



Vol. X, No. 5

O C U L U S

February, 1949

NEW YORK CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
115 EAST 40th STREET, NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

HAROLD R. SLEEPER, *President*
DANIEL SCHWARTZMAN, *Vice President*

WILLIAM POTTER, *Treasurer*
FRANCIS W. ROUDEBUSH, *Secretary*

DOROTHEA WATERS, *Executive Secretary*

MORTIMER E. FREEHOP, *Editor*

COMING EVENTS

Feb. 15, Tuesday Lunch 12:30

The Professional Forum Committee will present some forward looking proposals for Chapter action.

March 1, Tuesday Lunch 12:30

Discussion of Cost Analysis by the Technical Committee.

March 4, Friday Dinner 7:30

Anniversary Dinner of the Chapter at the Town Hall Club.

March 8, Tuesday Lunch 12:30

Pre-Convention meeting.

AN ACT — ASSEMBLY INTRODUCTORY 98

TO AMEND THE EDUCATION LAW, IN RELATION TO THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE.

The provisions of this bill, introduced by Mr. Noonan and referred to the Committee on Public Education (Wheeler Milmo, Chairman) read as follows:

"The department on the recommendation of the board may waive specific qualification requirements, except as to age, character and citizenship, in the cases of applicants who are possessed of long established and recognized standing in the profession of architecture, who have practiced lawfully for more than fifteen years."

The wording of this Act is not entirely clear, as for example, how may a candidate for registration practice architecture lawfully in the State of New York for 15 years *sans* license?

The intent, however, is clear enough. It proposes to lower established education and examination requirements for registration and is, therefore, of real concern to our profession.

To prevent passage of this Act, we urge all Chapter members and all interested agencies to write their representatives in Albany protesting

against any legislation aimed at weakening the Architects' Registration Law, and specifically the 'Noonan' Act, A. Int. 98. In particular we urge you to write to the Chairman of the Committee which now has the Act under consideration:

Hon. Wheeler Milmo, Chairman
Committee on Public Education
Assembly Chamber, Albany, N.Y.
Other Chapters please take action!

MEMBERS NOMINATED

On January 18, prior to the technical presentation, the luncheon meeting was devoted to consideration of nominations for several important posts.

The office of Regional Director of the A.I.A. for the New York District will become vacant at the next Convention, and nominations were invited. Maxfield Vogel proposed Arthur C. Holden for this office, and nominations were then closed.

The next post considered was that of National A.I.A. President for the coming term. Ralph Walker had already been nominated by thirty Chapters and a petition was circulated for endorsement by our own membership.

Matthew W. Del Gaudio has been proposed as a candidate for Second Vice-President of the A.I.A., a new office recently created.

Should the candidates named above be elected at the Convention, this Chapter would have representation in three important posts in the national organization.

Charles Butler reminded us that Glenn Stanton of Oregon is under consideration for First Vice-President of the A.I.A. He believes that Mr. Stanton is well qualified for this post and urged that the New York Chapter support his nomination.

Petitions were then circulated for signatures approving Messrs. Del Gaudio and Stanton.

NATIONAL COMPETITION

We regret sincerely to announce that this Chapter will not be represented in the National Honor Awards of the A.I.A. This effort of the Institute to assemble the best work of its members was the result of innumerable requests for a permanent traveling Exhibit of contemporary American Architecture.

Under the quota system established by the National Jury, the New York Chapter was entitled to the maximum number of entries—sixteen in all.

In spite of printed announcements and personal appeals, the number of entries received fell so far short of the allotted quota and was so unrepresentative of what the Chapter could do if sufficient interest were taken, that the screening Committee of the Chapter decided not to submit any entries this year.

WATERTIGHT MASONRY

Lessing Williams opened the technical discussion at the January 18 lunch by recalling the talk on lighting by Mr. Harrison of the Metropolitan Museum, and said that a field trip to the Museum would be arranged shortly, as a follow-up of this talk.

