

Karel H. Yasko Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 12/14/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Karel H. Yasko

Interviewer: William McHugh

Date of Interview: December 14, 1966

Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.

Length: 124 pp.

Biographical Note

Yasko, Karel H.; Architect and Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Public Building Service, General Services Administration (1961-1969). Yasko discusses his role as an architect for the General Services Administration, the works and programs he was involved in, and the issues within the field of architecture, especially in regards to designing federal buildings. He discusses the impact John F. Kennedy [JFK] and Jacqueline B. Kennedy had on architecture and the arts, and JFK's issuance of guiding principles of design for the profession, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

No restrictions.

Usage Restrictions

Copyright of these materials have passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the

transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Karel H. Yasko, recorded interview by William McHugh, December 14, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Karel H. Yasko

Although a legal agreement was not signed during the lifetime of Karel H. Yasko, upon his death, ownership of the recording and transcript of his interview for the Oral History Program passed to the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

The following terms and conditions apply:

1. The transcript is available for use by researchers.
2. The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
3. Copyright to the interview transcript and tape is assigned to the United States Government.
4. Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request for a fee.
5. Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

Karel H. Yasko

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1, 16, 29	Yasko as an architect for the General Services Administration
2	Yasko's first interaction with John F. Kennedy [JFK] at an architect convention during JFK's campaign in Wisconsin (1960) and subsequent interactions
11, 17, 33, 42, 51, 81, 111, 120, 124	Federal architecture
14, 25, 30, 42, 48, 57, 66, 81, 93, 97	JFK's support for architecture and the arts and his issuance of guiding principles of design
18, 27, 54	Yasko's staff, acquiring and motivating them
35, 45	John C. Warnecke's background with JFK and his involvement in the Lafayette Square Project
34, 40, 45, 49	Jaqueline B. Kennedy's concern for cultural heritage and her involvement in architecture and fine arts
42, 52, 82, 90, 94, 124	Marcel Breuer and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] building
47	Yasko's relationship with the Fine Arts Commission
55	Yasko's work environment, pressures and influences
60, 83	Yasko's reservations about competitions and what they entail
66	Reasonable architecture and regionalism
74	Yasko's role in federal and local urban renewal programs
90, 99	Relationship between budget and quality architecture
95	Discrepancies between architecture and applied art
99, 108	Art in federal buildings
109	Finding building sites
111, 117	Yasko's involvement with the design for Pennsylvania Avenue
Addendum	<i>The Washington Post</i> : "Pork Barrel Syndrome: Plague of Federal Architecture," February 23, 1969

Oral History Interview

with

KAREL YASKO

December 14, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By William McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

McHUGH: Mr. Yasko, how were you first invited to fill this position?

YASKO: I was first invited through a telephone call from the American Institute of Architects, who had been working with Mr. Walton, Bill Walton, who apparently was representing the President in seeking somebody who would establish some leadership in design. And so it all started with that telephone call when I was state architect in Wisconsin at that time.

[-1-]

McHUGH: I see. How many years had you been state architect?

YASKO: I'd been three years as a state architect, and before that I'd had, oh, eighteen years of private practice. I was called down almost in the same way down to Madison as I was out here. I was, curiously enough, it was through that that I first met President Kennedy and had my first series of experiences. You know I got off on the wrong foot. Would you like to know about that one?

McHUGH: Yes, I'd be very interested.

YASKO: I think it was amusing because it pointed up a quality of Mr. Kennedy which naturally left an impression. It seems that, it was during the primary campaign where Mr. Kennedy was in face to face with Mr. Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey,] who, or course, comes from that part of the country, and who had a running start because the counties, particularly the counties along the Mississippi

[-2-]

River were unquestionably influenced by Minneapolis, and Mr. Humphrey was a popular man out there. So the campaign was a vigorous one, and the American Institute of Architects, the Wisconsin chapter, was having its convention in Madison at that time and I had been state architect for a short time when I was invited to be the master of ceremonies at our annual dinner, and it was right in the heat of the campaign, not too long before the actual primary election, which is in the spring, in April, I believe, and as the people were -- I have to give this in detail because I think it's all rather, a little tiny mosaic of an amusing incident. One of the members of the committee came up to me as the people were sitting at their places and announced that Senator Kennedy was in the hotel where he had his headquarters, the Lorraine Hotel, and he was going out to give some speeches

[-4-]

that night, would it be alright if he was invited to stick his head in? And I said, "Wonderful." And this is something architects should see, is a candidate for one of the parties for President. So he went and talked to Ivan Nestingen, who was then the Mayor of Madison, and who was taking an active part in the campaign, as was Bill Walton, whom I didn't know as of that minute, but I got to know later.

McHUGH: He was active in the...

YASKO: The Wisconsin campaign. He was handling -- he was more or less the state manager for the Wisconsin campaign which was, as you may remember, was a rather vital state in the primaries. And so he went to talk to Ivan Nestingen, whom he came down, if he could just get off the elevator which was right outside the dining room door, enough to put his head in so they could see him, and he said he would sure try, he though

[-4-]

he certainly would. And so word came back to me that they would be coming in, and the timing was just right, and it was purely by accident, because the group was just sort of getting organized, and they, of course, they had had a few drinks, so they were very vocal, and under the balcony which ran across the, over the front door came Mr. Kennedy, with this very beautiful lady, who was Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy.] So I waved them

up to come up to the table where I was to hold forth. And they did, and no one paid much attention to them as they made their way through the tables, and I think, partly because they were so busy talking themselves, and partly because they weren't necessarily Democrats. I think most of them there were more apt to be Republicans, Wisconsin having been a Republican state historically. In fact, they had their first Democratic governor in thirty years, who was the one who had invited me to Madison, and who was now a state senator. At any rate, he came up and I introduced myself

[-5-]

and then asked him if he would care to say a word or two, here to our architects of the state, and this was the first remarkable thing, that until he came off the elevator, which was probably two minutes before he had no idea that the place was infested with architects. And so he said he would, be happy to. So I took this long flexible microphone and asked the people to be quiet and mentioned the fact that we had here a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, and I thought that they would like to see one in the flesh. They probably had never seen one. And I said, "I introduce you to Senator Robert Kennedy." And with that, I turned the microphone, of course the place broke into an uproar because they saw him next to me and he certainly was nobody but John Kennedy. And he took the microphone, and without losing a grip, he said, "Yesterday I was in Eau Claire and a nice old lady came up to

[-6-]

me and said, 'Mr. Kennedy, I'm so glad that your sons are taking an active part in public life. I think that's wonderful.' So I said, 'Thank you, Madam, but I happen to be one of the sons, you're talking about my father.'" And he said, "Just before that I'd been up to Wausau where the skiing was pretty good," and which incidentally, is, where I came from, "and some of the young people got around me and said it was wonderful that I found time to ski up there last weekend, and I had to tell them that was my brother Ted [Edward M. Kennedy.]" So he said, "The best of all was, as you know, we haven't been married too many years, and I was over in Sheboygan and a very nice pair of ladies came up to me and said, 'It's wonderful that busy people like you can still find time to have a large family of children.' So I just had to sadly tell her that was my brother Robert."

[-7-]

And he took me off the hook so beautifully and, of course, I was impressed. And he talked about the responsibility of the architect. And the great regret of my life was that someone forgot to turn on the tape recorder, because here was an extemporaneous, spontaneous talk on the responsibility of the architect to society, as he said. He called it the exploding society, and that made a tremendous impact on those people, and I'm sure unwittingly he gained votes. But the sequel to it is even more interesting, I think. At that time, I had taken another job and left my family back in Wausau, which was a hundred and fifty miles north of

Madison, up in the snow country, and Friday nights I would take a plane which left Madison, it was scheduled at nine o'clock, but it could be one o'clock in the morning, but I'd be out there at the cold airport. I did this every Friday night and this one night, which was two or three weeks

[-8-]

after this incident, and by that time Mr. Kennedy was still running around the state, just about winding up the campaign. There was a little commotion in the waiting room because Mr. Kennedy's plane, the *Caroline*, was right outside the window on the runway, and people were going to see the candidate and all of his party. Well, then people began to gather, people I didn't know then, but got to know later. Salinger [Pierre Salinger] showed up and he was more or less leading the pack with his big cigar, and several other people. And then Ivan Nestingen, who I only knew slightly at that time, who has since become a good friend, and was the Mayor that I talked about. He had showed up, and they were all getting organized, but Mr. Kennedy hadn't, and there was much excitement, and I was standing out in the middle of the floor, more or less, of this waiting room, which wasn't too large. There must have been twenty people in the waiting room at that hour of the night.

[-9-]

That was the last plane out, so there was no reason for anyone to be there. And presently, Mr. Kennedy arrived, as I say, it was about twenty below zero or so, and he had on a light weight blue top coat, and no hat. It wasn't a very warm one, he had to all huddle up as he usually did, hunched up his shoulders, hands in his pocket, which helped keep his coat closed, and he chatted a minute or two with Ivan Nestingen and turned and spotted me, and he had only seen me that one night, and he comes striding over, as he did, a long stride with a grin on his face, he looked kind of tired, stretched out his hand and said, "Bob Kennedy's the name." [Laughter] I was taken aback, and I apologized for what happened that night, and he says, "Oh," he says, "you know, the big problem is those three stories were true, I didn't make them up, but they just seemed to fit." So we had a nice little visit and he went around and he was a face that was well known in Wisconsin

[-10-]

by this time. But he went around modestly and introduced himself as Jack Kennedy and he would appreciate their interest in his election, and so he made the rounds, talked to everyone just a minute or two, and he was obviously tired. It was not after ten o'clock, and I had set down on the hard benches, and so he came and plumped himself next to me, stretched out long legs, hunched his shoulders, and said, "If I fall asleep, wake me up before my crew gets here." And I said, "Okay." And he was off to sleep just like that, in sort of a reclined position on this hard bench. Nobody else bothered us. And after a little while, my plane began to roar in, and so I thought I better wake him up, so I tapped him and said, "Bob, Bob, it's time to go." He jumped up and said, "Yes, Ted." With that he grinned and off we went.

... well, through here, and we come in through, underneath, and up these open spaces, as you see we'll get much light from these

[-11-]

openings once.... But actually, what happens is this space up here closed, and they come out now underneath this Avenue, not like they did it here, you see. The problem is that we were trying to get the architects to fit in to this Pennsylvania Plan, and then people would move into under the building, and then there's this big tray the building being up on stilts, and people walk all around in that area, back in there, and...

McHUGH: This is Pennsylvania Avenue?

YASKO: Yes, this is Pennsylvania Avenue. This is the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] building, which is the keystone of our whole operation. But you see, you haven't seen how the Federal Building has a big hat on and big spaces in here, and people moving into charming, exciting new spaces, go up these big steps and come out and walk around. I'll tell you, this is the front of this which can, well after it's all been enclosed,

[-12-]

these are places opened, tourists, epeople, visitors. We are very excited, Matt Owens thinks it's going to be one of the great buildings of our time.

McHUGH: Well, that will be different from the monolithic structure there now, wouldn't you...

YASKO: Well, this is what they proposed, the architects proposed, that building over there. I brought this up to have the contrast, and the picture that's the contrast I left downstairs. But it's -- that would have been there, out here. One door at each end.

McHUGH: Did you have much success in educating the public to good design in government buildings especially?

YASKO: Well, now that you mention success, I think the closest you can come is acceptance, and the fact that they don't string you up, or demand your resignation, or being fired. A few people

[-13-]

have, there have been letters come in, insisting that the person responsible for this design should be immediately drawn and quartered, but those have been -- among twenty million people, maybe half a dozen. But as a rule, I think they're accepting. Of course, they haven't seen too much of the larger structures yet.

McHUGH: You felt there was a new attitude towards...

