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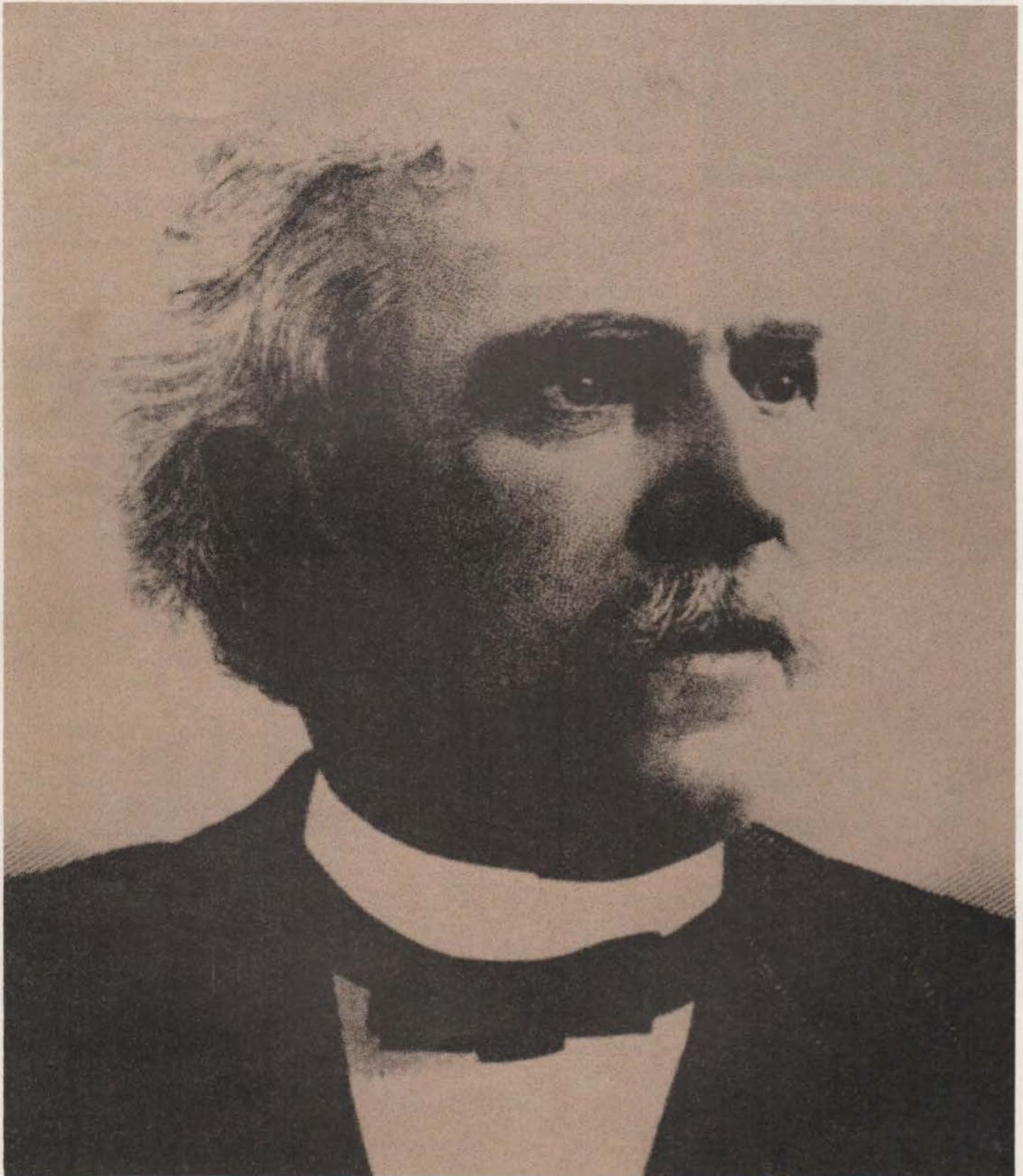
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Texas Architect

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On the Cover A reproduction of a 19th century engraving of Elijah E. Myers, architect of the Texas state Capitol building in Austin.

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Preservation and Purpose

Today, we hear a lot of talk about pollution in this state. About the air we breathe. About the water we drink. About the destruction of our natural environment. And all the time we are talking, debating, reading, and writing about pollution—great Texas landmarks are being destroyed and defaced. Architecturally significant homes are being torn down in one community after another. Complete cityscapes are being permanently scarred—as we plunge headlong into the future.

If historic preservation is to be a significant and meaningful factor in shaping our total environment, the emphasis must be on finding innovative and creative alternatives to destruction.

We must have preservation with a purpose. We must develop adaptive uses for landmarks which will serve our current lifestyle.

It has been my thought for some time that the Texas Society of Architects should take the lead in finding adaptive uses for our historically and architecturally important structures. No profession is more ideally suited to take the lead in this movement. Too often, architects are actually the ones who recommend the destruction of important landmarks instead of finding innovative uses which will insure their preservation.

Architects can show their clients how important landmarks are structurally sound, visually appealing, and on numerous occasions, meet the criteria for conserving energy due to the excellent manner in which they were constructed.

Older structures generally offer spatial arrangements that can be adapted to a wide ranges of uses, including professional offices, shops, stores, and even larger commercial facilities.

The Texas Society of Architects could set an excellent example by purchasing and restoring one of the important architectural landmarks in Austin for use as their state office. By doing this, they could show other organizations, individuals, and local governments the practicality of recycling important structures.

I would hate for succeeding generations to say that during the 1960's and 70's, this generation tore down more important structures in a 20-year span than it took an entire nation more than 200 years to build. I would also hate for future generations to say that we devoted our expertise to the recycling of tin cans, but could not recycle our landmarks.

We have reached the point today when preservation is no longer synonymous with museums or with someone trying to reproduce the past. Preservation has come to mean the continuation of the best architectural and human qualities of both rural and urban life.

When we lose an important landmark, we lose more than an old building. We lose the memory of what has been. We lose our sense of the past, the most visible evidence of our heritage.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Truett Latimer".

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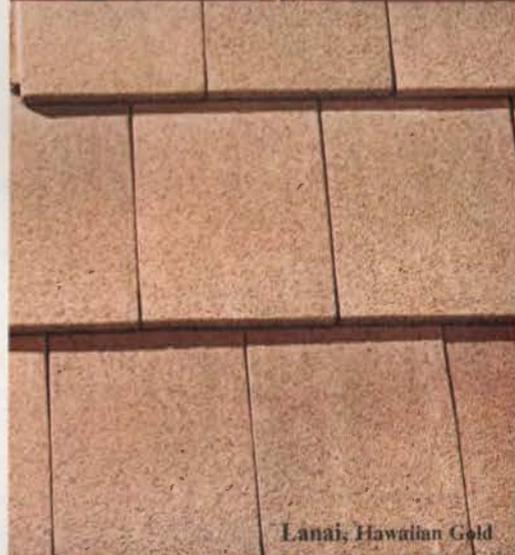


and economy are projected over the life of the structure.

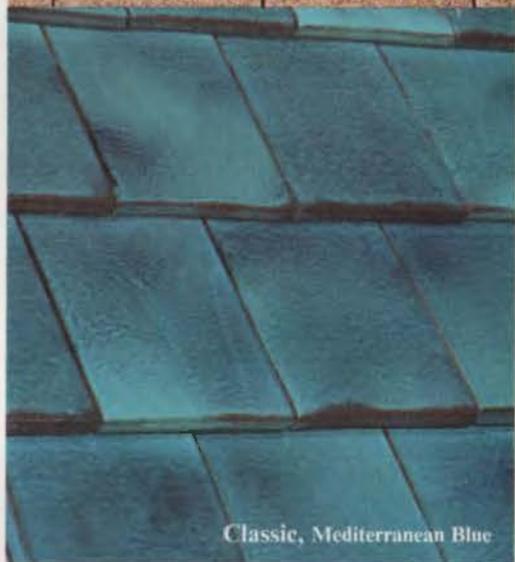
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Our Architectural Ancestors

By Paul Goeldner, AIA

While humility is not considered a typical attribute of the architectural profession, biographical data on nineteenth century architects of local and regional importance is scarce in comparison to that for politicians, merchants, clergymen or farmers. It is therefore helpful to find in county commissioners court minutes a variety of observations relating to the practice of architecture in Texas in the late 1800's. In addition to routine business, these documents note the idiosyncracies of individual architects as revealed by their clients. They also describe difficulties common to the profession as a whole.

Giles and Ruffini

It was during the 1880's that architects Alfred Giles and F. E. Ruffini first demonstrated their professional skills through the design of a number of important Texas courthouses. In an 1881 competition to design the Gillespie County Courthouse theirs were the only two entries. London-born Giles was selected as architect for the building which has recently been adapted for use as a community library in Fredericksburg. In a gentlemanly gesture he asked that the \$50 premium be awarded to Ruffini "as an acknowledgement of his talent and a compensation for his labor and expenses." On a required inspection trip from his San Antonio office to Fredericksburg, Giles' stage coach was halted by robbers who forced him to help them as they examined the mail for money and valuables. In 1883, when he was 30, the Fredericksburg courthouse was completed and his Wilson County Courthouse at Floresville was begun. His courthouses for Bexar and Tarrant counties were built at about the same time but replaced in the 1890's due to the rapid growth of San Antonio and Fort



Shackleford County Courthouse, Albany



Above left: cornerstone, Red River County Courthouse, Clarksville. Above right: Concho County Courthouse, Paint Rock. Above: courtroom entrance, Shackelford County Courthouse, Albany.