Herbert Lippmann then introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Frederick O. Anderegg, research director of building materials for the John B. Pierce Foundation, who gave a comprehensive talk on "Watertight Masonry", illustrating with slides various causes and preventive measures. Mr. Bayard R. Brick, consulting chemical engineer for the Wurdack Chemical Co., came all the way from St. Louis to speak on the properties of "Crystal". Mr. William S. Elliott, sales engineer for Belden-Stark Brick Corp. told us about "Aquaphane".

ZONING

The Architects' Advisory Committee, which was appointed by Chairman Wagner of the City Planning Commission, has invited the architectural societies of the five boroughs to submit their ideas on re-zoning the metropolitan area, a study of which is now being coordinated by the firm of Harrison, Ballard & Allen.

Our lunch meeting on January 11 was concerned with a discussion of this subject and Geoffrey Platt, Chairman of the Civic Design Committee, who conducted the meeting, called for constructive suggestions from this Chapter, to be forwarded to the Advisory Committee.

Robert Weinberg read a report on building bulk control. Electus D. Litchfield called attention to the fact that limiting of bulk is at present offset by the permitted unlimited height of towers occupying a certain percentage of lot areas. He also suggested that in residence districts, a minimum yard of 30' be established for buildings back to back, so that the resulting 60' width at the rear would equal a 60' width of street. Charles Downing Lay read a paper on control of density by decentralization. Simon Breines suggested that there be some limitation on allowed types of higher use occupancy in lower use zones. By permitting the erection of dwellings in business or factory zones, the areas available for such lower uses are reduced.

Harvey Stevenson described the legal difficulties in attempting to control aesthetics. He suggested that legislation be sought, which the courts might uphold, whereby for example some civic authority would be empowered to declare certain buildings to be public assets and as such properly subject to control. Such legislation could begin with the classification of landmarks and be extended to include structures giving public offense, such as signs and other displays.

Frederick Woodbridge recommended stricter standards for large scale projects because of the fact that they are complete developments in themselves. Arthur Holden continued in this vein by suggesting that the terms "lot" and "plot" be defined and appropriate controls established for each.

It was the sense of the meeting that all the suggestions discussed be submitted to the Architects' Advisory Committee with the exception of those concerned with aesthetic control, which by its nature is too indeterminate a subject to be concretely presented.

IS IT WORTH IT?

In the January issue, under this heading, we suggested that a charge of 20 cents per issue be made to each member to defray the cost of publishing and mailing the OCULUS. Your comments were invited.

At this writing we have received one verbal reply (favorable) and two letters which follow:

Dear Miss Waters:

This is in response to the question about making a charge for the OCULUS, as raised in the January issue.

I am opposed to making a charge because it would tend to make subscription to the OCULUS by the members of the Chapter an optional thing. It seems to me that all members of the Chapter should receive this publication whether they think they want it or not. If additional income for the Chapter is necessary I would think an increase in the dues would be the best way out. Certainly, in these days when the dollar only buys half what it used to, we have got to get used to paying more for everything—including professional associations.

Sincerely yours,

FREDERICK G. FROST, JR.

Dear Miss Waters:

In accordance with the suggestion made on page 2 of the January OCULUS, I am entering my squawk right here and now about any possible charge for the publication.

This is a necessary kind of bulletin and should be considered an essential part of the Chapter's service.

In the same issue appears an article on the 1949 budget. I would strongly resent any increase in dues or any assessment. It would be far more suitable that the Chapter "trim its sails" particularly in regard to the \$3,000.00 assigned to what in my opinion is (though well intentioned,) ill-advised, unnecessary and undignified publicity.

It is very odd indeed, to me, that it is considered ethical for an organization of architects to do what would be considered unethical for the individual.*

Ever sincerely yours,

EDWARD STEESE.

**Editor's Note: Acquainting the public with the functions and accomplishments of architects as a group constitutes a service both to the profession and to the public.*

YES, BUT WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE?