YASKO: I thought definitely there was the attitude, it couldn't help but have, at least, a fighting chance to do it, because the President was standing behind this and there had been this ad hoc committee report issued sometime before which had been, surprisingly enough, largely ignored, which contained the guiding principles for Federal architecture. And I felt that anyone who signed his name to that ought to see it implemented, and I found out when I came here that this had been put into the files,

[-14-]

and there was no one to push it. So I took that as my great mission, which is still the mission, is to fulfill the guiding principles which is what we have adopted as our charter for excellence in architecture and the arts. And in this paper, which is one that I give all the architects and I discuss it, and have them spread it around the offices, is not only a document for Federal architecture, but architecture and the arts as it relates to society. It's a magnificent paper. Which I understand Dan Moynihan [Daniel Patrick Moynihan] who is responsible for it largely, for putting it together. And since he spoke with, and for the President, and worked with him, this was truly a translation of the President's wishes and his thoughts. Moynihan wasn't inflicting this on the President as a political document, in fact, he had to slide it into this report, because on the surface of it it has no real place in

[-15-]

a study on Federal Office Space, numbers. And here, I think it was one of the great documents, this here paper, for the arts, that came out of Mr. Kennedy's Administration, or anyone else, including Mr. Johnson's [Lyndon Baines Johnson.]

McHUGH: That struck me as odd when I first looked at it, but this general title that it went under, I didn't understand the, as you say, the study in Federal Office Space, which has something like this, guiding principles of design.

YASKO: Curiously enough, if I might just touch on it, to show you that, I can speak like this, since I've only been here -- be four years in January -- but when I came here and found that there were only nine copies in all of the GSA [General Services Administration], and I wanted reprints, it took almost an act of Congress to get reprints made of that. I cut out the office space part. It was available at the

Printing Office in a limited quantity and they finally, after much persuasion, got an approval, I had two thousand

[-16-]

to three thousand copies printed, which I distributed at the AIA [American Institute of Architects] convention in Miami that April. So every architect who was there, and there were over three thousand of them, would know. And I gave a speech based on this thing also, that here is what I stand for, these are the Kennedy principles, and we better buckle down to them.

McHUGH: What did you think about Federal architecture before this? What were your general thoughts about it?

YASKO: I'll have to be very careful here so I don't be particularly catty. Well, it was dull, uninspired, and what one would expect from a bureaucracy, and it had the same quality that -- well, probably, it was a worse quality than we had at the state level at Madison, not that I had all the answers, but I had the enthusiasm to stimulate, which is

[-17-]

all I've been doing here, to get the excellence out of it. But I felt that there was no place to go but up. So no matter how little the improvement, it was an advance on what had been going before.

McHUGH: After your first few weeks in the job, what conclusions did you reach as to how you would have to move?

YASKO: Well, the first thing I had to do was to persuade my own staff people here that this was something that was in line with the President's wishes. I found that this is what I stand for, or say the Administration stands for. I had to invoke the President's name on it, and use it. And I have to admit, regretfully, that this was not enthusiastically received because we were operating under a schedule deal. Let's push the thing out quickly, and let's give them the proper space. Let the rest come what will. So the first thing I had to do

[-18-]

to win over the staff, and I'm not sure that they're all convinced yet, because it does mean hard work, and it means some thinking. It means stimulating, prodding. It's just a bigger job than it was before, where the GSA saw the architect once, probably twice, during the whole course of designing the project. Once, when he negotiated the contract; and once, when he came in for a project directive, which was about a fourth of the way through his drawing, and

never saw him again. And here I set up a system, which is still going strong, of having continuous contact with the architect through concept studies, and bringing him in whenever he could afford to come in, and it's been interesting to find that the architects have responded so well, without saying you pay me. But they come in voluntarily to -- want to talk about their projects, want to discuss their ideas. So

[-19-]

response in the profession has been excellent. The willingness has been great. The talent hasn't been as great as the willingness, but I think in time it will.

McHUGH: Was your budget and staff adequate to handle these problems?

YASKO: The staff was not, and it became increasingly worse. Mostly because the staff I inherited was rather octogenarian due to a rifting of people back in the late fifties, I understand, when a cut-back in personnel according to the rules of the game, the youngsters go first. So the oldsters were left. These are all people of thirty, thirty-five years experience, who had worked here under the system where the Government did it's own architecture. So this was the... They weren't adjusting to it, they didn't care for it. They still looked for the day, like the restoration of the monarchy, they were looking for the day

[-20-]

when we would do our own. And then as they retired, we weren't filling the positions, partly because talent was no available, and second, because the economy's unstable position, but yet our budgets grew bigger. So that the staff has not been adequate. We have filled in a few good people, but they're just not available, Government or private. It isn't that they're reluctant to come to work for the Government, I've managed to attract some of them, but there just isn't, on a national scale, enough talent to go around, sad to say.

McHUGH: This is not primarily a function of money is it?

YASKO: Well, part of it. It has been due partly to economic cutbacks, such cutbacks, and right now we're in that kind of a deep freeze where we have a great shortage of.... We have many vacancies of positions, but we're not authorized to fill them because we have to

[-21-]

show the economies.

McHUGH: What do you attribute shortage of talent to?

YASKO: Well, I think a large part of it is that our great society, or our own society in general, has moved along faster than we've provided talent and there's been a greater demand. Maybe it boils down to there's been a greater demand than the supply. The supply is based on a population smaller than we have. More people are aware of the abilities of architects and engineers. The talent shortage is true in both professions. I overlap in both of them, so I can speak from a position in both. There is a shortage in the building industry. Now engineers, the shortage, is due in part to the attraction from the exotic space programs, for one. They siphon off engineers who might be interested in buildings. In architecture some of them have too, but the

[-22-]

architectural school standards are still pretty high, so that we only graduate a few hundred each year and in a population of 200 million, and one that is becoming more aware of the need for design in their day to day activities. It just is a question of demand and supply.

McHUGH: Are the schools turning out people of caliber, that you feel, that are able to produce the type of design that...

YASKO: I think they're producing people in proportion to what would be normal the amount of talent. Actually, a designer of great skill, with ability, perceptivity, is a rare bird. And so probably in proportion, it's probably the same. Maybe it's a little less so. But, by the same token, we're turning out other people with less ability, who then come out, and as they pass their examination become registered architects and say, "I'm a designer because the school said I was." And they hang up their

[-23-]

shingles and they clutter the countryside. What do you do on that? I don't know, except, to have the public demand more from each of these architects, and maybe in time we will get this, I don't know. We do need more schools of architecture. We only have fifty in the country and the average graduating class maybe runs twenty, maybe twenty-five, because I think in a place like Illinois it graduates a couple of hundred, but most of them only graduate twenty-five or thirty a year. And out of that whole group, you get a handful of designers.

McHUGH: How many architects are there working for the General Services Administration?

YASKO: I'd guess, off hand, roughly a few hundred. That's for the whole country, see. We have ten regions around the country.

McHUGH: So one of the problems here presumably is

[-24-]

to assign an architect of design ability to work on important buildings. What's the cut off line there, on what is considered an important building, is there one?

YASKO: Well, our architecture is designed by private architects, this is the key to the whole problem. As Mr. Kennedy's guiding principles say, this architecture will come to the government from the profession, and not vice versa. This is one of the most significant statements in...

McHUGH: This was a new departure?

YASKO: Well, it was new in the fact this gave Executive blessing and incentive. They've began to make slight inroads in this area, but nothing to the point where, my gosh, this is where we're going to look for it. Where they had been, where agencies were applying to private architects and engineers, it was sort of a taken where they didn't give them direction. They strait-jacketed them and said, "This is what we want." This

[-25-]

business of the President saying that it will come from the architectural profession, and not vice versa, meant that we look to them. The best we can do to stimulate them. It's still a bit of a difficult thing to get agencies to adjust to, that principle that we don't give the architect something and let him be a draftsman or an engineer. We give him the program, and, "Here are the funds. Here is the problem. You solve it. All we'll do is ask questions."

McHUGH: I see, under this new program, what became of the role of architects who were already in the employ of the Government?

YASKO: Well, they served largely in directional capacity, and also as reviewers, project coordinators, pulling this thing around with the activities of the Government, get it through its various channels. And by being coordinators they offered the possibility of asking questions and putting in a demand for excellence. This is the great role that they

[-26-]

play, and the same goes for all the other phases of it, whether it's design, whether it's specification. But they serve as a tie between the profession which is solving the problems and the Government which is the user and the client. So there isn't a definite place for them.

McHUGH: So were you able to increase the competence of this staff of people

working for the Government to any extent?

YASKO: I would say that the people that I hired, and I hired very few. As I say, one, because they weren't available; second, we had restrictions; and third, the few that we came -- I was very selective and I don't think I put on, in those four years I've been here, more than half a dozen, and fortunately, they've all worked out extremely well. And one of them I put on because he sought me out, and using -- I was actually the symbol of Mr. Kennedy, because he believed in the principle, what can he do for his country. And

[-27-]

he gave up a good private practice, in fact, he had a very fine private practice, and he'd heard about me. I was the last straw that broke his back, what he wanted, to listen to Mr. Kennedy's question. He didn't quite know where he could find somebody that -- and not get lost in the Government -- then he heard what I was doing and he gave up his practice and came and joined us, and has been a tremendous guy, making less money than he made in; his own office strangely enough. And those that I have put on have turned out, not much to my surprise, I guess, only because there's a law of averages, but they've all worked out very well, and it has added to it. But it's been the willingness to carry more load with fewer people, and be selective in who you get on. And the run of the mill people, we don't want them. There's no point in adding to it.

McHUGH: Did you have a realistic amount of independence

[-28-]

to achieve your goals?

YASKO: I'm taking time here to phrase it, only that I want to get it clear, and see what we mean by the independence. I would say on this that I feel that I assumed independence in many of these areas because of my own peculiar nature of going in like a bull in a china shop. And going after what I believe in. And, of course, I was aided and abetted by the idea that Mr. Kennedy down at the White House was going to support me. I hadn't talked to him directly on it. And naturally, when you are turning the boat about in an area like design, from something that has been pretty stiff as -- you're going to make waves, and you're going to upset an awful lot of people, and you're going to worry them, because until they learn what you're trying to do they're at a loss, say, frightened of the unknown. And so there was much, I would say, quite a bit of internal unhappiness and disruption as to what was next,

[-29-]

and I was in constant hot water at that point trying to explain what we were trying to do. And a large part of it was due to the fact that we weren't meeting sacred, unrealistic schedules. My point being that creativity is not something that's turned on and off like a clock, and if you say we're going to have it done in four days, we don't know when we're solving it. SO this was the area that I had my most difficult time. They didn't understand the architecture. I could snow them under, perhaps, but this is where Mr. Kennedy, in his own way, and one that will give me thought, probably all the rest of my life, was how he knew it. And these were times when things got a little difficult, and pressures were on here, I would get a telephone call from someone, or I might meet them somewhere at some meeting or party, and they'd say they have a message from the President, which is, "Stay with it, he likes what you're doing, don't give up." This would be the tenor of it.

[-30-]

YASKO: Well, I was about to do that. Several times Auggie Heckscher [August Heckscher] called me, just out of the clear sky. I had known Auggie Heckscher at Yale where we went to school together. We were, strange enough, both in political science. And Auggie was then the President's Advisor on the Arts, and Auggie, out of a clear sky would call me and say, "I just saw the President and he asked me to call you and say, 'Don't worry, just stay with it. It will all take care of itself.'" Things of this nature. But I would say Auggie Heckscher probably called me three or four times. And even Roger Stevens when he came on, filled the same role. Charlie Horsky was another who served as a messenger at meetings where I would see him, he would.... And the thing that got me, the thing that I'll never understand, was how, because I never went running to anybody, even Bill Walton whom I got to know quite well, and who was on hand to greet me

[-31-]

the day I arrived in the name of the President, he brought this little message, how happy he was that I was here, and encouraging me to carry on as I had in Wisconsin, and they were having hopes. And I didn't go, maybe one or twice, I would confide in Bill, not so he'd go to the President, but I felt here was a guy who would understand. There's problems coming out of the Midwest into something like this, and these people would all bring messages to me, but how the President knew that I was having a rough time at that particular moment, I'll never know. Because there was nobody that I was knocking heads with, I'm sure, who ran to the President. But, how did he know that I needed just that kind of a lift at that time, and I asked Auggie Heckscher a couple of times on that, because it was becoming

[-32-]

almost like a pattern, that this is when I'd hear from him, would be just when I needed it. So I asked Auggie. He said, "I don't know, I just happened to be there. As I was leaving and he

knew that I was following your program. And he knew you were a Yale man, and he said he was a Yale man too, to give you this message.” But it was always most timely.

