbury--and his biggest disappointment--was called Heritage Square. The two-level shopping center plus hotel-motel and restaurant was to be placed in the 200 block of West Innes, bounded by Church, Jackson and Fisher streets.

Ramsay felt a 20th Century shopping mall in the midst of Old Salisbury's retail district would have given the project a unique flavor. "Together, they could have been something significantly different than what the average town had in terms of retail sales," he says.

The May 21, 1967, issue of the Salisbury Post featured a story on Heritage Square with a picture of Ramsay taken through a window in his office on West Innes Street. Smoke curled up from his pipe.

Blueprints were rolled like scrolls at his drawing table. Renderings dominated the wall behind him. Writer Jim Hurley began his story with the statement, "John Erwin Ramsay is a dreamer." The picture made him look the part.

But Heritage Square was more than a dream to Ramsay. It was a child he wanted to birth. "Ever since I came back home," Ramsay told the Post, "I have been dreaming of the potential of developing an entire city block. From a planning point of view, I am convinced that commercial trading belongs in the heart of the city. I believe it is best for the people, best for the merchants and best for the investors."

Ramsay was so sure of his idea that he was willing to do the drawings on his own. "If I'm wrong," he said, "it's going to cost me a bundle. But I've just hired an architect who will work for nothing."

He recognized then that leadership was crucial to the success of the project. "I have tried for years to find a champion to carry the banner for a thoroughly studied, fully planned, unified development in downtown Salisbury," he said. "I have failed, so I am going to carry the banner by myself and then I'll try to organize an army."

The block was controlled by the Maxwell Chambers Trust, made up of elders, past and present, in the First Presbyterian Church. Ramsay, also a Maxwell Chambers trustee, persuaded those who attended a meeting of the trust in 1967 to lease him the block for an extended period of time, so he could work to develop the Heritage Square idea.

He had an option on the block for about 10 days until a few trustees who had not been present at the original meeting persuaded the group to rescind their previous action. "They didn't have enough assurance that the Heritage Square project would actually pay dependable dividends," Ramsay says, "which could be interpreted as saying they didn't have enough confidence in their friend and fellow elder who wanted to promote the idea."

The confrontation with his fellow trustees led eventually to his asking to be relieved of his duties as an elder in the First Presbyterian Church. "I had to make a choice as to whether I would pursue my position as an officer in the church or my talents as an architect in trying to develop Heritage Square," he says. "I thought the greater good could come from developing Heritage Square if it could be

made to work because it could be an achievement city-wide if not regional."

Since elders are ordained for life, the only way Ramsay could be relieved of his duties was to request divestiture of office without censure. The May 1961 edition of *The Book of Church Order* prescribes the circumstances under which such an action may be taken in its twelfth chapter, entitled "Divesting of Office on Request."

The church acceded to his request. Only after the property was leased to First Union Bank did he allow his name to be placed in nomination once again for the office of elder.

Ramsay held fast to the idea for Heritage Square until he knew the property was no longer available. "In a vague way," he says, "I suppose you think, 'Well, it could happen one day, but I won't try to hold my breath until it does.' It's one of the agonies of the profession of architecture. You build buildings kind of like a mother giving birth to a child.' Unfortunately, there's always the possibility that the child will be stillborn.

"It doesn't usually happen as abruptly as a stillborn child," Ramsay says, "because when you get the first overtures of rumblings that the project is not going to fly, you think there still might be other possibilities and you can probe this one and probe that one, but if a child is stillborn, it's stillborn and that's final. It might be better for the architect if it could just be final and done as opposed to the slow 'no' and the slow disappointment of it not happening."

Ramsay finally pronounced the Heritage Square child dead in his own mind in the early 1970s and then began the task of distancing himself from it. In a lengthy letter to his children in October of 1972, he seems to have certainly begun--if not completed--the grief process. "We must all accept the fact that if we tackle big ideas and attempt major accomplishments, we must also prepare to assume major disappointments," he wrote, "for the chances of success with major concepts are obviously far more limited than concepts which involve modest knowledge, ability, effort, perseverance and money. In case you feel that this and other disappointments I have had (as a result of my 'wagon to a star' philosophy) are destroying my spirit, you should back up and take another look--nothing could be further from the truth.

"My conclusion is that I know better what can be done and what cannot be done; I know better what can be expected from people and what cannot be expected from people and I think I know a whole lot more about what can be achieved and how to achieve it and what percentage of one's time can be devoted to the 'wagon to the star' type concept."

In spite of his disappointments, he tells his children that he will never shrink from a challenge. He will always be willing to risk everything for something he believes in. "I believe the average person will choose to play it safe," he writes, "and avoid personal disappointment and rejection by the establishment for having tried something inconsistent with their philosophy. I, however, will always remember, and I hope you will always remember, that this is a blind avenue to progress and that most all progress, and all creative concepts, have been developed by someone who was willing to take a substantial risk and make a major contribution in time and effort and frequently in hard cold cash."

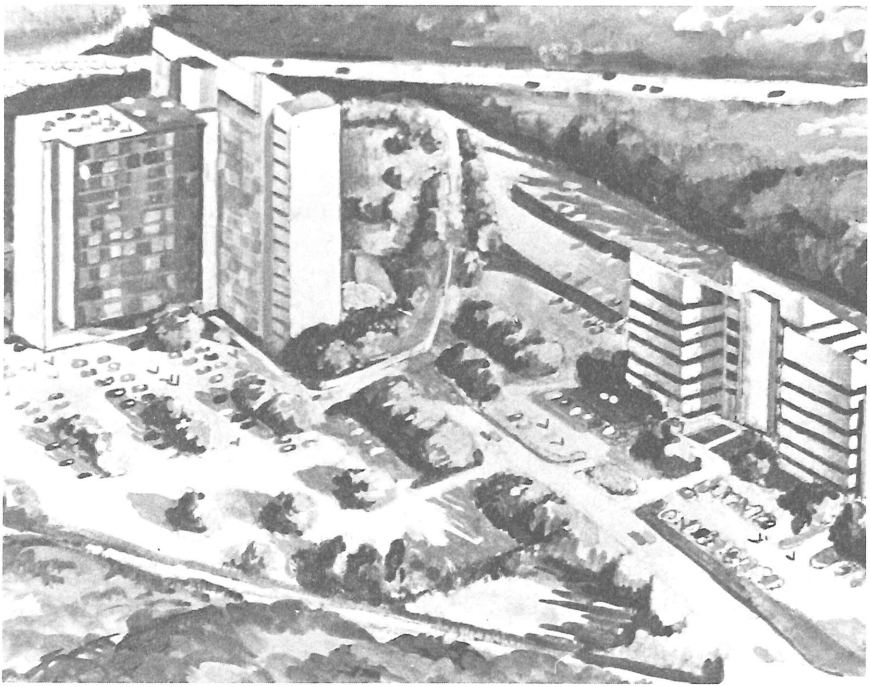
Ramsay didn't confine his hopes for Salisbury's commercial growth to the downtown. After economic analysts Marcou and O'Leary determined in the 1970s that a regional shopping center in the downtown would not be feasible, Ramsay drafted a plan for a center on the town's periphery. "We decided to see what could be developed on Town Creek, where Marcou and O'Leary felt was the best place to put it," he says.

He points to the Town Creek rendering on his office wall. It is a plan for a three-level regional shopping center with a hotel and office complex. The 43-acre site chosen for the project, owned by Shaw and Bankett, was located between Town Creek and Interstate 85.

He explains the logistics of the project with ideas for putting a tunnel under I-85, building parking areas on an adjacent 40 acres, and extending Monroe Street and relieving the traffic on Innes Street by allowing traffic to weave in and out over the gridiron pattern created by Fisher, Bank, Horah and Monroe streets. He spent a substantial sum of his own money designing the project.

"It was presented," he says, "but it didn't generate any real enthusiasm. It's difficult for a group of busy people to tackle a project of

some magnitude that would require extending themselves to a lot more time than they feel they have. It's also very easy to reason that any idea of some scope is a cloud nine type thought. They think, 'It wouldn't work anyway, so why bother with it?' "



**Town Creek Center**
**Salisbury, NC**

Ramsay learned from Town Creek and other projects that it takes more than concepts to get an idea into brick and mortar. "It's got to be financed," he says. "A great many things are involved to pull it off. One thing I've learned is that one single architect can't invest a wad of money here and a wad of money there and hope to survive financially himself unless he can generate a whole team of people who are willing to play that game."

