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## Architect Training at Syracuse

Dwight James Baum

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# ARCHITECT TRAINING AT SYRACUSE

BY DWIGHT JAMES BAUM

The Profession of Architecture, if it is to be a living, forward-moving thing, must be made up not simply of the group of men who happen to be in practice at a given time but also of their juniors, the draftsmen and students who have not yet arrived but are seriously on their way. There has to be a constant fresh supply of youthful talent and vigor and ambition if our traditions and ideals are to be carried on. For these increments we naturally look to the architectural schools. The matter of architectural education thus becomes of vital concern to every architect who looks to the future.

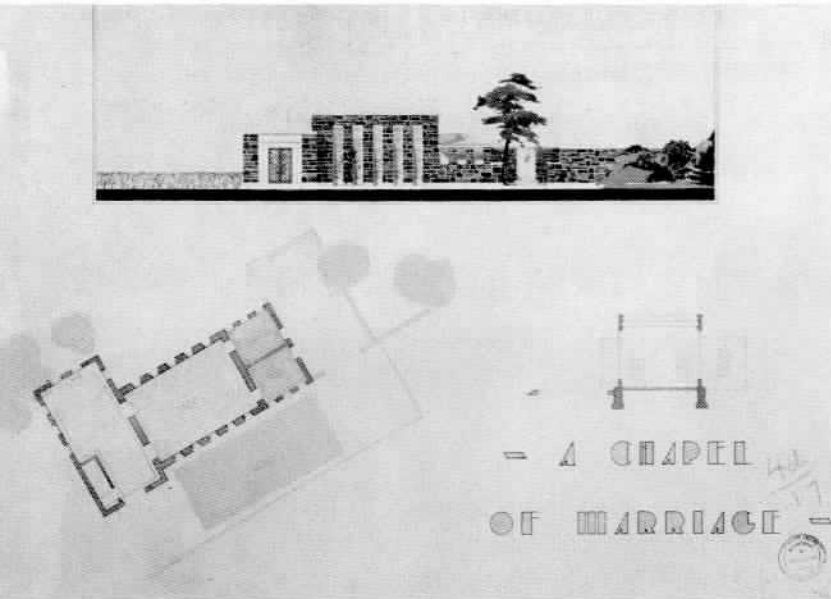
It has been, in fact, of such great concern that the schools from time to time are made the subject of lively controversy, brought about by the development of many and di-

verse theories as to what we need to teach and how it should be taught. With particular intensity has the battle raged during the past decade or so.

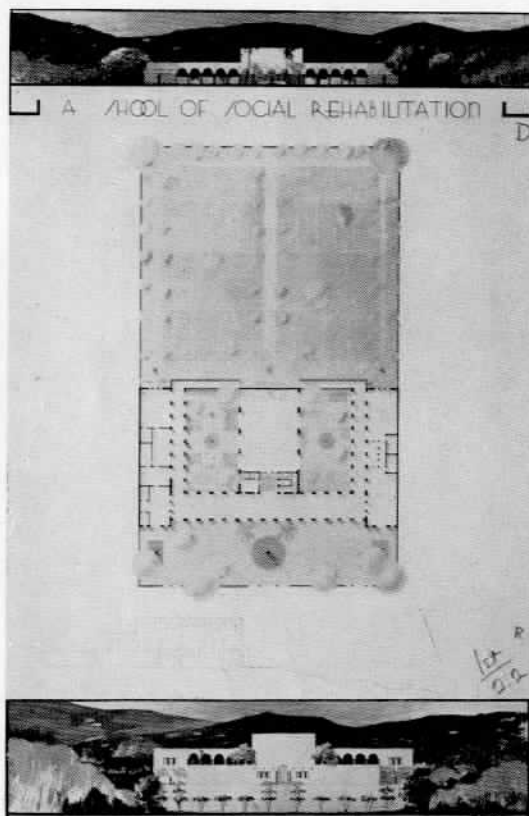
In these years, the architect has found upset social and economic conditions which have tended to shift public emphasis somewhat from architecture as a fine art in the direction of architecture as a practical applied science. At the same time the world has been swept by conflicting theories of "modernism" in design, some evolutionary and some revolutionary, but all evincing

THE SKYLIGHTED EXHIBITION ROOM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AT SYRACUSE IS CENTRALLY LOCATED WITH CLASSROOMS AND DRAFTING ROOMS AROUND IT





