PROFILES

ARCHITECT

III—A TAXI TO THE U. N.

Wallace Harrison

ON days when a strong southeast wind is whipping over Manhattan, Wallace K. Harrison, a fifty-nine-year-old New York architect, who served as director of planning for the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations, frequently finds it hard to center his full attention on his current projects. A tall, rugged, Roman-faced man who grew up in Massachusetts and is endowed with one of that region's traditional traits, a ponderous conscience, Harrison finds his thoughts travelling irresistibly across town from his office, in Rockefeller Center, to the East River and the United Nations buildings—specifically, to the Secretariat, the thirty-nine-story slab whose broad sides are uninterrupted walls of glass. "I don't know what I could have been thinking of—a building with all that glass on such an exposed site!" he exclaimed one recent windy morning to a group of his associates in the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz. "Boy, those windows take a beating! I know as well as the next guy that the gustiest winds we get in New York are southeasters. And I know that the East River is a perfect highway for them, and they sweep right up it unimpeded. I *knew* all these things when we were working on the Secretariat, and still, somehow, I didn't do anything about it. Well, our experts tell us the windows are perfect now, and that helps, but putting them in in the first place was hardly a stroke of brilliance." Coming from the architect who is customarily regarded as the most influential American practitioner of his generation, such a declaration of personal fallibility amounts to outright eccentricity nowadays, when it has become standard operating procedure for prominent architects to reëvaluate their earlier buildings as more impeccable, more epochal, than even they conceded at the time they designed them. "Actually, it's ridiculous to compare Wally Harrison with the geniuses of our profession," the British architect Howard Robertson, who was a member of the international board of design that planned the United Nations headquarters under Harrison's leadership, said not long ago. "Wally is an entirely different breed of animal from Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier. They're pure artists, great revolutionaries. Wally's a man whose profession is architecture. There's a true strain of the dreamer and the poet and the artist in him, but his visions are always tempered by a realistic appreciation of the conditions he's operating under on any particular job—the money that's available, the men he's working with, the time factor. He's a far rarer type than a genius, and in our world, such as it is today, he's at least as valuable. He can get difficult jobs done. I suspect that if the task of building the U.N. had been placed in the hands of any of the several architects who felt that the commission should have been theirs by divine right, the U.N. delegates would still be leading a highly nomadic existence."

People who have known Harrison ever since he first came to New York, in 1916, are inclined to feel that his ability to combine dreaming with getting things done may be attributed to the extreme vicissitudes of his earlier days, which were marked by a prolonged stretch of joyless grubbing that gave him ample time to muse about things as they might be, and was followed by a swift rise to a position of responsibility in the world of affairs. Unlike most of his colleagues, who made architecture their career because it appealed to them as a means of using their creative gifts to benefit the community, Harrison stumbled into architecture by accident when, at the age of fourteen, he found himself obliged to support himself and took the first job he could get, which happened to be that of office boy for a construction company in his home town of Worcester. This job gradually led to drafting, and aroused his interest in architectural matters generally. In all, Harrison struggled along through seventeen lean years, interrupted only by a hitch in the Navy during the First World War and a couple of spells in Paris as a rather overage student at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, before he broke into the big time as a partner in an architectural firm headed by Harvey Wiley Corbett—a connection that shortly afterward gave him the opportunity to help design Rockefeller Center. When Harrison looks back on the long and painful apprenticeship that preceded his arrival—something he does no more often than necessary—he feels sure that it accounts for the skepticism with which he now listens to some of his fellow-architects as they loftily insist that a modern building should have no connection with the past, or that it should be a machine for living, or that it should be a symbol of its own function. "I consider myself a modern architect, but a fellow like me, who has gone through the mill, never goes in for complete and uninhibited revolt," he says. "When you leave your drawing board and start getting your hands dirty, you stop thinking of buildings as a challenge to your ability to create absolute art. You're happy to settle for good buildings that get built, in the hope that they'll lead to progressively better buildings."

Harrison spent ten years working on Rockefeller Center, and in the course of that extended meeting of strong minds and hard currency he developed from a talented young designer into a mature architect. At the same time, a friendship that has had a marked bearing on his career ever since grew up between him and Nelson Rockefeller, who in 1938 became president of Rockefeller Center, Inc., and, like Harrison, is a man with a strong catalytic gift. As the thirties advanced and the world situation grew increasingly grave, these two men shared the concern of many others about the apparent inevitability of war in Europe and the possibility that such a war might spread across the Atlantic. Rockefeller, who knew Latin America well, was especially fearful about the South American republics; since the United States had been paying little attention to them for years, he felt that they might well fall to the totalitarians by default unless this coun-

try adopted a new and vigorous hemispheric policy. With the assistance of Harrison, Beardsley Ruml, and other informed friends, Rockefeller drew up an exhaustive memorandum on the subject and turned it over to Harry Hopkins, who brought it to the attention of President Roosevelt. Impressed, the President at once created a special government agency called the Office of the Coördinator of Inter-American Affairs, and in August, 1940, appointed Rockefeller to head it. Rockefeller suggested to Harrison that he drop everything and join him in Washington, but this proved impossible just then, what with the commitments of Harrison's firm—Harrison, Fouilhoux & Abramovitz—and a project he was working on with Rockefeller's brother Laurance and the Navy to save steel by building ships of concrete. The following June, however, Harrison turned the firm over to his two partners—André Fouilhoux and Max Abramovitz—and joined Rockefeller's agency as Assistant Coordinator in charge of its Cultural Relations Division. He subsequently became the Deputy Coördinator, and in March, 1945, after Rockefeller was transferred to the State Department, took over the job of Coördinator.