Ramsay was a man ahead of his time not only in his dreams for his hometown but also in the building materials he wanted to use. He proposed pre-engineered concrete panels that could be lifted into

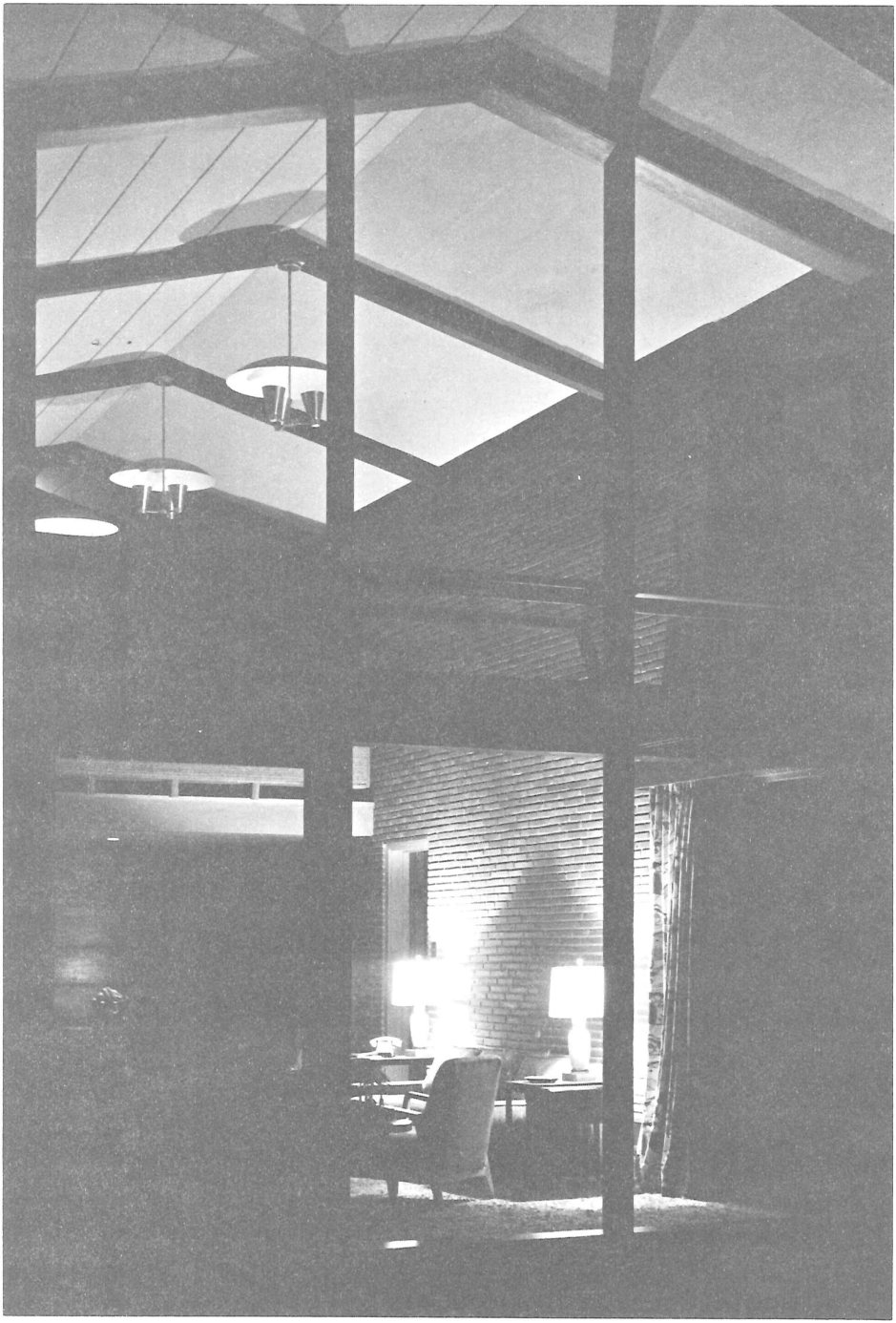
place as walls 35 years ago, long before contractors accepted such construction as commonplace.

He also advocated passive solar designs as early as the 1940s. He designed a passive solar home in 1947 in the country club area for Mr. and Mrs. Robert Haungs, now occupied by Donald Clement, Jr.

"I designed it so it would start small and expand into a bigger home," JER says. He had visions of it as a solution for returning veterans who could build houses on a limited budget. He reasoned that, as they developed in their careers, the houses could grow with them. "But because it was so different, and had a shed roof on it, and because it was designed for passive solar energy, almost 30 years before that became popular, I think the public decided that they didn't want to have anything to do with the architect who would design such a peculiar house," he says.

The first house he designed for his own family, the home at 119 Pine Tree Road now owned by Mr. and Mrs. James F. Hurley III, features a roof-high window wall on the south side that catches the low winter sun. A broad roof overhang and louvered first-floor overhang shade the home from the summer sun. The home received an award from the N.C. Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

The current Ramsay home at 1722 Park Road--originally designed for Bill and Betty Ann Stanback in the mid 1950s--also takes advantage of the sun through floor-to-ceiling glass on the south side. The winter sun's rays angle all the way across the living room, bringing with them an atmosphere of warmth and light.



**Ramsay-Hurley Residence**
**Salisbury, NC**

## CHAPTER VII

JER speaks frankly of the agonies that a progressive architect in Small Town USA necessarily must bear. But he also speaks of the ecstasies. Some have been modern structures. Others have been traditional. Some have been built in his beloved hometown. Others have been built in cities across the state and the South.

One of his ecstasies was the College-Community Centre in Salisbury. A modern building, it blends with the architecture of the original Catawba College campus. The progressive colonnade that surrounds the Crystal Lounge suggests the shape of the arches found on the upper windows in the administrative building across West Innes Street, and the dark brown brick harmonizes with the brick on the original campus.

Ramsay faced multiple challenges in designing the center, not the least of which was a limited budget. At the time the structure was being built, New York architects were correcting an acoustical problem at Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center. "They spent $800,000 on correcting acoustics alone," he says. "Our total budget in Salisbury for building two theaters, including an experimental theater that seats 250 to 300 people and a major theater that seats in excess of 1,555, with all driveways and parking areas, landscaping and furnishings, was $800,000."

The fact obviously pleases him, even though he admits to having to do some portions of the center more thriftily than he would have liked. One of the center's strong points is that one stage serves two theaters. Ramsay originally designed a concrete curtain that could have made it possible to have two productions going on at the same time. The scene shop could have also operated 40 hours a week with more acoustical protection. But budget considerations nixed those concepts.

The Detroit Symphony under the baton of Sixten Ehrling christened the center in March of 1964 with Schubert's overture to "Rosamunde," Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 in B flat major and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5.

Ramsay remembers the grand opening well. "I was sitting up there on the platform," he says, "and I thought, 'They don't need that damn

microphone over there.' I knew the acoustics were good in the hall." So he spoke to the crowd sans microphone. "That has been mentioned to me on many occasions in years since, as if to say, 'Weren't you nervous that they wouldn't be able to hear you?' But I'd been living with the building on paper and as it developed on the ground. I had stood on that same stage and talked to people in the rear of the house. I knew they could hear."

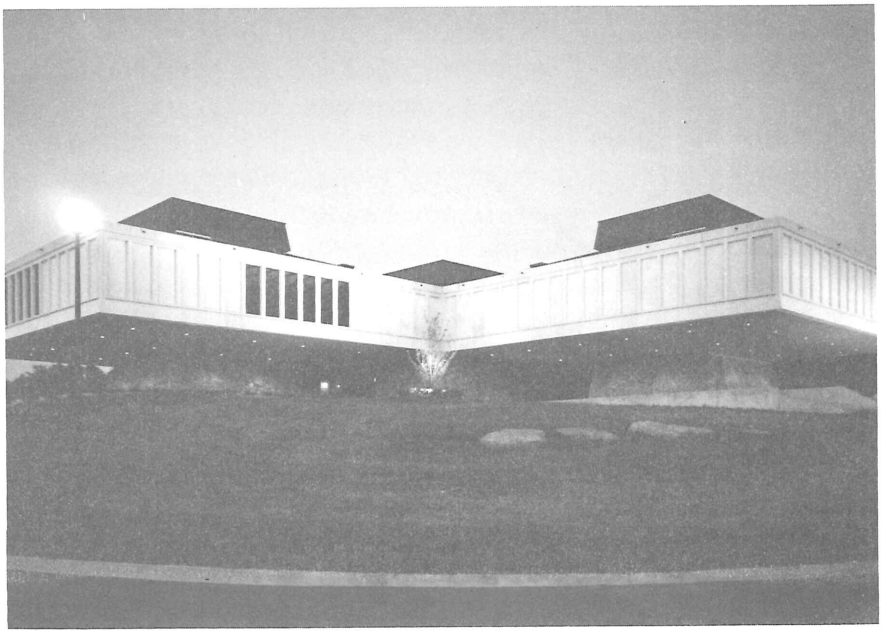
Was it an exhilarating experience? JER downplays such an extravagant choice of words. "I think human nature being what it is," he drawls in characteristic understatement, "almost anybody enjoys demonstrating something that he can do well."

**College-Community Centre**
**Salisbury, NC**

Some of Ramsay's best--and most progressive--work has been done outside Salisbury. In fact, he estimates that 50 or 60 percent has been commissioned by people in other cities. "I have run into far more people who think they have really found the architect outside Salisbury," he laughs. "I have found less skepticism." He feels, however, that this phenomenon has been repeated throughout history. He quotes the Gospel according to Matthew: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house."

The Fairfield Furniture Display Center in Lenoir was one of Ramsay's most significant works. The directors wanted 15,000 square feet of floor area on one level, but the site they had chosen was on the side of a hill. "It didn't lend itself to putting everything on one level," he says, "so we thought, 'How can we do this?' "

The directors were also interested in having a distinctive building. "They didn't want anything that looked like the usual shoebox," Ramsay says. So he designed three modules of 5,000 square feet each on pedestals. "We set the back side of it up so that trucks could



**Fairfield Chair**
**Lenoir, NC**

back up to a loading dock generally about four feet above grade and roll off on dollies such furniture as Fairfield Chair intended to show or remove from the pavilion," he says, "because they didn't want any ramps or steps."