McHUGH: Did you have the impression that there was a direct White House concern, or concern on the part of the White House about buildings that were put up? How far did that concern extend?

YASKO: You mean the design of them?

McHUGH: Well, yes, the design of them.

YASKO: Well, I think the evidence of it was demonstrated even before I got here in the Lafayette Square Project, when the President stepped in and persuaded GSA to change architects on that design. The architects who had been engaged on

[-33-]

the development of it, were good, competent, traditional architects, of the highest order. They were at work on designs which were going to follow Cass Gilbert’s original classic treatment of a great, almost a forum, around Lafayette Square, demolition of the old buildings in the front. Actually a continuation of that fragment that stands over on the other side of the square, colonnades up on the second floor. It’ll be a small version of the Federal Triangle up there. And when Mr. Kennedy came in he was shown these drawings of this thing, and of course, it was to be around the White House, and Mrs. Kennedy. I think she was the one that let out the first screech, that this couldn’t be. I would say in this particular case she let out the first flag, the first gun. And he took it from there. He just couldn’t understand this happening in the twentieth century. By the nature of this architecture, plus

[-34-]

the fact that here was a heritage, that was a symbol out here. It was going to be entirely demolished and nothing left of it, and there’s an environmental problem. And he worried these architects and they kept making studies and as I say, they were men of high talent in their own particular area. And then when they reached the point where it was almost pointless for them to continue, they couldn’t seem to communicate. It was then Mr. Kennedy brought Mr. Warnecke [Jack C. Warnecke] into the picture, quite by accident. And that story, perhaps, you’ll get from Mr. Warnecke, he can give it to you best, but this was an accident where he got into the picture. But he came at the right point and Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy. Mrs. Kennedy, I think, was prodding him that the only thing to do now was to change and get somebody who could understand what we’re trying to do. And Mr. Warnecke, who had

[-35-]

known Mr. Kennedy -- by the way, are you going to talk to Mr. Warnecke at all?

McHUGH: I don't know, maybe you could describe it briefly. I...

YASKO: Well, briefly it was this. I'll give you a quick summary on it, as told to me by Jack. He had known Mr. Kennedy slightly through Paul Fay, who was a neighbor of his in California. When Mr. Kennedy was a Congressman, he had known Fay. He had been in the Navy. Every time he was out on the Pacific Coast he'd stay with Paul Fay. They had a gay time, and then Fay would invite Warnecke who lived across -- the yards backed to each other, and Warnecke had been a football player, I think at Stanford, played in the Rose Bowl. And the President, being interested very much in football, made quite a point of Warnecke, and he called him "Rose Bowl." So every time he was out there they got together and that's how they got to know each other.

[-36-]

And he didn't know he was an architect, of course, you know. And President Kennedy became President, and Warnecke was out here to be a judge at the A.E. Reynolds competition, I think it was, a large architectural competition. It was one of these big prize things. He was on the jury, and he had been in touch with Fay, while he was here, to say, "I'm in town, let's have a drink together." And Fay said, "Look, there's going to be a party at the White House" -- on an afternoon a couple of days later -- "for all the PT boat people and their wives are going to be there, why don't you join us?" Well, Warnecke said, "No, I'm not..." He said, "True, oh, I'll get your name on the list." And he said, "All right, I'll be done with this thing," -- on whatever day of the week it was, -- "and the next day, that's just right." So he showed up at the White House, and sure enough, his name was on there, it was J.C. Warnecke. And he's a tall, and I guess he must be six six and a rather handsome person. When he got in

[-37-]

there he saw Fay, and then all the PT men were off in one corner, and all the women in the other. Well, Mr. Warnecke, being an architect and interested in things beautiful, naturally migrated over where the girls were, was surrounded by them, and they found out he was an architect. They were talking about it, and all of a sudden he looked up and the President was elbowing him, and he says, "Ah, you are the Warnecke architect, I was trying to figure out." Of course, Jack thinks he was teasing him. But at any rate, he joined them and they had a visit and chewed the fat, and that was it. And that night he was celebrating the end of the competition or something and having quite a party and was staying at a local hotel. And when he got in rather late, he left word not to be disturbed until ten o'clock the

[-38-]

next morning. At ten o'clock the next morning the phone was bursting off the hook, and it was the President. And Warnecke was still suffering the effects of the party, and when the man said, "This is the President," he said, "Aw, sure," and he twitted him about it, not knowing it was Kennedy, mostly because he was still pretty sleepy. Then Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn Lincoln] got on the phone and said, "Mr. Kennedy would like to see you in a half an hour or so." So here he was, a big head and the rest of it. And so he got himself quickly showered up and dressed, and then the President said, "I'd like you to walk around Lafayette Square with Bill Walton and have a little visit with him," not saying anything about what he had in mind. And as Warnecke says, "I could hardly remember who I was, I was still pretty fog headed." So he and Walton, and I'm not sure he knew Bill at all, at that point, they got up and walked all around the Square

[-39-]

and Bill was discussing the history of the Square, which Warnecke didn't know much about, and talked about possibilities. And then Walton was asking for suggestions. And Warnecke didn't even know there was a sturdy going on for the entire Square. So he got all excited and began to think up some ideas, and talked and talked for a couple of hours, and they parted company. And this was around noon, and off they went. Four o'clock in the afternoon he gets a call, and said he's expected at the White House, the President wants him for a visit. So he did, and Mrs. Kennedy was there, and a couple of people. So the President says that, "Bill says that you have some pretty hot ideas on what could be done up here at Lafayette Square. Would you mind telling Jackie and the rest of these people here what some of your ideas were? And poor

[-40-]

Warnecke had no recollection of anything that he had said to Walton through this fogginess in his head in the morning and there he was. Well, Bill Walton, apparently, was perceptive enough to know that Warnecke was at a loss, so he began to feed him a few cue words on it, and took off. And this struck everyone as being a darn good solution, which is really what was finally worked out. And then the point was how to get Mr. Warnecke into the picture. Now the architects who were on graciously backed out and GSA, which was handling the project, who still is, then engaged Mr. Warnecke to make the design. The one that's coming up now is one that Warnecke conceived, and in which the Kennedy's played a very large part, because all sketches and everything, were cleared with them, and they studied them. So they knew every aspect of it. They were very intimately wrapped up in it.

[-41-]

McHUGH: I see. Did you, other than this, were you ever aware of the President's tastes in architecture?

YASKO: I wouldn't say directly, except, just the key word that he was looking for excellence and quality. And this is a pretty large philosophic word, and I felt that if you're on the same wave-length, I think you understand each other. And since he was still with us when some of the designs were being published of things that I had been sponsoring, since I had only good words. In fact on the Breuer Building, which was the first building of significance that came out of my direction, the word came from the White House that they were very pleased with what they saw. And I took this as a cue, which was a building different than any Federal building in Washington. I don't know whether you've seen the sketches on it or now. Have you?

[-42-]

McHUGH: Are you referring to...

YASKO: Now the HUD Building.

McHUGH: Yes.

YASKO: It's this one, which as you can see, doesn't look like any Federal building that's in Washington, and Marcel Breuer being one of the world's leading architects, while he was born in Hungary, is an American. This shook up everyone, including my own organization. And Mr. Kennedy did see these drawings on these things, liked it, and of course, if you get that kind of sponsorship for something that was, in a sense, a radical departure, well, you knew that you were in pretty good shape. I thought this was an example of his trust in me. I was going to interpret what he meant by excellence and quality. He wasn't going to lay down any rules, because he said, "It has to come from the profession," all you have to do is -- somebody's got to stimulate.

[-43-]

McHUGH: Was there any concern on the part of Congress or anyone that this was being done by someone who wasn't a native American -- Mr. Breuer did become an American?

YASKO: Oh, yes, he's been a citizen for a number of years.

McHUGH: Is that so?

YASKO: In fact three of the leaders of the pack, none of them are American born. One of them, Walter Gropius, who is acknowledged pretty much to be the leader, by some strange coincidence of fate, designed the building in Boston, which is now the John F. Kennedy Office Building.

McHUGH: Oh, he was responsible for that building.

YASKO: He was responsible for it. So it was one of these interesting things that one of the leaders of the world should have wound up being the -- designed the building named after Mr.s Kennedy in his own town.

McHUGH: Who was the other architect you were referring to?

[-44-]

YASKO: Mies van der Rohe, in Chicago.

McHUGH: Mrs. Kennedy, of course, had very definite likes and dislikes. She was, as you said, the first one who spoke out on Lafayette Square. In general, her concern was to -- that the architecture should reflect the spirit of the times?

YASKO: In Lafayette Square, particularly, she was sensitive to its historical heritage. And she felt that this should not be disregarded, nor should we be reproducing on the Square, the architecture of the nineteenth century, but somehow we should bring about both. And this turned out to be a tougher job than it would appear because Lafayette Square went through several periods of history. This was a -- the tough job that Warnecke had, picking a period in the nineteenth century and sticking to that one. If you were going to try to recreate what

[-45-]

you call the early nineteenth century, or the middle, or the end. So he took a period about the middle of the nineteenth century. And her concern was that we have some tie with the past as well as to here in the present, and that she believed that it was possible to get qualities of both, and that were compatible, and she was exactly right. She still is in this point.

McHUGH: Was there a stylistic term to refer to that period?

YASKO: No, you can't. The closest you can come was Victorian, and the Victorian age in architecture, as it was in history, stretched over a large part of the nineteenth century, and not as is commonly supposed, just the tail end of it. Victoria was in there for a long time, and in her period, or reign, even the Victorian architecture and styles, whether clothing or architecture, took many changes, although this was less of the -- well, it was the middle period. There were only two left of the last part of the

[-46-]

century where you've got jimcrackeries and a lot of the grossness in it.

McHUGH: What relationship did you have with the Fine Arts Commission?

YASKO: A pretty direct one. This was an interesting aspect of it. As I told you earlier, Mr. Bill Walton, who became chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, and is still chairman, had quite an active part in my, I mean, his role in me coming here, was an activist one, representing the President as he did. One afternoon I called him because he suggested that some afternoon when on my way home I stop by for a drink, he wanted to visit. So I did, and what he had in mind was the President had asked him to submit some names of people who would be considered for the Fine Arts Commission, because strangely enough, five members were retiring at the same time, even though it was set up for staggered six year terms. Mr. Truman [Harry S. Truman] had allowed some to lapse

[-47-]

and by the time he caught up, this was replacing the Fine Arts Commission almost as a whole, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise, that so many of them were...

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

...retiring at that particular point. So Bill asked me to think of some names, and we -- do you want this recorded?

McHUGH: That's fine.

YASKO: Oh is it going?

McHUGH: Yes, it reversed.