PROBLEMS GRADE PROGRESSIVELY FROM SIMPLE COMPOSITIONS CONTAINING BUT A FEW ELEMENTS TO COMPLEX PLANS REQUIRING CAREFUL ORGANIZATION. ABOVE IS ONE OF THE SECOND-YEAR PROJECTS IN MASONRY CONSTRUCTION AND BELOW IS A THIRD-YEAR DESIGN. IN BOTH OF THESE THE STUDENT WAS REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THROUGH AND DEVELOP A FULL SET OF WORKING DRAWINGS



dissatisfaction with the past. Small wonder that the schools have had to take account of stock and make such changes in curricula and teaching methods as seemed proper to their respective administrators. Naturally, with so much disagreement among practicing architects, the schools have varied greatly from one another in the changes they have made. This is probably a healthy condition since a good deal of their reorientation is experimental and should properly be time-tested before general acceptance.

The Department of Architecture of the College of Fine Arts at Syracuse University, as befits one of the very oldest of American architectural courses (it was established in 1873), has kept its feet firmly on the ground during all the turmoil and has quietly gone ahead attending to its business of turning out its quota of young men equipped for immediate useful service in the offices of established architects. That is not to say that it has failed to adapt itself to the times, for it made a careful reorganization of its curriculum about five years ago which is just now bearing fruit in the form of a crop of graduating students who give promise of being better equipped than their predecessors to cope with the problems of today's architecture.

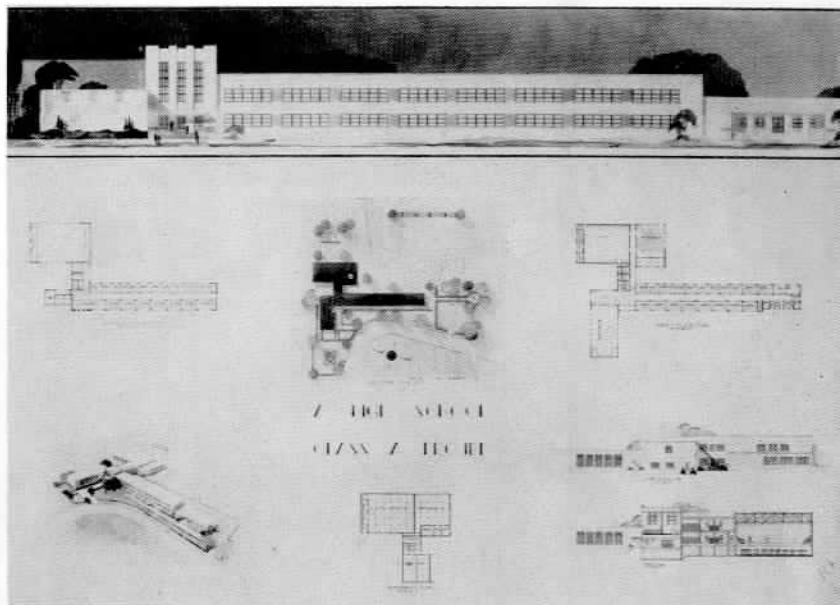
There is nothing spectacular about the school at Syracuse, nor anything exotic about its teachers. They are small in number (since it is a small school with a limit of twenty students for each entering class) and there are no acknowledged giants among them eager to undertake the intellectual rearing of a race of disciples to go forth and reform society. But they are practical men, sane thinkers and experienced guides along the path to capability in the everyday world of architecture.

These men have built and are conducting their courses with the subject of Design as principal focus. All other subjects (with the possible exception of those dealing with the business side of practice, which occur in the last two years only) are arranged to look toward Design as their ultimate point of application. Conversely, the problems in Design are laid out progressively to require at

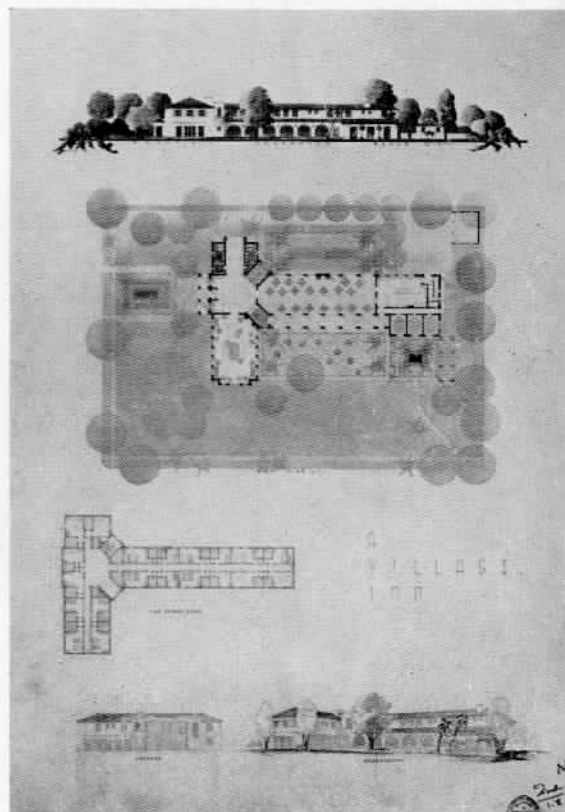
the proper time the application of the knowledge and skill gained in lecture and laboratory. The student grows in power and versatility of attack upon his design problems as he goes along, until in the fifth year he is mature enough to carry through a substantial project from the writing of the program (based on a real site and the needs of a well-informed though otherwise hypothetical client whom he interviews) through all phases of design, preparation of working drawings and specifications, schedules of materials and cost estimates, just as it might be done in an office. In fact, he does several such projects which afford an admirable transition between school and employment in practice.

