

MASS - A publication of the School of Architecture and Planning, UNM

Dated spring, 1983 the first issue of MASS has been published by the School of Architecture and Planning of the University of New Mexico. The issue is dedicated to John Gaw Meem, FAIA and contains articles concerning John and his long career in New Mexico. The lead article is an excerpt from Bainbridge Bunting's new book: **John Gaw Meem: Southwest Architect**. The article should make you want to read the book. Bain is a good writer. Anyone who has read Bain's articles or books knows that he makes history interesting, at times, even exciting.

John Meem, himself, is represented in the magazine. In an article, which first appeared in the November, 1934 issue of **American Architect**, John states very well his own approach to architecture and how the traditional forms and symbols of the New Mexico heritage can be integrated with contemporary buildings needs. One must also remember that 1934 was a romantic revival period throughout the United States. Williamsburg was spreading all across the land and in the west the California version of Spanish Revival was most popular. In 1934 the John Meem office was probably the largest, and certainly the most prolific, of the New Mexico architectural firms working in the traditional idiom.

John Meem entered the New Mexico architectural scene not as an innovator, but as a continuator of forces previously set in motion. He continued the revival; he explored its potential, perhaps to a greater extent than other architects.

It is certainly true that John's designs are generally graceful and friendly. While in the hands of others the Revival Styles often become coarse, even dull. W.C. Kruger's remodeling of the State Capitol in the 1940's-1950's and the subsequent buildings that his firm added to the Capitol Complex only make one wish that John Meem had been the better politician. (I must add, however, that I think the Capitol Complex could have been even better had it been handled by a more contemporary minded, but environmentally sympathetic, architect.)

In any discussion of John Meem and his architectural beginnings, one must not forget the other architects whose work formed the Revival Style and, thus, gave John Meem the architectural vocabulary which he so well used. These "founding" architects included Gordon Street, Rapp & Rapp and Trent Thomas. But, also, one is reminded of those non-architects whose residential work frequently outshines that of their trained professional contemporaries: Katharine Stinson Otero, William Henderson, Myrtle Stedman.

Other articles in the first issue of MASS include an analysis of two John Meem buildings on the University of New Mexico campus. The authors, who also served as editors of MASS, discuss the UNM Library, built in 1935 and the much later, 1955, Johnson Gymnasium. Architectural Historian Christopher Wilson examines New Mexico architectural regionalism and the impact of Modernism on the buildings of our state. Regan Young presents an interesting criticism of the recently completed addition to the Albuquerque Indian Hospital. (Mr. Young reports on another Albuquerque building on pages 8-11 of this issue of NMA.)

The design and graphics of MASS while clean and clear, are I am surprised to have to say, pedestrian. I would have expected a more lively, imaginative book from student designers. (To be sure, **New Mexico Architecture** might be in need of new graphic ideas; it is being "discussed"!)

John P. Conron

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Rockbottom Sales, Inc.	2
Rockbottom Sales, Inc.	14

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