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## **A Brief Survey of Architectural Holdings at the Syracuse University Libraries**

Werner Seligmann

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LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

C O U R I E R

WILLIAM LESCAZE

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THE RISE OF  
MODERN DESIGN IN AMERICA

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ARTHUR J. PULOS

---

LINDSAY STAMM SHAPIRO

---

CAROL WILLIS

---

DENNIS P. DOORDAN

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A BRIEF SURVEY OF  
THE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
ARCHITECTURAL HOLDINGS

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# A Brief Survey of Architectural Holdings at the Syracuse University Libraries

BY WERNER SELIGMANN

In 1928, Henry-Russell Hitchcock published a series of articles on the then novel topic of Modern Architecture. In these articles he tried to lay out a picture of the people and the movements which would shape the evolution of twentieth-century American architecture. Hitchcock established two basic categories among the world's progressive architects at that moment: The New Traditionalists and the New Pioneers.

To Hitchcock, the New Tradition was a gentle break from the past:

The New Traditionalists are retrospective in their tendency to borrow freely from the past but they are also modern in that they feel free to use and combine without regard for archaeological properties the elements thus borrowed. . . . The freedom of their principles makes it possible to provide solutions harmonious with, but not borrowed from the past, to the endless new building problems which the last fifty years have presented.<sup>1</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright was seen as the ideal American figure within the New Tradition, following on the heels of Sullivan and Richardson, along with Berlage, Saarinen, Hoffmann, Perret, and others in Europe. There were other American architects as well — such as the New York and Chicago skyscraper architects of the 1920s and 1930s — who could be placed within this classification, although Hitchcock was reluctant to address these architects' work in any serious way. However, other critics such as Lewis Mumford were describing architects such as Ralph Walker, Ely Jacques Kahn, and Raymond Hood along lines similar to Hitchcock's New Tradition.

The able young men . . . are in revolt. They are nauseated by acanthus leaves, and they know that if they pull down the stone columns the modern building, unlike the temple of the

1. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., "Modern Architecture; 1. The Traditionalists and the New Tradition", *Architectural Record* 63 (April 1928): 340-41.

Philistines that Samson destroyed, will remain standing. . . . We need a direct, simple, inevitable vernacular architecture for our great buildings; . . . the earlier skyscrapers in Chicago did this . . . and our present efforts here (in New York) mean, I think, that we are again at a hopeful point of departure.<sup>2</sup>

The New Pioneers were, in contrast, making a dramatic break from the past:

[They] insist that tradition must not restrain architecture from taking advantage of the latest engineering possibilities. . . . Architecture for the New Pioneers is the disposition of masses, volumes, and surfaces in geometrically significant forms according to the creative inspiration of the designer.<sup>3</sup>

Hitchcock saw the New Pioneers as almost purely a European phenomenon. In America, as he stated, “only one or two architects—although very great ones—have until very lately made a conscious cult of what is called ‘modernism’.”<sup>4</sup> It was clear, then as now, that Hitchcock was an advocate for the New Pioneers, that he saw himself as a publicist and polemicist in America for the work of Europe’s leading avant-garde designers. Through Hitchcock’s critical commentary, as well as through the unprecedented forms which the New Pioneer architects were creating, the new group gradually assumed center stage in American architecture. When Hitchcock first began reporting on the newcomers, they were a minor force. Quickly, though, they took on an equal footing with the New Traditionalists. Eventually, the New Pioneers would succeed in eclipsing the work and careers of the New Traditionalists.

Today, the equal footing is re-emerging. Historians are increasingly interested in the indigenous modern traditions of American architecture. Syracuse University’s architectural collections provide a unique opportunity for the scholar because they document the work of architects on both sides of this discussion. Within the collection are the design records and personal papers of architects whose names are synonymous with twentieth-century international avant-gardism, along

2. Lewis Mumford, “American Architecture Today”, *Architecture* 57 (April 1928): 181-82.

3. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr. “Modern Architecture; II. The New Pioneers”, *Architectural Record* 63 (May 1928): 454.

4. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., “Modern Architecture; I. The Traditionalists and the New Tradition”, *Architectural Record* 63 (April 1928): 337.

with those of long-neglected but suddenly re-emergent practitioners of Hitchcock's New Tradition.

In past years these interesting collections have received only limited scholarly attention, to some extent because it has been difficult to find financial resources for fully surveying and cataloguing them. As a result, the School of Architecture and the Syracuse University Libraries have set out on a long-term program of focused projects to bring to the public's attention the value of these materials.

We begin this effort with one of our most complete collections. The Lescaze papers at Syracuse's George Arents Research Library contain his personal and business records relating to his fifty-year career as an architect. The major portion of the collection consists of his job files, which document the design process on virtually every commission that Lescaze received. Most projects can be followed from earliest sketches, through technical drawings, to photographs of the finished work.

Lescaze's career is particularly interesting in regard to the discussion of the New Pioneers versus the New Tradition. The Lescaze materials, and indeed Lescaze himself, represent a rare bridge between these worlds which historians have set in opposition for so long. Lescaze was one of a very few American architects whose work fits comfortably within Hitchcock's definition of avant-garde design. As a result, Lescaze's work was enthusiastically published in the principal polemic of the New Pioneers in America: Hitchcock and Johnson's book, *The International Style*. At the same time, Lescaze's conception of Modern Architecture was influenced by the professional and artistic climate of the United States, where new ideas were more likely to be incorporated into culture along the lines of Hitchcock's New Tradition. In fact, this bridging identity is reinforced in Lescaze's partnership with George Howe. Rare indeed are partnerships between major traditional and avant-garde figures. Our exhibition and symposium on Lescaze's work examine what results when these sensibilities are brought forcefully into contact with each other; this issue of the *Courier* records the current scholarly discussion for future reference.

After beginning with this unique bridge figure, our attention moves toward the twentieth-century architects who represent more directly the opposing forces which have driven the progress of American architecture. Syracuse University holds major collections which support study of both the early avant-garde architects of this country, and those who

set out to modernize existing traditions of form.

The largest collection within the New Tradition group consists of the personal library and papers of Ralph Walker; as with Lescaze, we hold his entire personal archive. From his long career we have important documents relating to several projects such as the Irving Trust and Fuller Buildings in New York City. We have studies by Walker for the 1933 "Century of Progress" Exposition in Chicago. Moreover, we have documentation of his long and productive association with the New York Telephone Company, for whom Walker functioned as both image maker and facilities planner during the 1920s and 1930s. Out of this association emerged Walker's most famous work, the Barclay-Vesey Building, along with other significant buildings in virtually every city in New York. Also, there are probably some important research "finds" to be discovered in this as yet loosely catalogued collection. In addition, Syracuse University benefited from Mr. Walker's generosity in receiving his entire personal library. This collection of books and periodicals not only sheds light on Walker's lively interest in the arts; it also includes first editions of many important books and publications which are now in the Library's Rare Book Division. For instance, Walker's library included a copy of Christian Zervos' *Pablo Picasso set, Drawings for a Living Architecture* by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the limited run periodical *The Minotaur*.

Syracuse University's collections also contain materials from several other important New York City skyscraper architects. One of these is Max Abramowitz, of the firm Harrison and Abramowitz. Included in his papers are a number of sketches for the New York World's Fair of 1939, which was master-planned by Harrison and Abramowitz. Also represented is the architect Robert Jacobs, partner of Ely Jacques Kahn and another important American practitioner of the New Tradition. The firm of Kahn and Jacobs has provided the New York skyline with some of its most characteristic images. Among Mr. Jacob's papers is a photographic record of his work dating from 1918 to 1949, which includes such projects as the Bergdorf-Goodman store building, the Van Cleef and Arpels building, and the original Bonwit Teller building.