WEARY in mind and thin in wallet after nearly five years of government service, Harrison returned to New York and architecture in April, 1946. He found his firm in bad shape. Not long after Harrison had gone to Washington, Abramovitz, who was regarded by his partners as an enormously skillful designer, had joined the Air Force, and had spent two years on General Chennault's staff, building airfields in China. Fouilhoux carried on alone as best he could until shortly before the end of the war, when he was killed by a fall from the roof of a housing project the firm was putting up in Brooklyn. "He'd been terribly overworked and under a great strain for a long, long time," Harrison told a friend recently. "He was a wonderful guy, Fouilhoux—and a superb architect. We'd been partners since 1935." Harrison and Abramovitz, who was released by the Air Force early in 1946, set about reorganizing the firm, and before long they had all the business they could handle. Their first spectacular postwar commission was to draw up plans for X City, the city-within-a-city that William Zeckendorf, then executive vice-president of the real-estate brokerage firm of Webb & Knapp, was thinking of putting up on approximately the same site as that now occupied by the United Nations. Soon, however, Harrison found that he wasn't happy simply devoting himself to business as usual. "The battles were over, but the struggle was just as intense," he says. "We couldn't suddenly drop countries we'd been helping during the war and tell them to shift for themselves. There was a lot of work to be done, and among the many things we had learned while we were running the South American office was that you don't build a stable world just with propaganda and banquets." As staunch believers in the United Nations, which had voted to make its permanent headquarters somewhere in the United States and was weighing the advantages of various sites, Rockefeller and Harrison were delighted to accept appointments to a Committee of Plan and Scope that Mayor O'Dwyer had organized, with Robert Moses at its head, to present the case for New York City. The United Nations Permanent Headquarters Committee—a body appointed in January, 1946, and consisting of one representative from each of the member countries—had specified that it must have a site of at least two thousand acres (it later discarded this requirement), and the only available city-owned area that size was in Flushing Meadow, a practically subaqueous tract whose shortcomings were obvious to everybody. Rockefeller and Harrison, both of whom felt that the cosmopolitan spirit of New York and its exceptional communications facilities made it the natural home for the U.N., prepared a one-reel movie showing how the city planned to refurbish the Meadow if the United Nations would agree to settle there, but it failed to stir the members of the Permanent Headquarters Committee; during their tours of duty out there at Lake Success, then the U.N.'s temporary headquarters, they had had their fill of the region's subtle swampland aroma, and wanted no more of it, with or without improvements. By December, 1946, the Permanent Headquarters Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Eduardo Zuleta Angel, of Colombia, had finished inspecting the various other sites that had been offered to the organization, and had just about made up its mind to take a ten-square-mile one in suburban Phila-

"I wish I had my life to live over. Believe me, I'd pick a different lawyer!"

delphia. The Australian delegation and quite a few others representing countries in the Pacific area favored San Francisco, but the important European delegations, Russia among them, were dead set against the West Coast. As for the East Coast, an early preference for Connecticut's Fairfield County cooled off after several members of the Permanent Headquarters Committee had been stoned by the local inhabitants during an inspection trip there, and Boston's best offer wasn't in the same leafy league with the spacious tract that Philadelphia was prepared to make available.

On the morning of Sunday, December 8th, Nelson Rockefeller, who was in Mexico City for the inauguration of President Miguel Alemán, received a joint telephone call from Harrison and Frank Jamieson, a former Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaperman who handles the Rockefeller family's relations with the press and the public. They were calling to inform him of the Philadelphia threat and of the need for immediate action if he still had any hopes for New York. Rockefeller, who did indeed still have hopes for New York, arrived at LaGuardia Field around six that evening and was met by Harrison and Clark Eichelberger, another member of the Mayor's committee. The three men were driven directly to the United Nations' temporary headquarters at Lake Success, where, after being held up at the gates for an hour while the guards checked to see if they were who they claimed to be, they had a talk with Secretary-General Trygve Lie, Dr. Zuleta Angel, and Senator Warren Austin, the head of the American delegation to the U.N. Rockefeller asked them whether they thought the members of the Headquarters Committee might still consider settling in or around New York. Senator Austin said that he thought the minds of the delegates were still open, but that, as far as New York went, while they would not be averse to the countryside *around* the city, they would prefer a site *in* it, such as the X City plot, which Zeckendorf had not long before attempted to sell to the municipal authorities as a possible location for the headquarters. The important thing to bear in mind, Dr. Zuleta Angel put in, was that the Committee was scheduled to convene on Wednesday morning and reach a final decision then. In short, Rockefeller had two and a half days.

Rockefeller spent Monday thinking and conferring in his New York office, on the Fifty-sixth floor of the R.C.A. Building. He reached one con-