YASKO: Oh, how interesting. So we kicked around that afternoon names of quite a few people that we might consider because, as he said, the President believes that if you're going to be doing this you should have someone who understands what you're doing, and he thinks you ought to at least suggest some people that might be simpatico, which I thought was, again, you see, the President with all the things he had to do, this was an overriding concern, was what would help me

[-48-]

achieve this thing in architecture. He wasn't telling me this. This was why he was wonderful. He doesn't make an issue, but somebody dropped the bill. So we kicked around names and the one name we didn't have on it, one because it didn't seem like this was quite the spot, was Walton, himself, although he mentioned that the President suggested he take it. And Bill didn't want to be tied down with that, and eventually the President did convince him to

become a member and a chairman of it. And the one thing that Mrs. Kennedy wanted, she wanted to have -- she made two points that she wanted. She wanted to be able to name one of them, or recommend one name, and she also wanted to be sure that there was a lady on there, on the Fine Arts. So that message came through, of course. As far as her naming one, she'd have to make her own decision, but on the subject of what lady would be on it, we, Bill and I thought of a few names, and one of them was Aline Saarinen

[-49-]

who was then appointed as one. But curiously enough, the list that we more or less made up wasn't quite the list that Mr. Kennedy picked, but there were names on the people we wanted. And what he was trying to do, aided and abetted by Bill, was to give me somebody that would work with me, and it's turned out just that way. They've been wonderful this way, i that they weren't "yes men," but they were great supporters. They had a tough time at the beginning because they were all new to government operation, and John Warnecke, Jack Warnecke, was a member, Gordon Bunshaft, Aline Saarinen, Sasaki [Hideo Sasaki], landscape, Roszak [Theodore Roszak]. sculptor, and Dean Kelly [Burnham Kelly] from Cornell. These were all people unfamiliar with the operations of government and the problems involved. And they have been an excellent Fine Arts Commission. They've been gadflies when necessary. They've

[-50-]

been tough. They've been supporters. And as far as I'm concerned, personally, this has spelled the difference of me being able to continue to try for excellence in architecture, because, particularly here on the Washington level, they've supported it in letters to the Administrator. They've gone on record supporting these designs and the FBI is a very good case in point, the FBI building, which has been on design now for over three years, a large part of it is because I was determined to follow the Pennsylvania Avenue Plan which was also a part of Mr. Kennedy's legacy to us. And hadn't Dallas hadn't happened he was going to make the announcement endorsing this very shortly afterwards. So I took this because it was a good plan, and because it was part of one of the things that brought me here. the FBI building is a symbolic building in this respect, and we're winning out. We're

[-51-]

getting a building that conforms to the plan, and not a box building like you see on that. The one on the right is the architect's interpretation. That first sketch is one of what a Federal Building would be for the FBI. The building is now designed. Unfortunately I don't have a drawing up here. It couldn't be any more different than that than the man in the moon. It's a very remarkable building.

McHUGH: How did you happen to get, or could you tell me some events, surrounding having Brauer do the design for the HUD Building?

YASKO: Well, it was a case of laying it on the line. That is making a strong issue for it with GSA, that if we're going to start making it up we'd better get somebody of high quality, and I went to bat with the administrator who made the final choices, and he was not amiable to the idea at all. Then I think he

[-52-]

got some of his encouragement from some of the people who had been here a long time, because just the name Breuer and a few things they'd seen indicate this might be a radical man. He'd be difficult to work with. And so I got involved in quite a heated discussion on the subject. Of course, it turned out they had somebody else in mind, some pedestrian architect, who'd have done a competent Federal Building, period. But to have made a contribution to Washington and Federal architecture, they never would have done it. This architect wouldn't have. It was a question of him Breuer now. You'll get him, but it's your neck. Well, it wasn't my neck because Mr. Breuer's whole performance has been magnificent. Not only has he given a big spark and a key to Federal architecture, but he also did it within the money so he proved that quality is not necessarily

[-53-]

expensive. This is one of the remarkable things.

McHUGH: Did the talented architects, that you were able to get, prove difficult to work with?

YASKO: Not a one, not a one. I think it's like always, where you have talent. They have a certain amount of security so they're not worrying about the petty things. I think the difficulty comes from those who are insecure in their competence. We've had some pretty talented people, and every single one of them has been very simple to work with. Mies van der Rohe was considered a very difficult person, and no one could be more charming, more understanding, than Mies van der Rohe's been with it. Walter Gropius once in a while, gets a little crotchety, but that's -- after all, he's eighty-seven years old. But he has also been a very simple, understanding man to work with, I think he has the vigor of a young one.

[-54-]

No, I'd say to sum it all up, that the more talent that is available in the architect, the easier he is to work with.

McHUGH: This triumvirate aside, did you find that you were able to get the architects who were working to produce the designs they were capable

of producing?

YASKO: I'd say the batting average has been pretty good. I'd say we could feel that we've achieved something, that they have. It hasn't always been easy because many of these people haven't been stretched to see what they have had. Interestingly enough, I've had a couple of architects willing to submit to sort of masochism, I guess you'd call it, to see just how much talent they have got. I had one guy who -- is the word flagellation? -- really submitted himself to this kind of thing, just pounding him to see how much talent he had. And by gosh, he has a great deal of it. He's going to be one of our -- he's a young architect -- going to be one of our leading architects.

McHUGH: What is his name?

[-55-]

YASKO: His name is John McGough, M-C-G-O-U-G-H, he has an office in Spokane and the job he's doing for us out there, a Federal Building and

Court House, is going to be remarkable in that it's brick and is not one that is, isn't a building that is going to go down as an exotic form, a novelty. It's a fascinating building done in brick, a large Federal Building, eleven stories high. It's a tower and it's going to be quite remarkable. And that bothered a lot of Federal people. Who ever heard of a building, an eleven story building in an "old fashioned material." True, the Romans used bricks, but it's no reason why that should stop us.

McHUGH: You expressed a concern at one time about architects being unwilling to explore new ideas and to really come to grips with some of these problems, to knock themselves out over the creation. Did you feel that you were able to impart some of this atmosphere to...

[-56-]

YASKO: I think I have, and again, I used Mr. Kennedy's guiding principles. It's been a remarkable document to fall back on because I have found amongst the architects always a great admiration for what Mr. Kennedy was trying to do. They sensed it even though they were out in the hinterlands, and you couldn't get from them any specific instance, just as you asked me, any specific instance where they'd say, "This is what he said, therefore, I'm going to do it." But they had a sense, they felt comfortable in the fact that they could. But it hasn't been -- it wasn't always an easy job to get it out of them. It's required a goosing technique, if you want, a prodding, and even a slugfest. One of the earlier stages, the young architects, the young men, I really did slug. And I'll have a mental block the rest of my life. But I'd gone to bat for these young people. I thought they had talent. They were out in the Midwest, and when they brought in their

[-57-]

first sketches, I had given my lecture on the Guiding Principles on excellence and quality, given them a copy of the Guiding Principles, and when they came in they were doing Federal architecture, and they were all men bigger than I and younger, who wanted to respond but I couldn't communicate when they came in for a critique. Our sessions, which are critique sessions are really only questioning periods, the critique method being that, as opposed to "Do it this way," we just asked them. It wasn't getting across, and I was beginning to lose a little patience, which is not my usual trend, and without thinking twice, I hauled off and slugged this one man, and almost broke his shoulder, asked him to get -- "Has it come through?" And he admitted he did. And it shook him up, because he said the reason he would believe me, but he didn't feel that it would get all other agencies in Government and this is

[-58-]

what they wanted. So he had been thoroughly brainwashed. He couldn't believe it was quite for real that somebody was going to pound him. I've never pounded anyone since, but it still amounted to the sum of that. Some others responded, I think, very well, and then, of course, there's a percentage against you. There's enough pedestrians in the whole business that you can only get to their limits of talent, and we have to accept the fact that the talent varies in each person. There's a little bit in each of them. There's a lot in some, and those some are very few, but there is. But what we tried to do is get the most that's in them, whether it's an inch or a yard. And that's all we can expect. Then I think we do reflect American architecture. If we would just have people who have talent do architecture you'd have people who have talent do architecture you'd have no bench mark, and no criteria. You've got to have it all. And this is our culture, our culture is uneven, no matter where you look at it, and

[-59-]

therefore, it's uneven. It's creativity and architecture is the greatest creation of them all.

McHUGH: Were outside influences in the choice of an architect strongly felt?

YASKO: Candidly, there were. And this was one of my battles, was to keep out these influences. And this again, I think, and I couldn't cite a single instance of it, except that the tenor changed that Mr. Kennedy did, because he got the word. This again, he found out about my unhappiness over such things and he avoided it himself. In fact, on one particular project he was considering having a competition for it. And I was asked to write a little paper on competitions, and I wrote a paper advising strongly against a competition -- all the pitfalls. And it went to the White House, and it came back to me by way of the administrator saying that "Couldn't this be modified a bit?"

[-60-]

I don't know what -- so it would leave a little leeway. Well, it seems that this particular project in this particular area, there was a Congressman whom Mr. Kennedy thought he owed something, because he had been helpful, and this man suddenly had come forth and wanted to name the architect on the job. Mr. Kennedy's -- somebody looked over the qualifications, and they thought this architect just was a pedestrian. So Mr. Kennedy thought that if we had a competition he could get out of this little how, because this was the only job the man wanted, he wasn't going to appoint him for any other job, he wanted this particular one. So if it went into a competition then Mr. Kennedy says, "Look, it's in a competition, I can't." And so that kind of pressure. But it began to -- in time began to ease up considerably. And I think it's decreased tremendously. There's much less of it now than there used to be. But it's bound to be, I think, in a political structure. There

[-61a-]

always has to be a certain amount of pressures, it's just a question of resisting the pressure. In that particular job, incidentally, there was no competition and a highly competent architect was chosen in the normal course of events. And the Congressman, or whoever this political figure was, had nothing to do with it. But somehow, Mr. Kennedy appeased him, because there was no embarrassment or anything else.

McHUGH: Do you think there's any process by which, or any way, that the selection process could be removed from politics?

YASKO: Well, I keep saying that, and I keep insisting it can, because I believe it can. Our Federal structure may have its variation. The reason I believe it can is, in contrast to saying, "I feel it can," I believe it can because when I was State Architect in Wisconsin, I made a choice of architects. I introduced the program of

[-61b-]

private architects in the state government. And Wisconsin was on its way with one of the biggest programs it ever had, and has continued it. It's a program that's fantastic for a state of that size. And I -- all I was told by the Governor was, "We want some good architecture. We want some quality architecture. You take it from there." I chose the architects and many of my friends I never gave a commission to. I could be as ruthless in that particular area as anyone could be. And there was never a single bit of pressure from anyone, in any form. The closest that anyone could suspect is and think it was a rather amusing commentary on this, was after I'd been in Madison for a short time, my secretary announced that an assemblyman in the legislature wanted to see me, named Glotz, or some German name. And so I thought this was the beginning of the pressure. My office was located on the same proximity

[-62-]

in there as it is here, where the legislature's up on the Hill and the office buildings are down below at the lake. So the door opened and here was this nice, quiet, little man that looked like a farmer, with his hat in his hand. And I extended my hand, and said, "Won't you come in?" And he said, "No, thank you, I've seen you. One of my constituents asked me to see you. I've seen you, and you look pretty good to me. Good-bye." So I invited him in and showed him just what I was beginning to do and tell him about it, and he was so embarrassed because he said, "My business is up on the hill, your business is here, and I've done what I was told to do." And so that's as close as any political thing you can prove. And it proved we could do it, and not only were we able to do it outside of any political pressure, but I went out of the state of Wisconsin and I got architects if necessary to fulfill the program. If the quality

[-63-]

was there for a particular project, why, we went to New Orleans for Curtis Davis, Chicago for Harry Wiess. So it can be done. And the fact that we've got -- most of our projects now are comparatively free of such pressure -- proves that it can be.

McHUGH: In judging the qualifications of an architect of course his education would be important, but was your primary guide things that he had done? How could you determine whether...

YASKO: Well, this is all you have to judge is his performance. What has he done that has sparked the environment? What contributions has he made to society? And, of course, you have to look at, no matter what guidelines you set up, as a personal introduction here, and interpretation of what your goal is. Our goal is to fulfill the qualities of excellence and the interpretation of architecture being a part of our environment, and it affects the environment as a whole. We applied a criterion based on that. Which is now becoming accepted by many people, that

[-64-]

a building is not an isolated edifice plunged into the landscape, but is part of a whole. So working on that theory. And the other is that architecture is for me. Man is a measure of it, so you can take the environment and the building functions. So we try to analyze the performance of the architect. If possible, go see work he's done, or next best is by photographs. Has he fulfilled the mission he set out to do, which is to make something worthwhile?

McHUGH: Was there concern expressed about the fact that some of this architecture seemed to well, emanate from the Bauhaus or the fact that it didn't express anything American, particularly.

YASKO: No, this is very curious that the word Bauhaus has never entered the

picture, nor anything not American. The closest to any identification is modern architecture.