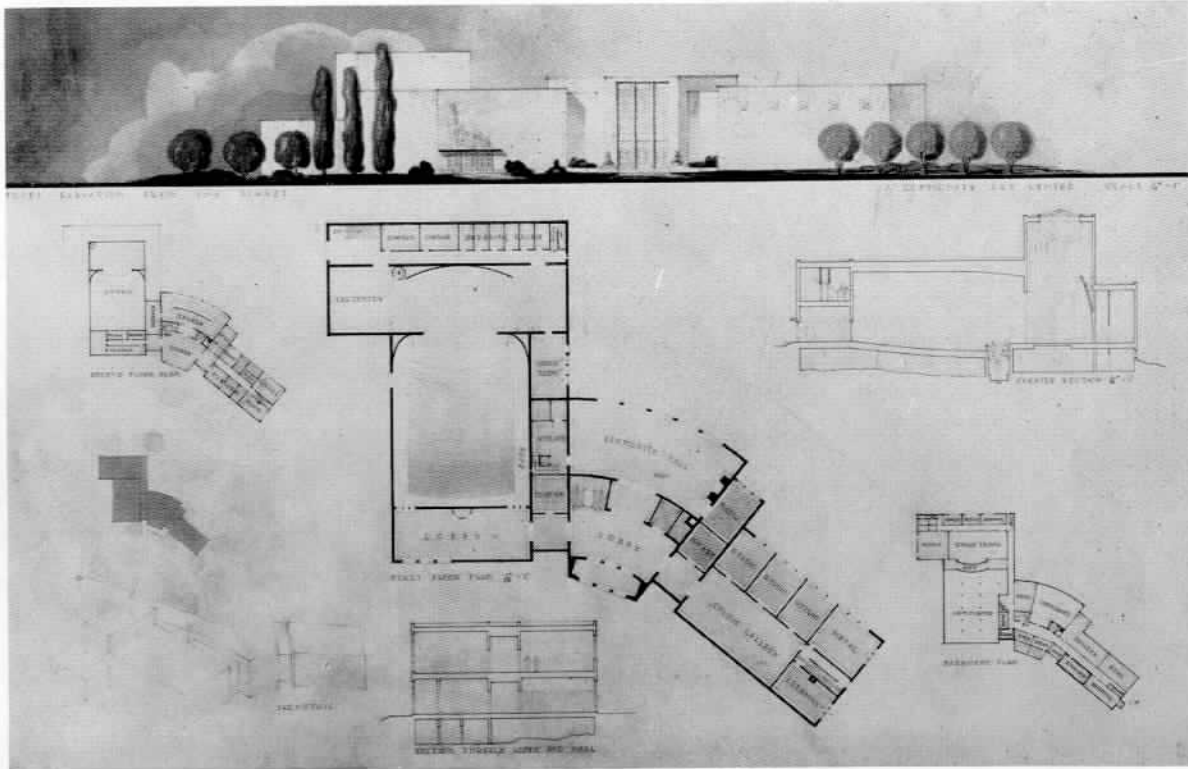
As in most schools, the subjects other than Design covered in the five years divide themselves naturally into four categories: (1) those that have to do with the development of background and understanding, such as History, Sociology, Theory and Philosophy of Architecture, Economics, etc.; (2) those that deal with techniques of expression such as Freehand Drawing, Modeling, Architectural Graphics, etc.; (3) engineering studies relating to Construction, Materials, Equipment, etc.; and (4) business subjects covering Office Administration, Specifications and Contracts, Superintendence, Real Estate, Money and Banking, etc. All but the last group are represented at Syracuse from the very first semester onward so that the student's training proceeds simultaneously along all these essential fronts. And as noted before, all are closely tied in with the work in Design. The construction teacher, for example, gives criticisms right in the drafting room during design periods in addition to his regular classroom work. The closely associated Landscape course also makes possible timely drafting room criticism in this specialty.

