

# N.Y.U. Seeks Master Plan For 10 Years of Building

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The development of the Washington Square campus of New York University, which has been marked by increasing confusion and criticism in the years of its postwar growth,

has been put into the hands of one of the country's leading architects.

In an attempt to coordinate the university's downtown expansion and establish a unity of architectural standards, James McN. Hester, president of the university, announced yesterday that Philip Johnson had been retained as the consulting architect for the Square. Mr. Johnson designed the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center and the New York State pavilion at the World's Fair. Richard Foster, formerly of Mr. Johnson's office, will be associated with him.

The university's action marks the first long-range attempt in its architecturally checkered history to come to terms with the problems of the growth and design of a city school in a well-defined urban neighborhood.

For the last 75 years the school has been expanding erratically around Washington Square, its buildings bound together in an uneasy coexistence of mutual incompatibility. In the next decade, the present enrollment of 26,544 is expected to increase by 15 to 30 per cent,

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# N.Y.U. SEEKS PLAN TO GUIDE BUILDING

## Long-Range Architectural Schedule Set by N.Y.U. for Expansion at Washington Square

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and the university plans a building program to match.

To accommodate the anticipated growth and change with some semblance of continuity and coherence, a concentrated, multimillion-dollar construction schedule has been laid out for a five-year period, beginning immediately. Mr. Johnson's chief assignment will be the design of three major new buildings, with four more under consideration.

### Governing Concept Sought

He will also have the responsibility of developing a governing concept for all the university's construction, which ultimately will determine the character of a large part of the Washington Square Village area.

Two of the Johnson-Foster buildings will occupy major sites on Washington Square Park. The first will be a library and study center on the southeast corner of the square, facing the park, scheduled for completion in the fall of 1967. Warner, Burns, Toan & Lunde will be associated architects.

Planned as a high-rise tower of about 550,000 square feet, the new library will accommodate 4,000 readers and incorporate the latest mechanical study aids, as well as books and reference materials. Its site is an open green space in front of the apartments of Washington Square Village, which has been bought by the university as investment property.

The second building on the park will be a new School of Education, on the site of the present Education Building on Washington Square East between West 4th Street and Washington Place. It is scheduled for completion in the fall of 1968. The old building will be demolished.

The third large project, scheduled tentatively for completion late in 1967, is a new Science Center, to be built in stages where the temporary ANTA Theater is on university-owned land on West 4th Street. ANTA will move to its permanent home, the Repertory Theater at Lincoln Center, as soon as it has been completed.

### Part of 10-Year Plan

The additional Johnson assignments under consideration would be part of the 10-year plan, which would also include facilities by other architects.

The university's building program looms even larger when recent and present construction is considered.

The Warren Weaver Hall-Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences by Warner, Burns, Toan & Lunde is well along on West 4th Street, east of the ANTA Theater at Mercer Street. University Village, a group of tower apartments for the faculty and married students and local residents, designed by I. M. Pei Associates, is going ahead just south of Washington Square Village for occupancy in late 1966. The Joe Weinstein dormitories by Harrison & Abramovitz were finished recently on University Place.

There is nothing intimate about any of these buildings, current or planned, which are all characteristically large and modern to accommodate expanding activities on a contemporary scale.

Discussions are being held with the city for closing some streets around the square to help unify the campus and extend the park's pedestrian boundaries.

All these changes are bound to have a substantial impact on the surrounding community.

The university has been a power in the neighborhood since it was founded in 1831. Its first "Gothic Revival" buildings were constructed from 1832 to 1835 between Washington Place and Waverly Place on the east side of the square. Its architectural history, however, is largely a story of design by default.

### Bronx Land Acquired

After slow growth, the school virtually abandoned the square in the eighteen-nineties when it accepted a gift of land from the Gould family on University Heights in the Bronx, where McKim, Mead & White developed a master plan for a new campus.

In 1893 the original downtown buildings were demolished. A new structure was put up by the university for the American Book Company, a publishing house and printing plant, just before 1895. Erecting this commercial building on university property was the first short-sighted step in a subsequent career of architectural blind-man's buff around the square.

Eventually, the university re-occupied the book plant, which is still used as the school's Main Building. With the School of Education, which is housed in other commercial buildings of the eighteen-nineties, it completes a characterless group on the square's east side that is blandly nondescript and totally unrelated to the park it faces. The street could be in any undistinguished older business or manufacturing district.

The mistake of the uptown move was apparent almost immediately. Primarily an urban school for urban needs, including graduate, extension and adult courses, the university's proper role was in the city. It returned downtown slowly and piecemeal, in what seems, with hindsight, an inevitable move.

To the Law School, which had been left behind at the square, and a School of Pedagogy, later Education, the School of Commerce was added in 1901. By 1913, with the establishment of Washington Square College, the heart of the school was back downtown.