[-65-]

I don't think you can tire them, because, well, the Bauhaus is underneath. Corbu, Corbsier is a tremendous factor in so much of this thing, and his disciples. Mies van der Rohe [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe] has his group. The thing you try to do, what I tried to do in this thing, and I think we succeeded in just enough projects to keep us going, is not seeking American architecture per se, or anti-Bauhaus. It is to -- architecture interpreting the area in which it is to be located, not the block, but the geographic area. And in the *Guiding Principle for Federal Architecture* your attention is called to a reasonable architecture, reasonable effects on architecture. And we made a great issue of this. One, because I believe in it, and that's why I say this paper says it

[-66-]

better than all my long-winded speeches. It pits the words. Architecture is created by people who respond to geography, climate, ethnic groups, economics, time. These create an architecture in that particular area. This is regionalism. The time probably has an effect on it. And so picking that up, the regionalism, this is what we have stressed with architects. Don't be putting a Lincoln Center in Independence, Missouri. But study that area of Independence, Missouri. Study Missouri and find out what brought about the architecture that you see there. And believe it or not, in spite of the fact that we have standardization on a broad scale in this country where you can take, you can get a Colgate's toothpaste in New York, or San Francisco, or Roswell, New Mexico, or you can get a Paper Mate pencil, or you can get -- these are some of the things, and you can see coming from airports, anytown USA, gas stations, hot dog stands. You see

[-67-]

rambler houses. But in each of these communities they have still retained a hard core of a flavor that is inescapable, and no standardization, I don't think, will ever wipe it out. There may be a shift, perhaps, by an ethnic group, of some kind. There'd be some shift, but the hardcore's been established. It was brought about by all these external forces working on the people, plus their own generation. So with this kind of a thing, and, of course, supporting it is right again back to the Guiding Principles. We have had some rather interesting successes, and we have learned something. I have, for one. And I consider myself slightly knowing architectural history. I've learned something because of this, and because of an area, region of our country. This is in Nevada. It's hard for people to believe that Nevada has an architecture of its own that is not Las Vegas, but it's an architecture that has been influenced by the most amazing group of

[-68-]

people, and these were the Chinese. We had a building going up in Carson City. It's under design. And a very perceptive architect who went to Princeton got the job. He listened to my design spiel on this regionalism and this ethnic group, the whole business I'm giving you here, that I usually develop for architects even further than that. And he came back sometime later with a whole suitcase full of pictures. These were photograph, drawings to show what architecture was in Nevada. And I didn't believe Nevada had an architecture, except some old ghost towns, perhaps, or what was in Las Vegas, or Reno. But it seems that, and the evidence is in the photography, that when the railroad was going through Nevada in the nineteenth century wherever they felt they wanted to set up a town, this might be a place, and it was probably based on the fact that after

[-69-]

a hundred miles or so they needed to refuel, or get some water. They dropped off a team of collies, who would be the laborers on this thing. And they'd leave behind -- they'd pick out of the collies, one that they thought was articulate and probably could understand, although few of them, very few of them, even understood English. They'd leave behind a Caucasian foreman to get the thing started, who would then draw on the back of a piece of wood something he wanted. And the usual thing they built, the first thing they built was a freight station, or the railroad station. And then they put up some other buildings around it. And this particular railroad station in Carson City is an excellent example. This man drew a simple sketch of a pitched roof, a building some forty, fifty feet long, most common looking building. Just a pitched roof and that was it. Made of stone, now

[-70-]

made of stone because they won't burn. Native stone, right there, and that they could quarry right across the city. And the foreman must have understood something about structures, because the ends of this building, due to the fact where you had this high wass, where the pitched roof came, had to be stiffened structurally. You do it two ways, you make a wall thicker than it has to be at the bottom to hold this thing up, or you put pilasters. It's the most common one. The pilasters are spaced at the third points, and they go up vertically, and they intersect the roof at an acute angle. So he drew this sketch for this Chinese forman, and then said this is the way you do it, with the pilasters, and off he went. Well, he didn't tell him how to build the pilasters or the principle of it, just drew this thing in. So the oriental mind said we don't know how to do it, but we'll do it our own way. They made the

[-71-]

wall thicker by four inches which was the thickness of a pilaster and then they chiseled out all the stone except the pilaster. But to top it off, instead of running the pilaster vertically so it intersected at an acute angle when it got up to about the eave end, they bent it so it intersected the slope at right angles, so you had these two curving things. Well, this is an

oriental contribution. But the most significant one, and this is a little tricky, was the windows and door openings are not the same proportions as we are accustomed to, which brought home the fact that Grec -- we're so strongly influenced by the Greco-Roman sense of proportion and design that we believe those to be universal and they are not. And if you ever get to Nevada, go look at these things. They're all over the state, mostly stone buildings, and this is the most glaring example, and they're very pleasant. They're a little taller, a little narrower, yet, I can't, and I believe I have a

[-72-]

Western mind, something due to my exposure, can't just sit down and sketch it. I couldn't do it for you right now, and give you those proportions. But this is a bit of Oriental architecture. Had we not asked the architect to pay attention to regionalism he would have done something that's common across the country. And up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, we did a wonderful job. The architects responded magnificently there. The only true, Georgian town in this country, Williamsburg included, where architecture was being done in the time of the Georges, when Georgian architecture got its name, done by local craftsmen in Portsmouth. So we have a tremendous heritage there. Yet the building that was designed is not archaeological, is not a restoration, is not a copy, but has the most wonderful flavor of the town, so much so, that both historical

[-73-]

societies think it's marvelous. I think it's a very swell job in a contemporary idiom, expression of the idiom. Well, this is our sense of regionalism, and this is how we got it. So we have tried to maintain the flavor, the architects are responding, as long as we're not out to get something archaeological about it.

McHUGH: What role did you play with Federal and local urban renewal programs?

YASKO: Well, I'm getting a good chance to review what I've been doing, in my stewardship. Well, technically, our role at GSA is almost a zero one, in those areas. The closest we come to it is that we participate by getting a piece of land in an urban renewal area. Because the city -- we're looking around for a piece of land, and the city says, "Well, take this one, help us along." This we have been

[-74-]

doing. And technically, this is about as far as we would be going. However, I picked this upso, and except for the fact that going into urban renewal areas, this is our chance for leadership, which is what we want to do in a community. We go into these communities, not with both feet and plunk it down and say this is Federal architecture. Our leadership should be more subtle, in that we're just ahead of them. We can't be so far ahead that they lose

track of us. So through the urban renewal, by coming up with a piece of quality architecture, and a good case in point is going to be Portland, Oregon, Wilmington, Delaware, where we'll lead the way by doing just something a little better, but also channeling the dreams of the community. Where they have these urban renewals they have plans, so we go along with them, and as far as we possibly can, to help them fulfill their ideas of

[-75-]

developing these areas. They have plans. Many of them have civic centers, and they have these things. So we will participate in the plan. In Wilmington, Delaware, is an excellent example of our participation and our leadership in getting it straight -- straightened out. In this particular area the city wanted to develop, in a sense, a civic center, two blocks off Rodney Square, the main intersection, one block off Main Street and Market Street. So for a couple of years they wrestled with GSA about what we're going to do because of the communication problem. I went up there to have a meeting with everyone in the town involved in it and they talked about having a city building, a country building, the Federal Government, and they also had to have some business in the area, some commercial to make it pay. And my biggest contribution was asking the question, "Why don't you hire a professional planner of quality?"

[-76-]

And for some reason, that had eluded them. And they did. Of course, first thing was, "how much does it cost?" I gave them an estimate, twenty-five thousand dollars, just out of a clear sky. The next morning they hired one of the top Ian McHary and Dave Wallace of Philadelphia, who did a magnificent job. When the Federal Building takes its place we contribute. We're not sacrificing a single part of the Federal image. The state was now going to enter into this thing, would tie the whole community in with four bridges. The only other contribution I made was a suggestion that we buy a strip of land about forty feet wide from this area, that one block to the main street so the people would flow, a matter of tying off the main street and this area would have commercial facilities. So it would be alive at five o'clock when the Federal Building closes, and the rest of them. There is much life, and

[-77-]

there's terraces and things of this sort. The city bought the plan magnificently. They're going to implement it. We feel we've accomplished some leadership. We encouraged them to do this thing. We're going to fulfill our part, to a point where to make the thing really work you have to provide parking. To make the thing really flow, they had to come on the outskirts of our property underground, to get to theirs, which really was no problem. So we're granting an easement. This is cooperation to make the urban renewal succeed. Does this give something of an answer to it? So we are participating in every community we can. We offer our services and our assistance as far as we can go.

McHUGH: Does that type of situation arise very often where you're...

YASKO: Oh, I'd say sure. We're getting, I think right now probably have half dozen of such areas. Every community just sits back in

[-78-]

amazement that we are not coming in with both feet and telling them what to do. We go along with their plan. We'll contribute professionally any advice that we can, and try to have these things working together.

McHUGH: Was it a problem to find really professional local architects?

YASKO: In Washington?

McHUGH: Well, no, I was thinking around some of these other areas that you were working.

YASKO: Yes. There are local architects, who -- now of course, it's "where is your standard and how do you equate them?" So by our standard we have found in quite a few towns, in a degree, you're missing. So we go outside the city. We operate on a principle that we're still within the state. We try to avoid going out of the state to find an architect for a project in the state. And so far, we haven't gone out of the state. Washington is considered national game, so we bring national

[-80-]

architects. But, if you take the state of Nebraska, for instance, or Iowa, or Wisconsin, we'll look in the city or town where the project's to be located first, and then we take our increasing large circle. We'll go to the state, we'll try to favor a local one, but we'll not sacrifice on the basis of the parochialism, or provincialism -- "You live here, therefore you get the job." If somebody up in the state capital or some little town, we believe has got more talent and can do it, we will do that.

McHUGH: Were you aware at whose behest the ad hoc committee on office space was formed, how that came to be formed, the ad hoc committee on office space?

YASKO: Moynihan's name was on it. The actual committee members signed it. Do you have a copy of that?

McHUGH: I think I...

YASKO: I was just going to offer you.... If you didn't

[-80-]

have one, I'd get one for you.

McHUGH: Oh, I see, okay.

YASKO: Well, if you have one...

McHUGH: I was curious how, where the initiative came from.

YASKO: I'm not sure where that thing came from.

McHUGH: Well, I was going to ask the question whether you find the Guiding Principles difficult to adhere to, was there any particular one that gave you a lot of trouble?

YASKO: The Guiding Principles? No, everyone of them said everything I wanted to say, and said it better.

McHUGH: Did they express the desire for buildings that had dignity and friendliness at the same time? Did these seem contradictory values?

YASKO: No, not at all. If you interpret dignity as being something related to the human being, it must be warmth. I think probably dignity has been so often associated with stuffiness. But dignity in my sense would be a person with true majesty

[-81-]

has dignity.

I haven't seen too many of the -- in fact, I haven't seen any of the bigger buildings because it takes so long a period to design and build. But as HUD is going up now, and is my first building, you realize that, this is, oh, now, will be the fourth year. It takes a couple years to get them designated and built. So I think within the next year, the first impact from the finished buildings, the designs themselves, when they were published, caused a lot of favorable publicity. The architectural magazines and the newspapers were most enthusiastic. And our finished product of course, where people who don't see any of these will judge. And to date, we've had some very favorable comments on what they see coming up. And this is the man on the street. This isn't the man that has some idea what's going on.

McHUGH: I see. You mentioned before you had strong reservations about competitions. What were some

[-82-]

of -- this is a time honored way of doing these things -- what were some of the problems you felt that they....

YASKO: Well, one of the first reasons is probably economic. A competition as a rule is wide open and anyone can enter it. It usually is restricted, perhaps, to architects or registered architects and sometimes it doesn't make any difference who can do it. It caused quite a bit of money today to get any kind of work done in the office, and it takes quite a sizeable amount of money for an office of any talent to take part in a competition. This could cost them twenty thousand dollars for a ten thousand dollar prize to enter a competition. So, as a rule, you get most of the entries and some of the people who have been running competitions have found this out. They've been trying -- some of them have given up competitions because they attract either the young man who's fresh out of school and, perhaps,

[-83-]

doesn't have a family, doesn't have an office so he does this at night, and it's not costing him very much money. And he comes up with a design idea and, perhaps, it's judged, but then has to find somebody and has to teach him how to build it. So it gets to be a complicated case. And Boston City Hall was a case in point. That in order to make that function, and that was a competition and there was much hoopla when these young men won it, and I happen to know them, but they didn't know how to build it.

