Architectural Registration
In New Mexico

By Kenneth S. Clark

(Editor's note: Kenneth S. Clark is well qualified to write a paper on registration procedure in New Mexico. He recently completed a term as a member of the New Mexico Board of Examiners for Architects. Mr. Clark is a partner in the Santa Fe firm of Clark and Register.)

The candidate for registration is at last before the Board of Examiners for Architects. He is either terribly nervous or overbearingly self-confident.

"Why do you seek registration to practice architecture in New Mexico?"
- "Well, I always wanted to be one" or
- "I have a chance now and then to do a small house plan, and I thought—" or
- "With registration record in my personnel file, I may be eligible for a Civil Service raise."

These answers and all the others may be sufficient justification to the individual. But there is one answer which should express the motive of all applicants: "To practice architecture."

There are no qualified or limited registrations; a registration granted is a recognition by a legally constituted agency of the state that the holder has qualified to practice architecture. The extent to which he exercises that registration is limited only by his own capabilities or desires.

The next question, "What is the purpose of New Mexico Architectural Law, requiring registration to practice architecture?" brings forth even more varied answers. A great deal of the burden of work and worry by members of the board is forgotten when the candidate replies "To safeguard life, health, and property, and to promote public welfare."

Our New Mexico law, with the latest changes thereto, is probably as good as most such state laws and much better than some of them. Anything as intangible as the qualifications to practice a profession must eventually be resolved by the judgment of the persons charged with the responsibility of making this decision. In this case it is the Board of Examiners for Architects.

The first case to be resolved by the board comes up when the application is received. Is the applicant eligible for admission to the exam? Take the simple case of an applicant without prior registration. The law requires that he "... has been actively engaged for eight years or more in architectural work of a character satisfactory to the
board. However, each year of teaching or of study satisfactorily completed of architecture in a school of architecture of a standing satisfactory to the board shall be equivalent to one year of such active engagement.” The board bylaws further qualify this requirement in that not over five years be accepted of academic training as compared to experience training.

What is “architectural work of a character satisfactory to the board”? Surely experience with an engineering firm or with a contractor could add much to a young architect’s training in architecture. But what if that is his total experience? Can “satisfactory” experience be gained in a government agency or in a large corporation where the young man’s responsibility is in a very limited range and possibly rigidly supervised by criteria or office policies?

And what about this “study satisfactorily completed of architecture in a school of architecture”?

There is a national accrediting board that compiles a list of Accredited Collegiate Schools of Architecture. The majority of the applicants are not from these schools. How is the board to evaluate a non-accredited school? Or, what is the relative value of four years or five years in either of two non-accredited schools? Can the board say five years in a non-accredited school is equivalent to four years in an accredited school?

So far this covers only a few of the fine points the board is called upon to decide. They know full well their decision is of great importance to the applicant; but, above this, it is of importance to those for whom the law was adopted—“to safeguard life, health and property, and to promote public welfare.” The law has a reference to good character and repute, but the only firm basis for granting or denying a registration is on demonstration of technical qualifications.

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