

ORAL HISTORY OF C. WILLIAM BRUBAKER

Interviewed by Betty J. Blum

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Chicago Architects Oral History Project
Ernest R. Graham Study Center for Architectural Drawings
Department of Architecture
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PREFACE

“I designed an art school for my thesis.... That was a clear-cut statement of my interests and aspirations.”

When reading Bill Brubaker’s own statement about his early interests in architecture, it comes as no surprise that the young graduate of the University of Texas and the well-established school-specialist firm of Perkins and Will were such a good marriage. This was a match that lasted more than fifty years, beginning with Brubaker’s summer internship in 1947 and concluding with his retirement in 1998.

Brubaker shaped the firm, just as the firm shaped him, during these fifty years. From student intern, Brubaker was made a partner in 1958, and rose in the ranks to become president and chairman of the board. As Larry Perkins did before him, Brubaker became a respected authority on educational facilities, spanning the range in size and audience from elementary schools to university campuses. Bill serves as the link between the founding generation at Perkins and Will and the younger generation of architects who run the firm today. His story bears witness to the development of the firm’s growth in services, expansion into diverse fields, increase in staff size, establishment of new offices in various locations both nationally and internationally, and Brubaker’s own role in this deliberate and remarkable evolution.

On September 28, 29, 30 and October 5, 6, 1999, Bill and I met in a conference room at The Art Institute of Chicago where we tape-recorded seven hours of his recollections about memorable personalities, events, and important commissions that were milestones in his career. The transcripts have been reviewed by both Bill and me and minimally edited to maintain the tone and spirit of Bill’s original testimony. This oral history is available for study in bound form in the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at The Art Institute of Chicago and may be accessed and downloaded from the Art Institute’s web site. Selected references, especially those written by Bill, that I found helpful in my preparation are attached to this document.

I would like to sincerely thank Bill for cooperatively sharing his memories with us and the future generations of scholars who will study them. The Department of Architecture is grateful to Perkins and Will for generously funding Bill Brubaker's oral history and to Diedra Noll, of Marketing Services at Perkins and Will, for her willing assistance in checking office records to clarify many details to help make this document as accurate as possible. Last but not least, our appreciation goes to Annemarie van Roessel in the Department of Architecture for her thoughtful care and unmatched skill in transcribing and shaping this document's final form and formatting the PDF form for Internet users.

Betty J. Blum
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C. William Brubaker

Blum: Today is the 28th of September, 1999, and I'm with Charles William Brubaker in a conference room at The Art Institute of Chicago to record his memories of his career. Bill was born in 1926 in Indiana and after a stint in the United States Navy he attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he received his degree in architecture. Bill came to Perkins and Will as a promising but untried graduate who proved his worth quickly and rose in the ranks to become a partner in 1958 and later became president. After almost fifty years with the firm, Bill retired last year, in 1998, but continues to work part-time for the firm. Bill, you've been an eyewitness to and a prime participant in fifty years of growth and change in Perkins and Will. You've seen the firm come almost full circle from schoolwork that it did in the 1950s to the schoolwork of today. Over the years your firm has done hospital work, office buildings, transportation facilities, nationally as well as internationally. Bill, you hold a unique position in the history of Perkins and Will. You are a link between the founders of the organization and those who head the firm today. As the three original principals—Larry Perkins, Phil Will, and Todd Wheeler-retired and left the firm in the early 1970s, the next generation took over. But long before then, you had really shouldered the mantle in the field of school buildings. You wrote, you spoke, you designed schools-kindergarten through university campuses. Your reputation is that of "a humanist who specialized in the design and planning of educational facilities." Having said that, it is curious that your best-known work is an office building in Chicago, the First National Bank. To understand how all this took shape, what it was that led you to architecture, may we begin where you began, in Indiana in 1926? Where in Indiana were you born?

Brubaker: I was born in South Bend and I went to elementary school there. My parents moved back to Leesburg, their original hometown, in my high-school years. I went to a very small school. The interesting thing is that I'm interested in planning large schools but much of my experience has been in small schools.

