Architects Start Program to Offset Visual Pollution

Disturbed by esthetically offensive signs and proliferation of billboards, two AIA Chapters in Alabama have taken a frontal attack on offenders.

First to act was the Birmingham Chapter. In November members adopted a statement and ran it as a paid ad in the Birmingham News. The ad read:

SIGN POLLUTION

The members of the Birmingham Chapter, American Institute of Architects, have noted with alarm the large billboards that have cropped up just off the right-of-way to the Red Mountain Expressway.

These signs are not only ugly, but, in distracting the motorist on this crowded and fast moving traffic artery, are dangerous. Such signs are unlawful on the right-of-way itself and we can only appeal to the owners and users of this type advertising on the basis of civic pride.

As an organization interested in good planning, beauty and esthetic taste we commend Mayor Seibels for his stand on this problem and urge the Birmingham City Council to take what action is needed to eliminate the billboard signs on this and all other expressways.

What's wrong with making Birmingham beautiful? It just takes a little help from everyone.

Subsequently, at its February meeting, architects in the Magic City Chapter heard Marshall Haynes, a vice president with Molton, Allen & William Realty Company, address the group on "visual pollution." The talk was widely reported in the Birmingham papers (see Chapter News). Chapter members believe that Mr. Haynes remarks provided an appropriate beginning for the AIA campaign to develop a model sign ordinance for the City of Birmingham.

BUS BENCH ADVERTISING STOPPED

In further action, architects appeared before the Birmingham City Council to protest a request by Jaycees to install bus benches with painted advertising throughout the city. The city council agreed with the architects, and denied the request.

Huntsville Action

Members of the North Alabama Chapter AIA approved a resolution urging the city council of Huntsville to adopt an ordinance regulating the size and placement of signs in the city. In a front page story in the Huntsville Times, the article said: "The growing number of lighted signs mounted on trailers a menace to the beauty and safety of our city streets."

Calling on other citizens to protest, the statement said further that "there is a growing problem of sign pollution in Huntsville; and the members of AIA, being interested in improving the environment, urges everyone to speak out against this blight on our cityscape."

The city planner's office has proposed an ordinance regulating the size, types, and placement of signs, subject to approval by the building inspector. A more comprehensive sign control ordinance may be included in the city zoning ordinance now being revised by the planning commission, it was noted.

(Continued on page 2)
VISUAL POLLUTION
(Continued)

MONTGOMERY ARCHITECTS DISTURBED

While no concrete action or proposals have been forthcoming, Montgomery architects are disturbed by the rash of mobile signs which have burst forth in every part of the city, including those near residential areas. Many have voiced the opinion that action should be sought to regulate this visual pollution.

WHAT THE OUTDOOR BILLBOARD PEOPLE SAY

Representatives of the Outdoor Advertising Association of Alabama agree with many of the architects' points. Jack Hail, of Birmingham, current president, said "I think it is important to make a distinction between standardized outdoor advertising and the myriad of miscellaneous signs of all sizes and shapes. "We in the Outdoor Advertising industry believe that our structures should be permitted as a business use only on property that is properly zoned or available to other business or industry. We recognize that our structures do not belong in residential areas. We willingly abide by all reasonable zoning ordinances. In addition to this we welcome regulation of our industry (even on property zoned for business and industry) as long as these regulations are reasonable. We recognize that there can be too many signs in an area and that too many signs too close together can cause clutter or visual pollution. We do not, however, believe that a well maintained sign of itself is visual pollution. And to those that say that a sign of itself is not pretty, I ask the question, "Not as pretty as what?". Beauty is relative. I certainly agree that a park is prettier than a sign; but we do not place signs in park areas. The areas in which we place signs are zoned for many types of business ranging from service stations to truck terminals, warehouses and manufacturing plants. None of these are as pretty as parks either. In fact, in a great many cases an outdoor advertising sign is the most attractive structure in the area.

In a nutshell, our position is that we should be permitted where other business and industry is permitted, and within these areas subject to reasonable regulation that would not allow signs too close together so as to form a cluttered situation.

We sincerely appreciate your interest and can assure you that we share the architects interest in good planning, beauty and esthetic taste."