The practicality and aesthetics of the design appealed greatly to Fairfield Chair directors. "They were quite enthusiastic about it," Ramsay remembers. "It was featured in furniture periodicals and magazines. They said, 'Look what they've done down in Lenoir, N.C.' "

The grand opening proved to be a gratifying experience for the architect. "People were amazed that we could cantilever a building 20 feet in four directions," he says. "They had never seen anything like it before, and they mentioned that the quality of light on the interior and particularly around the reception area had an ethereal atmosphere about it. They said, 'Wouldn't it be great if a church could be built that had the same feeling?' But industry produces more wherewithal than churches, generally speaking."

While the people at the opening praised him for the aesthetics of the building, he is quick to point out that logic must come first. That is perhaps the part of architecture that stirs his adrenalin most.

"I enjoy the planning process of arranging rectangles and spaces on paper so that they have a very practical relationship to each other and good circulation pattern," he says. "I enjoy putting an envelope around these spaces or developing the external appearance so that all this function comes off as aesthetically pleasant."

Ramsay's attention to both logic and aesthetics has brought him multiple awards from the N.C. Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. One was for his design of American Square in Thomasville. American of Martinsville commissioned him to design a dealer showroom that would be open only in April and October for the Furniture Market. Since it would be unoccupied most of the time, the owners feared they might have a problem with vandalism. That's why Ramsay designed the dual-level building--literally a square with an atrium in the center--with few windows on the outside. Virtually all the glass faced in inner courtyard, which featured a mosaic tiled patio, water fountain and sunken garden.

"We worked out a system on the lower level," he says, "wherein

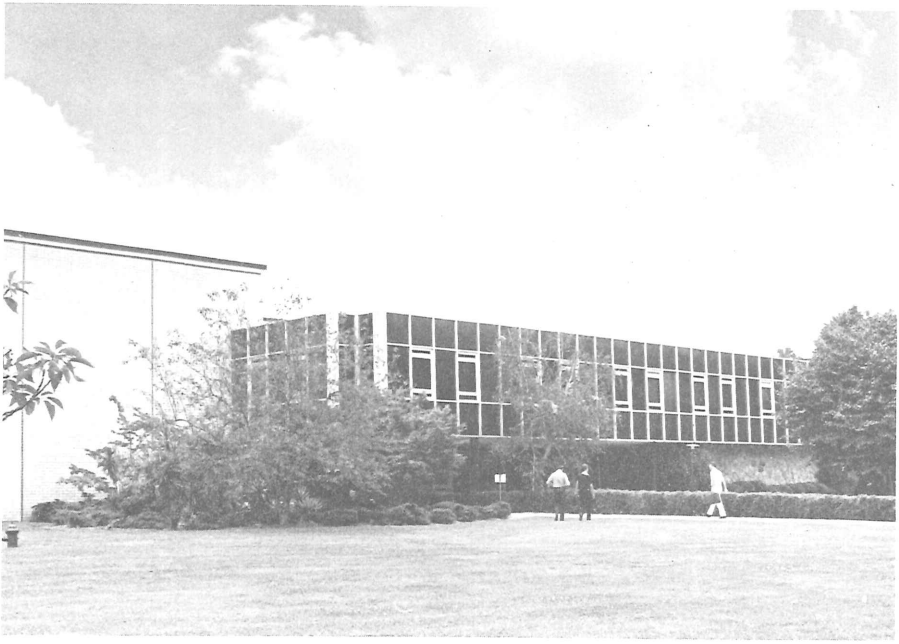
**American Square**
**Thomasville, NC**

the ceiling of the outside entrance porches could drop down and be bolted into place to protect the glass out of season and reduce vandalism."

Ramsay remembers the grand opening of American Square as quite an event. The art editor of the New York Times and the architectural editor of Architectural Record were there. The latter was apparently quite taken with the design. "She said, 'Ah, Mr. Ramsay, you have created an atrium,' " says Ramsay, who was seemingly a little uncomfortable with all the hoopla. "There was a lavish dinner and entertainment with everybody blowing everybody else's horn. It was quite a gala occasion."

Alderman Studios in High Point, built in the 1950s, is another of Ramsay's standouts. It is the largest still photography studio east of California. Designing an administrative area, a photography developing area and two major still photography laboratories was like building a warehouse plus high-quality office space, Ramsay says. "It's a very interesting building because every time you go there, it's set up for something different. To design a building to house functions that were so interesting and constantly changing was completely different from anything we have done before or since."

Ramsay has always had an innate desire to do something that hasn't been done before. Perhaps that's one reason why the central feature that he designed in Frederick Memorial Gardens in Gaffney,



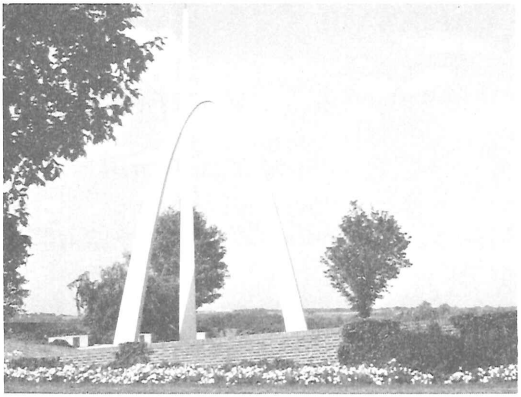
**Alderman Studios**
**High Point, NC**

S.C., gave him such obvious pleasure. "It's one of the most original things we've produced," he says. Called a parabalon, it married the ideas of both a parabola and a trialon. At the base of the structure is a pool and fountain.

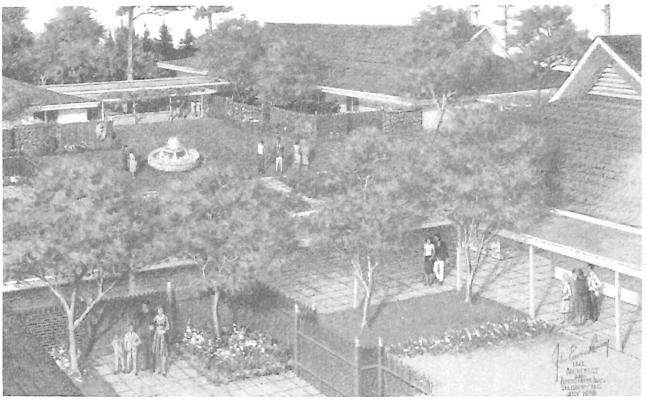
"Theology got into the picture," he says. He conceived and had inscribed at the foot of the memorial these words: "From the earth man through his own efforts soars upward in search of eternal life only to return to a point lower than his origin. Symbolic of man's futility is the parabola. The trialon, symbolic of the holy trinity, points upward to eternity through the redemption of Christ and the water of life."

Ramsay plummets back to earth quickly after reading the lofty inscription by saying, "I was trying to think of something that would look attractive and wouldn't cost a pile of money."

Ramsay has not limited his designs to single structures. He was



**Parabolon Frederick Memorial Gardens Gaffney, SC**



**Avalon Retirement Center Raleigh, NC**

commissioned to design the Avalon retirement center on a 50-acre site in Raleigh in the late 1970s. It had 250 housing units--some apartments and some individual cluster housing--a 60-bed nursing facility and all the supporting functions, including dining rooms, kitchens, swimming pool, health fitness center, library, banking facility and chapel.

Changes in leadership caused the board of directors to shelve the project. "I still hope it will be built on a different site at a different time with a different board of directors," Ramsay says.

Ramsay has distinguished himself as a church architect. Milford Hills United Methodist Church, which he designed in 1967, received an award for one of the three best rural churches in North Carolina from the Bishop's Committee of the Methodist Church.

His reputation as an architect who senses that a church building can give structural form to beliefs has led building committees throughout the state to seek him out. The Rev. Bradey Faggart, pastor of First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Greensboro, touches on a probable reason for Ramsay's continued success as a designer of churches. "He is an outstanding churchman in his own right," Mr. Faggart says.

Ramsay spent seven weeks with his wife in Europe in 1966, visiting one cathedral after another. "He is in love with Gothic cathedrals," Mrs. Ramsay says. "They are his friends. He knows their different characteristics and it was exciting for me to see them with him."

The church has played a substantial role in his life since birth. "On a scale of one to 10, I'd give faith about an eight," he says. "It's hard for an architect to design a really significant church unles he has been involved rather significantly with churches and church programs, what goes on in a worship service and what the faith of the people happens to be. If the architect's faith is extremely limited or if the faith of the congregation is extremely limited, you're not likely to wind up with much of a church."

Ramsay also has a fundamental understanding of how different sects approach their worship. "Baptists have a different concept of worship from that of Episcopalians or Roman Catholics," he says. "A design that is appropriate for one is frequently very inappropriate for another."