Blum: Where did your desire to become an architect, your interest in architecture, begin? What was your father's work?

Brubaker: Well, my father was a graduate in chemistry in Purdue University, although in his work he was a farmer and a banker and a person of very broad interests in a small community, in Leesburg, Indiana. Leesburg is a town of about four hundred people that is south of South Bend. My father had gone to university and went to Purdue and was always interested in chemistry. When it came time for me to select a college, I went to the college campus that I knew something about and that was Purdue. Nowhere does architecture appear in my thoughts at that time. I thought I was going to be a chemical engineer.

Blum: Just like your father?

Brubaker: Right. Which, incidentally is something that we ought to be more sensitive to, exposing young people to different kinds of jobs. It's amazing how little they know. I had never set foot inside an architect's office and I probably didn't know anything about architecture, but engineering and architecture are very closely related.

Blum: Do you have any recollection as a youngster of seeing buildings under construction or being impressed by any buildings?

Brubaker: Yes, I think that's interesting because one of my earliest memories is seeing the Chicago World's Fair—the Century of Progress Exposition—in 1933. My parents brought me up to Chicago to see the fair on at least two or three occasions. That did make an impression in me.

Blum: Well, if you saw it in 1933, you would have been quite young.

Brubaker: I was seven years old.

Blum: Can you recall what you saw that has stuck with you?

Brubaker: Well, I was fascinated, like many people, by the technology. This was not a romantic fair that restored old ideas or old scenery or concepts, it was modern.

Blum: It was celebrating a century of progress. Do you remember anything about the city?

Brubaker: I remember being impressed by, for instance, the apartment buildings in Gary. I had not realized that there were apartment buildings and it was really exciting to learn that people lived in walk-up apartments. When I was at Purdue, World War Two came along and I joined the navy. I met two people in the navy who influenced me: one was my one of my closest associates in the navy—he was from Texas, from San Antonio. Secondly, one of my other friends was an architect. I think he just wanted to be an architect and he was young enough to be in the navy.

Blum: Did he inspire you in the direction of architecture?

Brubaker: It was just a small event, actually. The other thing that I wanted to mention... This was after my short stay in the navy. I should point out that while I was in the navy I contracted rheumatic fever, which I outgrew completely, I'm happy to say. What it did for me was to give me the leisure to do a lot of reading. I read about architecture and that was my first formal exposure to architecture, reading a broader range of things than I had known about. So I was in the navy in Palm Beach at the Biltmore Hotel. This hotel had been turned into a hospital for rheumatic fever. The hotel had stashed away its

good furniture for the duration of the war, evidently. What you do when you get rheumatic fever is you need lots of rest. So I got from the navy a quality of care and rest that money couldn't buy. One very curious thing in retrospect is the fact that when I was Palm Beach I actually took the trouble to get out the phone directory to see if there were any architects in Palm Beach. I didn't know at the time that there were some very famous architects in Palm Beach—Addison Mizner, for one. So I actually discovered that there were architects in Palm Beach and I called one or two of them up and I went over and had an interview—this was a kid out of high school talking now.

Blum: Was this during or after your stint in the navy?

Brubaker: This was when I was in the Navy.

Blum: So this was in the 1940s?

Brubaker: Right. So I called one of these architects and I had a nice chat with him and he said that he'd like to hire me but he couldn't pay me anything.

Blum: Who was the architect?

Brubaker: I have no idea. He was just an architect but he gave me my first professional experience of calling up somebody and talking to them.

Blum: Bill, you are so prolific and glib with a pencil, were you that way as a youngster?

Brubaker: I did sketches as a youngster, yeah. But I don't think it was anything exceptional. It was fairly ordinary sketching. Most children of that age, and high school students do some sketching.

Blum: At a younger age, as a child, was this talent encouraged?

Brubaker: Yes, I think I was encouraged by my parents.

Blum: I thought this was what you might have shown this architect, or told him, what you could do for him if he gave you a job.