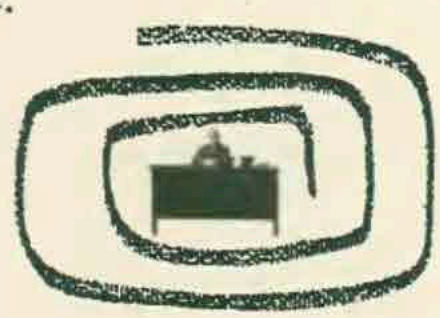
clusion—X City was out; it would undoubtedly be too expensive for him to swing alone. The most likely alternative, he decided, was Pocantico Hills, back of Tarrytown, where he, his father, and his four brothers all had homes, and on Tuesday morning he launched an eleventh-hour drive to round up enough land for a site there. He outlined his plan to his father at lunch, and to his brothers during the afternoon, and in every case he told them of Senator Austin's appraisal of the delegates' taste in the matter of an urban versus a suburban site, but added his belief that the Pocantico Hills area was worth at least a very good try. Each of the Rockefellers volunteered to give up a considerable portion of his individual holdings at Pocantico Hills, for a total of a thousand acres. Then, spreading out large-scale maps of the region on the cocoa-colored carpet of his office, Nelson hurriedly negotiated through his Westchester real-estate broker for options on two thousand acres adjoining the Rockefellers' properties, which would bring the complete parcel to three thousand acres. He now needed only to borrow a million dollars from his father for the purchase of the land covered by the options in order to wrap up the whole shebang. At the end of the day, Nelson called Austin to inform him that he had pretty well succeeded in acquiring a site in Westchester, but to his dismay, the Senator replied that he now thought the members of the Headquarters Committee would not be interested in any New York site that was not actually in the city. Gloomily, Nelson telephoned his father at seven o'clock on Tuesday evening, surrounded by an agitated group consisting of Harrison, Jamieson, Mrs. Louise Boyer, who is Nelson's assistant, and John Lockwood, one of the family's lawyers. Nelson told John D., Jr., how things stood, and then, as he listened to his father's comments, his face broke into a smile of astonished rapture. "Why, Pa!" he exclaimed. Cupping his hand over the mouthpiece, Nelson told the group around him, in a sort of whispered yodel, "He wants to know how much that site along the East River would cost! He wants to *give* it to them! . . . Wally, how much do you think it would take to get it?" Eight or eight and a half million, Harrison guessed. Upon receiving this information, Rockefeller *père* informed Rockefeller *fils* that if the river plot could be purchased, he was prepared to donate it to the United Nations, on one condition—that the United States waive the federal gift tax. (John D., Jr., pre-

How to be a Perfect Secretary

Know your company and the jobs of the people in it. Get used to taking responsibility — and doing it without becoming officious about it. Learn how to handle crises without blowing your bonnet. Gain a reputation for your willingness to work hard — to stay in the office till all hours to finish a job if need be.

Be completely at home with the language of your firm's kind of business, so you can handle communications comfortably with engineers, lawyers, doctors, Indian chiefs, or whoever it may be. A respectable knowledge of business law is an asset — as well as such bread and butter matters as insurance, taxes, pension plans and the like. Be alert to improvements. Don't be afraid to read —particularly business subjects.

Well, these are just some of the things we picked up from "Secretaries Try for Quality Control" in a recent issue of Nation's Business, a story about earning the new CPS rating — Certified Professional Secretary. Frankly, the only thing we're afraid of is, if our secretary were this good, why would the boss want us around? Nation's Business, *a magazine for businessmen*, Washington 6, D. C.



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sumably had in mind a rankling experience in the twenties, when he gave the League of Nations two million dollars for a library in Geneva and was held up for a gift tax of more than a third of a million by the United States government—a bite that rather took the joy out of his philanthropy.)

After the initial wave of exultation had subsided, Nelson and his cohorts deployed for action. Before the separate clearances with the city, county, state, and federal governments could be tackled, one piece of business, on which everything else hinged, had to be taken care of: An option had to be obtained on the river site, which consisted of seventeen acres between Forty-second and Forty-eighth Streets, and First Avenue and the East River, from Zeckendorf's firm of Webb & Knapp. Harrison was nominated for the job. He was the logical candidate, for he knew all about the site from having worked on it at the time Zeckendorf was planning to build X City there. The first step, therefore, was to find Zeckendorf. After an hour of putting in phone calls to various likely places, Harrison finally traced him to the Monte Carlo, a night club on the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and Fifty-fourth Street that was one of the odder properties controlled by Webb & Knapp. Zeckendorf told Harrison to come on over.

It was ten o'clock when Harrison arrived at the Monte Carlo, the pocket of his jacket bulging with a block-by-block map of the site. "I tried to assume an air of nonchalance, but I couldn't make it," Harrison recalls. "Did you ever see that Disney movie called 'Saludos Amigos'—the part where Donald Duck gets stuck high up in the Altiplano of the Andes? The air is so thin that Donald's heart is shown plunging a foot and a half out of his body every time it beats. Well, my heart was thumping just like that." Harrison found Zeckendorf in a private dining room at the rear of the club, attending a gala birthday party that was being given for one of his partners, Henry Sears. Harrison and Zeckendorf adjourned to the club's private office.

"You know that site on the river?" Harrison remembers saying, without any warmup whatsoever. "I want you to give me an option on it for the U.N."

"*Is* it for the U.N.?" Zeckendorf asked.

"Yes, it's for the U.N., and for nothing else," Harrison replied. "I'm not committing myself any further—about who I'm representing, or anything."

"O.K.," Zeckendorf said, without

hesitation. "I'll give you an option on it for eight and a half million."

Harrison said that this would be satisfactory, at which Zeckendorf, after consulting briefly with Sears, stretched Harrison's map out on the desk and, after outlining the six blocks involved in the site with his pen, wrote at the top:

$8,500,000 = East side of 1st Ave., 42nd to 43rd—Sq. Block 43-44 + 44-45 1st Ave. to East River + Sq. Block 46-47 NE Cor. 47 and 1st Ave. + 100 × 100 North Side 47th at Consolidated Garage = $8,500,000, to United Nations only.

On a side margin of the map he wrote an additional note: "$8,500,000 to U.N. Dec. 10 for 30 days," and then both he and Sears signed their names.