(Editor's Note: Paul Goeldner, AIA, formerly a professor of architectural history at Texas Tech University, is now affiliated with the National Park Service in Washington, D.C.)

Worth. Giles' extensive practice included a large number of fine residences in San Antonio, numerous public buildings in northern Mexico and the jail in Marfa.

F. E. Ruffini, who designed the original building for the University of Texas at Austin, was also the architect for the Robertson County Courthouse at Franklin, a building which has lost the elegance which clients praised at its completion in 1882. The commissioners expressed their "entire satisfaction" with the building, considering it one of the "most handsome and splendid structures in the state" and "heartily" recommended Ruffini as "one of the most accomplished and reliable architects in the state of Texas."

The Blanco County Courthouse at Blanco is a Ruffini design repeated in at least two other counties. It is only slightly older than the best remaining example, the Concho County Courthouse, which was begun in 1885, the year of F. E. Ruffini's death from tuberculosis. His brother Oscar, who had assisted in the Austin office, supervised the completion of the courthouse at Paint Rock and used the design again for the Sutton County Courthouse at Sonora.

J. E. Flanders of Dallas was the architect for the Shackelford County Courthouse in Albany, one of the oldest public buildings in west Texas. The woodwork details in the courtroom are without any scholarly precedents. Upon completion of the project in 1884, Flanders requested the return of his plans but the commissioners declared them to be county property and the original tracings remain in the courthouse.

Another Dallas architect, W. H. Wilson, designed the 1884-85 Red River County Courthouse, a highly original design with ornamental columns placed at each corner like diagonal

buttresses. At the base of one of these is an unusually attractive cornerstone of marble with a projecting doll-size figure of "Justice."

Cornerstones are an interesting study in themselves. Modernization has destroyed much of the original character of the Bell County Courthouse at Belton but the cornerstone, dated April 1884, retains its full Victorian flavor with a variety of lettering styles, and flourishes. The architects, J. N. Preston and Son of Austin, had more classical tastes than many of their contemporaries, and their Corinthian porticoes survive at each facade. Contracts totalled \$70,615, an unusually high figure at that date.

A much more modest, but very fine courthouse was built in 1884 at Center. J. J. E. Gibson was both architect and contractor. The Shelby County Commissioners' minutes include the specifications in full, including deafening, a mixture of sawdust and lime worked into a mortar to fill the space between second-story floor joists. Sanitary conveniences include a dry earth closet and a urinal piped to a barrel. Gibson's plans were valued at \$600 as part of the contract. In 1895 he was still unsuccessfully petitioning the court for reimbursement for repairs made during the construction period and necessitated by freeze damage. The court had colorfully expressed its opinion of his claim in 1886: "the same being seen and considered was dis-allowed, and *sit down on*, by the court."

W. C. Dodson of the Waco firm of Dodson and Dudley was probably the most productive courthouse architect in Texas in the 1880's. In an 1886 directory, the firm advertised that their work included the courthouses at Greenville, Cleburne, Brownwood, Wichita Falls, Waco, Palestine, Crockett, Graham, Pittsburg, Kauf-



Left: DeWitt County Courthouse, Cuero;
Below: courtroom, Shelby County Courthouse,
Center; and cornerstone, Bell County Court-
house, Belton.



man, Coleman, Bonham, Lampasas and Weatherford. Most of these were replaced long ago but the 1884 Parker County Courthouse at Weatherford remains as a landmark example of Dodson's talents. His 1890 Hood County Courthouse is a smaller version of the same mansard style. The Hill County Courthouse at Hillsboro was also built in 1890 with a virtually identical design. However, the \$83,000 contract at Hillsboro permitted a larger scale and a profusion of exterior ornament impossible at Granbury, where the budget was only \$40,070. In contrast with Midwesterners of the same period, Texans showed a stronger preference for exterior show than for interior elegance in their courthouses.

19th Century Professionalism

In the early 1890's there appears to have been a clearer definition of architectural professionalism which was alien to the thinking of many commissioners' courts. Conditioned to thinking of architects as architect-superintendents, some courts insisted on full-time daily supervision by the designing architect throughout the construction period. This is most evident in Dallas County where M. A. Orlopp, Jr. was retained as architect and superintendent in July, 1891 when the contractor, R. L. James, was fired and the county assumed the contract. In November, Orlopp was allowed three days leave to go to his former home in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he had been architect of the Pulaski County Courthouse.

At the beginning of a long career as a courthouse architect, James Riely Gordon resisted similar pressures at La Grange and Victoria. In February, 1891, the Fayette County commissioners ordered "that the County Judge notify

Architect Gordon to at once come here and Superintend in person the building of said Court House until the same is completed . . . and if necessary the County Judge is required to mail a notice daily to said Gordon requiring him to be here each day." The commissioners in Victoria County, in May, 1892, charged Gordon with having failed and refused to superintend construction or furnish vouchers to contractors (a more serious offense). They voided the architect's contract, having already paid a 3½% fee for drawings, and withheld 1½% for supervision.

Architects vs. Contractors

The contractors at both La Grange and Victoria were Marin, Byrne, and Johnston, who often provided their own plans for courthouses. Such package-dealers had frequent encounters with architects. Open competition was still the usual method of selecting a design and plans were submitted by professionals and non-professionals alike. Because contractors seemed better able to guarantee construction costs, their plans were often preferred to those of architects. It was not uncommon, however, for a designer-contractor to be underbid for the construction contract. Martin, Byrne and Johnston designed and built the courthouses at Hondo, Goliad, and Lockhart, but provided only plans at Hamilton and Throckmorton.

One of the most incredible confrontations between architects and contractors occurred in Karnes County in 1894. On February 24, eleven plans were submitted, some by contractors including Otto P. Kroeger, Davey and Schott and John Cormack, others by architects including Alfred Giles, J. Riely Gordon, A. O. Watson and James Wahrenberger. The Wahrenberger plans were adopted that same day, but only four days were allowed to contractors to



prepare bids. Three bids were received on February 28 and all were rejected. The commissioners' minutes only hint at their internal dissensions and external pressures: On March 15 they annulled their decision to adopt Wahrenberger's plans; on April 4 they reinstated his plans; on May 18 they rescinded the adoption of Wahrenberger's plans, returned them to him, and reviewed five plans submitted by contractors. The following day they selected a plan and bid of John Cormack of San Antonio and entered a contract with him for \$43,000. Unhappily for Mr. Cormack, he died fourteen weeks later, and the cornerstone of the Karnes County Courthouse, laid on October 25, 1894, is dedicated to his memory.

Because contractors usurped the architect's role, architects were tempted to become contractors. In May, 1894, when commissioners of De Witt County (Cuero) issued a notice to contractors for courthouse plans, A. O. Watson of Austin submitted the successful design and entered into a construction contract for \$70,000 including furniture. Watson had

been architect of the courthouse at Llano and, in the firm of Larmour and Watson had designed earlier courthouses at Del Rio, Anderson and Cameron. His attempt at contracting, however, was a financial disaster, and because of delays the county took over the contract and the incomplete building at the end of 1895. Nonetheless, the courthouse at Cuero is a gem of Richardsonian Romanesque inspiration in light gray and rose colored sandstone.

James Riely Gordon

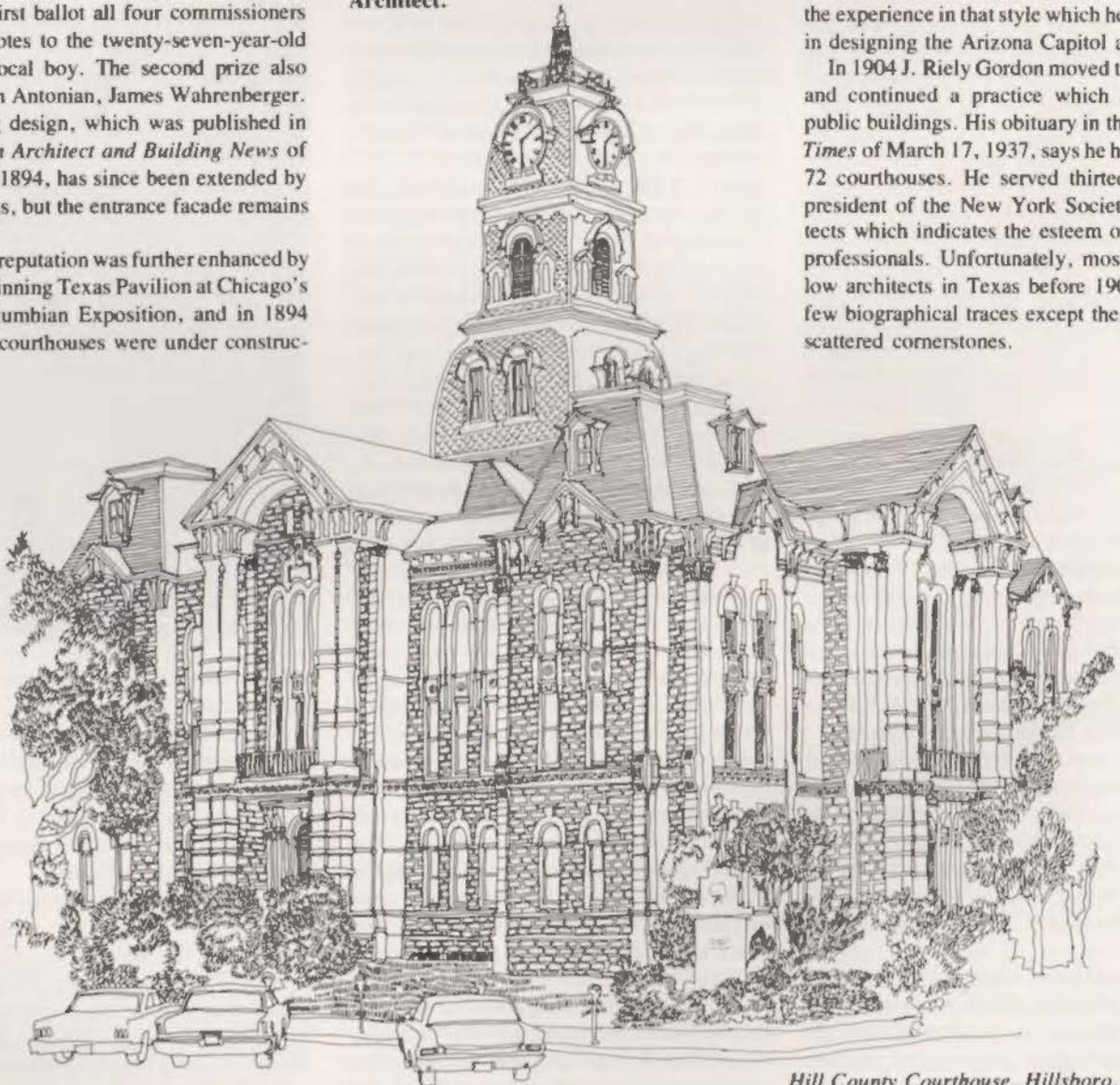
Few architects of the 1890's were more successful in personalizing the Romanesque idiom than James Riely Gordon of San Antonio. He also mastered the techniques of survival as a professional architect. An early boost to his career was the competition for the Bexar County Courthouse in 1891. First and second prizes of \$1,000 and \$500 attracted twenty-seven entries, some from Philadelphia, Kansas City, Atlanta, Chicago and Denver. The rules of the competition did not require anonymity, and on the first ballot all four commissioners gave their votes to the twenty-seven-year-old Gordon, a local boy. The second prize also went to a San Antonian, James Wahrenberger. The winning design, which was published in the *American Architect and Building News* of October 20, 1894, has since been extended by rear additions, but the entrance facade remains unchanged.

