



POTOMAC VALLEY ARCHITECT

AMERICAN INSTITUTE

Vol 2, No. 5 Official Publication Potomac Valley Chapter of Maryland, A.I.A. January 6, 1958

ARCHITECTURE — Profession or Business

by: Milton J. Prassas, Chairman, Office Practices Committee.

THE RAPID GROWTH in the number of architects gaining registration during the past twelve years, the Post WW II Era, is in part a reflection of basic changes taking place in the general practice of architecture during this period. Prior to 1940, there was a handful of firms employing as many as twenty-five or more persons. Today, there are hundreds.

The Architect's Registration Act for the District of Columbia was first passed in 1924. In 1945, I was registrant number 482. Or, in other words, an average of 23 licenses were issued annually over the first 21 years of the Registration Act. Today, 1068 architects have secured licenses which means that in this Post WW II Era an average of 50 registrations have been issued annually for twelve years—more than two times the number in one half the period of time.

We are often heard grumbling about there being too many offices for the work, but oddly enough, the number of offices have not increased to any great extent. What has changed is the operation within the architectural office. The registrant is being absorbed into the enlarged firms.

Our younger contemporaries may not recall first hand, but I'm sure many remember that in the earlier days of this century, the architect (spelled in capital letters) was one of the most respected personalities of our society. This stature was achieved, not through public relations, but through personal service and dedication. No one thought of building without first consulting an architect and turning the full responsibility over to him for design and construction. Many are the instances on record wherein the owner commissioned the architect, went on an extended trip and returned in time to receive the front door key to the completed building.

In those days, the architect, although considered by today's standards to be subnormal in business sagacity, was instead looked up to as the "master" designer and executive officer of construction. His zeal, in seeking the best solution to every problem, infected contractor and workman alike. His pride of workmanship was the craftsman's motto. The lazy, indigent and incompetent just were not to be found on construction work. They were not tolerated.

Regardless of the pleadings by Sullivan, Wright and others for originality in design, the architect, whether a design copyist or not, **did know how to build.** His buildings today reflect the degree of attention he paid to detail. His fees went farther. He could afford it. His clients permitted it. No one heard of leaky walls or roofs, structural failures, and the usual complaints made today. One reason is that impossible deadlines invariably at the root of

errors and omissions, were rarely imposed on him, but rather his work was thorough and adequate or else it was not put out for bids. The styles of his designs, notwithstanding, his clients were pleased with his buildings, and the contractor took pride in his part toward achieving the architect's success.

He lived and breathed his work. Rarely did he spend more than three hours a week to dispense with payrolls, bills and statements. If trouble developed on the job, no one looked to the architect to fix blame. Legal action against the architect was rarely heard of.

Today, Architectural practices appear to fall into four primary categories: (1) individual practitioner; (2) the small firm of five or less; (3) the medium organization of up to twenty-five; and (4) the "big operator" organization with upwards from 100; also the intermediate offices not classified.

Generally, the practice of the (1) and (2) firms follows erratic fluctuations. At times the principal works himself to a "frazzle". In between strenuous production schedules, he despairs over the morgue-like atmosphere of his office. He vacillates between the role of the "job getter", and the "job producer". One depends on the other; one precedes the other. Rarely do each follow in smooth flowing sequence.

The practice of the (3) and (4) firms has grown into a departmentalized type operation of specialists, each usually licensed and able to conduct his own practice. There could be found in one firm: job getters, designers, production project managers, spec writers, engineers, estimators, construction inspectors, site and landscape planners, and in the background a formidable business office which, among other things, produces weekly reports of the dollarwise progress of each job under contract in black and/or red.

How did this all come about? This development is the result of economic forces at work on our type of operation. We are forced to be tax collectors for federal, state and municipal bureaucracies. We are not permitted to balance good year profits against bad year losses; we are taxed to the "hilt". The courts have all but destroyed our ethical stature of agent for our client, and forced us to carry backbreaking liability insurance to protect ourselves from

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**POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER OF MARYLAND
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS**

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POTOMAC VALLEY ARCHITECT

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Kensington, Md.—LOCKWOOD 5-0800—5-0801

Benjamin P. Elliott, Chm. Public Relations Committee
8485 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, Md.—JU 9-2546

MEETINGS

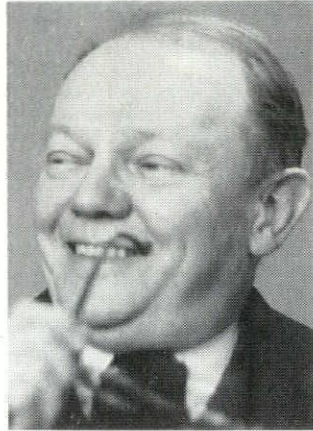
First Monday of Every Month
at 12 o'clock noon

NEXT MEETING
Monday, January 6

Stone House Inn, Silver Spring

PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

During the Yuletide I have had occasion to reflect with great gratitude on the active part our chapter is taking in all A.I.A. programs and activities. Because of the expert work of our School Committee, teamed with a similar Washington Chapter Committee, the Montgomery County Board of Education, by its enlightened request, is getting the skilled, detailed and carefully documented architectural advice and guidance this important Board needs for its school building program. "The Office Practice Committee is exhaustively doing a work and conducting seminars which will be invaluable to A.I.A. members everywhere. The Exhibitions and Competition Committee is broadening the base of this year's competition to conclude with a June 5th exhibition more impressive and newsworthy than any held before.



