

objective of having the plan adopted as the plan for the Central Area. So, we worked on that very hard, and I think we did a bang-up job. Roger Seitz was in charge of our planning effort. Bruce was involved. Have you seen the book?

Blum: Not recently, but I have seen it.

Hartmann: It was very complete and well done. I think everybody approved it. It was approved up and down the line. I'm minimizing the amount of effort, but it was an enormous effort. SOM didn't make any money from it, I'm sure. It wasn't very financially sound to SOM, but it was very important for the kind of excitement that it contributed to the office, and it was our responsibility as the leading planners to do this. Just like it was our responsibility to do Sears and Hancock, you know.

Blum: That plan had something in it that I had not noticed in any of the other previous plans as before, and it was preservation.

Hartmann: Oh, yes.

Blum: It was preservation of some of the areas. Some of the spirit of preservation came into play there where it had never actually been present. You gave an address to the "Know Your Chicago" series at the University of Chicago, based on the Chicago 21 Plan, but entitled "Making Preservation Part of Progress," so as you built you also saved.

Hartmann: Sounded pretty good, didn't it?

Blum: Yes. It does. But this occurred in 1973, and you personally had been involved in preservation as far back as 1957 in saving Robie House. Were you involved with saving the Auditorium in the 1960s?

Hartmann: Yes. Well, not in exactly a happy way.

Blum: Do you want to talk about it?

Hartmann: It really isn't worth talking about.

Blum: Okay. You witnessed the Auditorium saved and rehabilitated into a viable working structure in Chicago. However, you witnessed the destruction during the 1960s of the Schiller Building, the Michigan Square Building when the wonderful Diana Court had come down. The Stock Exchange in 1972 could not be saved. So you witnessed both saving as well as the destruction of some of our most important monuments. Now, in 1972, you became the chairman of a committee with a very long name, and that is the Mayor's Committee for the Preservation of Historic Architecture with sixty-five members.

Hartmann: Was I the chairman of that?

Blum: Yes. It was reported in the papers more than once. The object of that committee was to identify certain landmarks and make them economically viable, and that was what no one could really do to save the Stock Exchange, which was a tragedy. What did the Mayor's Committee for the Preservation of Historic Architecture do?

Hartmann: Well, there was the Schiller Building with the Garrick Theatre. We were losing important buildings. We were not alone, it was happening across the country and there was growing interest in seeing if some of these could be preserved. In all candor, there were no means. This was at the beginnings of this kind of drive and interest. After the Robie House, which was successful, then the next major one was the Schiller Building and the Garrick Theatre.

[Tape 8: Side 1]

Hartmann: Well, first of all, this building was practically unused and the owner wanted to tear it down and, I think, build a parking garage or something.

Blum: A garage exists on that site today.

Hartmann: Yes, he wanted to tear it down and build a parking garage. Of course, this upset a lot of people. I remember going to the mayor and saying, "We ought to save this building" and so forth. He said, "Well, there's was no way that the government can step in and buy an old building to save it. That is not the function of government. If the people want to save it, you better get the people together and save it. I'll do everything I can to help." We then met with the owner and got him to delay his plans. He was ready to proceed forthwith, and we convinced him, you know, a lot of people think this is terribly important. We think it's important. Why don't you wait and let us see what we can do. As I said, this was in the beginning of these kinds of preservation efforts. We got it delayed for one month, then another month, another month. I forget how many months, but I know the owner told me we cost him a tremendous amount of money by delaying. He still had that building. He paid taxes and all these kind of things. As I said, we did cost him money. The only thing is that at that stage of preservation, this was kind of a necessary step to go through. Here was a building that was of some importance going to be torn down, and we'll try to fight to save it. We aren't successful, but that helps us move to the next level on the next building. I always think that out of those kind of things there is some kind of progress made anyway. It was torn down. It was terrible. This lousy parking garage was built, and that's just too bad.

Blum: And that was in the 1960s. Well, what about Sullivan's Stock Exchange in 1972, the year of the creation of the mayor's committee. I remember that there was a last minute hope by those of us who marched that maybe the city could buy it. I think the price for the building was \$8 million, six or eight, I'm not sure, but there was that hope. And, of course, that didn't happen, and the building went down. But then the committee was created.

Hartmann: That's right. The committee was created and we did this and made landmark buildings. We designated landmarks and got plaques put on landmark buildings and that sort of thing to increase the public awareness. The

preservation movement requires serious consideration of the shape of the city, and you just can't have a blanket wish to save everything if you have our kind of civilization. I think some buildings that people would like to save are going to be destroyed. I think others are going to be saved. I would hope all the buildings designated as landmarks, as top priority, would be saved. I think there's another list or there certainly should be. You're not going to save one hundred percent of all the buildings that one hundred percent of the people want, I don't believe.