A large group, pleasantly including many of the wives of Chapter members and guests, attended the monthly evening meeting January 25, filling the League dining room to its utmost capacity. A provocative subject, "Is the Small House Architecture?", was scheduled for presentation in the form of a debate between Philip C. Johnson, director of architectural activities at the Museum of Modern Art, and Carl Koch, Assistant Professor of Architecture at M.I.T., representing architects engaged mainly in residential practice.

The speakers were introduced by Perry Coke Smith, who defined the small house as a family dwelling with its own entrance and other facilities separate from those of the rest of the community. He pointed out that such buildings obviously count heavily in our economy today and involve a large portion of our national industry, with which architecture is intimately concerned.

Carl Koch, advancing the affirmative argument in the debate, began his talk by taking exception to Henry-Russell Hitchcock's published statement to the effect that the problem of the small house is not one of architecture but of sociology and economics, and that such buildings must under present conditions be so standardized that the matter of creative aesthetics is automatically eliminated. He mentioned the lack of economy characterizing the present-day automobile, in which superfluous space and power are always provided, and indicated that it was the privilege of any individual to enjoy the same latitude in the design of his home. He gently ridiculed the school of thought which claims that no layman has an intelligent idea of his own architectural needs.

Individual freedom of choice, said Koch, is of the greatest importance in the design of the small house, and no inflexible rules can be laid down. If economy is the primary consideration, a flat-roofed building is called for, but the client desiring an old-fashioned sloping roof is entitled to have it, and it is the architect's duty to provide it in the best possible manner. Furthermore, since domestic building is becoming more and more a community matter, the skill and imagination of the architect are essential not only in the satisfaction of individual personal tastes, but in making each dwelling a sympathetic con-

tribution to the neighborhood picture as a whole.

Philip Johnson invoked the doctrine which holds that a cathedral is a work of art, but a bicycle shed simply a building, and that architecture must therefore be an abstract quality not inherent in mere utility. By this token he argued that the average small house falling within the means of the greater part of the nation's population today must be so strictly utilitarian as to preclude the introduction of any of the purely abstract elements constituting architecture.

He offered three examples of small-house design,—one by Le Corbusier, one by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the third by Marcel Breuer,—which in his estimation had qualities in their fenestration, mass, or texture rendering them worthy to be ranked as architecture in the exalted sense of his premise. But he doubted whether any of the three could properly be called a small house, since the effects which produced their distinction were the result of costly devices, striking in appearance, but elaborate beyond the necessities of simple living.

In further support of the negative argument he suggested that the small house was so much a matter of individual preferences that the architect should perhaps interfere in the field no more than a husband in the selection of his wife's clothes.

Following these initial speeches, John Hancock Callender gave certain observations made in connection with the development of Revere Quality Houses. He said that, while it was a matter of statistics that 85% of present day housing was erected by speculative builders without the help of architects, tremendous public interest had been shown in instances where his company had had architectural advice, and that builders were more and more beginning to realize that trained architects could often point the way to greater efficiency and sounder economy even in small projects.

The meeting was then thrown open for general comment, and discussion ranged from facetious suggestions concerning the aesthetics of exposed plumbing to much serious thought on the fundamental meaning of architecture. Former Chapter presidents Walker and Holden and members Hutchins, Kilham, and Vogel spoke, as did Thomas Creighton of *Progressive Architecture* and Messrs. Stowell and Haskell of *The Architectural Record*, while Katherine Ford, Architectural Editor of *House & Garden*

and Mrs. Sleeper also contributed. The atmosphere of amicable enmity deliberately initiated by the debaters resulted in a continuous flow of humorous repartee throughout the evening.

Although no formal decision was given as to the outcome of the debate, there is little doubt that the great majority of those present felt that the small house does come inevitably within the sphere of architecture, and that the architect must devote to it his most earnest attention. Still awaiting final answer, however, is the question of his basic mission. Is he the master or the servant of his client?

THE MODULAR LIBRARY

Angus Snead MacDonald, President of Snead & Company, gave a talk at our January 4 luncheon on recent development in library planning.

The traditional library, with its emphasis on monumentality, its long flights of stairs and large rooms with high ceilings and massive bearing walls, was criticized as non-functional and unwieldy.