If close association with the arts allied to Architecture is an advantage, and I believe it is, Syracuse benefits greatly also from its contiguity with the excellent courses in Painting, Industrial Design, Interior Decoration, and so on which are offered by the Department of Art. Students thrown into

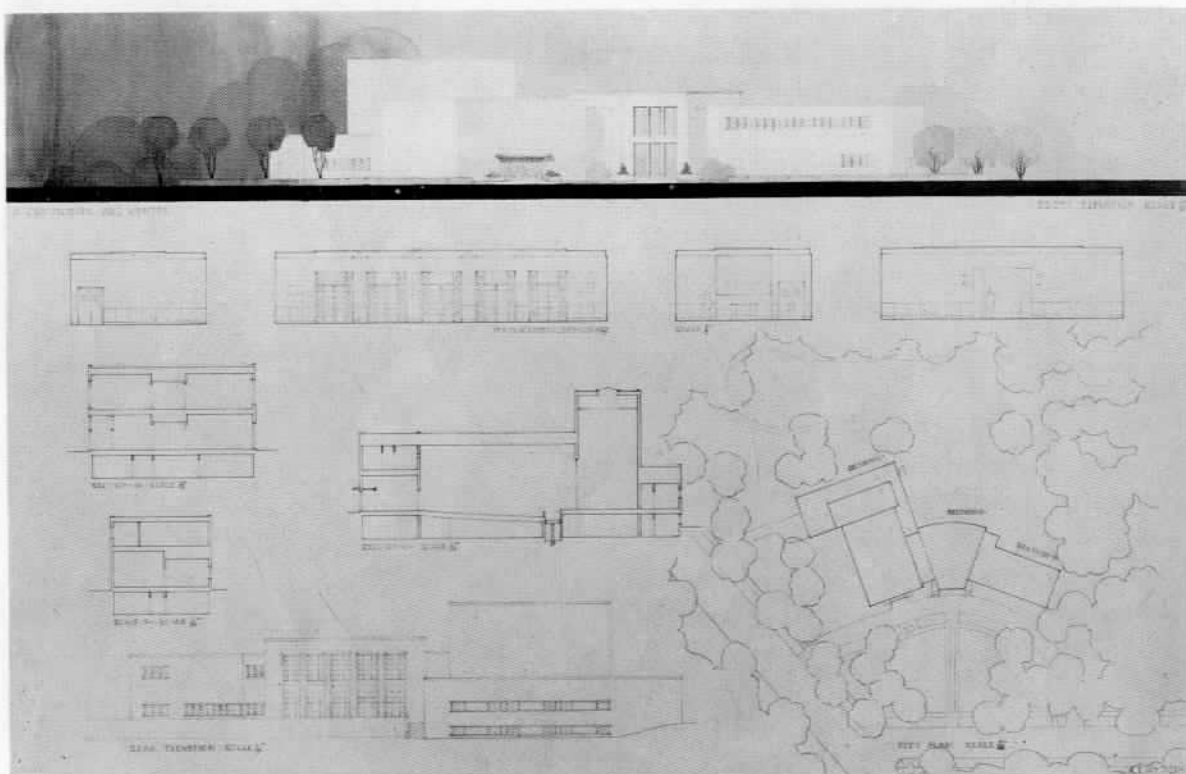