Robert Pearson, secretary of the OAAA, said that members of the organized outdoor advertising industry are just as interested in good planning, beauty and esthetic taste as are the architects. However, he objected to business discrimination, saying "we feel that we have every right to build our structures in commercial zones and if a city is going to allow other businesses, then we should certainly be allowed, and we support and urge zoning, based on sound community planning."

Pearson said that "In the ad by the Birmingham Chapter of the AIA that appeared in the newspapers, they stated that the signs were not only ugly but in distracting the motorists on this crowded and fast moving traffic artery, are dangerous. In this regard let me refer you to the booklet "The Highway Safety Issue Revisited." We have never been able to find in any traffic accident records where the cause of the accident was, or even mentioned, the driver's attention was distracted by a billboard. If the Birmingham Chapter has any such information, we would certainly like to know about it."

He concluded: "Certainly we appreciate the position of the architects and we want to work with them in solving these problems. In this connection, the Environics Committee of our National Association has met with a similar committee of the AIA to work together in meeting our common goals."

Paul Robertson

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CHAPTER NEWS AND EVENTS

AUBURN CHAPTER AIA PROGRAM PLANS FOR 1971

Auburn is a small and a relatively new chapter, still questioning the reasons for its existence and its mission in this world.

Its membership is largely made up of faculty members from Tuskegee and Auburn, with a few full time practicing architects to give us a contact with "reality". Our interests naturally focus on education for architecture and the student.

In this light, one of the Chapter objectives, I feel, should be to ease the transition between student status and professionalism. We need to acquaint the student with the practicing architect and the basic need for our professional organization. The AIA is the only group really concerned with strengthening the position of the architect and committed to making maximum impact, as a profession, on the ills of the environment.

PROGRAMS

The overriding Chapter "project" for the year will be hosting the State Convention ("conference") in the fall. We hope to make this conference a short concentrated inspiring session with some fun and games thrown in. Tentatively, the theme will be "Man vs Machine", and Professor Negropoute has been contacted to represent "The Machine".

The Student Chapters from both Schools will be co-hosts for the event. The Saturday morning part of the program will be theirs along with the luncheon. We hope that common interests of the students and corporate members can be explored in conversation at that time.

The Chapter is also in support of an effort to bring environmental message to high school students in the state. A plan of action is being developed to put together a good "show" of the best AIA prepared aids, plus examples from the local scene. We would like to see this presentation hit the road in the fall.


Auburn Chapter Schedule of Activities for 1971

Feb. 18 Joint meeting with Montgomery Chapter. Students will tour 3 Montgomery Offices and be guests for dinner.

MARCH-APRIL MEETING - Tuskegee - Members will be hosts.
MAY MEETING - Honors Day Program in Auburn for students from both Schools.
OCT. MEETING - Final preparation meeting for State Conference.
DEC. MEETING - Final preparation meeting for State Conference.

BIRMINGHAM CHAPTER AIA REPORT

Bill Blake, Tilman Wheeler, Charles Moss and Nelson Smith attended Grassroots 71.

The following committees were appointed with chairman and duties as noted:

Committee on Membership . . . Allen Bartlett, Chairman: Contact all eligible persons re: membership in Chapter. Big effort here due to possibility of restructuring Institute.
Committee on Education . . . Nelson Smith, Chairman: Concentrated effort to get films and speaker into high schools in Jefferson County and to explore possibilities of sponsoring student for AIA/Ford Scholarship program.
Committee on Professional Practice . . . Paul Speake, Chairman: Primary emphasis on communications with contractors (AGC) and crafts (Trade Unions).
Committee on Architectural Design . . . Don Horton, Chairman: Emphasis on Urban Design with profession assuming greater role on planning and zoning boards.
Committee on Public Relations . . . Joe Keeton, Chairman: Utilize T.V., Radio and Newspapers; have ordered Public Service slots from Institute to use on T.V. Contact all civic organizations with offer to furnish speakers and/or films (we have three at present).
Committee on Government Relations . . . Aubry Garrison, Chairman: This committee will try to promote a zoning change in Birmingham to prohibit billboards and to try to work out a general sign ordinance for the city.
Committee on Government Relations . . . Don Morrison, Chairman: Maintain and utilize the Chapter Office to the best interest of the membership and profession.