McHUGH: You mean from an engineering standpoint or how to make it function?

YASKO: No, how to make the building work, which is architecture, not engineering. How to make the building work, and how you stand it together, and how does it go together. So they had to hire a Boston firm, and they hired a good one, Aldrich and Campbell, or Campbell and Aldrich, who then proceeded to put the thing together. Well, the first thing they did

[-84-]

was took a lot of the spots off the plan, which is known as poche, and they thought that was pretty good stuff.

McHUGH: When you say spots, what are you referring to?

YASKO: Well poche, in the plan they looked like columns, you see.

McHUGH: Oh, yes.

YASKO: So they just erased a whole bunch of those, which threw these young fellows into a tizzy, because they felt that they were unnecessary, absolutely unnecessary stuff, and they interfered with traffic, because every ten feet you've got a, supposedly column sticking out. So how can you justify just sticking columns and holding up nothing in the air except themselves? And they had to do quite a bit of cleaning up. Well, that's all right, this is probably part of the game. The point is that you will not be attracting true talent. All right you may attract some of the younger talent, but the

[-85-]

younger talent if it so exists doesn't remain under a bushel. I have argued with young people, and I've been counsel or to them for years, that if you've got it somebody will find you. Because every firm in the country is desperately looking for talent, and you show any signs of knowing what it's all about, you'll be dug out. So I never have any fear that it has to take a competition to pull these people out of the back room of anybody's drafting office, and this is the biggest argument for it. Secondly, is that the best that it can achieve, a competition, is an idea of what talent this person has, because he can't solve, nor has any competition ever solved the whole program of the structure. This has to come, even though you have a long written program this must come from across-the-table contacts you have with the people who really understand it because to write up this thing thoroughly, it

[-86-]

would take volumes probably. So all you do is get a general idea of whether you're solving the program, but how to really make it work on a day to day basis, this requires much more daily contact which you cannot have during competition. It's impossible for you to get more than general direction. So all you get is the gist of an idea. So all you get is the gist of an idea. There it is. Now the AIA competition which was won here, by a pretty competent young man a year or two ago, I remember a judge stated the final design isn't going to resemble the winning design.

McHUGH: Is that so?

YASKO: Take your pick. This is the problem. They had this limited amount of contact. One of the things and this was very curious, was the south exposure was all the glass one when all the rest was masonry. The southern exposure in Washington was quite fantastic. So I don't think the competitions ever produced what the proponents have wanted.

[-87-]

Now, I know they come through and say, "In Scandinavia they do this all the time." Well, this is, I think, a different art. In the first place, usually the reputable guys are doing it, the

guys who have established talent. I think they wasted money because they go to this ring-around-the-rosy. They've got a gang of them and they do it. I think an invited competition, is the one type of competition. An invited, limited competition could be productive, but it still has its limitations in that after the competition and the architects who participate in it have been reimbursed for part of their expenses, we couldn't run a competition and pay them for the full cost of running it. I've been a member of the jury on competitions and I've been quite aware of the pitfalls of it. So I would advise against them strongly. I'll go along with them on a limited one, if they have to. We have one generating now some talk about it.

[-88-]

and we'll pick six architects, pay them money to help them defray their expenses, and then out of that six, let's take a choice. That could be acceptable.

McHUGH: You mentioned the problem of contact with the architect. Have you been satisfied that you have set up a system of critiquing that will carry on when you've left the job, or where you're getting feedback?

YASKO: Not from the people that we have here. This has been one of my disappointments, is that I haven't yet seen anyone. Not that I have the answers to it all, but I have a feeling when one responds. Now the younger people along may pick it up but then they won't have the influence on the older ones. They won't speak with the authority they might have when they're older. At this moment I don't find anyone who responds with the same kind of intensity. Some of this critiquing has to be a little fire and brimstone. You've got to wake them up, so it's a little bit of evangelicism in it.

[-89-]

McHUGH: Did you have difficulty impressing people with the fact that superior design didn't necessarily mean that the building had to be much more expensive?

YASKO: Yes, I've had some problems. In fact, the proof of the pudding though, has always been the final result. And then again, Breuer's job, which has been accepted as quality, there has not been a critic of it, that it's not quality design, supports my contention like this. When the building was authorized, it was authorized for a budget of twenty-nine million dollars, with an abnormal program and a subnormal site. When the program was half way done the -- well, it was more than half way, it was eighty-five per cent complete -- the drawings were done. Congress then appropriated the money. And that particular year they were deducing construction funds by ten

[-90-]

per cent. In this case, at eighty-five per cent we were suddenly three million dollars short. They knocked off three million dollars. And, which would have been enough to commit suicide. Our final estimate, by our people, by our estimators downstairs was this, well, we're going to have to finish it. We had a two and a half million dollar deficit. If we had the original three million we'd have been in no trouble even though Breuer was tightening up here and there. We just couldn't take three million dollars out. His estimators didn't feel quite that way. See, they had their doubts, but they didn't feel that we were that much in the hole. When the bids came in, we had eight bidders. Three bidders made the budget, this reduced budget we had, and the fourth bidder was two million dollars under the budget. Which meant that he was four and a half million dollars under our estimate. Now the reports came in early

[-91-]

that afternoon, while they were still reading some of the bids. And it came to me and I was taken back, and, of course, thrilled by it all -- but I suspected somebody made some mistakes, because curiously enough, there were many people who were unhappy over this, because they were hoping that this kind of junk -- they call this architecture -- would be so expensive that this would knock out the whole philosophy. My first reaction was to our people, "Talk to the contractor, immediately, this afternoon while they're still there, and ask them if they thought they had made any mistakes or were they satisfied with their prices." And the four low contractors, individually, separately and individually, "How do you explain your price?" And four almost alike, although they didn't even see each other, said this was the finest and most complete set of contract documents that

[-92-]

we've ever gotten out of our government. It left no doubt as to what was wanted. It was all clearly spelled out. And here we came in at two million dollars under the budget, for a budget that was so difficult, and yet it was understood by everyone who was discussing quality architecture. However, even with that experience, although I think I've alleviated it, one of our critics in town, has always maintained that this is the problem that we need a lot more architecture. And he had several times -- I finally gave him this story to see if I could squelch him. He will listen to me give a lecture in which I say that quality does not cost a premium amount of money. Mr. Kennedy in his Guiding Principles stated that if necessary, we should give money for it. We haven't yet reached the point that we have to go back for great funds because we've added

[-93-]

this thing. The Pennsylvania Avenue we can probably say we need more money, not because the quality, but because the circumstances change. However, as I said, I gave this same talk and say that quality is not a premium, and then this critic will come up and say, "That's a fine

speech, keep saying it. You and I know that it costs more money.” So then I have to remind them of Breuer’s and this is the most wonderful example, that there is some quality and it didn’t cost us. It cost us less than we would have, had we gone into the box that was expected. It was an E shaped box is what they were asking for. So, in summing it all up I can say, that it doesn’t necessarily mean more money. It just means harder work and harder thinking. All things being equal you can just take a small pad out; you only need a piece of string and some other things and you can come up with some quality.

[-94-]

All you need is imagination and the willingness to think.

McHUGH: The type of problem here was that most people perhaps thought that design involved a concern with fine arts as such.

YASKO: Yes. There’s a very clear statement again. This is the statement in the Guiding Principles on the question of fine arts. It’s a very good one, it’s a strong one, it’s a positive one. And on that one, I hung my hat. Because before it shortly before this, there had been a policy, loosely administered that said we would reserve money for fine arts. The administrator says we can. But when they ran into trouble, a shortage of money, the first money they took off was fine arts. So they might as well not have anything because they were always in trouble. They’d take up that money and it wasn’t. The great weakness in this situation, one of the great weaknesses in the situation, one of the great weaknesses of it, was all applied art. The architect became involved in it after the building was under

[-95-]

construction, at some point. Well, where are we going to spend the money for fine arts. The’d look for something. I’ve accepted the idea that art and architecture are one and the same thing, and that anything that you call separately as art, whether it be sculpture, or painting, or mosaics, or any other form of expression, it must be an integrated part of the whole. Therefore it must begin to show up in the architect’s thinking. The need for something of this character in a particular space, part of the structure must show in the small concept sketches. If it doesn’t then it’s all applied and I’ve held firm to this. A couple of architects have called me hypocritical because I ruled it out and I don’t use the money, just for the sake of using the money. It must begin to show up in these early stages, that there’s evidence in the thinking, and the evidence is that it is necessary to the whole. And, of course

[-96-]

Mr. Kennedy’s statement in the Guiding Principles this became a fixed deal. The money becomes quite sacred, the half of one per cent. The half of one per cent has been criticized by

the outsiders as insufficient because they say the standard has been one percent. I agree, except the Federal building, where our buildings are

[BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I]

McHUGH: You were mentioning problems that arose with fine arts.

YASKO: Yes. And the big problem is that it not be talk. Actually, I was talking about this question of one per cent versus half of one per cent. And I think whenever I have the opportunity, when the question is, I do explain this, and it seems to calm the waters. That a half of one per cent on our jobs, which are ten, fifteen, twenty and

[-98-]

thirty million dollars is a lot of money. And you don't need a one per cent. You get ten million dollars and ten per cent is a hundred thousand dollars?

McHUGH: Yes.

YASKO: That would buy a lot of art from very important people. And very few buildings are conceived with that much art. And we have proved that you don't need that much money to do it, and the Kennedy Office Building in Boston is a case in point, where we're using slightly less than half of one per cent in that building and we're having three of the world's fine artists doing the work for it. The Robert Motherwell Mural is now in place and he's acknowledged to be probably the leading abstract expressionist in the world. We have Dimitri Hadzi doing the sculpture. Here is the model right here in front of me. This one right here, and that's called Courage, inspired by the *Profiles in*

[-99-]

Courage. And this is something called *Thermopylae Four*. That's the study that's to go right outside the building in Boston. And the other is Herbert Ferber who is doing that piece of sculpture in the courtyard. See it on the table. And these jobs are the works of three famous artists, highly talented, accepted people, are coming to us for less than half of one per cent. Well, let me say again that the half of one per cent was established by a resolution by the President. This gave it the backbone. President Kennedy issues a resolution on this thing, an Executive Order I think it was called, that the agencies set up a policy, but it did not set the limitation. GSA's administrator settled at one half of one per cent, which I think is a realistic one in view of the budgets that we have available. Cities, towns, and states -- in the state of

[-100-]

Wisconsin we didn't establish any percentage. Whatever it was was necessary. I did the same thing there that I'm doing here. I started a program of art in architecture. And we never spent, I don't remember, never worked out the percentages, but it doesn't take much to get some good artwork in. And we're doing quite a bit of it, but it must be a part of the building and not an applique. Otherwise, I will not authorize the funds and I've made it clear to the administrator who is very happy to see that this becomes honest. And it's only to keep this as an integral part. It's an insult to the architect, or the artist, to do it. Now there is a powerful deficiency in communication between the artists and the architects. It's an insult to the architect, or the artist, to do it. Now there is a powerful deficiency in communication between the artists and the architects. Its almost non-existent in most areas. Most architects don't know where the painters, sculptors, and muralists are.

McHUGH: Why is this so?

[-101-]

YASKO: I've tried for years to figure that out. I was originally a painter myself, which helped me to bridge this gap. But I fail to understand why architects don't know about painters, or mosaicists, or sculptors. Why you have to chase them out to find them. This is one of the reasons that so much of it doesn't show up. They're not conscious of it. They're not aware of it. We're trying to stimulate them. It's not accomplished. I gave them a long lecture on this, but the admonition is, "Do not put it in just for art's sake. It must be a part of the design, so when you pull it out whoever is in this building, or looking at it feels the absence of something that is necessary to the composition." And I think we're getting some very interesting things. We've had some awfully interesting sculptors, particularly sculptors, doing some nice work.