Brubaker: All I had was the fact that I would like to know what goes on in an architect's office. I was just the kind of person he said he was looking for, but he couldn't pay me.

Blum: Were you willing to sit in and observe?

Brubaker: No, I decided to follow another bit of advice that I got from the navy doctors, which was namely "Don't live in a cold climate for a couple of months or a couple of years. Live down here and avoid the cold." So I did. The friend from Texas convinced me that I ought to go look at the University of Texas, which I did. I took the train down from Chicago. This was in 1947, or something like that. I took the train to Austin, Texas, on the theory that I had a big trunk and if I liked the looks of the place, I'd unpack my trunk and I'd live there for three or four years. Fortunately, at the railroad station the taxicab driver was fantastic and knew everything there was to know about the University of Texas. So I spent a couple of hours with him and I got a private tour of Austin. So during all this time I'm getting bits and pieces of the practice of architecture, but nothing very formal. I cannot remember, for instance, how I registered for the School of Architecture.

Blum: Will you help me understand something? When you went to Purdue, you had in your mind that you were going to be a chemical engineer?

Brubaker: I thought I was going to be a chemical engineer and Dr. Martin—Frank Martin who was the head of undergrad chemistry—called me in and had a heart-to-heart talk with me. He said that I didn't know what I was getting into and I ought to shape up or ship out.

Blum: You weren't doing very well?

Brubaker: I wasn't doing well in chemistry, but I was doing well in everything else. I took his advice, which I've always been grateful to him for. I quit chemistry and at that time I was on the verge of being drafted. Soon after I was drafted.

Blum: So you really had only a short time at Purdue, one or two years?

Brubaker: One year. And then I went to the navy in about 1945. Well, the war was practically over by then. I just simply got a very good deal. At that point in my career I was going to be an electronic technician because that's when radar was being explored and that was a new system and new electronics. But it was not my field at all.

Blum: Well, was it in your head that maybe being in the navy you would get some training in this new technology?

Brubaker: I thought that it certainly wouldn't hurt me. After the navy I went to school out at Herzl Junior College, which was on the Near West Side in Chicago.

Blum: Did you live in Chicago then?

Brubaker: Yes, I rented a room to start out with and it was in Oak Park. I was interested in Frank Lloyd Wright and I had read about him and I knew enough to seek out Oak Park and that's exactly what I did.

Blum: This was after the navy and before you enrolled at the University of Texas?

Brubaker: Yes. I was a beneficiary of the GI Bill. I had been introduced to architecture in the navy not really as a career choice but just as something kind of interesting.

Blum: Had you given up chemical engineering in your mind?

Brubaker: I had kissed that goodbye. No chemical engineering for me, thanks.

Blum: Did that disappoint your father?

Brubaker: No, he was good-natured about it. Well, let's look at the University of Texas for a moment. It was a five-year course. I had already had a year and most of it was applicable—a year of chemistry and other things. Being in the University of Texas one studies Texas history and other things that aren't...

Blum: Texas architectural history or Texas history?

Brubaker: No, Texas history. I think I was doing okay. I liked to sketch and I did sketch better than some of the other students, come to think of it.

Blum: In high school did you take mechanical drawing?

Brubaker: Yes, and it was a pointless course. Later, when I moved back to Chicago I went to the Art Institute and took life-drawing classes to help get rid of the mechanical drawing. The instructor told me, "Brubaker you look like a carpenter marking on a board. You came here to have fun? If you want to have fun why don't you go roller-skating." All he did was annoy me. I had great respect for the man. I think he's still around, but unfortunately, I've forgotten his name.

Blum: He sounds like a colorful character. May we go back to when you were at the University of Texas?

Brubaker: Yes, I had a friend, George Pearl, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and we shared an apartment, having outgrown my one-room kind of existence. I didn't want to live in a dormitory. So George taught me watercolor. I was a pretty good watercolorist, doing Edward Hopper-type paintings.

Blum: Did that pique your interest to become an artist?

Brubaker: No. He taught me what art was all about. I had never visited art galleries and I had very little to do with art departments. Anyhow, he was an exceptional influence on me.