Suppressing an impulse to grab the telephone on the desk and report the good news then and there to the group that was sweating it out in Nelson Rockefeller's office, Harrison tucked the map back in his pocket and walked out into the December night and over to the St. Regis Hotel, where he dialled his associates from a pay station in the lobby. "Nelson told me to pick up a bottle of champagne," he recalls. "He said a celebration was in order. Well, I fished in my pockets when I got out of the booth and found I had only a dollar and eleven cents on me. That struck me as funny as hell. Here's a guy who's just closed a deal for eight and a half million dollars and he hasn't got enough dough to buy a dozen bottles of Moxie."

In the end, the party got its champagne—two quarts of it—by sending out to "21." They polished off a quart (the other is still aging commemoratively in a pantry adjacent to Rockefeller's office) and then got down to business again. In one corner of the room, Lockwood, the lawyer, studied Zeckendorf's scrawled notations on the map and, after an hour's pondering, solemnly declared that he thought it would hold up as a valid option. In the meantime—it had become Wednesday by then—a number of telephone calls were put through. One was to Robert Moses, who agreed to see Mayor O'Dwyer the first thing that morning about getting the city to cede its rights to the streets, the river bulkheads, and various strips of land it controlled within the site. Another call was to Senator Austin, who was staying at the Pennsylvania Hotel, now the Statler. Austin is not particularly noted as a man of rapid action, but on this occasion he performed like an Ohio State scatback. He called Washington, awakened

the general counsel of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and obtained his substantial opinion that the government would exempt John D., Jr., from paying a gift tax if the United Nations accepted his offer. Later that morning, at about eight, while Moses was on his way to see Mayor O'Dwyer and Lockwood was calling Albany to negotiate clearances with the state authorities, Nelson Rockefeller—after breakfasting with his father—picked up Harrison and they went up to the Harkness Pavilion of the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, where Dr. Zuleta Angel, who was in poor health, had spent the night. They informed him of their last-minute entry in the competition.

At a meeting of the Headquarters Committee at Lake Success at ten o'clock that Wednesday morning, Dr. Zuleta Angel recognized Senator Austin, and the Senator made a dramatic announcement of the Rockefeller offer. Before adjourning, in a flurry of excitement, the Headquarters Committee instructed a subcommittee to inspect the land in question that afternoon. The next morning, following an enthusiastic report by the subcommittee, the Headquarters Committee voted, thirty-three to seven, to draft a resolution recommending that the General Assembly, then in session, accept the gift. Two days later, on Saturday, December 14th, the General Assembly voted, forty-six to seven, to adopt the resolution. "When it was all over, and we had won, I think we saw for the first time why we'd been successful," Harrison says. "It was very simple, really. The delegates had wanted New York all along."

SOME three weeks later, on January 2, 1947, Secretary-General Lie appointed Harrison director of planning for the United Nations Permanent Headquarters. "Harrison was only one of a number of architects who were under consideration," a veteran United Nations official stated recently. "There was some talk at the time that he went with the deal—that he was given the appointment because of his connection with the Rockefellers. That isn't so. The Secretary-General solicited recommendations from many sources. He decided on the basis of these recommendations that Harrison was the architect best qualified for the post. Harrison knew a great deal about the site, he was well versed in the special problems of building in New York, and he had had experience working with governmental officials and with men from foreign

countries. In fact, he was uniquely qualified."

Harrison and Lie got together in mid-January for the first of innumerable meetings they were to hold during the nearly six years it took to design and build the headquarters. Routine matters, such as the chain of command (Harrison would report directly to Lie or to Byron Price, an Assistant Secretary-General) and Harrison's salary (the same as that of the head of any large department of the U.N.—twelve thousand dollars a year, plus another six thousand to help out on income taxes), were quickly disposed of. Then came the delicate matter of how to select the architects who would design the buildings, and in this Harrison and Lie were guided by the knowledge that the old League of Nations had got off to a woefully bad start when, in seeking a design for its Geneva headquarters, it held a competition open to architects from all its member countries, failed to reach a clear-cut decision as to the winner, and, in the course of seven years of wrangling, managed to affront individuals and nations alike in wholesale lots before it at last erected a building that no one was happy about. "Lie and I tried to make the machinery as simple and foolproof as possible," Harrison says. "We decided we'd have an international board of design that would collaborate on drawing up plans for the headquarters buildings. First off, we sent notices to all the member countries of the U.N., inviting them to nominate architects to serve on the board. In a few cases—like Soilleux, from Australia, I remember, and Liang, from China—when we felt we didn't know enough about the men who were nominated, we asked them to submit samples of their work. Then the question was how many members the board should have. We finally figured that we'd need about ten, to take care of all the areas that we thought ought to be represented—somebody from Western Europe, somebody from Eastern Europe, somebody from Scandinavia, at least one from the British Commonwealth, one from South America, one from the Far East, and so on. We picked the members of the board partly for their talent and partly for geographical and political considerations. We couldn't pick Alvar Aalto, who's a wonderful architect, because Finland wasn't a member of the U.N. We had to pass up Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, because they were too closely identified with prewar Germany. The sixty-four-dollar question was whether