Blum: Well, I think in the mandate that was given this committee that you chaired, were the words "to make these structures economically viable." Maybe, as you're suggesting, if that's not possible, the building will come down.

Hartmann: In some cases it isn't possible, and in those cases, if the society wants to save them, they might require the government to save them and through taxation pay for it. So the people make up the subsidy to save that building. That's been done, I'm sure. There's nothing wrong with that. But that's the kind of perspective, I think, that is necessary about the whole matter. Fortunately, preservation is not a bad word.

Blum: Not anymore.

Hartmann: Not anymore. For a while it was. I think that is part of this evolution that we all contributed to. Now preservation is a very honorable and respected and necessary idea thanks to all the efforts of so many people in the past to bring it to this stage.

Blum: Is it possible that something like the Stock Exchange had to come down before the thinking could change?

Hartmann: That's what I'm suggesting. That's what I'm suggesting. Too darn bad. It cost Richard Nickel, his life, too, which is terrible.

Blum: Another large and prestigious project that SOM was involved in, at least

from my point of view, was the Art Institute. Now, you personally by 1970 were on seven committees.

Hartmann: Was I?

Blum: You were trustee, you were on seven individual department committees and that was the year, 1970, when the first phase of their additions was done and that was the second floor of McKinlock Court around the garden area. Would you comment on the idea of having such connections at the Art Institute and SOM getting this project?

Hartmann: We talked about this to some extent earlier on about IIT, I think. Outside of my family and SOM, I suppose I loved the Art Institute more than any place. I was very fortunate in being able to be involved with the Art Institute. Some great friends, wonderful people. Leigh Block was chairman for a while. Bill Blair was chairman. We made more than the usual type of friendships that one makes. These were friendships with roots around a cause, roots around an institution, so I was really involved a great deal in many aspects. When the subject of the expansion came up, I didn't say, "SOM ought to do this, please give us the job" or anything like that. I did not say anything like that. I remember Leigh Block coming to me and saying that he would like to see that Walter Netsch was the design person for this expansion. I quickly decided, after some discussion with Gross Sampsell and others, that I wouldn't say that we wouldn't, but I would not participate in any decision the Art Institute made in this, and I wouldn't participate in the projects at all in any way. And I didn't.

Blum: You weren't there even after everything had been decided? You know, who was going to do the designing and SOM was going to do the project.

Hartmann: I suppose that I couldn't help but have reports about it, just the way reports about all kinds of projects would come to me. I knew that conflict of interest was bound to be an aspect to be considered, and I did everything I could to remove myself from the project and never voted for SOM.

Blum: But you wanted to.

Hartmann: I knew we were the ones to do it. No question, no question. We were the firm that could do it best.

Blum: Why do you think Leigh Block said to you he wants Walter Netsch to do this?

Hartmann: Oh, I think he respected Walter and liked him. Oh, I'm sure of that. You know, Walter went to MIT. I may have met him, but I don't think he was there when I was a student. He followed along behind, I think. I had enormous regard for Walter and still do. He has a certain great ability. Anything he worked on he worked on with tremendous intensity and complete absorption. Never knew what the clock was, and, I think, in some cases ruined people by making intensive demands. His understanding of how to plan a university and educational programming was amazing. I always felt that SOM in Chicago having Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham, Myron Goldsmith and later on some others coming along, was the greatest thing in the world. This was my idea of that group practice that I talked about earlier. Yes, in some situations, one or the other of these people might have devoured the others or they would have quit and gone somewhere else or something. I think I was successful in preserving their autonomy. Granted, there was a basic kind of friction, but it was the same kind of friction that would occur in many kinds of enterprises. I didn't feel bad about that at all.

Blum: Well, maybe that's the creative tension that Nat Owings talked about.

Hartmann: No question. I mean, in that respect, I agreed with it. That's fine, and that is normal and not unhealthy.

Blum: You know, in 1977 the Columbus Drive buildings were done. I know that the stairs going down to the lower level were pretty scary and they had to be redone. How would an office who did so much planning and research be able to account for what was clearly a mistake?

Hartmann: Mistakes do happen, absolutely. I don't know. Somebody wasn't paying proper attention and raising questions about it and examining it beforehand and all that, and so it got designed and it had to be changed. Happily it doesn't happen terribly often, but I wouldn't say it never happens. It does happen.

Blum: In the book, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: Architecture and Urbanism 1973 to 1983*, Albert Bush-Brown says, especially about the Art Institute project, "Between the classical Art Institute of Chicago building and the new SOM additions lies the story of Chicago's growing pride encouraged by William Hartmann, Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham, who won the confidence of the civic leaders."

Hartmann: There's something to that.