Gordon's reputation was further enhanced by the award-winning Texas Pavilion at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition, and in 1894 three of his courthouses were under construc-

tion at Sulphur Springs, Gonzales and Waxahachie.

Gordon had developed a Greek cross plan with a square central stairwell and quarter-circular entrance porches in each corner which he repeated with minimal ornament at Giddings and New Braunfels in 1898. In New Braunfels, he attempted unsuccessfully to dissuade the Comal County Commissioners from holding a competition, urging them to engage an architect of acknowledged ability, presumably himself. When the competition was held in January, 1898, Gordon's design received three votes to Alfred Giles' one. An interesting item in the contract between Comal County and Gordon is the sentence, "Any matters not provided for in this Contract to be adjusted according to the

Sketches reprinted from A Line on Texas by Norman Baxter, courtesy of the artist. For a more complete sampling of this remarkable book, see the March/April issue of Texas Architect.



Hill County Courthouse, Hillsboro.

Constitution and By-Laws of the American Institute of Architects."

On July 2, 1885 the Denton County commissioners ordered "that the Court adopt the Romanesque style of architecture for the Denton County Courthouse as shown in the design prepared by architect J. R. Gordon." This order was rescinded before the end of the month and W. C. Dodson was employed as architect. His interpretation of the Romanesque is extremely personal, if not bizarre. Dodson was more successful with the classicism of his Coryell County Courthouse at Gatesville, completed in 1898.

If vigorous competition stirred up ill will between Gordon and Dodson, it was not apparent in 1900 at Waco, where Dodson was employed to examine ten designs submitted for the McLennan County Courthouse. His preference, expressed in a long analysis, was for the design of J. Riely Gordon, which was adopted by the Court. By this time Beaux-Arts classicism was in vogue, and Gordon utilized the experience in that style which he had gained in designing the Arizona Capitol at Phoenix.

In 1904 J. Riely Gordon moved to New York and continued a practice which emphasized public buildings. His obituary in the *New York Times* of March 17, 1937, says he had designed 72 courthouses. He served thirteen terms as president of the New York Society of Architects which indicates the esteem of his fellow professionals. Unfortunately, most of his fellow architects in Texas before 1900 have left few biographical traces except their names on scattered cornerstones.

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Sixty-Sixty Place

basically a restaurant

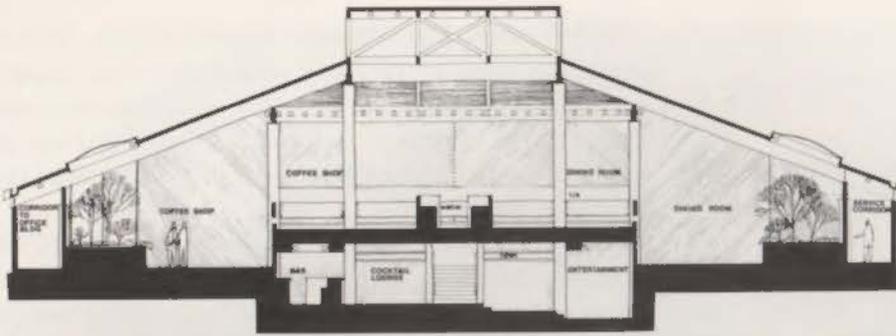


Architects who ply their craft in Texas have one design element constantly before them both as challenge and opportunity: the sun. There are few days that it isn't hanging there imposing itself, demanding either to be used or escaped from.

Dallas architects Harwood K. Smith and Partners, in approaching the design of a new Dallas restaurant, have chosen to use the sun, and the elemental quality of that decision is reflected in other aspects of their design as well. Just north and east of the site, for example, are an office building and Ramada Inn whose sharply geometric facades had at once to be complemented and counterpointed by the architecture of the restaurant. The solution was a long horizontal front wall, continuing the lines of the taller buildings, suddenly interrupted by an angled roof and glassboxed clerestory which directs the sun down into the building's interior. Concrete columns at entrance and front corners further interrupt the dominant horizontal motif.

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Photos by Charles E. Flak, Jr.



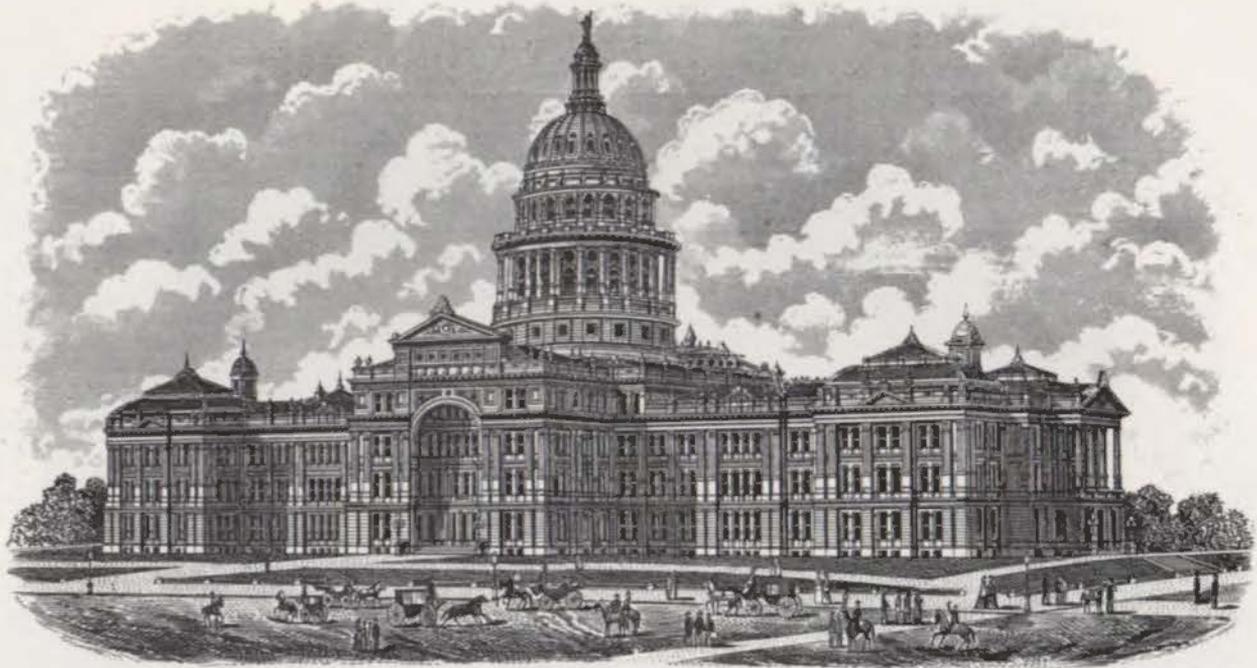
The simplicity of the exterior was likewise desired for the inside, where, in addition to the restaurant and cocktail lounge forming the hub of the building, there are several adjacent meeting rooms with space for up to 250 people. (The restaurant functions by morning as a coffee shop for 100, while at night it becomes a dining facility for the same number. The cocktail lounge, tucked economically beneath a mezzanine in the restaurant, serves 80.) This simplicity, with an accent on openness, was achieved through a merger of floor plan and "simple repetitive grid" which, in the words of the architects, "allows the inside and the outside to flow together, so that neither is surprised by the other."