[-102-]

That space thing and color photograph is one in Fort Worth by Seymour Fogel. It was just finished. Can you see it? And the one behind it shows this Hadzi sculpture in the wrong place at the Federal Building.

McHUGH: That's quite sizeable.

YASKO: Yes, I think about ten or eleven feet. It's going to be out here. Now this

 is where Gropius [Walter Gropius] and I disagreed. But he was gracious and, of course, the sculptor supported me. He had it back here, where the daylight sunlight doesn't get at it. It should be out here. So this is where it will be, out in front of this big tower. This is the J.F. Kennedy Center. This will be about, oh, eleven feet.

McHUGH: Where did Gropius feel it should be?

YASKO: Where it's shown here. He made the drawing.

McHUGH: Oh, I see.

YASKO: And he put it in here.

McHUGH: What was this reason for putting it in there?

[-103-]

YASKO: He said he knew that's where it belonged as a part of the building. He stressed the point of the fact that daylight and sunlight and snow on this thing which will make it really read. But it is directly inspired, as the sculptor has described this thing, as one of a series of sculptures. This one's called *Thermopylae Four*, based on the *Profiles in Courage* of Mr. Kennedy's. And this one he considers his best. And Gordon Bunchaft, who was on the Fine Arts Commission, an architect who collects, he's quite a collector, has collected Hadzi, says that this is the finest that he has ever done. So it's important, I think it's significant that it would be at the Kennedy Building, as based on Kennedy's writings.

McHUGH: You said there was a story connected with the painting, that Mr. Motherwell had done.

YASKO: I think so. I think it's a humorous one, because the furore was stirred up by only a few

[-104-]

people, aided and abetted by a curious newspaperman who was looking for sensationalism. And I think the true character of this thing showed up the first day. I've got clippings here that I've been trying to assemble. When the headline appeared in the Boston newspaper, and they showed only a piece of the mural, and the headline said, "Boston Outraged." When you read the body of the story you'll find that the person at that point who was outraged was some clerk that was in the building, and the painters, and the reporter looking for news said, "That's the assassination of President Kennedy. What do you think of it?" And she said, "It's an outrage." Well, she was a little clerk-typist who had no idea what expressionism was, and she took this title. And the newspaper was beating it up. And then he went to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and interviewed -- well, this reporter went to the Assistant Curator of

[-105-]

Paintings, and said, "Here's a picture of the assassination of the President. Will you interpret it for me?" And this guy must have been off his rocker. "Oh, yes, he says, "that's the blood, and this is this." Well, there's no red in the picture to begin with. It's black and white with a little purple and blue in it. And that supported to show that this was it -- nobody bothered to find out what the title of it was or anything. The Boston Museum the next day issued a public apology for the stupidity of one of its staff, that the abstract expressionism does not bear such clean cut definition, it's all in the eyes of the beholder. The title of it is New England Elegy. It was a personal relationship of Motherwell whom, one of the reasons for his choice, incidentally, was that he was a great admirer of the Kennedys and the Kennedys

[-106-]

thought he was a great man. So in the final selection, we had three or four that we were considering. It seemed appropriate that we ought to have someone who had this kind of an intellectual and emotional tie to the President to do the mural. And the furore lasted a couple of weeks, and our administrator was most concerned about it because the dedication was coming up. Then he went to the dedication very much concerned that he might be stoned. As it turned out, there was nobody wanted to see the mural, he had to go and try to find it by himself. So all the fury -- the thing has quieted down and has taken its normal place in the operation. So, again, I think, if you trust the people in the long run, I'm a great believer of this, just leave them alone, in time that they will do it.

McHUGH: You mentioned this was kind of, it was somewhat of personal statement. You felt that architecture

[-107-]

 in these Federal buildings should not be too much of a personal statement -- the architecture should not be too much self expression. Wouldn't any set of aesthetic values ultimately be self expression?

McHUGH: Oh, it has to be. You can't rule that out, and place the architect into a sterile compartment and say, "Here it is." It must be. This is the essence of art. This is the essence of creativity, is that spark which has to be. Now the personal statement I speak of, actually, is more than a statement, that's probably the simplest word to use. It's the big bang created by an architect that makes a lot of noise, calls attention to it without solving the essence of the problem. But the act of creativity is a personal one, I don't care what level it is, creating babies or creating works of art. I think it's always a personal one. This is why you're people, otherwise,

[-108-]

you'd turn into a computer. It's very curious I've had some architects fuss about this. The architects often criticize each other, you know. So the complaint about this personal

statement, and the only, actually it marks on any of them is jealousy, that if they had this thing they'd make a greater personal statement. Because there are many egos in this thing.

McHUGH: Was sitting these buildings much of a problem? Did you have to battle for good sites?

YASKO: We're still battling for good sites. And it's not the fault, necessarily, the fault of any arbitrary position. It's the manner of the beast, where we must advertise for sites. Maybe this is the problem of democracy. We advertise for sites. We want them to come forward, produce sites, and when the Federal Government enters into a community everything's fair game to give to the Government.

[-109-]

And good sites are tough to find because they're hidden away, or the prices that are placed on them. So we, as I say, like Avis, we try harder. We're victims of a whole picture, but we keep trying. And we're trying to attack this, even though it's a large part of it is so environmental. We're going to try to attack these things from geological soil testing deal, to start eliminating. But we have to go into a community, this is the law. We have to advertise. We're looking for sites, and everybody that has something to dump on us, is in to dump it. And when you find you've got all the dumping sites, and nobody comes forth with a good one you start looking for one. Well, often times the city has an axe to grind, they want to unload one, and they'll find.... So it's

[-110-]

still a problem and probably will be for a long time.

McHUGH: Is cost the major factor here?

YASKO: In sites?

McHUGH: Yes, in getting good sites.

YASKO: Yes, it's a limiting one. It's a factor. But we have paid, in some instances, I can't recall one off hand, but I do know we've paid in some instances more for one site than another because this was a preferable one, where we could really do it. But, naturally, I mean, we're out to get the best for the least amount of money.

McHUGH: You also worked, spent some time on the design for Pennsylvania Avenue.

YASKO: Not on the design itself. My biggest responsibility, my biggest

participation in that was to carry the torch, to see that it got started through the FBI.

McHUGH: Oh, I see.

[-111-]

YASKO: This was my biggest contribution because I felt that if the FBI building went off on that tangent it would have been so easy at that point. This building would have been almost done by now, because this was the architect's solution and this came about just when the Pennsylvania Avenue.... But I had, I believed in this solution. This basic goal was to correct and guess I was dedication to Mr. Kennedy, whose idea this was, that this was necessary, but I felt that professionally this was a very good plan and that the Federal Government ought to assume leadership and do it. SO I have been pretty much dedicated to seeing that it's filled out according to its guidelines. And we've gotten the FBI this fall when nobody was willing to bet a nickel we'd have gotten past a couple of weeks. We'd have wound up with that because that's what Mr.

[-112-]

Hoover [J. Edgar Hoover] wanted.

McHUGH: You mentioned in connection with this building the problem of scheduling. Who has been most critical of this problem in the necessity of more time for a good design?

YASKO: You mean who is getting put over the coals because they didn't meet the schedule? The management, the management end of business. And my job is still trying to do the convincing that we must have sufficient time to create, that you don't produce design on a computer basis. That if you say in three weeks we will have this solved, then two weeks for review, and that's five weeks from then. Everything is all mathematically laid out, because creativity doesn't operate that way.

McHUGH: Oh, then you think this is, maybe partially, a result of a sort of cookbook type of architecture that's been available in the past?

YASKO: Yes, oh yes. This is a -- they felt, well, they do it like this, therefore, we can

[-113-]

do one like that, and we did that in a year, we'll do this one in nine months, because we'll race right through it. And you have to be in complete ignorance of the act of creativity. Yet it boils, it boils quicker for some than it does for others. And for some it

never boils, but you've got to still keep putting a fire under it to bring it to a boil. And if you're going to follow this, or you're going to follow a dedication to excellence, you've got to give it every chance to come to a boil, and try like hell to find some way to put a fire. And so a schedule, something has to suffer, because except, in very few cases time is not that critical except that it's unofficially imposed because management wants their schedule. And this is the most important. And I've been banged around all over the place on this, still rumbling, and I keep dragging my feet. I've got one right here, and I know I may even get fired

[-114-]

because I won't go along with it until we get something, and I know I haven't been criticized head on, but I'm getting all the rumbling which could easily come to a head because this job, I will not....

McHUGH: Yes. Are you seeking to have the architect improve the design?

YASKO: Well, the architect and the agency. The Post Office is involved in it, and the Post Office is trying to foul it up. The architect has been responding in his own way.

McHUGH: I see. Do you give, do you find you're giving the majority of the work -- it is coming from individuals or do you give much to large companies, or how does this work?

YASKO: Well, there are really very few individuals, individually owned offices. Oh, let's say, oh the name may have a single name, Vincent Cling Associates. He's probably got five partners. And even in small offices you get two partners. But I know what you're talking about is the

[-115-]

big powerhouse firms versus the small owners. I'd say we have more of the big and middle group who have twenty to thirty people, maybe even less than twenty. At the most a four hundred man office.

McHUGH: Are the larger companies able to produce good architecture?

YASKO: Some do. I know Murphy in Chicago who's done is on the FBI. We've had to pound him and boot him, and he's got a good sided staff. I say, it's not a general criteria that if they're big they're not going to be producing excellence. There's a greater danger they won't. The odds are against them producing it because there's such a complicated overhead and a large overhead that they've

got to move. So they're battling this. And then there had to be a sense of dedication on their part that they will. Now, we had one outfit that's a very large

[-116-]

firm, several hundred, and I was pleasantly surprised at the design partner. There's five top partners, senior partners. He's willing to take the time. He has the same attitude I do as regards to schedule. If you go along with me, I'll do this even if it's going to cost me more money until we get what we want to do. It's the personal dedication to let's make the thing good, which isn't true in many of, as I say, in a lot of the forms.

McHUGH: To go back to the design for Pennsylvania Avenue, the report according to the words of Andrew Mellon, on these huge buildings in the semi-classical tradition and what does this mean with reference to buildings that GSA may be putting up?

YASKO: Well, we -- as far as semi-classical or classical buildings, the thing that will differentiate our structure will be the absence of the cliches

[-117-]

and symbols, the columns, the pilasters, the fret, the pediment in it's Greek-Roman concept. We'll have it in some other expressions but granted, let's admit it, we're based in a Roman-Greco tradition, where we have accepted principles which we felt that were universal which, God knows, clearly aren't. Our whole living is based on the classic order, and I don't care how you design it, it's going to be, if you've got discipline, it's going to be classic in it's essence. Now Boston City Hall, and I have the referendum downstairs, the Boston City Hall, the first blush was "My God, this is the big breakthrough." This is so purely classical that it's not even funny. In fact, the young fellows were trying to hide the fact, because they talk a great deal of anti-classicism. They greet everyone as wrong except today's people. Yet, if you

[-118-]

take the shadow boxes which they put in their sort of promiscuously to disguise the fact that they were being as pure as the Parthenon -- they have the columns and then they wanted me to eliminate -- doctor up the pediment. You take a piece of tracing paper and lay it over as I've done on this to illustrate it. This could be done by the Greeks, not by anyone in the twentieth century. And this is the big breakthrough.

McHUGH: Are you referring specifically to proportions?

YASKO: Well, the fact that they did use -- they did use columns. They changed the column shape. But the character and the quality of it, and the

proportions are as Greek today as they were in the time of Pericles and I don't care what they're talking about, they still are that. So the only difference actually between Andrew Mellon's architecture and what we're doing is the absence of the immediately identifiable

[-119-]

symbols.

McHUGH: What is the status of the plan for Pennsylvania Avenue now? Is it going to be carried, do you feel it will be carried through in, well...