Blum: Well, your career certainly verifies that. In 1972, Bruce Graham designed the John Hancock Center and that was a project for which you were the spokesman. The idea of this growing scale was very evident in the scale and size and scope of that building. Paul Gapp says, "As the big drives out the small in a city, we lose many amenities and qualities of the urban fabric, the very reasons why people wish to live in a city." How would you respond to that with Hancock, let alone the Sears Tower, but with the Hancock in mind?

Hartmann: Well, that's marvelous because we lived in the Hancock. We had the best apartment in the Hancock. I selected it while it was being designed and built, and we were very fortunate to live there for almost twenty years, I guess. Every city is different. I wouldn't like to see Chicago superimposed on the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Chicago is a marvelous form of a city, a half a circle permitting this open influence of the lake to cut right from the outskirts down through the center and out to the outskirts again. Most cities don't have such wonderful forms. This is almost a pure and classic idea. The center has no natural features particularly. There's the Chicago River, but that isn't a dominant feature. It has no other feature. The excitement and identification

of a center is the ever-increasing density as you come down to the center. It comes from Park Forest or Lake Forest and gradually builds up and finally comes up to the Hancock and Sears. It just goes like that. So, I think if there were no tall buildings downtown, Chicago would not be as vibrant a city as it is. I'm not for all tall buildings at all, don't get me wrong, but I think in some cities such as Chicago, there is a place for some tall buildings. They do make a contribution in increasing this density and the interaction of people going to and fro and coming in their various systems of rail and transit and buses and airplanes, all seeking to get into this mixture of a city. I'm sure that Franz Schulze would agree that Chicago without Sears and Hancock at the moment would not be as interesting a city as it is.

Blum: I think his comment was more about the price we pay for that in terms of context and the loss of small things that our city has.

Hartmann: Yes. I don't know. Yes, no doubt. I mean, the city is a small shop of artisans and all this that, you know, I happen to love the *suks*. Have you ever been to a *suk*?

Blum: I haven't but I know the word means market.

Hartmann: The *suks* of Cairo and Istanbul, in various, marvelous cities in Iran, these are wonderful. Wonderful little stalls and people are banging on copper or selling spices and all this kind of thing. I love those places. It's a great tragedy that America doesn't have much of that anymore.

Blum: Not in big cities anymore.

Hartmann: Listen, we go to Bangor and in almost every store you buy the same thing in that store as you'll buy in Woodfield Mall or wherever you go in Chicago. It's the same stuff. There's very little individualism in any of these stores. In Maine we do have more crafts. We have a fair number of crafts, I mean, not very many. Not very good ones.

Blum: In 1979, SOM created the SOM Foundation. Did you have a hand in that?

Hartmann: No. I really think the creator of that foundation is Bruce Graham.

Blum: Well, he certainly is the spearhead for what it has become.

Hartmann: That's true. He talked about it, and it involved conversation over a long period of years before it kind of flowered. But that was at the end of my career. Bruce Graham was supported by Tom Eyerman, because Tom had a lot to do with the economics of the whole thing. It's wonderful the way it's flowered and taken shape.

Blum: Well, they certainly bought an important house, the Charnley House. The title has changed to the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism, but that really is the SOM Foundation that was founded in 1979.

Hartmann: Right. I really don't claim any credit for that at all. Bruce Graham deserves one hundred and ninety-nine percent of the credit.

Blum: When you retired in 1981, I understand there was a project you had in mind that you began briefly to gather information about the history of SOM and write a history? What was that about?

Hartmann: I don't know. I can't remember that.

Blum: Well, the project was abandoned after a short time.

Hartmann: Is that right? I don't know. It couldn't have been terribly important. Did I think it was important?

Blum: You must have. You had someone gathering information for you. Do you think a history of SOM should be written?

Hartmann: No, I don't. I think that everything in the world shouldn't be saved. Every

letter of every architect in the United States should not be saved. Every letter of every president should not necessarily be saved either. I do think that enough should be saved so that some future historians could find the answers to questions that will come up through historical perspective. I do want to make a couple of comments that relate to this. Libraries. Nat Owings had a very interesting notion. We never had any library in the beginning of SOM.

Blum: In the office?

Hartmann: In the office. Because he felt looking in libraries interfered with creative design, and there's some justification in that. But also he was remembering that the major offices of a previous generation were noted for their libraries, the Graham library, for example. Everybody would go to these libraries and take the books out, and they'd copy these details and then they put them on the office buildings they were building and things like that. Maybe they're doing that now. I don't know. But, anyway, that was just one aside. I do think there would be some merit that someone maybe a hundred years from now or five hundred years from now might be interested in how a firm like ours operated. And, frankly, we never did care about any archives. I don't know where stuff disappeared to, but I know we just don't have it.

Blum: There are archives.