Mr. MacDonald advocates a more dynamic and flexible type of construction. The modern library, he said, should have large unobstructed floor areas supported by a modular arrangement of columns. As conditions warrant, this space could be subdivided by stacks, library equipment or movable partitions.

The present trend is towards small reading and study rooms with low ceilings, permitting of easy access to book stacks. This type of library, said Mr. MacDonald, would be not only more functional and flexible but also cheaper to build and easier to design. The subdivisions of space could be worked out by the architect with the library staff and could be easily revised from time to time.

Mr. MacDonald emphasized the importance of good artificial lighting and ventilation. By means of slides, he showed a modular frame developed by his company in which the structural columns and beams were hollow, thus forming ducts through which conditioned air can circulate throughout the library.

Mr. MacDonald concluded with an interesting interpretation of his theories—a library built as a tall building in which the lower floors could be rented commercially until such time as they should be needed for the downward expansion of the library above.

CANDIDATES

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

Corporate Membership:

1. John Pine Delavan
Sponsors: Benjamin L. Smith
Ralph Walker
2. Roger Halle
Sponsors: Max Abramowitz
Wallace K. Harrison
3. Joseph Kiell
Sponsors: Walter Hesse
Edward I. Shire
4. Serge Klein
Sponsors: B. Sumner Gruzen
Albert Mayer
5. Alexander McIlvaine
Sponsors: Wm. Adams Delano
Henry S. Waterbury
6. Allen Nathanson
Sponsors: Louis Bubeck
John H. Bennett
7. Gerald Anthony Paul
Sponsors: Morris Lapidus
Irving Semel
8. Bertram Lee Whinston
Sponsors: Leopold Arnaud
Percival Goodman

Associate Membership:

1. Murray S. Cohen
Sponsors: Seymour T. Joseph
Morris Lapidus
2. Joseph John Dunaj
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
Louis Bubeck
3. Jack A. Earnest
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
John H. Bennett
4. C. Thomas Ficarra
Sponsors: William M. Dowling
Harold Morris
5. Michael Gawlicki
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
John H. Bennett
6. Carmine Mario Immediate
Sponsors: Joseph B. Klein
Stephen F. Voorhees
7. Hugo Monteferrante
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
Louis Bubeck
8. Jack Penson
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
Louis Bubeck
9. Joseph F. Stuchlik
Sponsors: Joachim C. Accurso
Louis Bubeck

USUS LOQUENDI

As a result of a request from radio station WCBS for names of possible speakers, 3 Chapter members aired their views during the week of January 24.

The speakers were introduced by Quincey Howe, well-known CBS commentator, and the program subject, "You and Your Home," was subdivided into the following presentation:

Monday, Jan. 24 — "Buying a Home"; guest speaker, Walter S. Dayton.

Tuesday, Jan. 25 — "Building a Home"; guest speaker, Edwin L. Howard.

Wednesday, Jan. 26 — "Getting The Most From Your Apartment"; guest speaker, Elisabeth Coit, A.I.A.

Thursday, Jan. 27 — "Improvements for the Home"; guest speaker, Harold R. Sleeper, A.I.A.

Friday, Jan. 28 — "Reducing Housing Costs"; guest speaker, A. Gordon Lorimer, A.I.A.

"Your House: Building, Buying or Remodeling," is the title of a ten weeks' evening course to be given Wednesday evenings, beginning February 3, at the Institute of Arts and Sciences of Columbia University by Harold R. Sleeper.

The course should appeal to anyone planning to build a new house, remodel an old one, or buy a home. Subjects covered will be new materials on the market, proper construction, mechanical systems, economies in construction, etc.

This is the third time Mr. Sleeper has been invited by Columbia to give this series of talks, which bespeaks the popularity of the subject.

Two opportunities are being offered the public in February to learn more of the art and technique of planning.

Robert C. Weinberg, A.I.A., is giving a series of Monday evening talks on "City Planning Progress in the New York Metropolitan Area" starting Monday, February 7 from 6 to 8 P.M., at the New School for Social Research.