Chapter office back in full swing after a couple of months of intermittent service with a new secretary, janitor service and office committee.
1971 officers installed at dinner meeting the 22 January by Bill Pearson. Attendance was around 50.
Due to the membership assessing themselves an additional $3.00 per month and the success of the convention, we start '71 in good financial shape and with a membership of 88 corporate members, 12 professional associate members, 17 associate members and 5 members emeritus.

Chapter officers and directors are: Bill Blake, Pres.; Tilman E. Wheeler, Jr, Vice-Pres.; Joe Giattina, Sec.; Bob Bishop, Treas.; Paul M. Speake, Dir. (1 Yr.); Walter Entrekin, Dir. (2 Yrs.); James E. Adams, Councilor; Emory Kirkwood, Councilor; Aubrey Garrison, Councilor (Alt.).

(Continued on page 5)
GRASS ROOTS '71

A CRITICAL EVALUATION BY ALABAMA ARCHITECTS

WHAT IS (ARE) GRASS ROOTS?

New Orleans, January 14, 15 & 16

Explored by Nelson Smith, FAIA

Proxy for Jay Leavell, HAIA

Executive Director, Alabama Council AIA

AIA membership continues to increase with the Price Index (up 10-12% per year); AIA components (Chapters, State and Regional Organizations) are involved with broadening programs at local level; the National Convention is so large that it functions as an IRS sanction to see America, rather than as a sounding board for the membership. There's reason to question whether, in complexity of its operations and in recent orientation toward the charismatic uses of "evolving practice," the Institute may be in danger of growing away from large segments of its support. The need for verbal exchange between echelons becomes greater as the opportunity for it diminishes.

THUS GRASS ROOTS. Each year in mid-January, as new Chapter Officers are starting their year, members of the AIA Board expose their programs (and their persons) at meetings in three geographical zones across the nation. Chapter and State Organization Presidents from Illinois to Alabama, from Minnesota to Louisiana, a couple hundred of them, met at New Orleans for Grass Roots Central: a day and a half intense review of Institute structure and program:

The scope:
- Government Relations
- Human Resources
- Professional Practice
- Student Affairs
- Public Relations
- Institute Operations
- The Professional Society
- Environmental Concerns

The pattern:
- Assembly is broken into small groups, each scheduled for one or two sessions in the morning and again in the afternoon; five sessions over the two day period.
- Each presentation is chaired by the AIA officer or director who heads the commission or committee charged with that subject at the national level.
- A detailed description of objectives, present program and future plans, followed by questions (penetrative, provocative or abrasive) and answers (likewise).

Each group is small, the commissioner competent in his topic, and there is opportunity for pointed, informal exchange: - he gets through to them and they to him. A bit like "Things You Have Always Wanted to Know About the AIA"* and sometime wish you hadn't asked, (See below)

The Institute today strives toward all things that it is "proper" to be: relevant, involved, computerized, free-wheeling, viable. It is supremely conscious of its responsibility to guide its member into the "maximum competence in the essential phases of the creative process", and into an involvement in areas (social, political, economic, public opinion) "which shape the physical environment and constrain the creative process". Beginning as a patron of advocacy, and having recodified zoning and building laws, the architect is urged on through operation-retread into project development, promotion, financing, construction management and ultimate ownership — drawing the blueprints has become incidental if actually necessary at all.

It's easy to lampoon such earnestly phrased measures, and not quite fair. These objectives, plainly stated, are acceptable to most of us. One danger is that we become so trapped by verbiage, so absorbed in the beauty of the process, that we forget the objective. "Competence" is more than a swinging glossary of trick syllables; it did not suddenly spring from the forehead of an AIA officer in late 1970. More "involvement" is hard for a professional already involved sixty or more hours a week in maintaining a practice; and by way of caution) he might well consider the consequences if he — too ardently — coaches his client in matters social, political, economic and environmental, even assuming his "competence" in these matters.