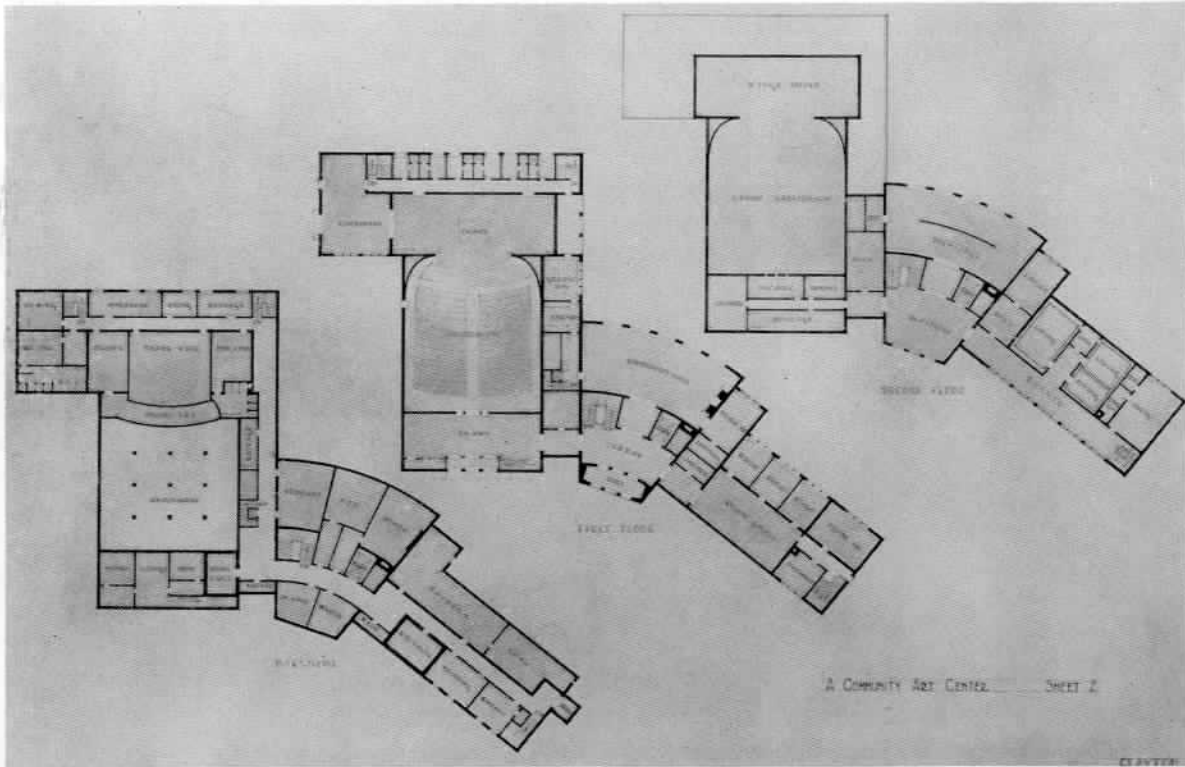
ABOVE IS A FIFTH-YEAR PROBLEM FOR WHICH THE PROGRAM WAS WRITTEN BY THE STUDENT TO FIT A REAL SITE AND ACCORD WITH REQUIREMENTS WHICH HE DISCOVERED THROUGH INVESTIGATION. THIS SORT OF THING OBVIOUSLY FORMS A VALUABLE TRANSITION BETWEEN HIS SCHOOL WORK AND SUBSEQUENT OFFICE PRACTICE. BELOW IS A SHORT FIFTH-YEAR PROBLEM