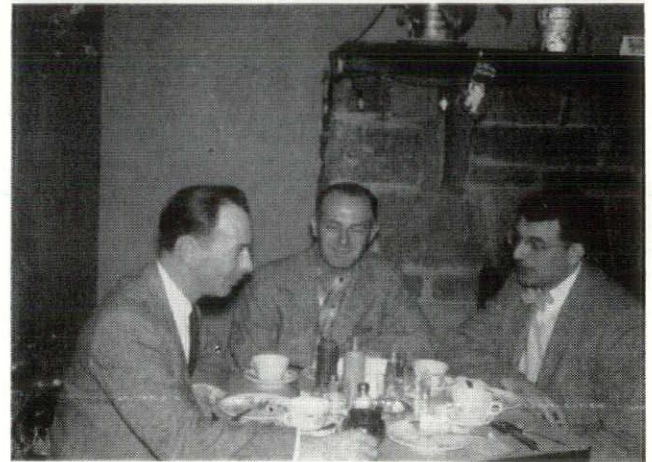
"HAPPY NEW YEAR—"TED

The Programs and Meetings Committee are lining up monthly meeting programs, beginning with one for January 6, which assure best attendance. I would like to see an increase in attendance from those good members who do not come to meetings regularly. We need them and they need us.

"All other committees are similarly on the ball while our Public Relations and Publicity Committee is doing a yeoman-like job. In the first place, this Committee has interested the many responsible advertisers who make our publication possible. Constantly it is getting reports of our activities into the newspapers.

"I want to express my sincere thanks to the Committees at work and for the readiness with which

PUBLIC RELATIONS HUDDLE



A MAN MUST EAT but he can get work done at the same time. This is the way the Chapter's industrious Public Relations Committee had it figured when sitting down for one of its December discussions in Bill Coffey's Silver Spring Coffey House. From left are: Chairman Ben Elliott, Joe Dennison and Gene Delmar. Absent was Jack Sullivan kept in Rockville by the snowstorm on the day of this meeting.

Winning Helpful Publicity

Your Public Relations Counsel and Editor is constantly pleased at the productive manner the Public Relations Committee goes about its work.

It is a stormy day with limited or no telephone service when Chairman Benjamin P. Elliott is not on the 'phone with some new idea. If, possibly, he is ahead of himself as to what can be done for the now, he is always providing more worthwhile public relations targets to shoot at.

Patronize Your Advertisers

Ben and Chuck Soule' got the first olives out of the advertisers' bottle and so, with the first issue of October 1, 1956, the regular publication of the Potomac Valley Architect became a certainty. Their work in this connection was carried on in a bigger way and relentlessly by Joe Dennison and Gene Delmar until this January 1958 issue contains 71 listings of approved firms whose quality service entitles them to architectural patronage and to be bidders on all jobs with the benefit of architectural designing and letting of contracts. This solicitation required more time and work than most members realize and Joe and Gene deserve a big E for their effort and success.

We Want A Picture Of Your Entry.

The advertising solicitation's success, Ben Elliott believes, will make possible an eight-page edition of the P.V.A. to include pictures of the winning entries in the 1957-1958 Competition and Exhibition. Be sure, when you have photos made of your entry to have three 8" x 10" glossy prints made for your editor and for his sending to the newspapers.

Drafting Class Co-operation

As a special project, Chairman Elliott has written all County high schools with drafting classes offering to send a member of the Chapter for a practical question and answer session such as Clif White successfully conducted at Montgomery Blair High School.

Coming-Up — A New Printed Roster.

If it is not in your hands with this issue, a new printed roster as assembled by the PR Committee soon will be.

most every member volunteers when there is a job to be done. You are making the work of the president's office much easier and very rewarding. "I wish all of you a very good New Year and one you will use to make your Chapter membership most valuable by continuing to take an active part in its professional and social activities."

Ted Englehardt, President.

Architecture - Profession or Business

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legal action by our clients. Employees demand fringe benefits insurance policies and the like. In the District the license bureaucrats catch us going both ways. The law requires we pay a professional license to safeguard the public, and they regulate us into the business license classification if we obtain gross fees in excess of \$5 thousand per year.