YASKO: Well, the first building is under construction, the Wolman building, one block up from the FBI. The FBI building will be the foundation. The construction will start no later than July one of '67, and we hope to have it ready, I think, in '69, the whole building. These are the two key notes, and the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission is working, and have had various people working on landscaping, designing and the rest of these things. So I think they'll be following, and I would say between now and 1970 you're going to see quite a change on the Avenue. Now the FBI is the only completed Federal Building on the Avenue, strangely enough. The rest will have to be put in by private enterprise. But they in turn will be guided by the criteria established for the FBI and by the Wolman building.

[-120-]

McHUGH: Are there building controls that will be...

YASKO: The controls have been as an exercise by National Capitol Planning, which is self-appointed protector of the planning commission. The final act has not been passed yet which gives the temporary commission on Pennsylvania Avenue the key to make this. The controls are set there, the guidelines for it, and it has to take personal diplomacy to convince the developer that this is the way you've got to do it. And that's what happened with Jerry Wolman on his building. There's got to be personal concessions between Cloethiel Smith and Nat Owings. Nat Owings [Nathaniel A. Owings] was the great salesman on that, convincing Wolman that it's to his interest as well as it is to the Government's that he stick to the guidelines of the Pennsylvania Avenue Plan. The plan is in its early states. And I would say that by 1970, you will see a definite set

[-121-]

up of this thing. It's going to take at least two buildings to give it the point.

McHUGH: Have you had a good relationship with the National Capital Planning

Commission?

YASKO: Yes. We've tangled, but I expect this in a professional relationship with creativity. We're bound to have it.

McHUGH: Well, in sum was it your feeling that these events all together inaugurated a new era in public architecture?

YASKO: Oh, definitely. God, there's no question about it, I think. And, of course, the thing we'll always regret is that if we had just a little longer to build a bigger foundation because there has to be people like ourselves that will stay with it and see that it will be carried on. And I'm not being a martyr or anything about it, but I feel that we didn't get quite enough disciples lined up who stayed or who were lined up at the point because it was a slow thing forming. It's all there, all

[-122-]

you need is people to see to it, to follow through. People like Nat Owings on the Pennsylvania Avenue. He and Moynihan saw the follow through on that. It was their duty to see that this thing came into being as a permanent thing.

McHUGH: So this depends on the individual in a sense. It's not something that the existing framework will tend to continue as...

YASKO: No, it's like all things with continuity. The essence is people, people who are dedicated to it, believe in it, who will carry it on, disciples of the cause. This is what it boils down pretty much to that. Because who's going to pick up the torch -- to form a brand new cliché. Who's going to carry it on? So you've got to excite other people to come and do it and believe in it, and see that it's a good thing. I think that, besides benign felt around the country, at least the reports coming in from architects who haven't even done work

[-123-]

for us but have seen the small things going up, that this is a big breath of fresh air and all this. So this is encouraging. You hang on to any kind of encouragement you get. In Washington which will be our national scene with the visitors and the rest, the Breuer Building has had a tremendous impact, that and the Forrester buildings, that big one. As those come up in another year, they take real form, by next summer when the visitors are here these buildings will have pretty high form. It's going to have this kind of an impact slowly, I think.

McHUGH: Well, Mr. Yasko, we thank you very much for your time.

YASKO: Oh, you're welcome. I talk and talk, but I get wound up in the thing I

believe most...

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-124-]

Pork Barrel Syndrome: Plague

By Wolf Von Eckardt

Nearly seven years ago, President John F. Kennedy directed, and President Lyndon B. Johnson later affirmed, that Federal Government buildings shall be "distinguished" and reflect "the finest contemporary American architectural thought."

What happened? Surely, what we have is by and large, hardly distinguished or thoughtful.

And as yet it is anyone's guess whether President Richard M. Nixon will do better; indeed, whether he even cares to do better and, if so, whether a mere President of the United States can do better in this field.

In Washington, to be sure, the largely Kennedy-appointed Fine Arts Commission made the General Services Administration think harder. That shows or will soon show. The late 1960s and early 1970s crop of Washington's Government building designs (HUD, Forestal, FBI, Labor, Tax Court, Hirshhorn Museum) can be argued about but need not be apologized for.

The trouble is out in the provinces where there is no Fine Arts Commission but should be. The Federal office buildings in New York City and Baltimore, for example, are beyond apology. They are just bad, woefully bad. Philadelphia, after much public uproar, is touch and go.

It is easy to charge, as an architectural magazine has recently done in so many words, that most of our latest Federal office buildings and courthouses around the country are nothing but giant pork barrels disguised behind concrete waffle irons and that they reflect far greater concern for the Democratic Party coffers than for the beauty of the cityscape.

But that misses the truth. The truth is simpler and more devastating than that.



The earlier (at left) and the final design of the U.S. Courthouse and F

It is that our oppressively mediocre Federal buildings quite accurately reflect both the oppressively mediocre state of common, contemporary American architectural thought and the stodgy, unbendable, oppressive mediocrity of the Federal bureaucracy.

That is hard to overcome. It can't be done by giving all the plush Government jobs to the few architectural luminaries around. It seems almost impossible to penetrate the administrative system—that rigid mesh of trepidation, legislation, appropriation and dedication to regulation that hog-ties even administrators who care.

And we can't expect much support for fine architectural thought from a Congress which chose to memorialize itself in a structure like the Sam Rayburn House Office Building.

Yet we must try. The Federal Government builds far

too much for anyone to be indifferent about how well it builds or to be indifferent about its responsibility for esthetics.

Kennedy's "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" for the first time in our history recognized this. The trouble is that they have never been fully enforced.

In fact, the man who was hired to enforce them, Karel Yasko, a former State Architect in Wisconsin, had a hard time finding a copy of the Presidential directive when he arrived in GSA. It was locked away, he discovered, in the Administrator's office.

The Administrator at the time was Bernard Boutin, a Kennedy man, who made fine speeches about good design. But within a week after President Kennedy died, it has been charged that Boutin commissioned nine projects over the objections of Yasko who disap-

proved of their design.

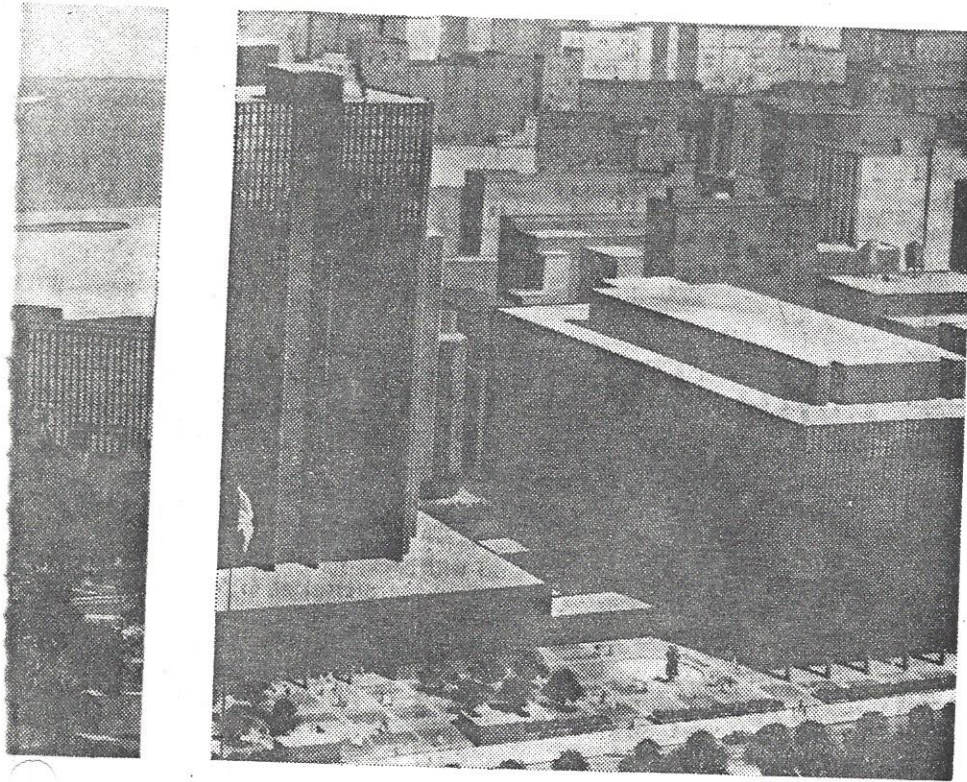
Yet Yasko has bravely kept trying to chase excellence up and down the dingy, labyrinthine corridors of GSA. Within a year and a half he was demoted.

More recently, GSA's Public Buildings Service has again been reorganized, leaving Yasko with the title "Special Assistant to the Commissioner."

This arrangement seems convenient for all concerned. Yasko is free to pursue excellence where he can or where it is expected (by the Fine Arts Commission, for instance). And PBS Commissioner William Schmidt, a former engineer, as well as his assistant for design and construction, Leonard Hunter, are free to get Government buildings built in the same, unfathomable, complex bureaucratic ways in which they have been built for years and years.

It is easy to see why they might like their freedom

Plague of Federal Architecture



6, the U.S. Courthouse and Federal Office Building in Philadelphia.

proved of their design.

Yet Yasko has bravely kept trying to chase excellence up and down the dingy, labyrinthine corridors of GSA. Within a year and a half he was demoted.

More recently, GSA's Public Buildings Service has again been reorganized, leaving Yasko with the title "Special Assistant to the Commissioner."

This arrangement seems convenient for all concerned. Yasko is free to pursue excellence where he can or where it is expected (by the Fine Arts Commission, for instance). And PBS Commissioner William Schmidt, a former engineer, as well as his assistant for design and construction, Leonard Hunter, are free to get Government buildings built in the same, unfathomable, complex bureaucratic ways in which they have been built for years and years.

It is easy to see why they might like their freedom

from the bothersome restraints of excellence-chasing.

They see their job as getting the building built. And Federal buildings are built as much of politics as of steel and concrete. That means accommodating a congressman, senator or mayor who may prefer one architectural firm or one location over another.

It means having full control over all the strings that must be pulled and it means constant worries about Congress and the budget.

From their point of view, the entrenched GSA builders are probably right in shunting Karel Yasko aside as "a poor administrator" if in their dictionary, administration means playing politics.

Some critics believe they are "over-reacting," that they kow-tow too easily when a Senator, just out of courtesy, sends a letter introducing a constituent architect.

Yet, Yasko insists that Schmidt and Hunter are converts to good architecture and believe in the Kennedy guidelines.

He also says that Lawson B. Knott Jr., the current GSA administrator, is proud of administering "the finest contemporary American architectural thought." Yasko points out that three years after the directives for them, Knott even appointed a 13-man national architectural advisory panel plus one panel in each of the 10 regions, for good measure.

Though Yasko denies it, these panels are mere window dressing.

Their members are prominent and busy and meet rarely. They are asked for their approval only on what Knott, Schmidt et al. decide to show them. Even then they are confronted with fait accomplis. There isn't much to say about a design that is virtually completed.

The Kennedy directive reads: "The advice of distinguished architects ought to be sought prior to the award of important design contracts."

If the panel were allowed to select the architect, it would help GSA keep the hacks and campaign contributors out. It should be happy to be immune from patronage pressures.

The directive also says: "Competitions for the designs of Federal buildings may be held where appropriate."

The finest new public buildings on this continent—the city halls in Boston and Toronto—resulted from architectural competitions. It is the best, if not the only, way to bring fresh talent to the fore.

But our busy Establishment architects have little interest in that.

The American Institute of Architects has done little to seize the guidelines as a means toward reform of GSA's design procedures.

That's not surprising, perhaps, if you consider that, according to "Progressive Architectural" magazine, seven of the most recent AIA presidents have received major GSA commissions valued at nearly \$100 million.

As of this writing, President Nixon has not yet gotten around to GSA.

Knott's current policy is reportedly to give his agency "low visibility and short horizons." One wished this were true of his buildings.

But there is some hope.

Whatever the President's own architectural tastes may be, one of his advisers is familiar with Kennedy directives. Daniel Patrick Moynihan drafted them.

"You can say that my interest in better Government architecture has not diminished," Moynihan told this reporter. "It would seem to be part of the new urban policy I am currently working on."

as of
2-28
he had