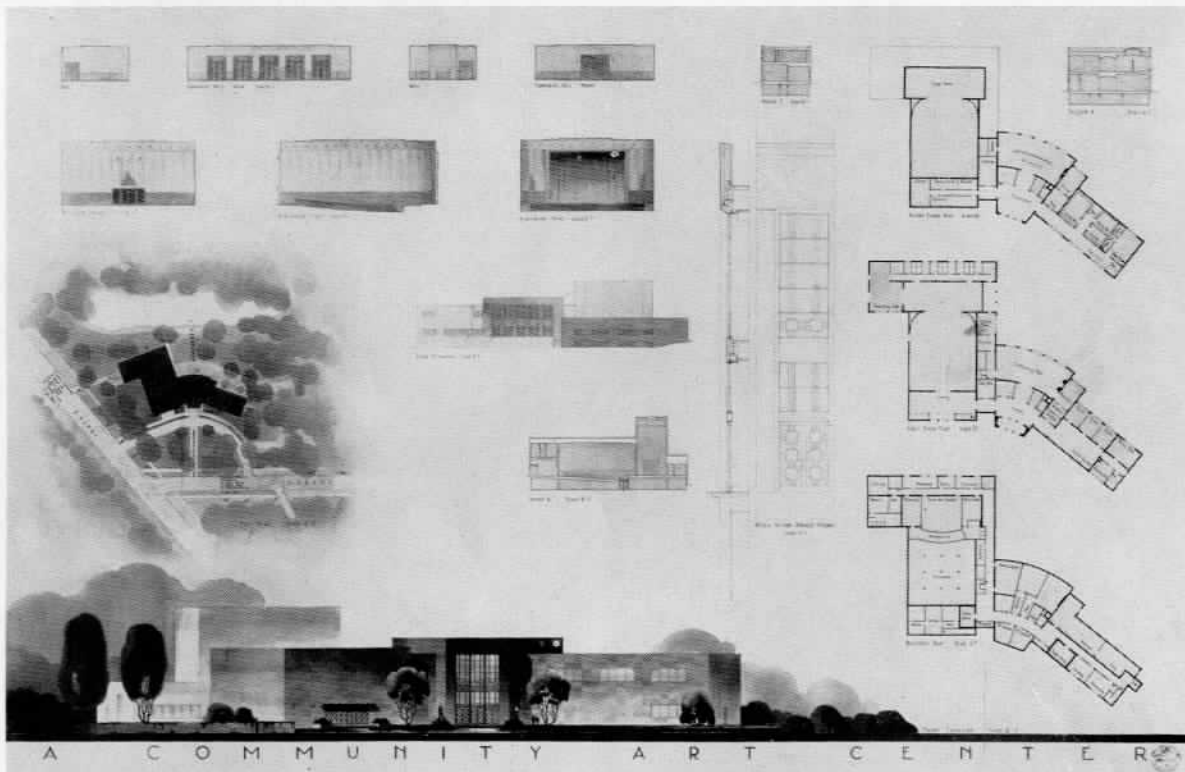


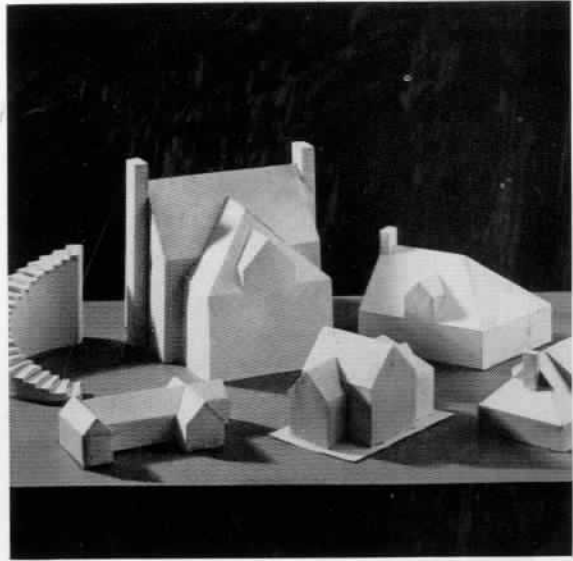
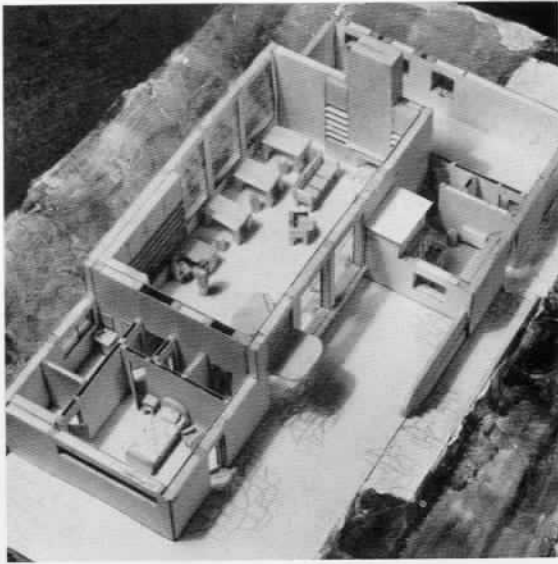
EXEMPLIFYING THE THOROUGHNESS WITH WHICH DESIGN PROBLEMS ARE STUDIED IN THE FIFTH YEAR AT SYRACUSE ARE THE THREE STAGES OF A PROJECT ILLUSTRATED HERE AND OPPOSITE. THE PROBLEM WAS GIVEN OUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER. IN THE PROGRAM WAS INCLUDED, AS USUAL, A DETAILED STATEMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS, AS SET DOWN BY A HYPOTHETICAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES; ALSO A TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP OF A REAL SITE AND A DESCRIPTION OF SOIL CONDITIONS AND SERVICES. PRELIMINARY SKETCHES WERE REQUIRED IN THREE WEEKS AND WERE PRESENTED TO THE "BOARD" FOR DISCUSSION AND CRITICISM IN THE FORM REPRODUCED ABOVE. THE STUDENT THEN WENT TO WORK TO RESTUDY