Blum: When were you at the University of Texas, in 1947?

Brubaker: No, I usually say it was 1948 and that is when I first worked at Perkins and Will as a summer student.

Blum: You worked there while you were still a student?

Brubaker: Yes. Now, the question is, How did I get to Chicago? I got to Chicago because of Martin Kermancy. He was a professor at the University of Texas who had, a short time before that, been a designer at Perkins and Will. Now he and his wife are touring the world.

Blum: You're still in touch with him?

Brubaker: Yes. Back to how I got to Chicago—Martin Kermancy said that I ought to get some work experience and he thought I ought to go up to Chicago and have a summer job. He said he'd see what he could do for me. Now, a lot of times people say that and they don't follow through. But he followed through and he called up Larry Perkins and he called up Phil Will and he said, "I've got just the guy for you." The first thing you knew, I was on the train for Chicago. That was a little bit complicated, but everything seems to point to Chicago.

Blum: There seems to have been a force that was drawing you to Chicago.

Brubaker: Right, I really think that was true.

Blum: Architectural education had undergone some changes by that time. Perhaps the most pointed example I can think of was Gropius at Harvard and Mies at IIT. How would you describe the University of Texas and its orientation?

Brubaker: I would say that I was very naïve and I really wasn't too interested in what the courses were or how they were designed or what the philosophy was in teaching. I was more interested in being out in the field and just simply learn by doing it.

Blum: But there were classes that you were required to take. Were they slanted in the direction of the Beaux-Arts or in a more contemporary direction?

Brubaker: The University of Texas had given up on the Beaux-Arts, just like many did, so the University of Texas no longer followed the Beaux-Arts system.

Blum: So it was more in a contemporary theme.

Brubaker: Yes, people like Martin Kermancy were modernists.

Blum: Was Colin Rowe at the University of Texas when you were there? Was he one of your professors?

Brubaker: No.

Blum: He made quite a mark in the field and was surrounded by a large group of admiring students at the University of Texas.

Brubaker: Incidentally, I just came back a month ago from the University of Texas and they gave me an Outstanding Alumnus Award and that was quite agreeable. It was three days of parties and celebration and talking about architecture. It was just a very pleasant affair.

Blum: Was your college friend, George Pearl, there?

Brubaker: No, he was not there but I had seen him here in Chicago a few weeks before that. He's a principal in the firm of Stevens, Mallory and Pearl, in Albuquerque. He is a great watercolorist. He's a good architect and a good artist. I've learned a lot from him.

Blum: Some architects who went to school after the war, for their architectural education, found themselves on campuses with many older students, students who had been through the war, as you had been.

Brubaker: Well, I missed the war.

Blum: Well, you missed the war but you had some military time.

Brubaker: I almost had some accidental exposure to the military.

Blum: It seems that the students who had some military experience were much more serious to get on with their careers and to get trained in their professions.

Brubaker: I think that's true.

Blum: Were there many returning GIs in your class?

Brubaker: The people in my class were older than I was. I was one of the youngest, having been in the navy for only one year. Some of them had been in for four or five years. So I had sort of a minimal military training.

Blum: But you had had time out for rheumatic fever?

Brubaker: That was courtesy of the United States Navy, right.

Blum: Was the attitude on campus a serious or a happy-go-lucky one?

Brubaker: Architecture students tend to be pretty serious. They don't really party too much and they're pretty serious generally.

Blum: You said that Martin Kermancy was a modernist, was one of your professors and is one of your lifelong friends as well. How was the history of architecture treated by Martin Kermancy?

Brubaker: Well, we had one professor who was Hugo Leipziger Pierce. He was a historian and city planner, mostly a city planner. The University of Texas got off to a kind of a slow start in terms of planning. Now you associate it with planning and architecture and interior design, but the school then was primarily architecture.

Blum: Was Professor Pierce teaching at the university as well as practicing?

Brubaker: He was teaching at the university and he did some practicing, I believe. He really wanted me to change from architecture to city planning.

