



O C U L U S

Vol. I

No. 8

THE NEW YORK CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
115 EAST 40th STREET • MAY, 1939 • WARD W. FENNER, EDITOR

APRIL MEETING

The Chapter meeting on April 25 was sparsely attended by thirty-six, probably the only members of the Chapter who were not in the Smithsonian competition.

Mr. Harmon reported that he had sent telegrams to the State Senate committee considering the Phelps Bill, S. I. 1316, Pr. 1471 which if passed will prevent the employment of private practitioners of architecture and engineering by the State of New York and by cities of over 100,000 population. The Joint Committee resolution opposing the bill was also read.

A motion was passed instructing the officers of the Chapter to censure the member or members who recently sent to Dean Hudnut a communication asking for an extension of time on the Smithsonian competition, and without the knowledge or consent of the Chapter or any of its officers, signed the petition: "Architects of the New York Chapter."

The Chapter passed a vote of thanks and appreciation to Mr. Charles Butler and Mr. William A. Delano for the splendid results accomplished through their recent negotiations with the Treasury Department.

The next order of business was the viewing of several excellent amateur motion pictures loaned by Mr. Stephen Voorhees, Mr. F. J. Woodbridge, and Mr. Maxwell Harvey, Director of Operations of the New York World's Fair.

The subjects of the pictures were the New Orleans convention, and the Paris and San Francisco fairs. The pictures were most interesting in themselves, but added zest was provided by the deft handling of the projection machine, by Mr. Woodbridge who could show the films not only in the usual way, but also backwards, upside down and hindside front.

NOMINATIONS

Pursuant to the Chapter By-Laws a letter ballot for officers for the coming year is enclosed with this issue of *Oculus*. This is the list of nominations presented by the Nominating Committee of the Chapter.

(*Couldn't figure out any other way to get you to read this.—Ed.*)

Subject: Regular meeting, and reception of visiting foreign architects who have designed Fair buildings. You are all going to the Fair sooner or later. Make this the occasion. Dinner for the chapter will be served in a private room in one of the restaurants. This will probably be your one and only chance to see the Fair in company with the men who designed it, and perhaps can explain it.

Place: WORLD'S FAIR
Time: May 22, 7:00 P.M.

NEXT MEETING

PUTSCH

Our scouts advise us that Big Bill Gompert, backed by a small but determined group of supporters, is organizing a coup d'état and will seize the reins of Chapter government. In a recent interview his spokesman declared that once safely in the saddle Bill will annex the Brooklyn, Westchester and Central New York chapters, and that it will be merely a matter of time before the encircling policies of the Philadelphia, Boston and Buffalo chapters will force him in self-protection, to march on Washington.

A BOW TO DOW

The Dow supplement no. 1194 of April 6, contains an excellent dissertation on the value of the architect's services. It is required reading for all clients. Extra copies may be had from The Dow Service, 420 Lexington Avenue on request.

SMITHSONIAN

The Museum of Modern Art informs us that approximately five hundred drawings were entered in the Smithsonian competition. A pleasant pastime these days is to sit at lunch at the League and listen to the competitors trying to worm out of each other information as to the various partis that were used. Everyone seems to be extremely gagy.

*For the following we are indebted to the Bostonian architecture,
Hubert G. Ripley*

OVERTURE, 1939

Had it not been that my old friend Patout urgently pressed me to visit him during his stay in New York, I would not have seen the World's Fair, 1939, on the opening day. If these random impressions chiefly concern the French Pavillon and the superb gigot that Madame served Saturday night, it is because of the dominance of the esprit gaulois, the theme of the week end. (By the way, "week end" is now a French word, one of many such expressions of international usage.) In fact, we talked French and English interchangeably all the time and got on famously. Madame said when she returns to France her friends will tell her she speaks French with an American accent: "Beaucue!"

Patout and Expert, as all know, designed the Pavillon Francaise, and I was especially anxious to see the latest masterpiece of one who has been a valued friend and kindly mentor off and on for more than thirty years. Even in its unfinished state, lacking the final settings that will adorn its suave outlines, the Pavillon possesses a vibrant appeal that cannot fail to impress the most uncompromising traditionalist. This emotional appeal to static old codgers like me is strong, and youth fairly bubbles over with delight on glimpsing its dynamic asymmetries. I can think of no more spontaneous tribute than that which came from the lips of a lovely young girl the day before the Fair opened, with the building not quite finished, a great tangle of staging swarming with workmen. Patout and I were standing on the curved ramp that leads to the first floor, when a most attractive person came up to us and said, "May I go inside?" Patout, who loves to practice his English on all occasions, said: "Yes, right there!" The girl turned to him, seeming to sense who he was by his appearance and the sound of his voice, and cried out impulsively: "Oh! I think your building is perfectly lovely!"

There's hardly a right angle in the whole plan, and nearly all the straight lines have become gracious curves wher-

ever it seemed fitting so to make them. The great sweeping arcs and parabolas, the contrast of its flowing line, lend the quality of life and motion to an inanimate thing; just as when far-shooting Apollo strikes his lyre that cunning Hermes made for him from the shell of the mountain tortoise, its unheard harmonies ring in our ears.

This quality of intangible rhythm is sensed in the great Court of Peace, where on Sunday afternoon the ceremonies attending the formal opening of the Fair took place. Wriggling our way with circumspection between squeezed humanity, we finally found seats and were able to relax in comparative calm despite the presence of 39,995 others inside the barriers (our party of four, and I. Howland Jones, who also came down from Boston, rounding out the reported total). The plaza hummed in an atmosphere of expectancy and repose after the hurly-burly of gate-crashing.