The opposite danger of course is that this kind of flimsy reasoning, this self-justification, excuses inaction; we become bogged in the mire of our own making, trudging the treadmill of "decision, design and delivery" as it already occurs in most small and medium architectural offices. No time for critical looking and critical action, or for improvement of self and improvement of our profession. There ARE contributions which architects can and should make toward solutions (Continued on page 5)
GRASS ROOTS
(Continued)

tions of today's mess; a strong national organization is required to assemble and articulate workable programs. An understanding membership - a hearing membership - and a LISTENED TO membership - is required to accept and effectuate such programs at the local level, where solutions must finally take place.

Thus GRASS ROOTS: - the opportunity to hear, to question, and to be heard. Your Chapter president has had his opportunity; through him your turn will come over the next few months. You will serve yourself, and the AIA, by making use of it.

Attachment "and sometimes wish you hadn't asked"

"Examples" of this have been requested and attempted; out of context they appear abusive, rather than merely abrasive:

a) The explanation of discrepancy between estimates and bids on Headquarters Building would be unacceptable to clients I know.

b) Critical commentary on our recent national advertising is met by PR Committee's plea: "these fellows are our professionals, we hired them, we must accept their advice".

c) 23% of all national committee members whose expenses are funded by AIA are "students" or "young professionals" (presumably non-AIA, non-licensed).

d) Discover that AIA, so earnestly liberal, was gored by Proxmire yet, through defeat of the Brooks Bill; reassessment of objectives indicated.

e) CDC: in spite of major effort and monumental talk almost no material success can be claimed: - "involvement": some; "production": hardly.

There are other "examples", but to tabulate even these is counter-productive (not to mention depressing). Also deceiving, since the Institute doesn't stumble in everything, or even many things, it undertakes. It seems to stumble worse where it listens least to the membership (which of course is a polite word for "me").

Thanks to Nelson Smith for this thought-provoking comment on Grassroots '71.

Each of the 5 Alabama chapter presidents has written a report which will be printed in the next issue.

CHAPTER REPORTS
(Continued)

MOBILE CHAPTER AIA


A report of activities and plans for the Mobile Chapter is being prepared and will be included in the March-April issue.

MONTGOMERY AIA

CHAPTER REPORT

The Montgomery Chapter of AIA at this time has set the following activities for the year 1971:

- Reinstate Workmanship Awards.
- Sponsor a tour through 3 or 4 Architectural offices in Montgomery for interested Auburn and Tuskegee Institute Architectural students, culminating with invitation to attend regular AIA meeting with dinner provided. (See article).
- Establish closer relationship with out-of-town chapter members, particularly those in Dothan and points east. Also, intend exploring feasibility of providing a "Section" in Dothan.
- Chapter to carry on with AIA-AGC relations with idea toward better workmanship through better control over subcontractors as a start. Study of mutual problems brought about by the package dealer and large conglomerates.
- Plan to increase activity in public relations area with guidance from Council level.
- Will maintain continued interest and activity as necessary to combat problem of engineers practicing Architecture.
- The Montgomery Chapter held a Ladies Night Meeting on January 28, 1971, at 7:00 p. m. at the Pine Room, of the Montgomery Country Club.
- Guest speaker was H. Morgan Smith, who is Chief of the Arctic, Desert, Tropic Information Center, Aerospace Studies Institute's Environmental Research Division at Air University. He spoke on "Art and Architecture in Latin America".

The chapter conducted an architectural student program on February 18, 1971. A student's tour of architects offices was held from 2-5 P.M. These offices were visited by more than 65 students. Sherlock, Smith & Adams, Wiatt, Watson & Cole, Tiller, Butner, McElhaney, Rosa & Seay.

Students and faculty members attended the regular AIA Dinner-Meeting as guests of Montgomery Chapter.

The meeting was held at the Sahara Restaurant. The program dealt with the "Future" of Architectural Office Practices.

Prior to the dinner, officers and directors held an executive meeting at Sahara at 4:00 P.M.

Montgomery chapter officers and directors for 1971 are: Richard Brunschwyler, Pres.; Gene M. Parsons, Vice-Pres.; W. Murray Watson, Sec.; E. Sam Butner, Treas.; Ross S. Brown, Dir (1 yr.); John Woodham, Dir (2 yrs.); Gaines B. Hall, Councilor (3 yrs).