Blum: I thought you said they got a slow start?

Brubaker: They did and they were looking for good students and pointing out what advantages there were to working in the planning field, but I didn't bite.

Blum: It seems that you became a believer later on. Many of the articles I read that you wrote later on were about planning.

Brubaker: There's no question about that. But I always thought more about planning as an application. My prime interest at that time was in buildings.

Blum: Well, you had a delayed reaction to planning.

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: As a student were you asked to read Corbusier's book, *Towards a New Architecture*, or Giedion's?

Brubaker: I think I was. I have a couple of copies of the big volume at home. I read them while I was in school.

Blum: Were they recommended or required reading?

Brubaker: They were recommended.

Blum: Did you know about Mies?

Brubaker: I knew about Mies. Mies was already well known. He had won the Museum of Modern Art nod for new architecture and the IIT buildings were in that book that I have. So Mies was not a discovery. Pilgrimages were made to Illinois Institute of Technology campus to see what the mechanical plant looked like, because it was one of the first buildings out there. So we were just fortunate in Chicago to have a rich heritage in Frank Lloyd Wright and a rich heritage in Mies, both.

Blum: Was that taught at the University of Texas or did you experienced it first-hand in Chicago?

Brubaker: I think I experienced it first-hand, first of all. I had to search out the Mies things.

Blum: Did you ever have a desire to leave the University of Texas and come to study with Mies, as one of the modern-day masters?

Brubaker: No, I didn't. Maybe that was a grave mistake. I didn't take any graduate work whatsoever. Before World War II, not many people were in graduate

school in architecture, but after World War II, it almost became necessary. I missed that in my career.

Blum: What was your experience like when you came to Chicago to work as a summer intern at Perkins and Will while you were still a student at the University of Texas? How do you remember the office?

Brubaker: There were about fifty people; that was a good-sized office at that time. When I came to work at Perkins and Will the first time, which was in 1948, I believe, I had drafting-room experience. When I came back the second time looking for a job, it was the summer when there was an economic decline and I couldn't get a job.

Blum: So for how many summers did you work at Perkins and Will before you were permanent staff?

Brubaker: Two. The first summer I was doing drafting mostly. The second summer they didn't have enough work so I couldn't work. The third summer I was working out in the field in construction because I announced to the people at Perkins and Will that I wanted to have a muddy boots job. They reacted in different and interesting ways.

Blum: Who was your point of contact at Perkins, who said, "Okay, here's your drafting board; here's what you'll do"?

Brubaker: There were three people: Larry Perkins, Phil Will, and Cap Starrett, of the Starrett Construction Company. Cap Starrett was our construction man. After working and supervising a school which he helped me with, and after getting some ground experience, Perkins and Will got their first million-dollar job—everything had been less than a million dollars up to then. It was in Keokuk, Iowa, and I asked to work on that job. When I first asked for the job, they said, "No way. This is a million-dollar job and it's too complicated for you."

Blum: This was a job that you wanted to supervise out in the field?

Brubaker: Yes. So I sort of shrugged my shoulders. I wasn't mad about it; I was maybe a little bit disappointed. However a week later Mr. Cap Starrett came around to my drafting desk and asked if I was still interested in going to Keokuk. Of course, they had had trouble finding anyone who would go to Keokuk. Keokuk was a really crummy, small town—I had no contacts there, no family, no friends. So anyhow, the next thing I knew I was on the train to Keokuk. I was on my way to Keokuk and I did that for about six months. Then I'd come back to the office and work on projects for a week or two.

Blum: When you were supervising the job in Keokuk were you then officially working for Perkins and Will? Had you finished your degree?

Brubaker: Oh, yeah, I was working for them.

Blum: I see. Well, I wanted to explore more about the time when you were working there as a student: what the work was like, what the firm was like, what the city was like?

Brubaker: That's right. I did that same thing out in the field. In fact, I did it three ways: I lived in a different place on about six different occasions just to get to know the city. When I lived in Chicago I lived on the West Side, I lived on South Shore Drive, and I lived in Bucktown. I did that to get to know Chicago better. The other occasions for getting to know the city was the construction industry, which I had my muddy boots on for.