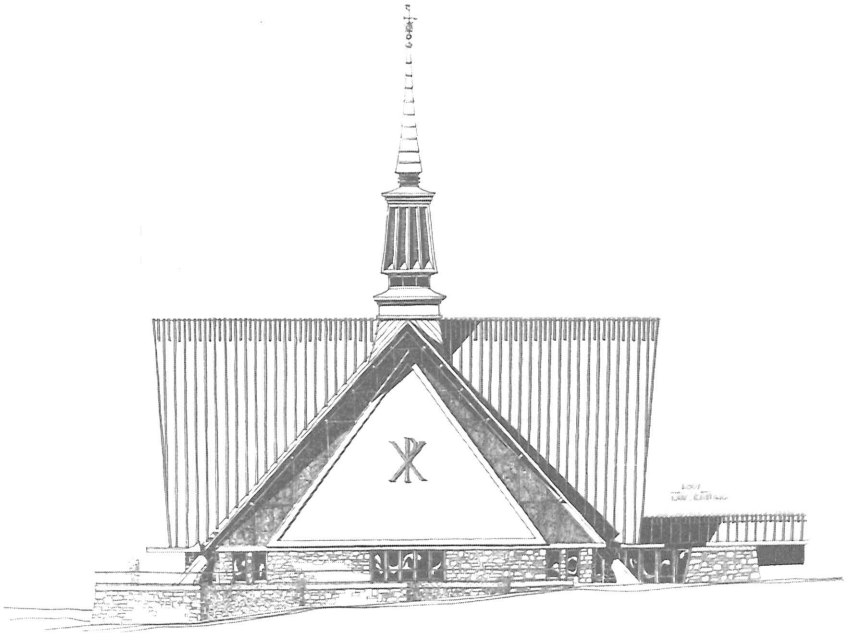
Charles Mortimer, chairman of the building committee at First Lutheran, says committee members felt Ramsay was "sensitive to what we were trying to do." He adds that all the ballots came back with the same name when members were selecting the architect for the project in 1980.

Ann McIntyre, chairman of the building committee of Grace Episcopal Church in Lexington, says her committee found itself in a

similar situation. "The amazing thing was that John was consistently the highest all the way through the voting," she says.

Their new church, which is still merely lines on paper, will seat 230 to 240 people. A modern A-frame structure, it is designed to blend harmoniously with the original turn-of-the-century church designed by Richard Upjohn. "The new church will have the possibilities of having the congregation worship around the worship center," Ramsay says, "or it can be converted into a more traditional form with a central aisle and the congregation on each side."

The First Lutheran design is essentially square, with the worship center in the middle and the congregation and choir sitting around it. "I think the space is going to be inspiring when people walk in," Ramsay says of this ongoing project. "I expect they will feel the aura of religion and faith that churches should exemplify."

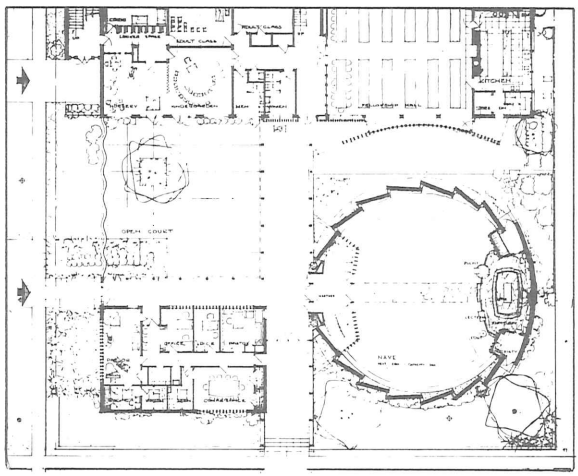


**First Lutheran Church**
**Greensboro, NC**

Calvary Lutheran Church in Spencer, which he designed in 1959, is an early example of his innovativeness, his willingness to step outside the dictates of convention. Its circular form was influenced

by what Ramsay calls "an uncommonly small site." The ceiling and roof were similar in concept to a bicycle wheel turned on its side. "The worst acoustical form you could build would be a dome over a circle, a concave shape on the interior," he explains, "so we built a convex ceiling." The walls, overlapping rectangles 10-12 feet long and 28 feet high, were joined by windows.

Here again, acoustics played a substantial role in the use of overlapping rectangles for walls. Circular walls would have been acoustically disastrous. "To my knowledge, no other church has been built like it anywhere with this combination of structural elements all in one building," he says.



**Calvary Lutheran Church Spencer, NC**

Ramsay is obviously partial to progressive architecture in churches, as well as in other types of buildings. But he can point to First Presbyterian Church, where he is a life-long member, as a splendid example of traditional architecture. "We wanted to prove to the public that we could build a fine traditional building," he says. "We were seen as modernists, period. But we could out-Fink Hansel Fink and out-Wag Harold Wagoner, great traditional architects."

Ramsay acknowledges, however, that he tried to sell the building committee on a modern structure at the beginning. A model of this proposal sits in a corner in his office. It is a hexagonal building with a steeple rising from its center. The plan, Ramsay says, was based on

the concept "that we are a fellowship of believers who worship together with no priest who intervenes between us and our God." He explains that a minister in the Presbyterian Church is a teaching elder governed by ruling elders. "The minister should not pontificate from the pulpit, dictating how people think and feel," he says.

With those theological concepts in mind, he designed the hexagonal structure that would have arranged the people around the presbytery with the Eucharistic table foremost at the center.

But the building committee was interested in the basilica form of sanctuary, so that's what he built. The $640,000 church, with a seating capacity of 500, is well known for its intricate detail. Ramsay quotes Michelangelo: "Trifles make perfection, but perfection is no trifle."

A drawer in the Ramsay office is stuffed with drawings that testify to the days, weeks and months that went into the church's design: details of the descending dove on the topmost part of the steeple, details of the fountain, of the handrails, of the chandeliers.

Associate Bill Burgin notes that Ramsay pays more attention to detail than most architects. "He wants to design every item of the building," he says. "Instead of saying 'base moldings,' he wants to show the contractors the base molding shape."

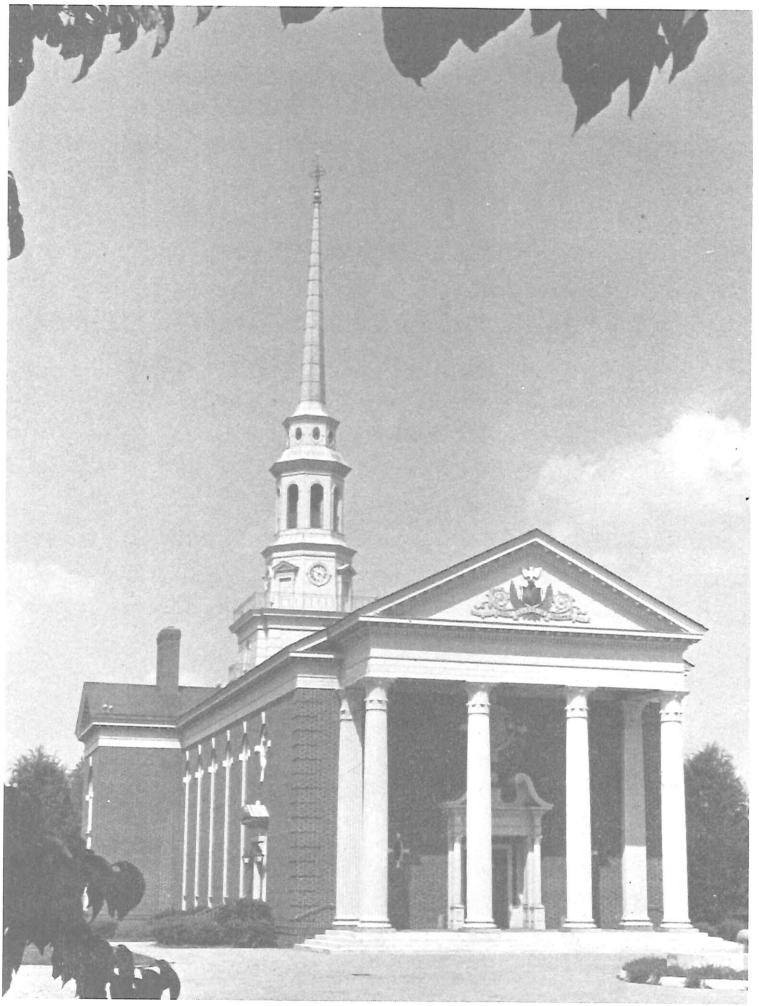
Ramsay talks about the drawings as if they are intimate friends: "This is drawn in large scale so the builder can count off each concrete block to see how they all fit together and how the pipes come down through the brick and how the insulation goes in the wall." He thumbs through some more. "That tells you where to get the finial that goes on top of the newel post. Decorator Supply Catalogue No. 126, No. 8762W."

The details seem excessive. But "if you hope to get it right," he says, "that's what it takes."

An acoustically transparent reredos shields the choir from view, yet makes for beautiful music. Here again, knowledge of details made the difference. Since the spoken word is at one end of the acoustical spectrum and organ music is at the other, Ramsay's solution was to design a reverbèration time of approximately 1.6 to 1.7 seconds, which varies with the number of people in the nave.

The building was dedicated May 4, 1969, but not without a last-

minute total family commitment. Mrs. Ramsay remembers accompanying her husband and son John to the church at midnight late in the construction phase. "The people who were installing the canopy above the pulpit were having trouble," she says. "I was just praying that it would go together." It did, but only after John Jr. climbed on top of the canopy and guided the massive hook through its ring.



**First Presbyterian Church**
**Salisbury, NC**

# CHAPTER IX

"To be old is not enough. You must be old and practical."

Ramsay was talking to the Salisbury Traveler's Club in 1979 about revitalization. A charter member of the Historic Salisbury Foundation, he has done his share of restoration. But he refuses to allow the past to dictate the present and future. "There are those preservationists who recognize that the best historically and the best architecturally should be preserved," he says. "And there are those

**Ramsay Associates Offices Before Renovation Salisbury, NC**

**Ramsay Associates Offices After Renovation Salisbury, NC**

preservationists who reason that everything should be preserved because we really don't have the pattern of the past unless we keep it all. In my book, age alone is not an adequate or reasonable basis of judgment."