Two other architects in the collection, whose work places them among the New Traditionalists, are Lorimer Rich and Aymar Embury II. Rich is best known for his first major project: the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, from 1929. After the completion of this monument, he went on to become a pro-

lific designer of institutional, governmental, and university buildings. Like many of the tradition-oriented architects of his time, he eventually made a dramatic conversion to Modern Architecture. This extensive collection documents that shift and thus gives us a picture of the changes occurring in the profession during Rich's career. Aymar Embury's papers document both writings and design works by an architect whose interests were exceptionally broad—technically progressive and yet intensely concerned with traditional sources of form. Embury's work is represented in all its breadth, ranging from an important 1911 publication, *The Dutch Colonial House*, to photographs and technical drawings of his many suspension bridges such as the Triborough and the Verrazano-Narrows.

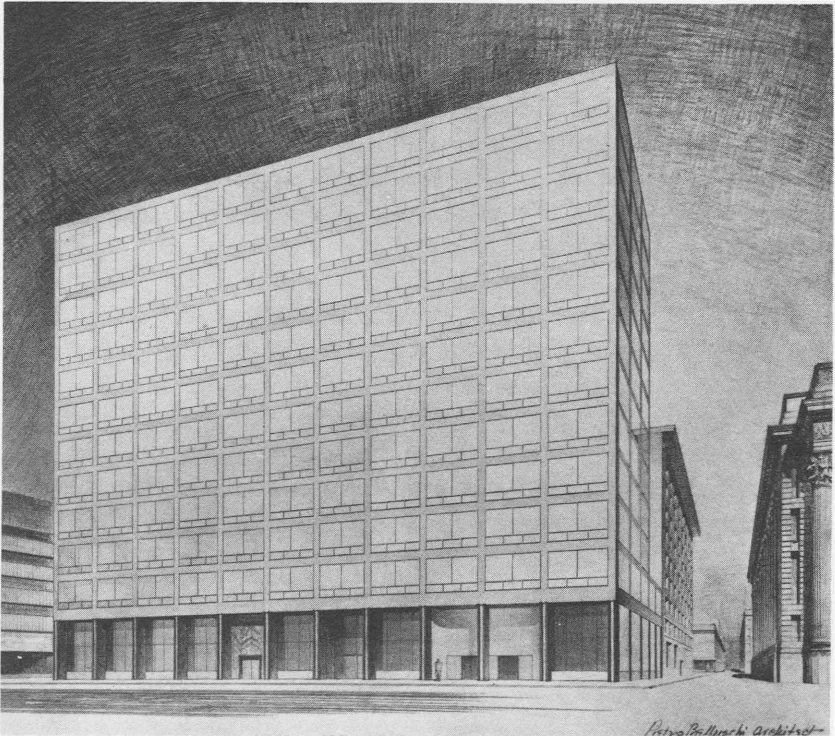
The centerpiece of the New Pioneers group within our archives is a collection of the drawings and papers of the architect Marcel Breuer. Breuer's importance as a primary figure in the rise of modern design is well established through his seminal furniture designs at the Bauhaus, his academic and professional associations with Walter Gropius, and his architecture in both Europe and the United States. The materials in Syracuse University's collection span the years 1934-1953 and contain virtually all of the surviving drawings, correspondence, and photographs prior to 1951. These papers are an especially important resource, for two reasons. First, most of Breuer's earlier papers from Europe have been destroyed. Second, the years represented in the Syracuse University collections are those during which Hitchcock's New Pioneers were arriving in America, establishing themselves, and gradually assuming leadership positions in the profession. Since Breuer was a principal figure in this group, it is particularly interesting to follow his early American years through the materials held here.

Within this extensive collection are numerous letters and contracts, along with pencil sketches, photographs, and thousands of drawings. The collection documents such important projects as the proposal for Black Mountain College in North Carolina, his early houses, the exhibition house at the Museum of Modern Art, and the Yankee Portables house. These materials still await serious scholarly attention, yet they are an invaluable resource for examining not only Breuer himself, but also the era in which he played such a telling role.