The glass walls of the clerestory, in league with skylights atop corridors flanking the restaurant, channel the sun onto wooden walls and ceiling beams, additional concrete pillars, and a garden of live plants. Here again, according to the architects, the idea was to "use the basic elements of the building in a simple, direct manner, leaving them exposed to the

space." This effect was heightened still further by the installation of "bare bulb incandescent lighting to add sparkle and richness to the wood interior." Final touches on the outside/inside format include a "controlled view into the restaurant from the hotel lobby, and vistas out the clerestory and skylights to the building complex."

Jack R. Yardley, Director of Design





A. BART & CO.—ST. LOUIS, MO.

TEXAS STATE CAPITOL BUILDING

E.E. Myers, Architect.

mately 4 x 8 feet. An attempt to make reproductions from sunprints failed due to refraction from poor glass, so it was necessary, if painstaking, to retrace the original drawings. The second and final set of tracings was not completed until February 1883.

The first snag in construction, and the beginning of Myers' problems with the State, came not long after excavation and foundation work was underway late in 1883. The contractor complained of discrepancies in the drawings and the architect was asked by the commission to clarify them by January 1, 1884. Myers claimed illness and did not arrive until January 18. With the legislature in session, he was unable to see the Commissioners and returned leaving the questions unanswered.

Another problem developed in 1884 as the time neared to begin the exterior walls. Building Superintendent R. L. Walker complained that the stone being taken from nearby Oatmanville Quarry was imbedded with pyrites which would disintegrate when exposed to air, thus streaking the limestone and making it unsuitable for surface work. This eventually resulted in a switch to pink Texas granite donated by the owners of Granite Mountain in Burnet County, and hauled with the assistance of convict labor on a specially-constructed 75-mile railroad. Myers was asked to redesign his structure, using the Classic Doric style in granite rather than limestone, but his revision consisted only of a perspective drawing.

In June of 1885, as Texas officials yearned to continue the building project, Myers was again ordered to Austin for the purpose of clarifying discrepancies in the drawings. Once again claiming illness, he did not arrive until October 8. After a short report to the Commissioners, he left Austin without making the needed clarifications, but promised to

return January 1, 1886 to answer questions about the plans and furnish all modifications required.

But Myers was never to return to Austin, and he was notified that the Attorney General had been authorized to bring suit for breach of contract. Myers countered that all allegations were untrue and that "the plans and specifications are in no respect defective or insufficient." Whether the suit actually materialized is unclear, but there is no evidence that Myers was ever again consulted regarding his Texas project.

On December 8, 1888, two years and nine months following Myers' departure, the new Texas State House was accepted. The building towers 311 feet from gradeline to the top of the star held aloft by the "Goddess of Liberty," and still serves as a center of interest and activity for Austin and the State. But Elijah E. Myers, who received little glory for what was perhaps his supreme achievement, has been largely forgotten.

Editor's Note: The above is an adaptation from an article written and submitted by B. Royall Cantrell, AIA, of Cantrell & Company, Architects, Inc. in Amarillo.



Photo by Ed Stewart

Century Center

There is a real estate developer in San Antonio who wanted to construct a suburban office building with 200,000 square feet of space. To an extent perhaps unusual, he wanted the building not only to be comfortable and functional, but to make a "bold statement," to distinguish itself from others in its genre. This was particularly important in view of the site location along a busy freeway where it would be seen almost exclusively from speeding cars. An additional design factor was a relatively severe height restriction, due to a nearby airport, as well as "significant set-back requirements."

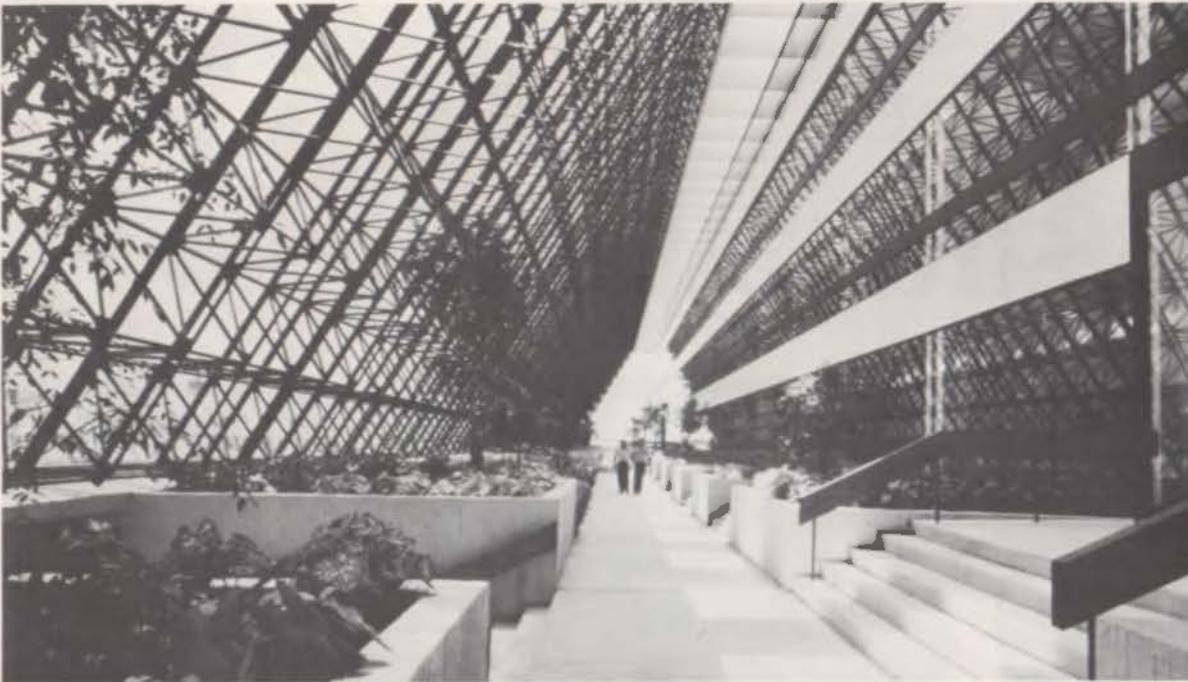
The architects selected for the project were Neuhaus + Taylor, of Houston, and their solution has won them an honor award. Given their design philosophy, this is not altogether surprising. A spokesman for the firm writes: "If Neuhaus + Taylor can be said to have a particular architectural

style, it is that it doesn't have one . . . a tenant office building designed by Neuhaus + Taylor in Houston may have little or no visual similarity with the same type of structure designed by the same firm in Atlanta."

Principal-in-Charge on the project was Board Chairman Harwood Taylor. In relation to the problem of the building's identity, he writes that it "was achieved through the design of a particularly long (580 foot), relatively low (four story) building, with a sloping facade of gold reflective glass. In turn, the facade, which actually is a screen wall attached to the building, contributed to the solution for the second major design consideration — that the building's interior be both comfortable and attractive for tenants and visitors. The screen wall encloses a four-story landscaped courtyard, two football fields long, complete with seating and foun-

Texas Architect

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Texas
Architecture
1973



Charles Burgess

H. Taylor



Elmo Valdes



tains. Tenant offices along the courtyard side of the building have an unrestricted view into the courtyard. This provides the building's occupants a pleasant view as well as a visual buffer to the busy expressway traffic."

Another project requirement was an early occupancy date. Toward that end, writes Senior Vice President Charles E. Burgess, "we relied heavily upon SCAT, a management innovation unique to Neuhaus + Taylor, which stands for Systems-Communication-Action-Team. The team is comprised of the owner/developer, the architect, with his group of consultants, and the general contractor and major subcontractors working together to find the fastest solutions to design and construction problems. Through its flexibility, speed and ability to use innovative design and construction techniques, SCAT achieves significant savings in time and money for the owner/developer. The cooperation and efficiency of the general contractor, Pence Construction Company of Bellaire, Texas, played a vital role in the early completion of the project."

Returning to the question of the firm's design philosophy, Project Designer Elmo M. Valdes writes: "I believe Century Center meets the obligation we feel at Neuhaus + Taylor to create architecture that expresses an acute awareness of human values and needs while providing a sound initial and long-term investment for the client."



Main Street Spanish



Story and Photos by
Peter C. Papademetriou
Drawings by
Catherine Mitchell and Ed McGuckin

During the secondary development along the South Main Street corridor following Houston's boom years of the early 1920's, a number of buildings were erected in the Spanish Colonial Revival Style popular at the time. Most of the more obviously commercial of these structures have fallen to subsequent growth and change. One of the few survivors is a mixed-use development of stores and apartments at the corner of Isabella and South Main known as Isabella Court.

Two architecture students at Rice University, Catherine Mitchell and Ed McGuckin, recently became interested in the building and approached me about the project. I happened to know where to find a 50-year-old set of blueprints to the project, but the actual Isabella Court turned out to be at some variance to the original plans. With the support of the Texas Architectural Foundation, the students and I undertook production of a set of drawings documenting Isabella Court as built.

Spanish Colonial Revival had been used extensively in larger buildings during the 1920's in Houston, the most notable example being the old Houston Public Library designed by William Ward Watkin. In fact, when Watkin

(Editor's Note, Mr. Papademetriou, author of "Houston: an architectural guide," is Associate Professor of Architecture at Rice University.)



was commissioned to design Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, he provided a Spanish rear courtyard facade complete with green tile roof, although the main entry and elevations along Main Street and Montrose Boulevard were articulated in a Classical Palladian manner. Other examples of Spanish Colonial Revival included the "craft district" of printing companies along Allen Parkway, as well as miscellaneous structures ranging from restaurants to outstanding residences in River Oaks. Isabella Court remains unique, however, due to a variety of design factors uncommon to any other building.