While he insists that structures built within his lifetime are hardly historic, he did make use of the past in 1960 when he restored two abandoned homes in the 600 block of West Innes to be used as the office for Ramsay Associates plus rental office space. He bought the Kelly and the Petrea homes when "the doors were falling off the hinges and the windows were knocked out," he says.

The design for their restoration surfaced on Sunday morning during the worship service at First Presbyterian Church. "To keep our children quiet," he says, "I drew them a little picture on the back of the church program." The "little picture" became the original concept for restoration.

The rendering suggested a late Colonial flavor with four dormers, which replaced a non-functional gable on the front. But JER refused to be restricted by the history of the buildings. "If you were a purist, you would not have renovated two old houses other than to be authentic and demand that they be used as residences," he says. "But they were no longer practical as residences."

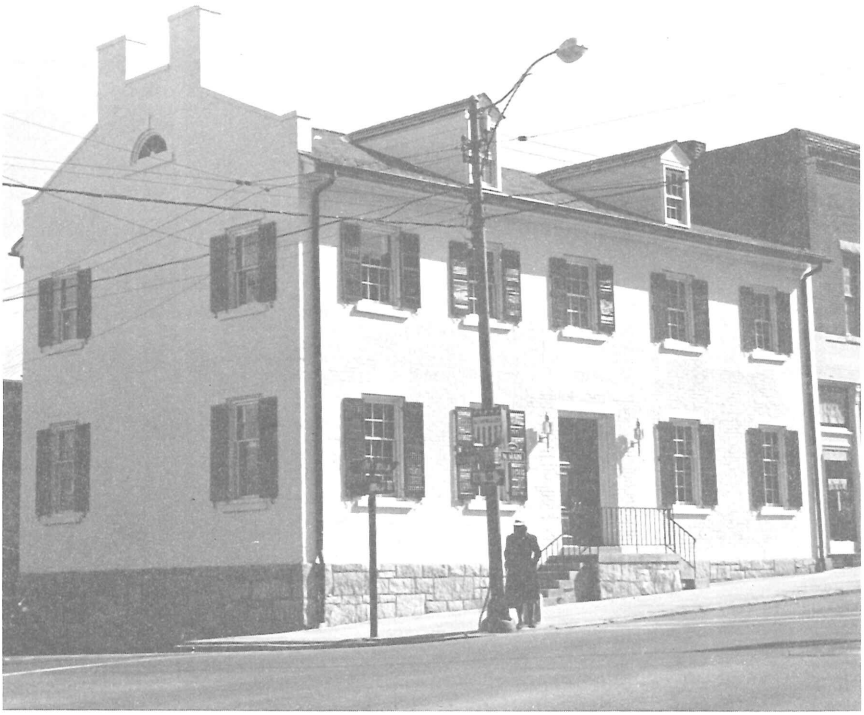
Ramsay's first renovation project was the old street railway car barn on North Main Street. He directed its renovation for Duke Power Company in 1958.

"They wanted to renovate it into office and warehouse space," he says. "The objective was to make a practical building that was pleasant enough and could be economically attractive."


**Kluttz & Hamlin Law Offices**
**Before Renovation**
**Salisbury, NC**

His office also renovated the Kluttz and Hamlin office in 1961, transforming it from a retail establishment into a law office.

The renovation of the Hobson House was a significant project because of the way Ramsay integrated it into the property



**Kluttz & Hamlin Law Offices**
**After Renovation**
**Salisbury, NC**

at the corner of West Innes and South Ellis streets. His approach to the project demonstrated his sensitivity to the small structure and its site.

The original building was a dependency for what is now the Rowan Museum. "I think it was the slave quarters and wash house," JER says. The one-room building was moved from behind the Presbyterian Manse to its present location, where it was to be used for public meetings. "There were two trees on the site," Ramsay says, "one magnolia and one pecan. To keep the trees, we had to build the building in a zigzag shape."

His clients were interested in a return on their investment to offset the cost of restoration. "It couldn't just be for charm and nostalgia,"

**John Knox House**
**Salisbury, NC**

he says. "So we built an addition that was substantially larger than the original building (for office space), which was sympathetic with the original architecture."

A project Ramsay tackled in 1971 turned out to be a labor of love. It was the renovation of the John Knox House at the corner of Bank and Jackson streets. Ramsay recalls happy memories of riding his tricycle to the home of the Knox sisters to get a pail of buttermilk for his mother. Bank Street was being paved at the time, and he remembers mimicking the steam roller, riding forward and back on his tricycle as he rode to see Miss Clara, Miss Bertha and Miss Margaret.

Miss Bertha taught John in Sunday School, and Ramsay continued his visits to the Knox House as long as the sisters lived. Miss Clara told him on one of his later visits, "John, you love this house so

much, you ought to have it when I'm gone."

He did indeed buy the home after the sisters died, when tattered lace curtains hung at the windows. An example of Victorian or Gothic Revival architecture, the house was built just five years after the Civil War, probably by freed slave labor.

While Ramsay felt it was not economically practical to renovate the home as a single-family residence, he did feel he could restore it as a building with four apartments. "We decided to keep its external appearance essentially as it was," he says, "which was a vista back into the 19th Century."

That included the picket fence. "I found few painters interested in painting the fence," he says. So that particular chore fell to him and his family. They took the pickets out of the fence one at a time, removed multiple coats of paint with Red Devil lye, and repainted them.

He made other economic concessions in the interest of aesthetics. "It would have been far more economical according to the zoning regulations to put a driveway through the front yard, taking the lawn and trees in its wake," he was quoted as saying in a July 18, 1971, feature in the Salisbury Evening Post. "But I wanted to keep the green area and avoid like the plague that sea-of-asphalt look."

He also noted that he "deliberately kept the little gravel walk to the house because of its quaintness even if it would have been more practical to have paved it."

President of the North Carolina Board of Architecture. Vice president of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. President of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Listing in Who's Who in America.

John Ramsay's accomplishments are legion. They include brick and mortar, certainly. But they also include selection to positions of honor within his profession and within his community. They include awards. They include teacher-pupil relationships.

Ramsay has been recognized as an outstanding architect throughout his career. He was elected to the College of Fellows in 1964, a distinction shared by fewer than three percent of American architects. He was nominated for his unusual service to the field of architecture and for his high quality design by the N.C. Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, which carries a stronger recommendation than nomination by an individual.

He has framed policies and procedures for the N.C. Board of Architecture. He has worked with the Educational Testing Service at Princeton in framing national examinations for architectural registration. He has represented the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards in discussions with architects in England, France, Spain and Italy. He has written articles for Architectural Record, Good Housekeeping, House and Home and Interiors. Buildings he has designed have been published in Southern Architect.

Not all his honors fit into neatly framed certificates or appear on the pages of prestigious magazines. Some were quieter distinctions - a favor here, a word of encouragement there.

Ramsay was selected in 1977 to review the professional qualifications of architectural firms interested in redesigning the Raleigh-Durham Airport. "Eighty to 90 percent of the prominent architectural firms in the United States expressed an interest in the project, and we had one firm from as far away as London, England," he says.

Ramsay's reputation as an architect of uncompromising integrity no doubt influenced Bernard "Rocky" Rothschild when he asked Ramsay to mediate a dispute between an Atlanta area hospital and its architect. Ramsay reviewed the project but downplays the honor.

"They settled out of court," he says.

Henry Kamphoefner, retired dean of the School of Architecture at N.C. State University, regularly sent students to Ramsay's office when he headed the school because he felt his students would benefit from Ramsay's work in contemporary architecture.

In fact, Ramsay Associates has been the training ground for dozens of young men. Burgin calls Ramsay a great educator. "Mr. Ramsay has in some sense paid something back to architecture by the time he spends with his draftsmen because he will literally sit down and draw details while you are watching," he says. Burgin realizes that this may not be the most cost-effective way to run the office. "To him it is more important to explain why something is proportioned a certain way or is put together in a certain way," he says. "The money is secondary."

Builder Alfred Wilson, who has completed a number of personal projects for Ramsay, has also found him to be an outstanding teacher, a master of detail and a mentor who is willing to pitch in and work alongside his pupil.

He recalls building a utility shed for Ramsay in the spring of 1978. Wilson was amazed to find that Ramsay had completed a set of detailed drawings for a structure that would house nothing more than a lawnmower and garden equipment. "I worked for a few hours and then he came out with his old clothes on and helped me tear off an old roof," Wilson says. He was impressed that a client would be willing to help him "on the most menial task."

Ramsay works closely with his associates, some of whom have come from other lands. Polish-born John Lewandowski currently works as an associate in the Ramsay office. Korean J.J. Kim worked with Ramsay for about five years. He also employed Doug Tennant of England and Tan Ersoi from Turkey in earlier years.

In the late 1960s, Ramsay hired a black and a man who had served time in prison as draftsmen. "I'm a strong believer in opening the door to people who seem to want to produce," he says. "I don't think we should have barriers for those who may have had one kind of disadvantage or another."

Ramsay has served his community as faithfully as he has his profession--as a trustee of Rowan Technical College, president or chairman of the Rotary Club, the Salisbury Chapter of the N.C. Symphony

Society and Rowan Civic Music.