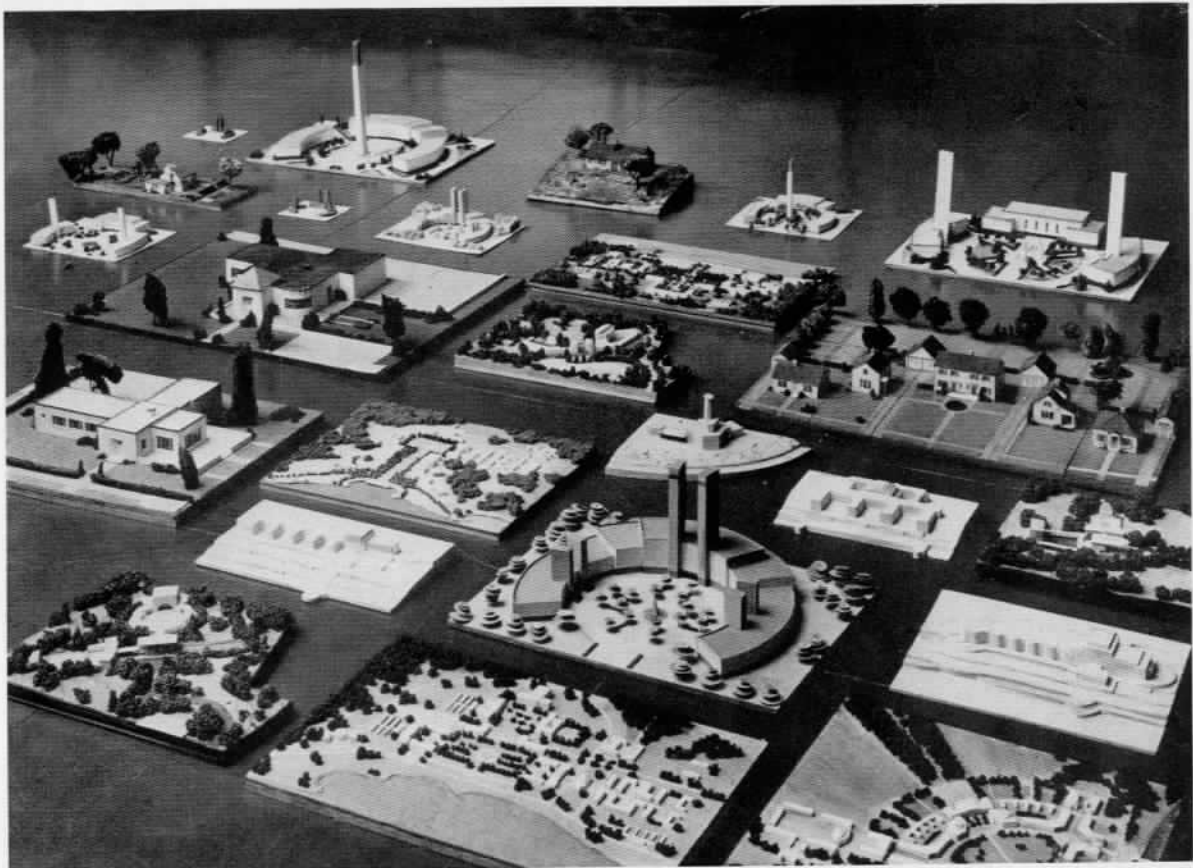


THE DESIGN, INCORPORATING SUGGESTED CHANGES AND MODIFYING DIMENSIONS AS NECESSARY TO BRING THE BUILDING WITHIN THE STRICT BUDGET. THREE WEEKS LATER, WITH HIS SECOND SUBMISSION, DRAWN ON TWO SHEETS, HE INCLUDED A CAREFUL COST ESTIMATE TOGETHER WITH OUTLINE SPECIFICATIONS, SCHEDULE OF MATERIALS AND FINISHES. AFTER GOING OVER THIS REVISED PRESENTATION WITH THE "BOARD," HE WORKED OUT THE FINAL DESIGN AS SHOWN ON THE SHEET BELOW, ON WHICH HE HAS INCLUDED THE DESIGN OF PRINCIPAL ROOMS, THE LANDSCAPING OF THE SITE, AND SECTIONS SHOWING CONSTRUCTION. HE ALSO REVISED HIS SPECIFICATIONS AND FINALLY CHECKED HIS CUBAGE AND COST FIGURES