NORTH ALABAMA

CHAPTER AIA

North AIA Chapter activities for 1971 include: going thru self-analysis of objectives. A critique of chapter is being held. A committee has been named to bring in associates and others to determine direction. Restructuring of committees along lines of interest by architects as well as community lines. The chapter is taking an active part in sign control and working thru the city council.

North Alabama officers and directors for 1971 are: David Crow, Pres.; Fred Underwood, Vice-Pres.; William Herrin, Sec.; Frank Neville, Treas.; Tom Joyce, Dir.; Fred Underwood, Councilor.

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The First Quarterly meeting of the Alabama Council AIA was held in Montgomery at the Holiday Inn Southwest on Friday, January 29, 1971. The meeting started promptly at 10:00 a.m., with Bill Pearson presiding. Every Chapter was represented and all Council officers were in attendance.

Following a reading of the minutes of the last 1970 Council meeting to provide new members with a feeling of continuity, the audit of the books for 1970 by a CPA was examined and approved. The 1971 budget was presented by Charles Moss, treasurer, and approved in the amount of $9,900. The Council will attempt to operate on a balanced budget this year.

Moss discussed the profits of the 1970 convention and it was voted to distribute these to the host Chapter (Birmingham); the Council, and to each Chapter.

Bill Pearson discussed the Auburn-Tuskegee program of visiting critics, which seemed to be going along as rapidly as the schools could schedule it. Bill Blake made several observations on the proposed statewide competition for a new State Judicial Building, and plans were made to put this into an action program.

T. Ramon Perdue, Montgomery insurance executive who has been functioning as the schools could schedule it. Bill Blake made several observations on the proposed statewide competition for a new State Judicial Building, and plans were made to put this into an action program.

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The Alabama State Registration Board held their first meeting of the new year in Montgomery on February 4th and 5th at the Whitley Hotel. All board members and assorted kibitzers and lookers-on were present.

For those of you who don't know, the board members for this year are Virginia March, Mobile; Murray Watson, Montgomery; Tom Jones, Huntsville; Hugh Ellis, Gadsden; Charles Blondheim, Eufaula; and Jim Adams, Birmingham. Of course Jack Morton is secretary, yours truly is representative from the Alabama Council A.I.A., and Dick Millman represents the school of Architecture at Auburn.

Two future trips are on the agenda for the members, one to the southern conference N.C.A.R.B. meeting in the Virgin Islands on April 15th, 16th and 17th.

The board discussed possible new registration procedures (more about that later) and Bob Adams from Birmingham was interviewed for his senior examination.

The law suit in Mobile against an engineer practicing architecture has been held up until the middle of March. The results of this should be in my next report.

Thursday afternoon Dick Millman papered the walls of a large room with the latest design and site planning problems of registration hopefuls. After the smoke had settled the following were dubbed "Registered Architect": William W. Renneker, Steve M. Robbons, Harold Nichols, Philip Fretwell, Chas. F. Bischoff, Robert G. Crosby, Jack W. Nix, Al Dampier, and J. F. McWilliams.

The Friday meeting was rather subdued as the board discussed and up-dated present registration board by-laws.

The next meeting is to be held in May in Auburn. The board hopes to have an open meeting at this time and to answer questions from students.

Respectfully submitted,
John B. McDonald

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

As evidenced from this first quarterly meeting of 1971, the Council seems to be working well as a cohesive force uniting the efforts of the individual Chapters, which is the basic reason for its existence. In addition, we are opening lines of communication and services to the members and firms.

Other needs will arise from time to time and the Council officers and councilors, working from an effective, central office, should be able to meet and solve them.

The Council now has new offices on the tenth floor of the Union Bank Building in downtown Montgomery with a commanding view. Available facilities include an extra office and telephone for use by any architect who is visiting in the city, a conference room seating six comfortably, plus available use of a tenant conference room on the fifth floor seating fifty (this room must be arranged for in advance).

Respectfully Submitted,
Jay Leavell, Executive Secretary

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