When he was elected chairman of the Rowan Democratic Executive Committee in 1974, he embraced his responsibilities in characteristic JER fashion.

Brent Hackney, in a Sept. 1, 1974, Salisbury Post column, wrote that Ramsay "virtually turned the chairmanship into a full time job." He built a Democratic organization from the ground up, communicating extensively with precinct chairmen and Democratic notables on both the state and national levels.

Ramsay's organizational efforts were conspicuously successful. Democrats won the 1974 election and he was re-elected to the chairmanship in 1976.

A former Salisbury Planning Board member, Ramsay is currently serving his second term as a city councilman. It is an elected position he takes quite seriously. He willingly takes unpopular stands on issues if he feels the progress of his beloved town is threatened, and is often first to state his views on delicate council matters.

He was motivated to run for the city council by the same dream that lured him back to his hometown in 1946. He wants the city to grow and prosper, according to a sound plan.

His stand on a Salisbury Boulevard zoning change in February 1984 is a case in point. The planning board recommended in December 1983 that a strip of land be rezoned from R-8 (single-family residential) to B-1 (office-institutional). Ramsay, however, felt that B-1 zoning was too restrictive. "It's called 'office-institutional,' " he says, "but realistically it means small offices and small institutions. Technically, it cannot include commercial sales or trading, such as hospitality shops or vending machines."

He explained to the council and the Ridgewood residents who attended the Feb. 7 meeting that the B-1 classification encourages small individual office blight, such as that around Rowan Memorial Hospital or on Statesville Boulevard.

Reasoning that it is vital for Salisbury to encourage measured growth, Ramsay proposed that about a third of the Salisbury Boulevard strip nearest N.C. Highway 150 be zoned B-2 (retail business), which would permit dairy bars, clubs, service stations, bakeries, barber and beauty shops, dry cleaners, ABC stores and banks. He

had no objection to B-1 zoning for the remaining two-thirds.

The Ridgewood residents protested and the council voted Feb. 21, in Ramsay's absence, to rezone the strip B-1. "The neighborhoods are generally concerned with self-interest," Ramsay says. "Most self-interest groups don't care about Salisbury's overall growth and probably don't want it, but the lack thereof will inevitably lead to higher taxes."

Ramsay was disappointed in the outcome. "To go through all the wrangling discourages growth and sends potential developers elsewhere," he says.

JER is concerned about the future of Salisbury. He feels that the town's progress suffered a severe blow March 5, 1984, when Maxwell Chambers trustees voted overwhelmingly to lease the Wrenn Building and a quarter city block on Jackson and Fisher streets to Roy Alexander of Granite Quarry. Ramsay was one of seven trustees to vote against it. Alexander pledges to renovate the building for $175,000 and turn it into a restaurant.

Ramsay has hoped for many years to see a retirement center built on Fisher Street across from the Rowan Public Library. It would help to abate the erosion of the retail sales dollar downtown, he says. Senior citizens could walk to the central business district for shopping, plus it would draw their children and grandchildren to the downtown.

Locating a 130-apartment retirement center at the Fisher Street location would be an economically sound move because "if it were put there, it wouldn't be necessary to build ancillary features to complete the center," he says. A library, churches of all denominations, banks and a YMCA are all within walking distance.

"But the retirement center had the rug pulled out from under it when the lease was signed with Alexander," Ramsay says. The only way the center could be built now would be if a developer were to lease the other quarter city block and negotiate a sublease with Alexander for the remaining property.

Ramsay will not carry this banner. "I have been trying to deal with the Maxwell Chambers trustees since 1952," he says. "I don't have much time left." Besides, office responsibilities preclude his getting substantially involved in a time-consuming crusade.

The demise of the central business district weighs heavily on Ramsay's mind. Aside from tourism, the retirement center "is one of two major things that could cause people to turn off I-85," he says.

The other one is marketing analyst Ken Gifford's idea to reactivate the old post office, Wallace and Bell Telephone buildings. "They could rent luxury offices in the post office for less than $10 a square foot," he says. Prime office space in major cities costs more like $20 a square foot, but people in Salisbury think $10 is extravagant, he says.

What will make this dream a reality? "We can't just sit and hope," Ramsay says. "We have to get the leadership together."

He laments the fact that Salisbury has not kept pace with her sister cities for decades. Just before the Civil War, Salisbury was second only to Raleigh in population. By 1900, it had dropped to fourth or fifth.

Ramsay credits the transportation union that followed the railroad into the county with discouraging other industries from locating in the Salisbury area. Plus, he says, "three banks failed before I was 12 years old. I lost money in all of them.

"We entered 1900 in a strong position of leadership," he says, "but now we've faded to about 17th. The parade of progress has passed us by. We need strong aggressive and progressive leadership with a sensitivity for the quality of history that has preceded us--people who are willing to stand up and be counted."

He believes that the right leader could create a positive attitude in the minds of the people and a pride in the city. One man who measured up to that criterion, in his opinion, was Jim Cobb, the manager of Owen-Illinois during the 1950s. "He had the ability and the tact to cause people to believe that they could do it, too," he says. "But, as you might guess, a man with that much talent was quickly moved up the ladder in his organization, and Salisbury lost him."

What will happen to Salisbury if this type of leadership doesn't emerge? "The demise of the business district will be slow but sure," Ramsay says, "so long as we continue on our present course."

# CHAPTER XI

Jean Anne Ferrier learned early that architecture had a firm grip on Ramsay's soul. They sat one wartime evening in a cocktail lounge at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia. Ramsay mentioned Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead.* "He said, 'You're not really interested in all this architecture, are you?' " she recalls. "And I said, 'I really am.' "

That interest has provided a support system for John Ramsay for nearly 40 years. "I was a very smart boy when I persuaded Anne to marry me and come back to my hometown," he says. "Anne has been a tremendous asset in people relations, which is not one of my strongest suits. She has more friends in my hometown than I have because she is a very warm and engaging personality who alienates virtually nobody."

She has entertained clients and potential clients. She has fixed luncheons at the Ramsay home for young licensees who were awarded their certificates to practice.

Ramsay indicates that he still hears favorable comments about those occasions. "It's usually a more routine operation," he says.

Mrs. Ramsay has met the members of building committees after her husband was awarded a commission. "They said, 'Why didn't you bring her along the first time?' " Ramsay says. " 'You would have had an easier time with the contract.' "

Mrs. Ramsay has had ample opportunities to demonstrate her interest in architecture since that wartime conversation at the Bellevue-Stratford. Her husband's ecstasies have been her ecstasies, his agonies her agonies. She has shared his profession with him and she has shared him with his profession. "It is obvious that no human being can go through all the agony and ecstasy without having to make a substantial sacrifice to personal interest," Ramsay says. "This she has done with grace. She's an exceptional person."

Ramsay has shared his triumphs and disappointments with his children, too. When the Heritage Square dream died on the drawing board, the entire family mourned.

In a letter to his children in October of 1972, Ramsay told them how much their concern meant to him. "You have no idea how grate-

ful I am for the letters you wrote and the concern you expressed for my disappointment over Heritage Square," he said. "And I regret that some of this disappointment had to rub off on you. Sharing it together, however, went a long way toward facing the problem and preparing for the next one."

The letter is vintage JER. The disappointment, while obvious, is controlled. The tone is philosophical. Typed on Ramsay Associates letterhead, it conveys the professionalism that seeps into even his intimate relationships.

It also reveals Ramsay's pervading sense of responsibility toward his children. The obvious intent of the letter was to lessen his children's concern ("In case you feel that this and other disappointments I have had are destroying my spirit, you should back up and take another look. Nothing could be further from the truth"). But he seized the opportunity to share information with them. In the postscript, he said, "Thought the attached enclosures, 'How to Save Money in Spite of Yourself' and 'A Good Citizen Votes,' might be of interest."

Ramsay is proud of his children and speaks of them with affection. He begins at the beginning with their first child, Anne Ramsay Saunders. "Well, you know," he says, "Anne's a fine young woman." She is a graduate of Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., and the University of Georgia. She is married to Frank Lyle Saunders, Jr., local art teacher and football coach. They have two children, Susan and Eric. "They both have proven to be splendid scholars," he says.

The Ramsays' first son, John, operates Ramsay Associates in Raleigh. He graduated with honors from N.C. State University after two years at UNC-Chapel Hill. An architect and licensed general contractor, he is also vice president of Retirement Properties Inc., which concentrates on the marketing and financial aspects of architecture.

"He's a talented young man," Ramsay says. "He can fix almost anything." He is married to the former Sue Hubbard. They have one son, Carter Hubbard.

Kerr Craige also graduated with honors from N.C. State University after spending two years at UNC-Chapel Hill. He, too, is an architect. "He had an uncommon talent as a draftsman, delineator and artist before he ever went to architectural school," Ramsay says.

Kerr Craige is employed by Tolsen Associates in Raleigh. He is

married to the former Ann Clark. They have two children, Kerr Craige and John Robertson Clark.

The Ramsays' third son, George, is a real estate analyst for the B. F. Saul Co. He has an MBA from UNC-Chapel Hill. "He's happy as a Turk," Ramsay says, "having found himself in the investment and banking arena."

George and his wife, the former Anne Stuart Edmonds, live in Atlanta.

Ramsay also has a special fondness for his only niece, Eleanor Ramsay Williamson, and his godson, Stephen Allen Messinger, who originated the name family members call him: Papa John.