Original blueprints for the project bear the seal of "William Bordeaux, architect" from Miami, Florida. The drawings are dated 1928, but by 1933 the original owner, P. D. Michael, encountered financial difficulties with the project and deeded it to his friend John Radford. How Bordeaux came to be architect is unknown, for he appears not to have done any other buildings in Houston. Indeed, certain discrepancies including one between architectural and structural sets, as well as outright departures from the drawings, raise the question of the extent to which the architect was actually involved.

Spontaneous Design

There are aspects of the design which reflect an amateurishness that actually gives Isabella Court its appeal. The design is quick to accommodate unpredictable events, subtle in its modifications of typical design features, and just plain arbitrary when it comes to compositional decisions. Proportions, dimensions and details appear naive, unsophisticated or simply *ad-hoc*, suggesting that many of the more delightful touches simply appeared on the job as it was constructed. On a general level, one can see these hang-loose traits in the seven variants around a basic theme of eight apartments on each of the two floors; there are, for example, only two units sharing a common plan on any given floor.

Isabella Court was apparently designed to emphasize its urban, even *urbane*, context, an unusual format for a city such as Houston. The mixed-use development combines commercial and service space with two floors of residential space in relationships which are responsive to the grain of this context. The Main Street side is obviously the primary public side. Isabella Street is only one block long, dead-ending into Main and Fannin Streets respectively. The entrance to the residential second level was consequently put on Isabella, providing a sense of privacy. Access to the primary commercial space is accomplished through a rear easement.

The initial program called for a ground floor accommodation of five commercial shops fronting on South Main and a smaller office bay on Isabella. Perhaps the most unusual feature of the ground floor is a photographer's studio consisting essentially of a double-height space in the rear to be used for portrait sittings. The mezzanine for the studio contained storage and a darkroom; this space in turn created a step-section affecting apartment plans above, as well as elevational treatment where the transition is finessed by two windows placed on diagonals.

The entry on Isabella Street leads to the central courtyard furnishing the main visual feature of the building. Each apartment is entered through a circulation arcade around the court which also provides cross-ventilation. More



1. Interior courtyard 2. Arcade opening as seen from central courtyard 3. Connecting access stair between apartment floors; note *ad hoc* detail of handrail transition





West Elevation



South Elevation



East Elevation

than half the apartments boast two entries, though each entry varies in its relationship to the overall plan.

One feature differing sharply from the original drawings is the secondary court adjacent to the main access stairs to the fire escape. Originally this had been a notch in the building shape, but as built it consists of a false screen punctuated by openings, producing what is perhaps the most interesting elevation in the building.

The stepsection introduced by the mezzanine results in certain picturesque effects for some of the apartments, like small rooms overlooking other spaces, stairs, and higher ceiling. One can actually imagine Dorothy Lamour entering from an upper level!

Overhanging glass registers, open on the sides, were added after construction but remained consistent with the spirit of the original building (besides affording protection from Houston's tropical rains).

In general, Isabella Court has added a meaningful public element to the provision of apartment spaces; the treatment of the courtyard, its relation to the surrounding apartments, and picturesque romantic details result in a meaningful contribution to the overall concept. On top of this, the proximity of the apartments to other commercial frontage on Main Street validates the strength of the court as an "in-between" space, a layer between the public street below and the private spaces above.

Are we to judge Isabella Court an original

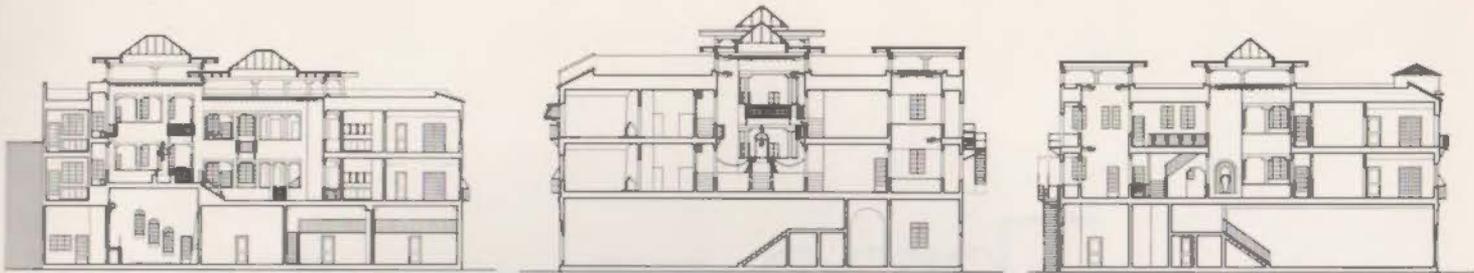
prototype, or was it derived from other sources? Some comparisons are possible with the contemporary La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe, particularly the idea of a layer of commercial spaces on the street with an interior court given over to private spaces. Yet La Fonda is executed in the softer, more picturesque adobe vernacular of New Mexico. Isabella Court has a more taut quality, more akin to Santa Barbara, California where an entire city was designed and built in Spanish Colonial Revival.

In the final analysis, Isabella Court may be viewed both as derivative, according to principles generally accepted at the time (such as the apartment programs and layouts), while also incorporating a number of *ad hoc* design decisions, either on the part of the architect or as a result of changes and improvisations during construction.

As a *planning solution*, Isabella Court combines the mixed uses of commercial shops and residential apartments representative of urban living in Houston in the 1920's. Judicious placement of service zones, separation of entries, and response to the corner are especially noteworthy. As a *stylistic exercise*, it is a facile manipulation of Spanish Colonial Revival motifs in response to program needs. As a *unique statement*, it is extremely interesting in its responses to circumstances of design, as well as to the basic *parti* behind the project: the open central space and genesis of the name "Isabella Court".



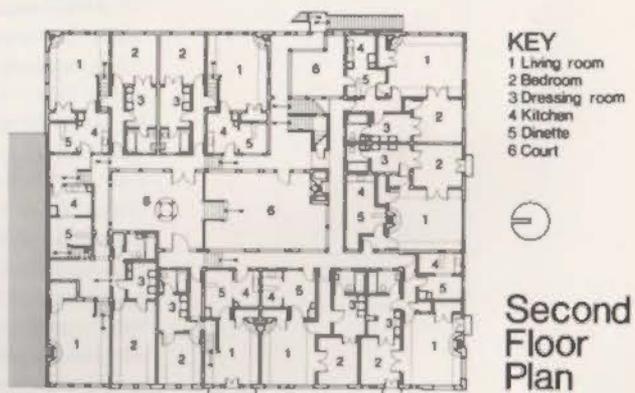
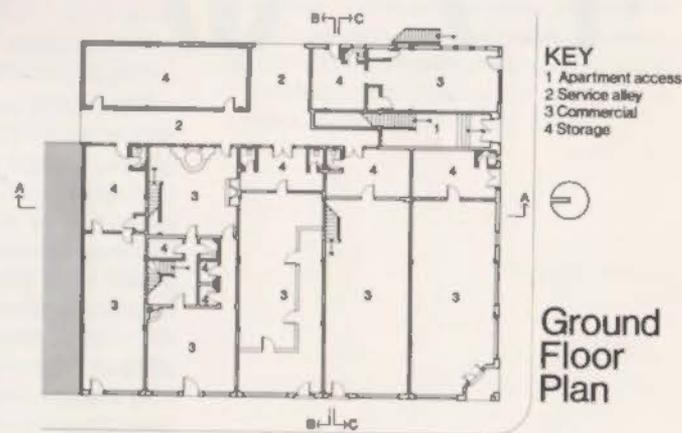
1. Entry to largest apartment 2. Typical detail between ceiling and wall 3. Milk delivery box (normally in kitchen but here in bathroom) 4. Unresolved joint over stair between rooms 5. Split-level apartment 6. Upper-level bedroom 7. South elevation apartment, extra-width windows



A-A Section

B-B Section

C-C Section



Three from Texas

FAIA

Harry Golemon



Harvin Moore



William Jenkins

Three Texas architects reached the pinnacle of their careers May 20th with their investiture into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects during the AIA national convention in Washington, D.C. Harry A. Golemon, William R. Jenkins and Harvin C. Moore, all of Houston, were among 73 AIA members to receive the cherished distinction this year. In providing the following personal glimpses, *Texas Architect* offers its warmest congratulations and seeks to depict something of the scope of accomplishment that Fellowship entails.

Harry Golemon

"I like people," says Harry Golemon, partner in the Houston firm of Golemon & Rolfe. "The architectural profession affects more people than any other profession." That's why he went into architecture more than 20 years ago. And "designing for people" is still a basic tenet of his architectural philosophy. "Consider," Golemon says, "the numbers of people that use a building in its lifetime and how much time those people spend in buildings designed by architects. One architect or one architectural firm can literally have an influence on thousands to millions of people."

Golemon's architectural education began at Auburn University, where he took his Bachelor

of Architecture in 1951. A year later, he received his Masters degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Golemon's continuing interest in architectural education is reflected in some of the many committees and organizations with which he has been affiliated: Committee on Education of AIA, Education Research Project of AIA, Architectural Education and Student Affairs Committee of TSA, and Awards and Scholarships Committee of the Houston Chapter of TSA.

Other committee work includes the Committee on Professional Consultants (AIA); the AIA Task Force on the Architect and Development Team; the Program, Legislation, and Civic Design Committee of the Houston Chapter of TSA; and the TSA Editorial Policy Committee, of which he is presently chairman. In 1973, he edited *Financing Real Estate*, an AIA publication.