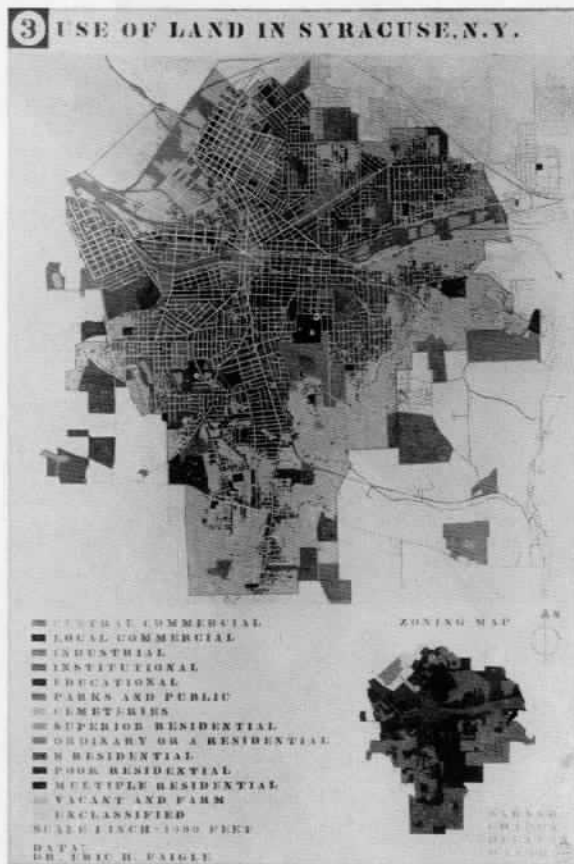


THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING IN TERMS OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE IS RECOGNIZED AS SHOWN BY THE ATTENTION PAID TO MODELS. A WELL EQUIPPED MODEL SHOP PROVIDES THE MEANS FOR STUDENTS TO TURN THEIR DESIGNS ACCURATELY INTO VISUAL FORM WHICH HELPS TO AVOID "PAPER ARCHITECTURE." NO ASPECT OF THEIR BUILDINGS OR SITE ARRANGEMENTS CAN ESCAPE OBSERVATION. ABOVE, AT LEFT, IS A FIRST-YEAR SPACE MODEL FROM WHICH THE STUDENT GAINS APPRECIATION OF DIMENSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS. AT THE RIGHT ARE EXERCISES IN GRAPHICS IN WHICH TWO-DIMENSIONAL DRAWINGS ARE FOLDED INTO THREE





GRADUATE WORK IN URBAN PLANNING AND RESEARCH IS BEING GIVEN MORE AND MORE IMPORTANCE IN MANY SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE AND SYRACUSE HAS BEEN QUITE ACTIVE IN THIS FIELD. THE MAXWELL SCHOOL OF CITIZENSHIP, THE NEW YORK STATE COLLEGE OF FORESTRY, THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS, AND THE SYRACUSE HOUSING AUTHORITY HAVE ALL COLLABORATED WITH THE DEPARTMENT AND THEIR COMBINED EFFORTS DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS HAVE MADE POSSIBLE SEVERAL EXTENSIVE REHABILITATION AND REGIONAL SURVEYS OF WHICH ONE COVERED SYRACUSE AND ONONDAGA COUNTY AS INDICATED





frequent contact with young workers in these fields cannot help developing greater breadth and understanding of points of view held by those with whom they may later collaborate. As a matter of fact, training in collaboration is included in the regular work in Design, during which occasional problems are given requiring the students to work with landscape architects, painters, and sculptors.

Contact is maintained with the realities of practice in several ways. A Cooperating Committee of established practitioners keeps in close touch with the faculty and lends advice and assistance when needed. Summer work in offices is required at the end of the third and fourth years and is encouraged at other times. A field trip of a week's duration is made by the fifth-year students, who are taken to New York or some other large center where they may see important new buildings and question leading architects and designers about their problems. The unusual emphasis on working drawings and other practical phases of architecture also keeps the student's mind close to the everyday actualities which must be met when he gets out of school.

The general attitude of this school towards architecture and design is in my opinion sound and praiseworthy. It is not trying to

propagate any "isms" nor does it lack healthy curiosity concerning the search for new and significant form that characterizes the world of today. It believes that the job of an architect is Architecture—*all* architecture, not just one particular sort. Realizing that its students are drawn mostly from upper New York State and will very likely practice there eventually, it cultivates a strong respect for tradition, without, however, closing its eyes to the ever-increasing interest in contemporary design thought.

Students are being taught history, not to encourage blind copying of material that has come down to us from the past but to give them perspective to see why and how the builders of past ages arrived at the forms that marked each period. The ability to perceive causes in relation to effects is important to a serious designer. It is my strong belief that unless this ability is acquired no man can gather together the causes of today or tomorrow and discover the forms in which they should be logically and appropriately manifested. The young men now at Syracuse are not being led up a blind alley.

AN EXCEPTIONALLY WELL EQUIPPED MUSEUM OF MATERIALS IS IN CONTINUOUS USE IN CONNECTION WITH COURSES IN CONSTRUCTION, DESIGN, MATERIALS, AND EQUIPMENT