JER is pleased that two of his sons chose his profession. "But you say, 'Why aren't they here?' " he says. "I think I can sum it up by saying, 'Pop, you should move to Raleigh. That's where the action is. We can accomplish twice as much in Raleigh with half as much energy as you spend trying to sell ideas in Salisbury.' And I say, 'I can't feel badly about your electing to live in Raleigh because I am convinced that architects operate better in larger communities.'

"Not more than one-tenth of the people give a damn about architecture to begin with, so one-tenth of 23,000 is 2,300, and a very small percentage--maybe 200--of those build anything to begin with," he says, speaking of Salisbury.

"I tell them, 'If you hope to get close to the market, you have probably sized it up about right. You need to be where there's more population.' "

He pauses. "But then I keep the door open," he says.

Ramsay's sons may never return to Salisbury, but recent discussions indicate that son John will be a principal of Ramsay Associates when his father retires. He, along with Bill Burgin and John Lewandowski, may form a professional association that would perpetuate Ramsay Associates in both Salisbury and Raleigh.

Both Burgin and Lewandowski have an uncommon respect for their mentor and what he has accomplished. "He is rooted in Salisbury," Lewandowski says. He has remained faithful to his hometown during economic slumps and emotional setbacks. Lewandowski admires that fidelity.

"To think that Mr. Ramsay has accomplished what he has from a

Salisbury base is incredible," says Burgin. "His architecture is regional."

Burgin feels that Ramsay has given Salisbury the architecture of the period. "He wasn't able to in all cases because the owners didn't want it," he says, "but a hundred years from now people will look at these things and they'll appreciate them."

Ramsay speaks highly of his three successors. "They're fine young men," he says. And while retirement may not be first on his list of desires, he acknowledges that he'd be "extremely naive" to think he could go on forever.

"I've been working at it for a lifetime," he says, "and I haven't begun to accomplish the potential that I thought was available in Salisbury when I started back in the '40s. Maybe they can finish off some of these things and develop a lot of new concepts."

He reflects on his career as an architect, on his desire for perfection. "I've never produced a building that I didn't think, if we had a chance to do it again, we couldn't do it better," he says. "If I design a building that I feel cannot be improved, I think it will be time for me to be sent out to pasture."

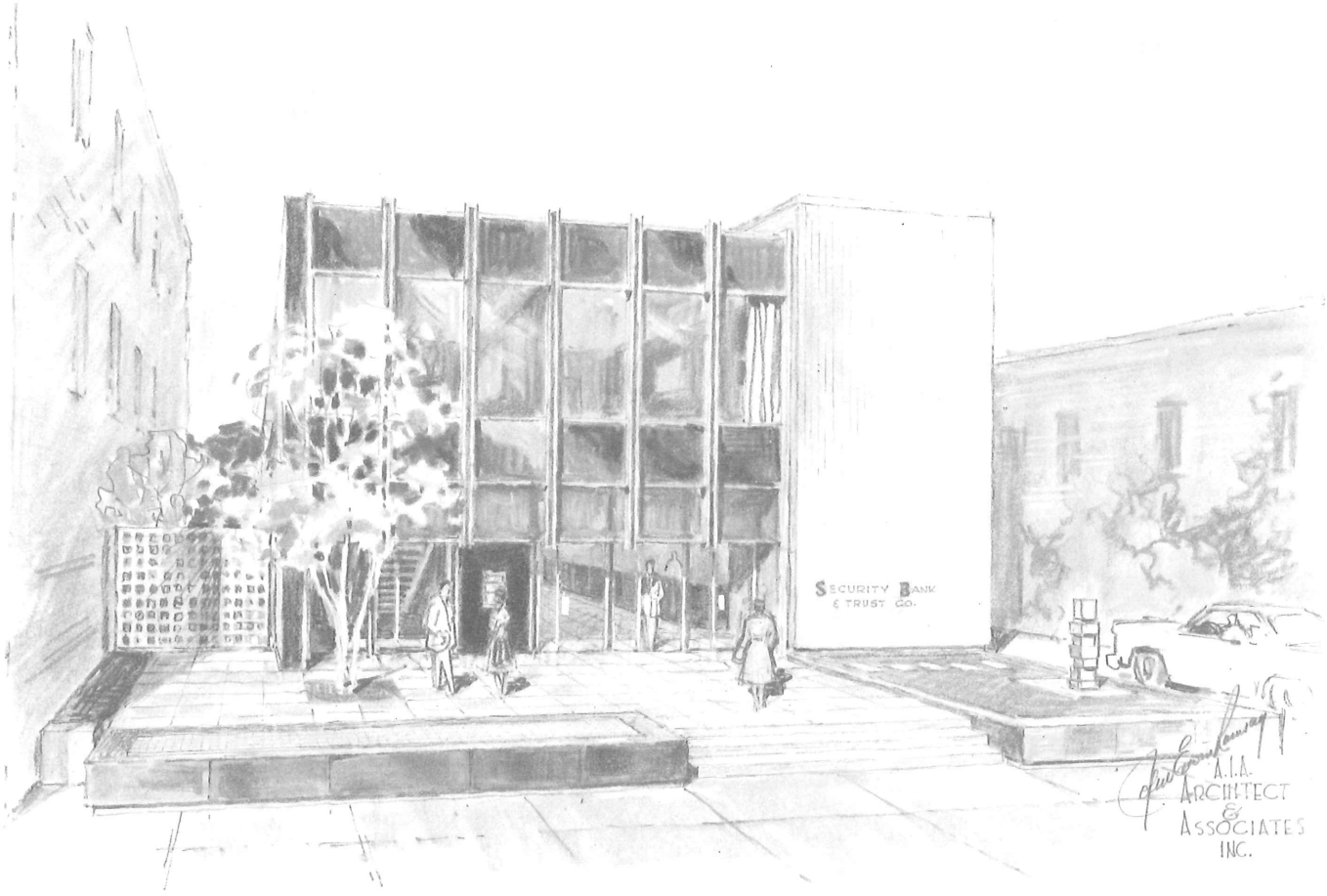
He softens the the self-criticism by noting that Winston Churchill wrote his speeches multiple times "and he gave the impression, after he delivered them, that he remembered things he had meant to say."

James Mitchener, Ramsay continues, "writes and rewrites paragraphs. I suspect poets do the same thing. You read about Michelangelo and how he never felt totally happy with his Sistine ceiling or his statue of David. I think this is part of the agony of the design profession."

So, two years from retirement, with nearly 40 years of architecture behind him, Ramsay is thinking of improvements. His face is always turned toward the future. His best work, he insists, is always "the next one."

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

--Henry David Thoreau




**Security Bank, Salisbury, NC 1962-1983**

# APPENDIX

This list includes all projects, large and small, that reached the construction phase. Unless otherwise noted, all structures are located in Salisbury, N.C., and Ramsay Associates was responsible for all five phases: Phase I, schematic design; Phase II, design development; Phase III, construction documents; Phase IV, bidding and/or negotiation; Phase V, construction administration (supervision).

Some of the structures--particularly the earlier ones--have undergone subsequent alterations. Consequently, a few current structures bear little resemblance to the original designs recorded in the Ramsay office.

**1939**

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. W. M. Elliott, 106 W. Colonial Dr.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. John G. Riley

**1940**

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Carson Brantley, 643 Mahaley Ave.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. Harold B. Ervin, Jr.

**1945**

Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Richard Dobkin, 520 Club House Dr.

**1946**

Carolina Tractor and Equipment Co., Hwy. 29, South
Present occupant: Rimtrax Corp.

Hedrick Memorial Bell Tower, Memorial Park

**1947**

Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Julian Robertson, 236 Confederate Ave.

Granite Quarry School Addition

Davis Frozen Foods, Additions and Alterations, Lexington, NC
Present owners: unknown

WSAT-Mid-Carolina Broadcasting Co.

Purcells, R. Dobkin, Addition and Alterations, S. Main St.

**1948**

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Dan F. Ritchie, Stevens St., China Grove, NC

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Cecil Graham, S. Franklin St., China Grove, NC

Residence, Dr. & Mrs. Jay Smith, 4th St., Spencer, NC

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. F. C. Wedler, 2317 Princess Anne St., Greensboro, NC
Present owner: Mr. Joseph Bryan, Jr.

**1949**

Residence Addition and Alterations, Dr. & Mrs. J. B. Fry, S. Franklin St., China Grove, NC

Farm Colony Building, Broughton Hospital, Morganton, NC

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. J. R. McCartney, 17 Oak Rd.
Present owner: Mrs. Fred H. Ziprik

1950
Rowan Public Library
Educational Building., First Presbyterian Church
Residence, Alexander/Johnston, 17 Pine Tree Rd.
Present owners: Dr. & Dr. Bohdan and Anna Gulyn
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. John Erwin Ramsay, 119 Pine Tree Rd.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. J. F. Hurley III
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. J. P. Mattox, 231 Confederate Ave.
Present owners: Dr. & Mrs. John R. Crawford III
Mt. Mitchell Maintenance and Service Center
1951
Mt. Mitchell Natural History Museum
Library, Agricultural and Recreation Bldg.
Present owners: Noble and Kelsey Funeral Directors
Residence, Dr. & Mrs. James C. Coffey, 8 Pine Tree Rd.
Rowan County Health and Agriculture Building
Present occupant: Agricultural Extension Service
1952
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Walter Woodson, Jr., 116 W. Colonial Dr.
1953
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. George L. Burke, Jr., 120 Shady Lane
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Don Walser, 401 Country Club Dr., Lexington, NC
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. Fred McIntyre, Jr.
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. James M. Myers, 13 Oak Rd.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. Wm. V. Bost
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Clyde Smith, 10th St., Albemarle, NC
Present owners: Dr. & Mrs. T. F. Kelly
Residence, Dr. & Mrs. W. N. McKenzie, 10th St., Albemarle, NC
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Holt Grace, 249 Annandale Ave.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Query
W. T. Grant Store, Lexington, NC - Phase I
1954
All Faiths Chapel, Dix Hospital, Raleigh, NC
Wilson Construction Co. Office and Warehouse, Hwy. 29, South
W. T. Shaver Building, 309 N. Main St.
Present owners: Art Donaldson and John Holshouser
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Robert J. Levin, Braxton St., Mt. Gilead, NC
1955
Spencer Clinic
*Rowan County Jail Addition
Residence, Dr. & Mrs. Wm. Smith Kirk, 10 Mulberry Circle
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. I. H. Pope, Jr.