Golemon is the father of four children and is active in civic activities. Currently, he is chairman of the Economic Development Committee of the Houston Chamber of Commerce and the Buffalo District, Houston Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

Asked to comment on what he regards as the number one challenge confronting architects in the next decades, Golemon replied that "individual architects should earn and assume the leadership positions in the decision making

process of financing, designing and building all sizes and types of projects throughout America. So often an architect enters a project after all of the important decisions have been made. As a result, his talents are not fully utilized. Assumption of the leadership role is the architect's responsibility . . ."

William Jenkins

William R. Jenkins is both a practitioner and an architectural educator. A partner in the Houston firm of William R. Jenkins Architect, he has been in private practice since 1951, and has taught architecture at the University of Houston (where one of his two daughters is now a student) since 1956. In 1960, he was appointed Associate Professor, and is presently Dean of the College of Architecture. After service in the United States Navy during World War II, Mr. Jenkins attended Rice University and the University of Houston where he received a Bachelor of Architecture Degree, later taking his Master of Architecture Degree from Texas A&M. Licensed to practice architecture in fourteen states, Jenkins belongs to numerous organizations, including Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, American Institute of Architects, Texas Society of Architects, and American Association of University Professors.

Among the committees on which he has served are the Education Committee of AIA, The Association of the Collegiate Schools of Architecture, and the Aesthetics Foundation, and as architectural advisor in a cooperative program with the Department of Physics, University of Houston, and McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Company to investigate the influence of major solar collector systems on the environment, sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

His awards include those from the American Association of School Administrators, the American Institute of Architects, the Contemporary Arts Society, *House and Home* magazine, *Progressive Architecture*, the Houston Independent School District, and TSA.

Jenkins maintains that "while the profession aspires to a role of leadership in determining the future quality of the built environment, it also seeks realistic answers associated with prob-

lems of survival. Today's architect, and certainly tomorrow's cannot disassociate himself from the problems of the 'real world'. This observation is finding its way not only into the active profession, but also into schools of architecture."

Through an attitude of "open awareness," says Jenkins, "and recognizing the need for continuing education, this most important profession can make itself a primary force in solving the overwhelming socio-economic and physiological problems of the future."

Harvin Moore

Harvin C. Moore thought at first that he wanted to be a doctor. But after receiving a pre-med degree from Rice University in 1927, he turned instead to architecture. "Since early childhood," he says, "my interests were in drawing, building, and considering three-dimensional problems." So, "with no family heritage in architecture, I embarked on the pursuit of that profession as a graduate course—simply because I thought I would enjoy it!"

Since then Moore, a partner with his son in the Houston firm of Harvin Moore-Barry Moore, AIA, Architects, has become a nationally recognized authority in the field of historic architecture and preservation. His preservation commissions include four projects for the State of Texas, one for the General Services Administration, four for the city of Houston (Harris County Heritage Society), one for a pre-civil war church, and 10 restorations for private owners. He has also served as a consultant to such groups as the Galveston Historical Foundation and Texas Pioneer Arts Foundation. In addition, Moore has delivered almost 200 lectures on historic preservation to regional civic organizations.

His professional and civic affiliations include the TSA Historic Resources Committee, the AIA Historic Resources Committee, the Historic Building Committee of the Houston Chapter of TSA, the Rice Alumni Association, Sons of the Republic of Texas, The Art League of Houston, the Executives Association of Houston, and the lieutenant governorship of the Oklahoma, Texas District of Kiwanis International.

Thinking back to the days when he was first

formulating his ideas about architecture, Moore credits William Ward Watkin, then head of the Architectural Department at Rice, with instilling a noble appreciation of the profession. Watkin "represented the profession as a complete fulfillment in itself . . . he typified a sincere reverence for design and beauty mingled with a high level of pleasure in the creative realization of problem solution."

The respect Moore has for his profession he likewise holds for the position of Fellow. With the new title, says Moore, also comes an obligation to "improve the practice of architecture, to stimulate a sharing of interests among the Fellows, to encourage the highest standards of professional ethics, and to stimulate research, education, and interest in the improvement of the physical environment."

"A profession," says Moore, "like a chain, depends on each link to survive." He asks—in this time of "economic, political, and moral uncertainty"—that the individual architect be "honest, perceptive, understanding, energetic, capable." The profession must look to each of its members, each "link in the chain," as a "symbol of its importance and future."

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ing or pointing of the joints — is normally not required until after the building has been in service 30 or 40 years.

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There are, however, some inherent disadvantages of masonry. For example, you can't see through it. But, with the proper architectural balance of masonry to fenestration, you can deliver a building to your client that is both serviceable as well as aesthetically pleasing.

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Endangered Species

“The Sentinel on the Prairie”

(Editor's Note: Here follows an account of another "endangered specie" which has been salvaged through the initiative of Texas architects.)

Two Houston architects — Jim Bishop and Lewis Ransopher — have secured and begun to restore what Mr. Ransopher calls “a remnant of our Texas heritage, a Victorian wonder known locally as the Old Stafford Ranch House (also called ‘The Sentinel on the Prairie’). If you climb the stairs to the fourth-level widow’s walk, you will be treated to a view fit for a Texas Cattle Baron. Three miles north lies Columbus, with its silver-domed courthouse and big oaks growing in the middle of some of the streets.” To the east stretches the Colorado River valley, to the south the Gulf coastal plain, and west the “rolling foothills leading to the Edwards Plateau.”

If this suggests a kind of emperor’s roost, that is not far from the truth. “John Stafford and his brother Bob must have looked upon this



Photos by James Bishop

vista with satisfaction, almost a century ago, for their cattle domain extended in some places all the way to the Gulf, a hundred miles away . . . In the days before barbed wire, according to Hollis Massey, attorney for the Stafford estate, the family owned 90,000 acres outright, but controlled considerably more than that.”

It was in 1882 that John Stafford initiated construction of the cypress palace that would serve as ranch headquarters. Fable has it that he personally selected, from East Texas or Louisiana, the hard timber which has “now weathered to a silver grey . . . if anything harder than ever for the aging.” The home encloses about 7,000 square feet of floor space, “with galleries around three sides on the first and second floors.” Gracing the eaves and dormer windows are “elaborate brackets with detailing typical of the Victorian era, but unique in size and intricacy.” Square columns, extending in groups of five from the floor of the veranda to the eaves of the third floor, “are

detailed with ‘gingerbread’ reflecting a high state of the craftsman’s art.”

Indeed, one of the problems the new owners face, according to Mr. Bishop, is finding a contractor capable of performing the quality of work which the restoration will demand. Another problem is vandalism: “Several years ago, the beautiful hand-carved walnut mantles for all six fireplaces were barely saved from vandals who had pried them loose.”

Renovation of the 15-room mansion may or may not include air-conditioning. “We are trying to resist it,” says Mr. Bishop, who is thinking instead of “old-fashioned ceiling fans.” When work on the house is completed, it will be opened to visitors, and one of the features they will inspect is a fragment of hitching-block on which are inscribed the words “Able McL---, Architect.” Perhaps, writes Mr. Ransopher, “another part of the hitching block may one day be found to give us the full name, but until then we can only wonder.”



Photos by Alan Pogur

Hunnicutt House Finally Succumbs

One constantly learns anew, in this age of future-shock, never to count one’s chickens until they have hatched and started scratching around the barnyard. In our first installment of this column (March/April), we reported with pleasure the apparent salvation of Austin’s 100-year-old Hunnicutt mansion. Slated for demolition by an adjacent church desiring the site for a parking lot and childcare center, the house was rescued virtually at the last minute by a group called Preserve Austin, Inc., which won acceptance of a plan to relocate and renovate the structure. The group had found a new site several blocks away, a parking lot (ironi-

cally) situated behind another old house being used by a law firm. There were sighs of relief and celebrations all over town.

Too soon: the lawyers adjacent to the new site notified the church that they would not relinquish the land. Evidently unwilling to wait any longer, the church called in the wrecking team before Preserve Austin, Inc. could search out another location. Last-ditch efforts at resistance — including a roof-top “sit-in” by several young people defying the wrecking ball — did not succeed. The demonstrators were arrested, and the iron maul came crashing down.

Old Tyler House

(Editor's Note: The following appeal was received by Texas Architect and forwarded to Preserve Austin, Inc. We hope it is not too late to rescue the old Tyler house in question, and we commend Mr. Cox for his attentiveness.)

2602 South Donnybrook
Tyler, Texas 75701
April 27, 1974

Preserve Austin, Inc.
Austin, Texas

Dear Sirs:

It was only today that I learned of your program of saving old homes. I'm writing the same day because there's a house here in Tyler that should be saved and time is of the essence. I am an architectural student and have traveled all over east Texas photographing old homes. Of all I have seen, this house is one of the most beautiful.



The need for prompt action arises for two reasons. First, the house is located on a lot that has been zoned commercial and if it falls into the pattern established too many times before in the city, it will be torn down to make room for some business to be built there — it's a good commercial site. Second, the real estate agents are pricing the contents. When the pricing has been completed, the contents will be offered for sale to the public, whereas they may be purchased in one lump sum before the pricing is complete.

The house was built in 1870 by Mr. John Douglas. Miss Josie Belle Holland is the current owner and has put the house on the market for the first time in its 104-year history.