The business procedures within the architect's organization grow steadily more complicated and the staff overhead costs to handle such matters steadily rises. Paradoxically, these procedures have no relationship whatsoever to the design and production of plans and specs and inspection of construction. Yet, to practice architecture, each office must first establish these procedures in order that our bureaucratic governments are served according to law and regulation. This is particularly evident in our own American Institute of Architects by the ever increasing volume of work assigned to the national Office Practices Committee, by the increasing attention the membership pays to the findings of this committee and by the importance the national directors of AIA attach to the activities of the national committee.

In the case of the (3) and (4) type firms, once on the treadmill of large scale operations, there is no receding. Sad but true, the successful businessman-architect, because of the great capital investment, and the dependence by so many people upon him, of necessity finds his major attention glued on the profit-loss ledgers. Continued success of the firm is dependent upon a high standard of efficiency and a steady flow of new job contracts into the office. The margin of profit in architecture is so small, the principal often can't afford the luxury of personal detailed field direction and, in some instances, he can't even afford the time for personal direction of office production. The larger the firm, the farther removed is the principal from the end-product bearing his name. His role seems to get closer to that of a corporate administrative officer and farther from that of the bygone master architect.

Even though we may look back with nostalgia on the homage and respect paid the "master architect" of the past, in the final analysis, this may all be for the good of our profession. If professional jealousies are reputed to have divided individual practitioners in the past, the ever growing need and urgency for us to share and refine our know-how about business practices, more than any other factor, may bring us closer together in a true spirit of professional fellowship.

NEWS OF THE VALLEY

Hospital Exhibition

President Ted Englehardt is calling the attention of boosters for needed new hospitals in Suburban Maryland to the unusual exhibition of new hospital architecture now being held in the Octagon's gallery at 1735 New York Avenue, N. W.

In a special chapter news release the president advised all people working for hospital projects that the designs on exhibit were selected by members of the A.I.A. Committee on Hospitals and Health from those shown recently by the American Hospital Association in Atlantic City and includes the outstanding work of 22 architectural firms.

He is also suggesting that all members who have not studied the designs do so before January 19 when the exhibition will be brought to a close.

Office Practice Meeting January 9

The Office Practice Committee, which is unhappy about A.I.A. Document No. 71.3, feeling it covers too much territory, will hold its first meeting of the year this Thurs-

day night at 8 o'clock at the Octagon. Chairman Milt Prassas directs the committee to meet every Thursday evening following the regular monthly meeting of the Chapter membership.

Nice Work For Samperton

It's nice work when an architect can contribute of his time and talents for the success of a worthwhile charitable organization. Jack Samperton has had the privilege in designing the badly needed \$65,000 home for the Montgomery County Society for Crippled Children and Adults. Jack's rendering (in most cases without credit to him) has appeared in all newspapers.

Dude Slagle

If you hear of Len Slagle taking a Dude's vacation, think nothing of it. He's designed an addition to the Gulf Hills Dude Ranch and Country Club at Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

Medical Designer Cohen

When Jack Cohen is on the sick list he has clinical facilities designed just to suit him. First there was his Silver Spring Medical Building. Now Jack has designed the \$400,000 Frederick Medical Center.

Drink A Toast to Eddie Morris

Now, on January 15, you can do it at Eddie's annual, enjoyable Olney Inn Dinner.

Ron Senseman Office Party

A highly successful Christmas party can be staged with tea and good food. Ron Senseman proved that December 17, when, using the unusual facilities of Silver Spring's Park Silver Motel recreation room, he entertained his 25 employees and their families.

Familiar and Welcome Figure

Frank J. Duane presides as president at the Washington Chapter meeting. At ours he regularly takes any old seat and helps enliven meetings as one of the most active and welcome of A.I.A. members.

Accounting For An Expanded Chest

If you've wondered about Luther Flouten's chest sticking out the way it does there's good reason. Mrs. Flouten (who is "just fine") presented Luther with a son and heir, now christened Christopher Sam.

Lovely Formal Gowns

Most all Washington Chapter wives had new gowns. Those of Potomac Valley members who did, put black ties on their husbands and, on December 13 enjoyed the Washington group's formal Christmas party at the Roosevelt Hotel.

Not In Keeping

The Octagon dining room doesn't have the decor and comfort appropriate for its users. Its proper outfitting is a pet project of Dana Johannes.

Are You Young?

We know you are outstanding, but are you young? The Octagon will make an award to an outstanding, young architect in the area. Reveal your age to Vice President Chuck Soulé. (Editor's Note: Clif White has withdrawn from this competition.)

New Year's Present!

President Ted reports this good income tax news as given him by Accountant Ralph Boyd. The order requiring that expense accounts be noted on Line 6 and reported in detail has been rescinded for 1957. Remember, however, that Line 6 is still subject to audit and the detail will be required for 1958.

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