or not we should pick Le Corbusier. When you have to deal with matters of opinion and problems of personality—and, you may be sure, Le Corbusier is a man who can contribute plenty of both—it complicates the job. A good many people strongly advised against having him. On the other hand, there were some good reasons why we *should* have him—he was a great architect, of course, and besides he'd been given such a dirty deal in that League of Nations competition when his plan, although it was the choice of the majority of the judges, was finally thrown out on the absurd technicality that it had been drawn up with the wrong kind of ink. When all was said and done, we decided Corbu was better in than out." In addition to Le Corbusier, who, of course, represented France, the board was made up of G. A. Soilleux, of Australia; Gaston Brunfaut, of Belgium; Oscar Niemeyer, of Brazil; Ernest Cormier, of Canada; Ssu-ch'eng Liang, of China; Sven Markelius, of Sweden; N. D. Bassov, of Russia; Howard Robertson, of Great Britain; and Julio Vilamajó, of Uruguay. To supplement this group, seven special consultants were later added: Josef Havlíček, of Czechoslovakia; Vladimir Bodiansky, of France; John Antoniades, of Greece; Matthew Nowicki, of Poland; Peter Noskov, of Russia; Hugh Ferriss, of the United States; and Ernest Weissmann, of Yugoslavia. "Two-thirds of the board turned out to be marvellous architects," Harrison says. "The other third were good architects."

The first of the architects arrived in New York in early March—Robertson, a methodical-minded, well-tailored Londoner with a solid air of affability; Liang, who was an archeologist at heart and was overwhelmed by the newness of New York; Bassov, a stocky, middle-aged Russian engineer-architect, who had made his reputation during the war, when he was entrusted with relocating his nation's heavy industry east of the Urals; and Le Corbusier, crisp, high-pitched, and garrulous as a blue jay, his lean face dominated by thick-bowed, heavy-lensed spectacles—and the others trickled in, one at a time, during the next three or four weeks. Meanwhile, a group of architects from Harrison's office, headed by Harmon Goldstone, Abel Sorensen, and George Dudley, had started developing a "program," which is what architects call the documented study they make to determine the space and facilities a proposed building will need in order to fulfill its specified func-

tions. Harrison's men interviewed dozens of Secretariat officials and members of the General Assembly, and then converted their mass of information into architectural facts and figures; for example, estimating that in time as many as 5,265 people might be employed in the various divisions and departments of the Secretariat, they came to the conclusion that the building to house it would require 439,595 square feet of office space, 25,033 square feet of meeting rooms, and 351,483 square feet for "other services." The program, printed in English and French, made everything as plain as day from an architect's point of view, and Harrison says he believes it helped put everybody in a hopeful frame of mind. In any event, the members of the board were in a conspicuously amiable mood when they began exchanging ideas at their first regular meeting, held early in April in the Headquarters Planning Office, which Harrison had set up on the twenty-seventh floor of the R.K.O. Building. Harrison picked this midtown location because he thought it would be a good plan for the board to be physically separated from the other activities of the United Nations, at Lake Success, and therefore less exposed to any possible oblique political pressures.

After studying the program, the board voted unanimously in favor of putting up three buildings—one for the General Assembly, one to house the Secretariat, and one for conferences of the various councils and committees. From the beginning, the Secretariat Building was visualized by practically everybody as a skyscraper, since no smaller structure could provide the needed office space and still leave enough room on the site for walks, grass, and trees. The amiability of the visiting architects visibly increased as they contemplated this obvious need for at least one skyscraper, since, as they were not reluctant to admit, they had come to New York with the hope of getting a crack

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Portland, Oregon.....Mathis
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Wilmington, Del.....Mansure & Prettyman
Worcester, Mass.....Mark, Inc.

at designing a real American cloud-buster—an opportunity none of them had ever had back home, and quite possibly never would have. To familiarize them with the problems of building skyscrapers, Harrison appointed six American engineers and three American architects to serve as technical consultants. However, since these consultants popped in only when they were asked to and since few of the board members had been able to arrange to stay in New York for more than two or three weeks at a time—incoming architects were always bumping into outgoing ones at Idlewild—the group that collected each morning in the planning office usually was small, averaging, perhaps, eight or nine men. Their workroom was an orthodox office, about forty feet by thirty, with four cubby-holes along one wall, to which members could repair whenever they wanted a little privacy. The board met around a table in the center of the room—it nearly always held plasticine models of various projected designs—and traded their views in a mixture of French and English. All of them except Bassov could speak at least one of these languages. Since no one else spoke Russian, Bassov did the best he could with an interpreter and what little English he was able to pick up as he went along. When he liked an idea, he said so with a brusque "Okay;" when he didn't, his response was an explosive "Nokay." At lunchtime, the members took turns escorting their colleagues to restaurants that specialized in their native cooking. "Brunfaut, the Belgian, preferred to eat at the Brussels," Harrison recalls. "He knew the proprietor. And Havlíček took us all to Lüchow's when a new kind of Czechoslovakian beer came in. Mostly, though, they dug up wonderful little spots I'd never even heard of in all the years I'd spent in New York. I've never eaten better." The afternoons had no set pattern; some of the members rambled about the city studying skyscrapers at first hand, some went to their hotel rooms to work in private, and others returned to the planning office and worked there. In the evenings, most of the members visited with countrymen of theirs or went out on the town.

Under no circumstances were the members at any time permitted to enter the drafting room, which was next door to their workroom. The drafting room, where the rough sketches that were approved by the board were translated into working designs, was manned by a staff of draftsmen, designers, and modellers under the direction of Abramovitz, who

had been made Harrison's deputy director of planning. "It's never a picnic when several creative minds are brought together to work on one project," Abramovitz says. "The rivalry for individual credit is always hovering over things. It can be ruinous. We were determined that the U.N. was going to represent an authentic group effort. That was the reason Wally declared the drafting room out-of-bounds—to prevent any member from getting his own idea drawn up into one of the plans before the rest of the members had a chance to pass on it. All ideas went into one common pot. All sketches were unsigned. That way, everything that was sent to the drafting room came from the group as a whole."