The Great Court is wonderfully named. Its designers have created a beautiful and a noble group of buildings, adorned with statuary, fountains and spots of color. Sunday afternoon, within a setting of massed cumuli, patches of cerulean and opal, plashing waters and fanfare of brass, the guards of honor and the holiday spirit, the spectacle was tremendously impressive and stimulating. The Court is a fine conception finely carried out, with no discordant note to mar its noble serenity. Here the new architecture achieves eurhythmy. I'm sure our old friend M. Vitruvius Pollio will be greatly pleased with his pupils when he visits the Fair.

How M. Pollio will react to the great ball and trylon, one may not say. The ball is so vast that one doesn't have to go near to see it unless one wants to, and being a person of modest aspirations I was content to view these contrasting objects from a distance. It's a fascinating spectacle, however, that one is constantly being confronted with. The ball looks as if it might float away on a cloud like a titanic soap bubble if one blew hard enough. The trylon, set to guard the ball, has a threatening air of conscious rectitude as if he were afraid this might happen, and was jolly well determined to allow no nonsense of that sort. At night, under the spell of Hephestos, Patout says the spectacle is a gorgeous one. This spectacle will, for me, have to be reserved for another occasion, as a small sector was quite enough to digest in a two-day visit. Like Manhattan cocktails, one is just right, two are too many, and three—not half enough.

Speaking of Manhattan cocktails, a perfect one is almost a masterpiece of nature, and for the most part I stuck by them—one at a time, of course—during my stay in New York. But it's high time to return to cabbages and kings. The

nearest we came to royalty was on May Day when the taxi driver who took us down from Flushing said he'd just taken a Norwegian couple, dressed in the National costume, to the Fair, where Olav the Good was dedicating Norway's pavilion. As for cabbages, let the word be a symbol for nutriment. I firmly hold with Katherine Stanley-Brown's thesis, that architecture and cooking are indissolubly linked together in rhythmic ephphony. The character of a nation's architecture is reflected in its cooking. As one art progresses, the other follows in its footsteps. In the glacial period of American architecture, it was the custom to serve enormous dinners whose menus included a multitude of dishes; everything, in fact, from ox-tail soup to harlequin ice cream appeared on the table practically at the same moment. During that unhappy period our leading architects stressed the opportunity to show their stuff—shoot the works—so to speak, on each commission. Gradually the Sister Arts underwent a process of elimination until the World's Fair, 1939, appears as a demonstration of what can be done by observing the principles so simply stated by Vitruvius in "De Architectura."

To me, Brillat-Savarin and M. V. Pollio have been a great comfort, a rod and a staff on which to lean. It is an accepted fact that the cuisine française occupies the chief niche in the temple of Gasteria, and it was a privilege to observe the meticulous care which Patout displayed in the selection and consummation of food. "Why is it," he remarked, "that people I see in restaurants take so many things on their plate at the same time? I take only one thing always, and maybe a little; when that is finished I take another thing." "Don't you like broiled lobster and fried potatoes?" I asked. "Never together," he said, "only lobster. The potatoes gagent—how do you say it, impair?—the delicate flavor of the lobster. If you wish, eat some fried potatoes after, never at the same time!" I think he's right. When we learn to eat broiled lobster without fried potatoes the quality of our architecture will improve. It was the same with Saturday's gigot. Madame first gave me a spoonful of the sauce on a hot plate to sop up with a bit of bread as a prelude to the pièce de résistance. It was deliciously flavored with a hint of what Madame called "une gousse d'ail." The whole dinner, in fact, was a little Chateau de Porcelaine in miniature.

If Dr. Fellows, the antiquary, should see these lines he'd never forgive me if I did not mention the New England exhibit. I understand that Colonel Fullerton and Dr. Fellows made a special trip to New York last week to break a bottle of old Medford Rum on the starboard bow of the bark *Calasaya*. (A replica, one must remember. The original bark

was first christened the *Bouncing Betty*, or the *Sarah E. Pryme*—I'm not quite sure which, and went down with all on board in the famous hurricane of '43 off the Rutabagas.) The christening seems to have taken place, for I saw a sturdy prop near the bowsprit, evidently covering some mark or other abrasion.

The Board of Design has done a wonderful job of coordination on the Fair. Their guiding spirit is evident throughout an area so vast that one could almost spend the entire summer there with profit and pleasure, or preferably make numerous visits at convenient intervals. The only criticisms or suggestions, rather, that occur as a result of a brief stay—and these are doubtless due to the overwhelming wonder of it all, are: that there should be (a) shrines of Dionysos spaced nearer together, and (b) if the cocktail glasses were larger, they'd sell more.

CANDIDATES

The names of the following men have been presented for membership:

FOR INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP

1. Ides van der Gracht

Sponsors:

Wm. Adams Delano
Wallace Harrison

2. Walter H. Kilham, Jr.

Sponsors:

Walter H. Kilham, Sr.
Alfred E. Poor

3. Eugene Raskin

Sponsors:

Leopold Arnaud
Talbot Hamlin

Pursuant to Section 6, Paragraph 3, of the Chapter By-Laws, members are requested to submit within ten days for the information and guidance of the Committee on Admissions, privileged communications relative to the eligibility of the above-mentioned candidates.

ART CREDITS

Enclosed with this copy of *Oculus* are samples of the credit-acknowledgment form evolved by the Municipal Art Society. It is felt that progress can be made toward getting complete and correct credit from publications if this standard form is attached to all photographs or other reproductions which are sent to newspapers or magazines for publication.

ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Chapter will be held on Wednesday, June 7, at the Architectural League. Save this date. Announcements of importance will be made, and a full attendance is required.