The house contains all the furnishings. Since both Miss Holland and her father and mother were very particular, it's overflowing with beautiful antiques, all in mint condition (she wouldn't even let anyone go upstairs for the

July/August 1974

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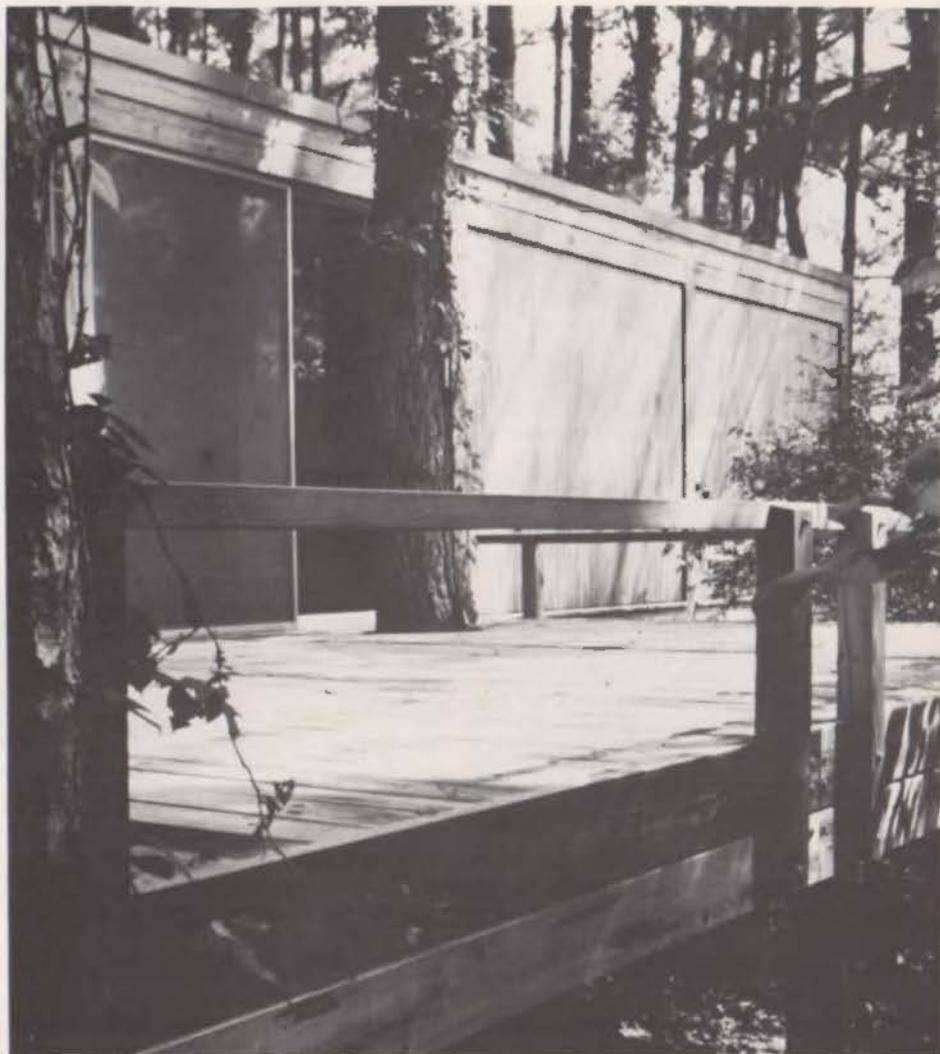
past 15 years). As you may well guess it's like a museum. Upon entering the door it's as though you are stepping back in time 100 years.

The house has 11 rooms: a parlor, dining room, kitchen, stair hall, living room, a bedroom and a bath downstairs. Upstairs there are three more bedrooms and a bath. Still further up is a cupola that was an artist's studio. The staircase is made of solid walnut. The interior is in exceptional condition and would require only a good cleaning and very minor touch-ups (possibly some papering). Structurally, too, the house is in very good condition.

The agency wants \$39,500 for house and lot, excluding furniture, but with some pressure they would probably include the furnishings for the same price. As a student at Tyler Junior College, I'm financially unable to take on the project myself. Therefore, I'm writing to you for complete details on your program and any financial assistance you might be able to provide. If you're unable to help financially, please send information concerning someone who might.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas Afton Cox

hide- out in the woods



Mr. and Mrs. Frank J. Kelly, of Houston, wanted a week-end hide-out in the woods, and their son, Frank S. Kelly, a senior vice-president of OMNIPLAN Architects, Harrell + Hamilton, designed them one. Then the family built it, trying to avoid disturbing the pine trees and underbrush covering the site. They succeeded so well — hid the house so thoroughly — that a subsequent attempt to take photographs proved almost impossible (hence we make do, on these pages, with a glimpse here and a peek there).

Besides a desire to maximize preservation of the "natural character of the site," there were three additional design requirements: (1) a weekend house for a couple and occasional guests with living, kitchen, and dining spaces, two bedrooms and two baths; (2) minimal exterior maintenance; (3) a construction design and schedule of materials which would permit the owners to build most of the house themselves.

The site, not far from New Waverly, is a woodsy hillside overlooking a meadow and a pond. To enhance the visibility of this topography, as well as to avoid damaging the foliage which blankets the site, the house was constructed on a "foundation" of concrete pillars, providing a kind of





Honor Award
Texas
Architecture
1973

Frank S. Kelly

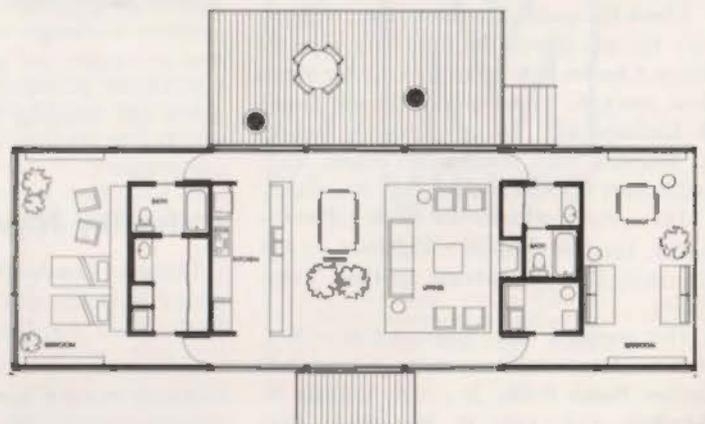
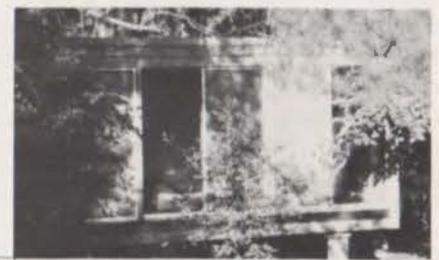


“treehouse” effect. A “floating” deck attached to the house was likewise suspended above the earth.

Exterior maintenance was reduced to a minimum by fashioning this deck, along with the walls of the house, from pine planks treated with penta oil which will cause the pine to weather to a soft grey color. The remainder of the walls are glass, for which, of course, the only maintenance required is a bottle of Windex and some elbow grease.

The interior of the house is a study in open simplicity. The floor plan, according to the architect, “focuses on a central living space separated from the two bedrooms (and bathrooms) by ‘cores’ in which all of the plumbing and mechanical equipment are concentrated. The kitchen and dining facilities are an integral part of the living space and its activities.” From within the house, each interior space is oriented toward a different view over the underbrush and through the trees.

As planned, the Kelly family did virtually all of the basic construction and finishing work themselves, and the fine craftsmanship of the house reflects the care with which it was built.



In the News



AIA officers for 1975, left to right, are: Hilliard T. Smith, FAIA, Lake Worth, Fla., Secretary; Elmer E. Botsai, FAIA, San Francisco; John M. McGinty, Houston; and Carl L. Bradley, FAIA, Fort Wayne, Vice Presidents; Louis de Moll, FAIA, Philadelphia, First Vice President and President-elect.

AIA Convention

Texas architect **John M. (Jack) McGinty** won his bid for re-election as a Vice-President of the American Institute of Architects, during the AIA national convention in Washington, D.C. May 20-23. McGinty is a principal in the McGinty Partnership in Houston.

Approximately 100 Texans attended the convention, which brought together AIA members from all parts of the nation for an exploration of the theme "A Humane Architecture." Keynote speaker was **Mayor Tom Bradley**, of Los Angeles, who paralleled TSA's own interest in land use policy in his call for "the orderly, balanced, and reasoned growth of urban and rural areas" within which "local policies can be implemented."

Held jointly with the convention was the National Architectural Conference of the Associated Student Chapters of AIA. **Pat Davis**, of the University of Texas at Austin, currently serves as president of the organization, which featured seminars, presentations and workshops, and a complex of tents and pneumatic structures comprising a Life Center on the grounds of the Washington Monument.

News of Firms

Clovis Heimsath Associates, Inc., of Houston, has announced the following appointments: **Charles F. Stephens**, AIA, Vice President; **Jerry W. Mendenhall**, AIA and **James B. Gaffney**, AIA, Senior Associates; **Robert A. Warrick**, AIA, **Emmett H. White**, AIA, and **Robert W. Bainbridge**, AIA, Associates.

The correct address for **Staten/Pierce-Lacey, Inc., Architects + Planners**, is 444 Executive Center Boulevard, El Paso, Texas 79902.

Five members of the Houston firm of **S. I. Morris Associates** have been promoted to partner: **Nolen Willis, Jr.**, AIA; **William D. Kendall**, AIA; **John H. Wiegman**, AIA;

Thomas B. Daly, AIA; and **George W. Spence**, AIA.

Travers/Johnston Architects and Planners, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, has opened a Dallas office in the Elmbrook Gardens complex.

Zeb Rike, AIA and **Dan Ogden**, AIA, Architects, have announced the relocation of their office to 1007 Walnut Avenue, McAllen, Texas 78501.