During the first two months, the board of design chugged along at a steady clip. "It was an exhilarating experience," Robertson, the British member, has since said. "When we started, each of us had his own pet idea of what the whole project or some part of it should look like. Liang proposed that the Secretariat be built on an axis running due east and west. The important buildings in China had always been built that way, he told us. It insured good luck. Liang also thought the entire site should be enclosed by a wall. Antoniades couldn't see any virtue in a wall. He preferred a continuous colonnade. You see, a good many of our concepts were quite atavistic. I was the courtyard fiend, which was proper for an Englishman, I suppose. Cormier, the Canadian, was for the conservative, solid, Anglo-French approach. And Le Corbusier, of course, was for Le Corbusier. He wanted the headquarters group to be one gigantic terraced block raised on stilts, or *pilotis*—Corbu's trademark. Bassov detested stilts. 'Chicken legs!' he'd snort. 'No-kay!' The design *he* had in mind was something like that of a power plant. That's how it went. But all of us gradually subdued our personal vanities and gave up the preconceived visions we'd come with, and as the project took shape the feeling of group unity grew. This was very noticeable to me. I went back to England for a couple of weeks, and when I returned I found the members of the board had knitted together into a sort of architectural jury. Each individual was still expected to express himself without reservation, but he was also expected to abide by the group verdict, and not go into any tantrums. Harrison was what you might call the foreman of the jury. The important thing to bear in mind is that

Wally Harrison never submitted a design of his own. That's what made Wally's position so strong."

In late April, a mild crisis occurred. Some of the delegates, with Le Corbusier as their self-appointed spokesman, favored having all the lounges and the committee and council rooms in the Conference Building on one floor, while the rest favored having them on two floors, one right above the other, to make everything more compact. The debate reached its climax when Le Corbusier read a prepared statement consisting of thirty-six points. A number of these supported his single-level thesis, but some of the members found others weirdly irrelevant, such as Point 6: "I was sent by the French to defend the ideas of modern architecture and am responsible to the world at large for (a) undisputed function and (b) certain beauty," and Point 31: "Architectural splendor comes from the great books." In essence, Le Corbusier's statement amounted to a request for a vote on the two schemes. Harrison answered it at the next meeting. "There can be a decision by a vote, or I can make the decision," he told the members. "I have explained the difficulty of a vote: After a vote, you have the winners and the losers. If I make the decision, I am the only loser." He then recommended further study of the problem, but when the stalemate continued and there seemed no other solution, he ruled in favor of the two-level scheme, on the ground that while it was a little less beautiful, it would provide a little more convenience. It was the only time that Harrison ever exercised the final authority that was his as chairman of the board.

This brief squall over, the members quickly pushed ahead again, and in mid-May, less than three months after the start of the deliberations, a final plan was unanimously agreed upon—a feat of collaborative international design comparable to the four-minute mile. The plan was then presented to the Headquarters Advisory Committee of the General Assembly which unanimously approved it on May 21st. In November, the General Assembly formally accepted the plan, and excavation of the site was started on September 14, 1948. Perhaps the most significant, or at any rate the most exuberant, footnote to the life and times of the board of design was a five-hundred-word statement, entitled "A Declaration," that Le Corbusier released to the press shortly before it was disbanded. "A wonderful result has been achieved and one that

is worth noting: we are all of the same opinion," it read, in part. "To those outside who question us we can reply: we are united, we are a team, the World Team of the United Nations laying down the plans of world architecture. . . . We are a homogeneous block. There are no names attached to this work. . . . Each of us can be legitimately proud of having been called upon to work in this team, and that should be sufficient for us." It *was* sufficient for Le Corbusier for a time, but a year later, with his rambunctious ego once again in the ascendant, he began claiming credit for the whole plan, and was miffed when officials of the United Nations would not arrange a press conference at which he could elaborate on this theme. He had, however, in the opinion of his colleagues on the board, made a considerable contribution, of which, in his own words, he could be legitimately proud.

ON the southwestern corner of the United Nations site, near the junction of First Avenue and Forty-second Street, there stood, and still stands, a six-story concrete building of no particular architectural distinction that was nearing completion at the time the U.N. acquired the site and was originally intended to provide office space for the New York City Housing Authority. During their deliberations in the spring of 1947, the members of the board of design briefly discussed the question of whether to raze this brand-new building, which would have to be bought from the city in any event, or try to work it into the scheme of things as best they could. They ended up by tossing the problem into Harrison's lap. His decision was to keep it. Nowadays, if the subject of this stepchild, which is currently serving as the United Nations library, happens to come up, Harrison is likely to frown and to confess that he has concluded it was a mistake to leave the building standing; he considers it a jarring note in the otherwise architecturally harmonious headquarters. Actually, at the time Harrison decided not to raze the building, he could hardly have decided otherwise, for the problem arose just when Secretary-General Lie was diligently paring his proposed budget for the headquarters, in an effort to persuade Congress to lend the U.N. the money to build it. In the course of three fruitless months of trying to round up funds, during which he had been turned down cold by the International Bank, Lie had already appealed once to Congress—for eighty-five million

dollars—and had met with no success; now he was asking for only sixty-five million, and on August 11th, Congress granted the loan. The U.N. had to pay the City of New York about a million and a half for the Housing Authority Building, and Harrison felt that the additional money that would be needed to tear it down could be better spent elsewhere. The building served for some time as a base of operations for the Headquarters Planning Office and, as Harrison frequently points out, whatever its architectural shortcomings, it was ideal for this purpose, since it was not only right on the site but, unlike any other available building that would have provided equal facilities, remarkably handy to several restaurants on or near Second Avenue, such as the Imperiale, Colombo's, and the Palm, where, he finds, the easygoing atmosphere does wonders for a man whose head is too full of girders, spandrels, beams, and the ultimate failing point of steel.