Another of the early American modernists represented in the collection is Pietro Belluschi. Like most of these architects, Belluschi was born abroad. However, he was educated in this country, worked here,



and was Dean of the architecture school at MIT from 1951 to 1965. His papers include many sketches, drawings, and photographs, along with his own writings, covering a period from 1908 to 1964. Among the works documented in the archive are Belluschi's Unitarian Society May Memorial in Syracuse, and the Equitable Building in Portland, Oregon. The Equitable Building is recognized as one of the most significant and influential post-World War II office buildings. A photographic survey, drawn in part from the Pietro Belluschi holdings at Syracuse, is scheduled for publication in September 1984. This book, entitled "Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture" (Western Imprints, The Press of the Oregon Historical Society), is by Gideon Bosker and Lena Lencek.



Pietro Belluschi,  
Equitable Savings and Loan Co. Building,  
Portland, Oregon, 1947, Rendering  
(Pietro Belluschi Papers, George  
Arents Research Library).

While Syracuse University's architectural materials clearly are of interest related to this discussion of American sources of Modern Architecture, our collections also are of significance to historians in other ways. For instance, the regional history of architecture in upstate New York continues to generate scholarly interest. As one of the oldest schools of architecture in the country, Syracuse University has had a deep and continuing role in this regional history. The University has educated the majority of architects who practise in the region, and professors in the School of Architecture have designed buildings which have helped to shape the region's communities. The University's archival collections have become not only the major repository for the record of local architecture, but also a focus and foundation of research into our region's design history.

We hope that the regional materials which exist at Syracuse University, rich as they are, are only the core of an ever-growing resource. Several significant collections have been added in recent years, and we hope that this trend will continue. For example, it was only four years ago that the papers of one of Syracuse's most important architects, Archimedes Russell, came to the University. Russell, who taught at Syracuse's architecture school, moved from Boston to open his office here in 1868. The firm he founded still exists in Syracuse. The Russell archive contains several hundred original drawings, along with business records. Included in this extensive collection are drawings for Crouse College on the Syracuse University campus, the Crouse Stables, the Yates Hotel, and numerous others. This collection was made use of a few years ago for a major exhibition, which was the topic of an issue of the *Courier* at that time.

Dwight James Baum was an early graduate of Syracuse University's architecture program, who returned in collaboration with John Russel Pope to masterplan the campus and to design Hendricks Chapel and the Maxwell School of Citizenship. Baum also was a scholar of Georgian architecture. The Baum collection includes a large-format photographic survey of his work, along with some drawings.

Two longtime Syracuse University professors, Frederick A. Lear and Harley J. McKee, added depth to the regional architecture archives by the donation of their papers. Lear, who was an alumnus of the School, is represented by his teaching files along with extensive sketchbooks and design records. Among his design records are original drawings for a number of the best-known church buildings in Central New

York. Harley McKee was an architectural historian and one of the earliest active preservationists. His collection includes drawings by other architects such as Ward Wellington Ward, and McKim, Mead and White. Also included are measured drawings of buildings throughout the country, which record McKee's long association with the Historic American Buildings Survey. McKee's files, notes and unpublished lectures on the architecture of our region are an uncatalogued resource of tremendous potential value.

The Syracuse University George Arents Research Library for Special Collections provides an exceptional facility for serious historical study of the evolution of American architecture. The School of Architecture, with the cooperation of the Syracuse University Libraries, hopes to continue a systematic process of scholarly use of the collections. The current focus of interest on William Lescaze sheds light on our society's first ventures into abstract Modern Architecture. It is our hope to follow up these efforts with a serious look at the next historical moment, when the first generation of modern architects from Europe — the main body of Hitchcock's New Pioneers — came to America and injected abstract design issues into the mainstream of architectural thought. This future endeavor will catalogue and make public the Breuer materials. Gradually we hope to find the financial means, on a project-by-project basis, to make Syracuse University's architectural collections into an accessible and widely recognized record of design knowledge.

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