*No longer in existence

Residence, Dr. D. B. Moore, Badin, NC
Parabalon, Frederick Memorial Gardens, Gaffney, SC
Salisbury/Rowan YMCA, Original Building and Exterior Pool - Phases I, II, IV, V, John R. Hartlege, Architect - Phase III
Swimming Pool, Mr. & Mrs. C. W. Isenhour, Jr., 820 Mocksville Ave.

**1956**

Residence, Mr. & Mrs. J. W. Johnson, Colonial Drive, Thomasville, NC
Residence, Mr. E. L. Brown, Millbridge, China Grove, NC
Price High School, Major Addition
Residence, Dr. & Mrs. John Gregory, 521 Confederate Ave.
Present owners: Dr. & Mrs. Robert B. Tannehill
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. W. C. Stanback, 1722 Park Rd.
Present owners: Mr. & Mrs. John E. Ramsay
Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Paul B. Reynolds, Rebel Road
Fire Station #3

**1957**

Spencer Clinic Addition

**1958**

American Square, Thomasville, NC
Duke Power Co. Renovation
Wachovia Branch Office, West Innes Street
Dept. of Social Services Addition (to Health and Agricultural Bldg.)
Residence Addition, Miss Julia Groves, 117 W. Colonial Dr.
Present Owners: Mr. & Mrs. James Butner
Residence Additions, Johnston/Gulyn, 17 Pine Tree Rd.
Woodard-Carolina Forge, I-85 South - Phases I & II

**1959**

Wachovia Bank, North Branch Office, High Point, NC
Scottish Bank, Branch Office, Archdale, NC
Rowan Dairy
Present owner: Flav-O-Rich
Farmhouse Renovation, Mr. & Mrs. John A. Morrison, S.E. Rowan County
Leisure Lads, Inc., Renovations and Additions
Present owner: unknown
Wachovia Branch Office, Park Rd., Charlotte, NC
Kimball Memorial Lutheran Church, Kannapolis, NC
Calvary Lutheran Church, Spencer, NC
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Kluttz, 329 W. Bank St.
Alderman Studios, Inc., High Point, NC

**1960**

Ramsay Associates Building, 1st stage
(Major renovation of Kelly House)

Peoples National Bank & Trust Co., Branch Office, Lynchburg, VA.
Penrod, Inc., Concord, NC
Present owner: unknown
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Fred J. Stanback, Sr., 241 Confederate Ave.

**1961**

*Cooleemee Bank Renovation, Cooleemee, NC
College-Community Centre, Catawba College
Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. George Burke
Thomasville Industries Showroom, Thomasville, NC
Beach Residence, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Wallace, N. Myrtle Beach, SC
Present owner: unknown
Southern Pines Shopping Center, Southern Pines, NC
Ramsay Association Building, 2nd stage (Renovation of Petrea house)
Howard Johnson Motor Lodge & Restaurant - Phase V (collaboration with Starnes and Richter, AIA, Miami, Fla.)
First United Methodist Church - Phase V (collaboration with Barber and McMurry, AIA, Knoxville, Tenn.)
Law Offices, Kluttz and Hamlin (Restoration of Horace Beard House)

**1962**

Wachovia Branch Office, Addition and Renovation, Thomasville, NC
Wachovia Branch Office, Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC
Wachovia Branch Office, Snow Hill, NC
Catawba College Chapel - Phase V
(collaboration with Barber and McMurry, AIA)
Lincoln Park Apartments, Old Concord Road
Security Bank Main Office (see illus.)
Carolina Rubber Hose Office Addition

**1963**

Lyerly Funeral Home
Alderman Studios, Warehouse Addition
Educational Building, Milford Hills United Methodist Church
*Salisbury Post* Addition
Wachovia North Branch Office, Burlington, NC

**1964**

Chapel, Broughton Hospital, Morganton, NC
First Presbyterian Church Sanctuary
Coca-Cola Plant, Major Addition
Mid-Carolina Telephone Co. Exchange, Hwy. 52
Central Fire Station
Medical Services, Inc., Original Building
Woodson and Abernethy Dormitories, Catawba College

*No longer in existence

**1965**

Howard Johnson Addition

Dolly Madison Plant Addition

**1966**

First United Methodist Church Sanctuary, China Grove, NC

Wachovia Branch Office, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC

Southland Life Insurance - Phase V

**1967**

Coca-Cola Co. Addition

Vocational Rehabilitation Facility, Morganton, NC

Goldsboro High School Addition - Phases I-IV (collaboration with Billy Griffin, AIA -Phase V)

Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Wm. H. Ruffin, Roaring Gap, NC

Rowan County School Bus Garage Addition

Catawba College Physical Education Building - Phase V (collaboration with Barber and McMurry, AIA)

**1968**

Residence, Dr. Elizabeth Phillips, 2170 Royall Dr., Winston-Salem, NC

North Rowan High School Addition, Spencer, NC

Milford Hills United Methodist Church Sanctuary

First United Church of Christ Sanctuary, Landis, NC

John Knox House Renovation, 303 W. Bank St.

Farm Colony Building Conversion - Phases I & II

**1969**

Lyerly Funeral Home Addition

Rowan Public Library Renovation

Fairfield Furniture Display Center, Lenoir, NC

**1971**

Power Curbers, Inc.

Kitchen Renovation, Mr. & Mrs. Hayden Clement, 302 S. Ellis St.
Present occupants: Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Piper

**1972**

Residence, Dr. Germaine Breé, 2135 Royall Dr., Winston-Salem, NC

Lamp post, Historic District

**1973**

China Grove Jr. High School Gymnasium

**1974**

Hobson House, for Citizens Federal Savings & Loan (Presbyterian Dependency Renovation and Addition)

Knox Jr. High School Addition: Classroom and Media Center

Bostian School Addition: 6 Classrooms and Long Range Plan, S. Rowan County

First United Methodist Church, China Grove, NC, Fellowship Hall Renovation

1975

Front entrance alteration, Mr. & Mrs. Willis N. Dixon, 18 Pine Tree Rd. Present owners: Dr. & Mrs. B. B. Vinoski

Residence, Dr. & Mrs. Shasta Bryant, Royall Dr., Winston-Salem - Phases I-III

1976

St. Paul's Episcopal Church Renovation

Hong Kong East Restaurant, Albemarle Rd., Charlotte, NC

1977

First Union Bank Renovation, Archdale, NC (Conversion of Scottish-Bank, 1959)

American Square, Major Addition

Porch Addition, Residence Dr. & Mrs. Robt. W. Wilson, Stokes Ferry Road

Rowan County Courthouse, Courtroom Renovation

1978

Horse and Feed Barn, Mr. & Mrs. Boyd Miller, Jr., Cleveland, NC

White Rock A.M.E. Zion Church, Major Repair, Granite Quarry, NC

Civic Recreation Center

1979

Churchland Baptist Church Addition - Phases I & II

Handicapped Adaption, Halfond Residence, Clancy St.

First United Methodist Church, China Grove, Covered Walkway

1980

Second Presbyterian Church, Lexington, NC, Ramp/Landscaping - Phases I-III

Town Creek Tennis Courts (for Civic Center)

Oakland Ave. Presbyterian Church, Rock Hill, SC (in progress) Major Additions, Renovation and Long Range Planning

First Lutheran Church, Greensboro, NC (in progress) New Sanctuary, Renovations, Additions and Long Range Planning

Grace Episcopal Church, Lexington, NC (in progress) New Sanctuary, Additions and Long Range Planning

Residence Addition, Smith/Kelly House, Albemarle, NC

1983

Residence Addition, Dr. & Mrs. Dirk Dixon, Crescent Drive, Lexington, NC (collaboration with R & A Interiors)

Residence Addition, Mr. & Mrs. Michael Levi, Lyles Rd., Raleigh, NC

1984
Northwestern Presbyterian Church, Rock Hill, SC (in progress)
Long Range Plan for total church plant (to be built in phases)

**Consulting Services:**
1963 - Ragsdale Property Survey
1968 - Cobb General Hospital, Atlanta, Ga. - Arbitration
1970 - Second Presbyterian Church, Lexington, NC - Programming
1973 - Alexander Long House, Mr. & Mrs. R. D. Messinger - Renovation Consultant (collaboration with John Bivins, Jr., Winston-Salem)
1975 - Folletts Firehouse - Structural Consultation
1977 - Raleigh/Durham Airport Authority - Consultant for selection of project architect