Ambivalence about which division belonged where and in decision about the allocation of programs uptown or downtown



New York University buildings and sites in the Washington Square area are shown in aerial view. They are: (1) Library and study center to be completed in 1967; (2) new science center to be built on site temporarily occupied by ANTA Theater; (3) School of Education, to be replaced by

a new building late in 1969; (4) Warren Weaver Hall-Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, under construction; (5) Catholic youth center; (6) Joe Weinstein Residence Hall; (7) Loeb Student Center; (8) Hayden Residence Hall; (9) Law School. Washington Square Park is in center.



Roman Catholic center, right, beside Loeb Student Center on Washington Square South



Philip Johnson, the architect, is in charge of plan.

resulted in haphazard building by expediency and architecture by accretion until the nineteen-thirties. By then, the square was lost.

At no time was a comprehensive master plan developed for the downtown campus, educationally or physically. Washington Square and its environs, once largely residential, with the pleasing 19th-century domestic scale of row housing neatly containing the green park, was to be subjected to increasing depredations.

After World War II, the administration realized that the downtown school was destined to be the focus of the university. The undergraduate college and general education facilities were there, and it had become an important graduate and professional center.

By then, land cost \$1 million an acre, and the need for organized growth was critical. The firm of Eggers & Higgins was called in, and a scheme was produced to demolish everything on the south and east of the square and build a series of over-blown, meticulous Colonial reproductions focusing on an elephantine Georgian structure on the square's east end.

The Law School was built in 1951 at the west corner of Washington Square South. Hayden Residence Hall was added in 1956, to the accompaniment of neighborhood protests at the destruction of "Genius Row," a group of locally prized 19th-century houses. Substantially constructed, the Law School's vestigial 18th-century details are cold, pallid and colorless as a result of necessary compromises with mechanical facilities and functional requirements. The Georgian concept immediately proved too rigid and unsuitably rural-Colonial for a dynamic city school's needs.

### Shifting Styles

Styles went in and out with the university's presidents. Later in the 1950's, Henry Heald brought more progressive attitudes and introduced the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz, the architects of the United Nations buildings.

Where Eggers & Higgins's sterile period adaptations had the virtue of offering lip service to tradition in the square, the Loeb Student Center, completed by Harrison & Abramovitz in 1959, exploded it. A busy, broken grouping of disparate, borrowed elements—a Lever-house-type glass box next to a clumsily curved brick wall—it contains a Scandinavian-inspired auditorium that is the building's best feature.

But its most serious failure is

urbanistic. The necessity of "enclosure," or "containment," as the basic feature of building on a square has been either ignored or misunderstood in this awkward, disconnected design, as has the matter of those close relationships to neighboring buildings that create a satisfactory urban environment. Nothing is saved by the sculpture added to the facade.

At this time, Harrison & Abramovitz proposed a kind of "master plan" for construction around the south and east sides of the square as a replacement for the Eggers & Higgins colonial enclave, a two-level scheme with upper pedestrian walks bridging the streets. Because no educational program had crystallized to support it, the physical plan foundered.

Soon after, however, the university's educational aims were evaluated and defined in a report by Chancellor George D. Stoddard, and under Dr. Hester those aims are being given concrete form, with the architectural pendulum swinging to Philip Johnson.

### Site Is Surrendered

Unfortunately, the intervening period without a coordinating architect has been just long enough to seal the destruction of the square's south side. In a trade with the Roman Catholic Church, the university gave up the site next to the Loeb Center in exchange for church-owned land that it needed to complete the library parcel. Thus it sacrificed the chance to rescue the remaining section of a badly mutilated block.

The result, a Catholic youth center and church by Eggers & Higgins, now in a non-Colonial mood, can only be called a minor monstrosity. On a direct axis with Fifth Avenue and the long vista through Washington Square arch, it might be labeled, most kindly, misguided modern. It composes grotesquely with the Loeb Center next to it, and the gratuitous "unifying" gesture of using the same brick only emphasizes the misfortune.

Inevitable comparison with the newly cleaned, jewel-fine brickwork of McKim, Mead & White's 1892 Judson Memorial Church, just across the street, is a lesson in architecture versus gimcrackery.

There are several reasons why New York University's planning and building efforts have been so unsuccessful in this landmark area of the city.

First, there has been its own confusion and indecision on both its educational and building programs, beyond the point at which this could be blamed on unpredictable factors.

Second, the most consistent

policy has been short-sightedness in developing any kind of master plan that could have eliminated some clearly avoidable outrages.

Third, the possibility of a master plan has always been hamstrung by economics. As a private purchaser, the university had difficulty assembling land, which has been equally attractive to speculators.

Fourth, the school has demonstrated a consistent blindness to the area's architectural and historical features, awakening very late, for example, to an appreciation of the heritage value of the Greek Revival houses on the north of the square.

Fifth, the architects themselves have demonstrated a lamentable inadequacy in their understanding of urban design.

To tie together the present mixture of ill-matched office-building-type construction, pseudo-Georgian additions and uneasy modern ventures, all of which have contributed to the destruction of the square's pleasant scale and character, will require some kind of miraculous architectural catalyst. The university is seeking it earnestly.

The formula has not been found so far, and the question is whether it may not be too late even for an architect with the taste and talent of Philip Johnson.

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