A second series by Mr. Weinberg will be at New York University on Wednesday evenings from 6 to 8, starting February 9 on "Problems and Techniques of Urban Planning." This latter is given in connection with the University's Graduate School for Training in Public Service.

Mr. Weinberg is Chairman of our Sub-Committee on Zoning which is part of the Committee on Civic Design and Development. That Committee's

publication — *East Midtown Manhattan, a Comprehensive Plan for Development* was prepared under his general direction.

RADIANT HEATING

On Friday, January 14, the Heating Seminar got under way with a great show of enthusiasm. A group of 17 members met in the Chapter Office at 5:45 p.m. and remained until 10:30, without interruption except for the serving of sandwiches and coffee.

The following speakers led the discussion: Peter B. Gordon of the firm of Wolff and Munier, and Chairman of Group "A" Technical Advisory Committee of ASHVE; John Skidmore, Assistant Mechanical Engineer of the Port of N. Y. Authority, and Oswald Quist, Application Engineer of Minneapolis-Honeywell.

The enthusiasm and interest shown in this first session prove the long-felt want for a study group of this sort. C. Herbert Wheeler, Chairman, who organized the seminar, plans to concentrate on the subject with a number of further sessions and field trips for those who have definitely committed themselves to attend.

THE REGISTER

Richard Boring Snow reports a distribution of 830 copies of the first edition of the Register and Year Book. In addition to this figure approximately 75 persons have consulted the information included, in quest of data on practicing architects and types of work.

Mr. Snow, together with Messrs. Hutchins, Lawford and Tauch, are now at work on the second edition, to bring the Register up to date and to make it even more comprehensive and useful.

PUBLICATIONS

Charles K. Agle, a member of this Chapter and a specialist in city planning with the firm of Harrison, Ballard & Allen, is the author of reviews of Albert Christ-Janer's *Eliel Saarinen*, Eliel Saarinen's *Search for Form*, and Leonard Silk's *Sweden Plans for Better Housing*, which appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, Sunday, January 16, 1949.

The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians has published two articles by Chapter member Giorgio Cavaglieri, on the subject, "Outline for a History of City Planning."

ADDITION TO OCULUS STAFF

We are happy to announce that J. Bruno Basil has joined the Editorial Committee on Public Relations.

THE CATCH BASIN

A letter from a member in Poughkeepsie is quoted in part below. Perhaps if more architects become articulate on this subject some newspaper might be tempted to try it out.
Editor, Oculus

Dear Sir:

The article in the December 1948 issue of the OCULUS entitled "The Catch Basin" by Mr. William B. Hornblower expands a topic which should receive much more attention from the A.I.A. in general and be the concern of local chapters specifically.

The lack of promulgation of competent architectural criticism and comment is perhaps one reason why so many architects rue what is sometimes called "public taste." Certainly a column or article on a weekly basis, as suggested, would increase the influence of architects on the public's standards of architecture.

Certainly articles of architectural criticism and comment written by a competent architect would do much to aid the observer or user of a building to form a well-based opinion of its merits, and to apply more enlightened judgement to influence the design and reception of future buildings.

As Mr. Hornblower points out, the only comment available to the general public is that generated by those in the real estate market and which therefore might not be considered wholly detached from other aspects of the building or project being discussed. Other publicity, not always salutary, comes when some more extreme or unusual structures are noted by the press and played up as a sort of "side-show" interest.

The absence of a sounding board for initiating comment addressed to the general public by a competent architectural critic is not only a liability to architects professionally but is also a sin of omission against our poor friend and potential client, the man in the street.

ROGER G. SPROSS

500 Church St.

Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

BY LAWS UP TO DATE

The Committee on By-Laws is working on a complete revision of the Chapter By-Laws to bring them up to date and to eliminate conflicts and consolidate the various amendments made since the last revision.

Among other things, the Committee is investigating the possibility of rearranging and condensing the By-Laws into a more useful instrument.

The Committee is composed of Jedd Reisner, Francis W. Roudebush, Otto Teegen, Fenwick Wall and Philip Bartlett, Chairman.