Hartmann: There are now, yes. But there weren't in 1950. There were no archives at all. Nobody thought about anything like that. I'm sure there were tons of materials on Oak Ridge and all that.

Blum: When did they begin to be saved?

Hartmann: I don't know. I was not terribly interested in it. You can get preoccupied with all that stuff, too.

Blum: Some person with an archivist's mind must have come along at this point

because the Chicago office does indeed have an archivist and an archive, which is used all the time. It's used all the time because it is useful. Maybe not for copying details, as in the Beaux-Arts system, but for other reasons.

Hartmann: That's good. Fine.

Blum: As you look back over the years of your career, what was your greatest opportunity in architecture?

Hartmann: I can't say that there was any one greatest opportunity. I think you could have a sense that my life has had these distinct steps of evolution, and each one has just been wonderful. We haven't commented, for example, on what I did after retirement. Well, we went and lived in Denmark for a year, and we had a boat built in Finland, and we sailed the boat back from Finland across the ocean and had it here in Castine last year, a little sailboat. That just comes into the matter because each one of these is a different period in terms of length of time, but each one has been a special experience. I've been fortunate to be alive in this era, and I've been fortunate in having the opportunities as they came along. I never dreaded waking up in the morning. Never dreaded that. I don't mean everything was milk and honey and a bed of roses and all that kind of stuff, but it was a real world. You had a responsibility to do what you could in it. My life is so full of highlights that I couldn't pick out one.

Blum: You are a very, very fortunate man.

Hartmann: I think I am. I think I'm the most fortunate man that I know of. Don't you think so?

Blum: Yes, I do. The way you express your joy about your experiences in your life, indeed it's true. You know, one thing you did mention along the way and it's true, we didn't talk about it, and if you care to would be just fine. What impact did your career in architecture have on your family?

Hartmann: I'll just make this brief just because it ought to be in the record, I think. I was

married in 1941 to a very fine person whom I'd known while I was at MIT. We were married for three months and the war broke out and within another six months I was gone to Europe for three years. Well, I wasn't alone, but it was tough on any marriage. Everybody isn't exactly the same person after three years of that kind of experience. Then the intensity of work at SOM and all that, and the marriage just didn't work out. We had three children, and they are fine children. My first wife was a fine person, excellent person, still is. I have a second wife, and we are very happy with one son.

Blum: I've been in your home for three days now, and it shows. Are any of your children interested in architecture? Did they become architects?

Hartmann: I have not encouraged or discouraged them, and none have proclivities in that direction.

Blum: For what would you like best to be remembered?

Hartmann: I don't believe in that kind of stuff. Truly. I don't have large sentiments so far as I am concerned personally. I don't want to be remembered at all. I don't care. I really don't mind not being remembered.

Blum: I don't think you have any control over that.

Hartmann: People don't have to clutter up their minds with me. What do I remember of anybody? Hope some of it's pleasant and kind of nice. That's all.

Blum: If you had an opportunity to speak to a group of young architects, based on your experience, your life, your career, what would you tell them?

Hartmann: I still do. I had a call from a student at Berkeley just the other day on the telephone, wanting some advice about something or other. First of all, in architecture there are a thousand careers possible. Tom Eyerman's an architect. Bruce Graham's an architect. Somebody else who does individual houses is an architect. A preservation worker is an architect. So there are a

thousand possible careers, but you have to have determination and a strong sense of commitment. Curiosity and all these things to subject yourself to entering this profession. While today you don't have to have the same attitude about design that we had in our period, you've got to have some attitude. It really is a wonderful profession because you really can't think of success so much because you're too darn busy. You're just too darn busy to think of it. Financially it is not a great profession at all. It's a terrible profession financially compared to the responsibility and the work that's done. It is not a lucrative profession.

Blum: Well, you seem to have enjoyed it.

Hartmann: A baseball player can make over \$2 million a year if he's good.

Blum: Well, that's a glaring inequity in our society. That's true.

Hartmann: In one year. It would take us a lifetime to make \$2 million.

Blum: We've talked about so many things. I think we've not only done a representative sampling of your career, but maybe even beyond that. Is there something that you would like to talk about that I haven't thought to include?

Hartmann: I'm exhausted.

Blum: You're entitled to be exhausted.

Hartmann: We never did talk about John Merrill, Sr., very much. Never did talk about problems, and there have been problems. No, I think we've done enough.

Blum: Mr. Hartmann, thank you very much. You've said your success or whatever you call it is due to your good luck. In my opinion, you made some of that good luck. You made the most out of some of the good luck.

Hartmann: Well, Betty, thank you very much for coming to this beautiful, little village of Castine and helping me share these ideas and thoughts.

Blum: This has been a treat for me. Thank you.

Hartmann: Okay. You bet!

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Work
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