Lie engaged Harrison & Abramovitz to convert the international board's plans into drawings for the contractors—a choice that was far from unexpected, since the firm was already so closely linked to the project. This put Harrison, the director of planning, in the bizarre position of being the client of Harrison, of Harrison & Abramovitz. "He was very tough on himself," H. L. McLeod, who headed the finance department of the Headquarters Planning Office, said later. "An architectural firm doing a job such as Harrison and Abramovitz did for the U.N. buildings would ordinarily charge a fee of several million dollars. Harrison & Abramovitz insisted on doing the job for just cost plus the actual overhead. They didn't make a cent of profit."

If there was any one day during the construction of the Headquarters that stood out as crucial for Harrison and his staff, it was the twenty-fifth of November, 1950. Around nine o'clock on the morning of that day—a Saturday—a hurricane blew into the New York area from the southeast and ripped full force up the East River. Harrison raced from his home on Fifth Avenue, near Sixty-fourth Street, to the half-finished Secretariat. He was soon joined there by three other members of his staff who were deeply involved in the project—McLeod, Glenn E. Bennett, and James A. Dawson—and by Byron Price, the Assistant Secretary-General who was working with the Headquarters Planning Office. "It was a real storm," Dawson has since said. "About thirty yards in front of the Secretariat stood

a platform used for mixing concrete. It was around twelve feet by twenty, and made of two-inch planks. Well, the hurricane lifted that platform up out of the mud and right into the air like a toy, and almost tossed it against the building. It dropped a couple of yards short of where we were standing, right at the entrance. A little later, Harrison and Price and the rest of us went up on the roof to see if we could measure the sway. We didn't have a level with us, so we used the crudest of all measuring devices; we dropped a paper match into a puddle of water and watched how much it moved—really the same as the bubble-in-water principle. By our computations, the Secretariat was performing beautifully; she wasn't swaying any more than three-quarters of an inch. We doubled the figure, to be on the safe side, but that's still darn good, you know." Harrison, who was also worried about how the vast expanse of glass on the Secretariat's east side would hold up (it did), remained at the site until well after dark, when the storm finally blew itself out. "It was a pretty rough day for me," he said later. "Every time you get a building up, there's always one day when the full consciousness of your responsibility as an architect hits you. It's the day when the building has to work. This was it."

The Secretariat was finished first, then the Conference Building, and, finally, the General Assembly. In the summer of 1950, when the last two buildings were still far from completed, Harrison and his staff suddenly found themselves faced with the problem of inflation resulting from the outbreak of war in Korea. Two years earlier, in lining up its sources of construction materials, the Headquarters Planning Office had contracted to buy its structural steel from the American Bridge Division of the United States Steel Corporation, and Benjamin Fairless, the corporation's president, had agreed to give the United Nations "preferential treatment." Delivery dates on steel at that time were ordinarily from twelve to sixteen months after the receipt of an order, but Fairless guaranteed Harrison delivery within six months. When the war in Korea began, and steel became even harder to get than before, Fairless stood by his guarantee, and most of the other companies supplying materials to the United Nations came through in the same manner, but the cost of steel and other building materials rose sharply—an average of around twenty per cent—and this threw the

closely figured budget of the Headquarters Planning Office badly out of kilter. Lie succeeded in negotiating an additional loan of three million dollars from Congress, but from there on it was up to Harrison to scale down the original plans as best he could to complete the project without exceeding the total appropriation of sixty-eight million dollars. This meant some fairly drastic changes. Four committee rooms were eliminated from the Conference Building, and the General Assembly was redesigned no fewer than nine times, each design being more economical than the one before. As originally conceived, the General Assembly was to have been a thin-waisted structure with an assembly hall at either end; now one of the two halls had to be abandoned, a lounge area for the delegates was chopped in half, the height of the ceiling of the remaining hall was dropped fifteen feet, and the length of the north lobby was diminished by some twenty feet—a loss that, in Harrison's eyes, severely impaired the looks of the entrance. All along the line, less expensive materials were substituted for the ones specified in the early plans—terrazzo and carpeting for marble flooring, fabric for wood on the walls of several committee rooms, marbleized glass for marble, and so on. "Wally was very ingenious about it all," Michael Harris, a member of Harrison's executive staff, said later. "For instance, there was the matter of some columns in the lobby of the Assembly. They were to be made of concrete, and we'd been planning to cover them with plaster instead of the marble facing originally called for. When Wally saw how the columns shaped up in concrete, he told us, 'Forget the plaster. We can save a little dough here. We'll just paint the concrete.' "

In October, 1952, four years and one month after construction began, the General Assembly Building was completed and the job was done. Counting the funds set aside for the landscaping of the site, the total cost had been sixty-seven million five hundred thousand dollars.

AROUND nine o'clock one Monday morning early this fall, Harrison arrived in town from his country place at Huntington, Long Island, and made for his office, in Rockefeller Center, in a state of high good humor. He had just spent the kind of weekend he thrives on. At Huntington, he had read a mystery by Ellery Queen, one of his favorite contemporary writers, and bal-

anced this with some poems by Dylan Thomas, whose rich, tumbling language fascinates him. He had enjoyed a first-class argument on the future shape of the City of New York with one of his favorite conversational sparring partners, Robert Moses, who has a place in nearby Babylon. On Saturday evening, he and Mrs. Harrison had entertained a fairly large group at dinner, and during the meal he had instigated the sending of a cablegram to Fernand Léger—whose professed Communism none of his old associates take very seriously—congratulating him on the opening of a new exhibition and signed "Your capitalist friends." In addition, Harrison had worked for some time on an abstract painting he has been trying to finish for two years, pruned some fruit trees on his property, and put in three reviving hours sketching a bright, lively design for a new combination office building and opera house that may or may not go up someday on Broadway at Sixty-fourth Street.