Rapp-Tackett-Fash-Inc., Architects & Planning Consultants, have announced the merger of their practice (under the same name) with that of **Thomas M. Price**, Architect, and the relocation of the Galveston office to 3901 Broadway, P.O. Box 1480, Galveston 77550.

AIA Appointment

AIA has announced the appointment of **Robert Traynham Coles**, AIA, of Buffalo, N.Y., to the newly created position of deputy vice president for minority affairs.

New Book

Designing for Human Behavior, co-edited by Dean Charles Burnette of the UT Austin School of Architecture, has been published recently. Developed from a 1971 conference at Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, the book provides a synthesis of changes taking place in architectural philosophy and practice, and deals with fundamental processes of environmental behavior and obtaining behavioral information. Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., Pennsylvania, \$20.

Industry News

Linbeck Construction Corporation has moved its Dallas office to One Turtle Creek Tower, Suite 524, Dallas, Texas, 75219.

Construction is scheduled to begin immediately on a new **Armco Steel Corporation** plant in Longview. The plant will manufacture

components for pre-engineered steel buildings.

Monray Roof Tile Company recently opened a new tile manufacturing facility at 9508 So. Harlan St., Stockton, Calif. The company also has factories in Duncanville, Texas and Camarillo and Corona, California.

News of Schools

"The professor who designed spaces rather than buildings"—**Hugo Leipziger-Pearce**—has retired from the UT/Austin School of Architecture after 35 years of teaching. A specialist in urban design, Professor Leipziger-Pearce helped establish in 1947 the Texas Association for Community Planning, Research and Education.

Professor Hugh Lyon McMath has retired from the UT/Austin School of Architecture. A UT faculty member for 44 years, Professor McMath is widely known for his studies in the art and architecture of Mexico.

Texas Tech University has announced a new \$1,000 annual scholarship in architecture to be awarded to "minority students who otherwise would not be able to begin their professional architectural studies." The scholarship is a gift of the Lubbock and Panhandle Chapters in conjunction with AIA's Disadvantaged Minority Scholarship Program.

Professor Richard Vrooman, of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Texas A&M University, has been appointed Associate Dean.

Anti-Intrusion

Austin architect **Bob Peters**, a partner in the firm of Peters and Fields, has been appointed as the only architect to serve on the Anti-Intrusion Standards Advisory Committee of the Texas Municipal League. The 8-member committee has been charged to devise a model code for building security for possible adaptation by Texas communities.

Research

Houston architect **David C. Bullen**, on leave from the firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott, has been selected to head AIA Research Corporation's assignment to review the recent GSA publication, "Energy Conservation Design Guidelines for Office Buildings."

The guidelines, issued in March, 1974 by GSA's Public Buildings Service, provide the first comprehensive criteria for conserving energy in the design, construction and operation of office buildings. The document also has been reviewed in the May 1974 issue of AIA's Review of Architectural Periodicals (RAP), a monthly cassette tape series available to TSA members for \$60 per year. Order no. S101A.

Letters

Awards

The San Antonio Chapter of AIA has announced the winners of its 1974 design awards program. Receiving two of three Honor Awards was the firm of **Ford, Powell & Carson, Architects & Planners**. They were cited for Braniff International Hotels' Santa Maria Beach Club, in Lima, Peru, designed in conjunction with Peruvian architect Alberto Menacho, and for the Harding L. Lawrence Ranch House in Patagonia, Arizona. Also, the firm of **Ken Bentley and Associates** received an Honor Award for Canavan Center, in San Antonio, a complex of medical offices owned by John Canavan.

Merit Awards were presented to **Marmon & Mok Associates** for the San Antonio Transit System Offices and to **Peterson & Williams Architects**, in association with Charles E. Schubert, for the Bexar County Law Library and San Antonio Bar Association Office.

Big Thicket Saved?

Ending a struggle which dates back to 1930, conservationists have won a modest victory in their attempts to save part of the lush Big Thicket area of East Texas from timber interests, developers and paper manufacturers. The U.S. Senate, in recent action, passed a bill introduced by Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen designating 100,000 acres of the Big Thicket as a National Preserve. Still to be worked out are minor difficulties between the bill and an earlier version passed by the House which sets aside 84,550 acres.

At best, the size of the preserve will be a far cry from the 200,000 acres originally proposed. But sponsors of the measure claim it will preserve the basic character of the forest, which constitutes a delicate habitat for certain species of wildlife and foliage found nowhere else in the world.

More Billboards

A federal program of billboard removal along interstate right-of-way — initiated nine years ago at the urging of Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson — is sputtering to a final death, according to a dispatch from Christian Science Monitor News Service. Congress simply is not appropriating the funds to continue the program. "By June 30," says F. John Frances, highway beautification coordinator for the Transportation Department, "we're broke. And without the necessary funding, the momentum we've built up in removing signs will be lost."

Editor: I enjoyed reading the article ("Taking Down the Signs"), and while I was disappointed that Denver's Sign Code was not mentioned, I do think the article was well done, and it very adequately covers the major points of contention between the Sign Code combatants. And thank you very much for your very kind acknowledgement in the editor's note.

Lynn Vandegrift
City and County of Denver
Department of Planning

Editor: Several weeks ago you provided me with a copy of TSA Handbook 74 and several copies of *Texas Architect*. I regret that I did not have a few more minutes to spend with you and your staff. It would have been very enjoyable. The TSA staff is to be commended for a very fine handbook, and many of us envy your successful *Texas Architect*. It is certainly something for us to shoot for in this area.

Robert A. Floren
Naramore Bain Brady & Johanson
Seattle

Editor: As an Industrial Engineer I find there is an increasing need for communication between the architect and the industrial engineer, manufacturing engineer or the individual responsible for the layout and definition of manufacturing facilities, small industrial plants and in many cases, hospitals and/or office buildings. Direct communication is needed to assure that the facility will meet the needs of the client.

What is accomplished by the joint effort of the industrial engineer working with the architects and/or planners designing an industrial facility? The major advantage to be achieved by this corporation of individuals is that the industrial engineer in most cases, theoretically is an efficiency expert and is well-acquainted with manufacturing processes, general management systems, paper flow, communications, and many other interrelated facets of the complex industrial and management complexes in this country and can substantially broaden the scope of the architect's experience.

There are many industrial engineering organizations in the State of Texas who are well qualified and trained for such activities and could easily be brought into a project for development assistance at the same time the mechanical engineering people are contacted for the mechanical layout of the facility.

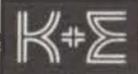
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Drawing by Mark Stearns

Retail Signage for the Real World: A Third Alternative

By Crawford Dunn

The March/April 1974 issue of *Texas Architect* contained an article entitled "Taking Down the Signs." The first two illustrations in that article depicted a before-and-after concept of a small shopping strip. The former showed the raw aggression of retailers in a kind of visual free-for-all. The scene was one of brutal vitality with signs inflected to present a large profile to approaching pedestrian and vehicular traffic, gaudy, and vernacular but effective from the standpoint of conspicuity, conspicuity being just about the first requisite for good visual communication.

The "after" situation is something else. The vitality is gone; the variety and randomness are gone; the spontaneity is gone; the conspicuity is gone. The life of the former scene has been zapped in favor of a simplistic "order" of compulsive neatness. The curse of the Bauhaus has struck again.

Perhaps nowhere is the inadequacy of a strictly architectural approach to communication more patent than in the area of architectural graphics in the retail context and most especially in shopping centers. In the names of some compulsive architectural "order", some designers have shown little concern for the very essence of retailing: the quantitative maximizing of profitable commercial transactions.

Too often, the designer (who seems very uptight about any "disorder") merely labels a

store or shop. Should he not, instead, address himself to packaging the entire retail operation, a task that most certainly involves more imaginativeness and style than merely identifying? In his labeling of an establishment or the various shops in a complex, he is imparting no more vitality to his results than the labeling of sections of bookshelves in a library. He is leaving out the lifespark of the marketplace: the visible vitality of competition.

Two Extremes

An analysis of tenant signage in shopping centers in this country shows that there are two extremes to be avoided. The first of these is to effect no environmental control, to adopt no signage criteria at all and, thus, to invite open anarchy. This approach has never yet failed to have a seriously deteriorating effect upon the environment; it can, in fact, guarantee visual disaster. Normal, wholesome competitiveness is transformed into an aggressive destructive "shouting match", to the detriment of all. The other extreme to be avoided is to adopt such rigid standards for signage as virtually to abolish the desirable qualities of randomness, vitality, and festiveness within the shopping center. The resulting drabness and monotony are antithetical to the very nature of merchandising.

Again, it is the essence of a good shopping center to be a marketplace, a fair, a bazaar, an animated, lively, colorful exposition of things

to see and buy. A successful center, in short, must be attractive in order to attract: it must have an air of excitement and stimulation, satisfaction, optimism, informality, activity — all within the context of an aesthetic environment.

The very desirable atmosphere of variety within a center can best be achieved by means of a simple, straightforward and practical procedure. Each tenant should submit proposed designs for his own signage requirements to a consultant designer who then determines whether the designs conform to the generous minimal standard set for the center. In addition, the designer may recommend modifications in shape, size, texture, color, materials, etc. to enhance the attractiveness of the signage. The owner should invite the full cooperation of all tenants in such a program for the mutual protection of everyone concerned. Those two illustrations in the article perhaps inadvertently imply that we have *two* choices only. Actually, there is a third choice that takes into account the very real needs of retailing while exercising strong design control at the same time.

(Editor's Note: This article was received as a proposed addendum to "Taking Down the Signs," which appeared in the March/April issue of Texas Architect. Mr. Dunn is president of RYA/Crawford Dunn, Inc., Visual Communication Design Consultants, of Dallas.)

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