Upon reaching his office, Harrison whipped through his mail in ten minutes, spent a half hour cleaning out a closet with Vinnie, the firm's general factotum, and went over his sketches for the opera house with Abramovitz, and then the two partners discussed plans for an office building that the Commercial Investment Trust expects to erect on Madison Avenue, between Fifty-ninth and Sixtieth Streets. Presently, a young architect from the Middle West arrived to keep an appointment with Harrison, and in the ensuing chitchat it developed that the visitor had not yet seen the United Nations Headquarters. Harrison rarely visits the United Nations these days unless some maintenance problem there calls for his attention or he wants to talk over with Lie's successor, Dag Hammarskjöld, the touchy business of accepting or rejecting gifts of art proffered by member nations, but on this morning he impulsively offered to take the young man over and show him around. The offer being eagerly accepted, Harrison slapped on a narrow-brimmed brown felt hat he once picked up in Oslo, and the two men headed for the street, where Harrison hailed a taxi. "The United Nations Headquarters, skipper," he said to the driver; who nodded and swung into the stream of traffic. As the cab made its way across town, Harrison said he felt that New York needed a club to supplement the present Architectural League by providing a comfortable, natural gathering place for painters, sculptors, and archi-

tects, as the Café de Flore does in Paris, and then turned to discuss the increasingly important role that he believes optics will play in the architecture of the future. "Since Cézanne, painters have studied every possible method of intensifying the human being's reaction to the forms depicted on flat surfaces," he said. "In architecture, we're dealing with the same problem. What is the effect on the little guy when he looks at a building, or walks through it, or lives in it? How do we intensify his visual experience by simplifying form and color? No architect of the future will be any good unless he's a painter and a sculptor, too."

When the two men reached the Headquarters site, Harrison took his companion for a stroll around the grounds. "We were talking about optics," he said. "Well, see that little break up there?" He pointed to the top of the Secretariat, where the marble framing along the sides is slightly recessed. "We did that to pull the building in at the top. You know how the Greeks and Romans used to build their walls slanting inward, so that the buildings wouldn't look top-heavy? We couldn't do that here, of course—the Secretariat is too high—so we stepped in those sides instead." Harrison turned, and his eye fell on the old New York City Housing Authority Building that is now the library. He sighed. "That was sure a mistake, leaving that building up," he said. "It doesn't fit at all. But it's a complicated story, and anyway it's too late now." A few yards farther on, he came to a sudden halt. "The corner of that neck over there," he said, waving a hand toward the narrow, rectangular passageway that connects the General Assembly with the Conference Building. "You've probably heard a hundred and one criticisms of these Headquarters buildings, but somehow no one has ever jumped on that neck. I don't know how they missed it. It's not right—not right at all." The two men entered the Secretariat Building, and Harrison led the way down a back staircase. "If anyone was looking for something to criticize, that neck is certainly lousy," he said as he guided his companion into a subbasement, two stories below street level, where a battery of clerks were sorting mail. "This ceiling should have been at least a foot higher, too," he continued in a mournful tone. "None of us realized that those overhead pipes would take up so much space. It doesn't give the guys enough room."

The tour moved on briskly—a brief

examination of the twenty-third floor, which is a typical service floor, housing elevator, air-conditioning, and ventilating machinery, on to several office floors, then earthward by elevator and escalator and into the Conference Building, with its three council chambers, its numerous committee rooms and lounges, and its two restaurants, and finally, via the offensive neck, to the General Assembly Building. For the most part, Harrison was content to point out things that "we might have done better," but he was openly pleased when the young architect expressed his admiration for certain features of the buildings, such as the movable partitions in the Secretariat, which make it possible to rearrange the whole layout of a floor in a couple of days, and the parabolic sweep of the walls of the Assembly Hall, which gives an effect of intimacy to a domed auditorium that is only a little smaller than the Radio City Music Hall.

At the end of the tour, Harrison and his companion stood at the curb on First Avenue, waiting for a cab. "There'll be one along in a minute," Harrison said. "Six years ago, there wouldn't have been one in half an hour in this part of town. I don't suppose you noticed when we got in the taxi coming over that the driver knew right away where the United Nations was. Probably seemed to you the most natural thing in the world. But, silly as it may sound, that always makes me feel good—I mean the fact that the cabdrivers all know now where the United Nations is. Hell, back in '48, when we were starting the U.N., none of them knew what we were talking about."

—Herbert Warren Wind

(*This is the last of three articles on Mr. Harrison.*)

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Dr. Frank Willard Libby, the newly-appointed scientist member of the Atomic Energy Commission, is known as the inventor of the "atomic time clock," a device by which he has been able to determine the ages of objects up to 20,000 years old. This device will be used in Egypt as well. . . .

Thus it will be possible to determine the age of the mommies in Egypt.

—*Beirut* (*Lebanon*) *Star.*

The red-hot ones?

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NON-SEQUITUR DEPARTMENT

[*From the Springfield* (*Mass.*) *News*]

The custom of using mint sauce with lamb is very old as indicated by the following verse from a medieval era:

"Always have lobster sauce with salmon."