Blum: So you got to know some neighborhoods in the city, but you already knew Robie House and Sullivan's work and Mies's work at IIT.

Brubaker: Yes, I had already sought them out.

Blum: What was your reaction to such a town that had such an important architectural heritage?

Brubaker: Well, there was just no way that you would have gotten me out of Chicago. I had lots of opportunities and we should talk sometime a little bit about our offices in White Plains, New York, and Washington, and now in other cities.

Blum: But you were here, by choice. Did you have to produce a thesis at the University of Texas?

Brubaker: Yes, it sounds remarkably consistent, doesn't it, in retrospect. I hadn't thought about it for quite some time, but I designed an art school for my thesis. It had zigzag, sawtooth roofs, to bring in lots of natural light—this was before any of the buildings at the University of Texas were air-conditioned. It gets quite hot there in the summer—not as bad as Houston or Dallas, but hot enough. So I got permission to design a university art school—you had to get your project approved ahead of time. So that was sort of a clear-cut statement of my interests and my aspirations.

Blum: Well, certainly with hindsight we can see that.

Brubaker: I thought it was a lot of fun and it was an interesting project.

Blum: Now that you know what your future held for you and can look back on fifty years, when you graduated were you adequately prepared for the career that you entered?

Brubaker: I think so. You know, you can't do everything and you miss certain things and the University of Texas was certainly lacking in many ways. On the other hand, it had a lot of advantages there. State capitals are often where the best architect's offices are and that was true of Austin.

Blum: When did you get your license?

Brubaker: I got my license eleven and a half months after becoming an architect. You have to be an architect before you can get a license. The State of Illinois gave me a break and said that I could have a license eleven and a half months afterward. I've always been proud of the fact that I've always been able to avoid the rules.

Blum: At that time were you actually working at Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: I got off to a fast start at Perkins and Will.

Blum: Well, you had a head start after the summer jobs. Was it easy to go back to Perkins and Will after you had been a summer intern there and get hired on a regular basis? How did that work?

Brubaker: Well, that's a difficult question...

Blum: Were you expecting to come back? Were they expecting you to return?

Brubaker: Oh, yes. There was no question about that. I wanted to stay in Chicago. I have had lots of opportunities to move to New York and Washington.

Blum: At that time?

Brubaker: Yeah. Lots of offers from Perkins and Will from their other offices. Larry Perkins and Phil Will tried to talk me into going to New York, and I said, "No way!" That was smart. We still do that and other firms do it too. That gets the new office off to a hot start.

Blum: You're saying that as a recent graduate they wanted to send you off to another office?

[Tape 1: Side 2]

Blum: You say that you came back to Perkins and Will on a permanent basis in 1950. How do you remember Larry in the context of the office?

Brubaker: Larry was the one who made lots of speeches, he wrote lots of books and articles and the charmed boards of education. Phil Will acted like a designer. He wore a smock—I think that Frank Lloyd Wright wore a smock too—to keep his clothes clean. He spent a good deal of time in the drafting room supervising work. He was somewhat critical sometimes about his partner, Larry Perkins, doing too much community work. That's very common among architects, having that kind of a problem.

Blum: Isn't community work done to encourage prospective clients to use your firm when they needed architectural services?

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: Was Todd Wheeler with the firm at the time you joined in 1950?

Brubaker: He rejoined the firm in 1957 specifically to build up the hospital practice.

Blum: Well, he had been with the firm almost as an original principal in 1936. Why did he leave?

Brubaker: Todd left because there wasn't any work. We were in World War II and schools weren't in great demand. That came in the next decade with the baby boom.

Blum: Well, Todd also had an interest in hospital work and he was offered an important position in that field.

Brubaker: Well, what he did was leave Perkins and Will with the idea of becoming the architect at the University of Illinois, Chicago and developing the West Side Medical Center, which is a bureaucratic job—no art. He did that for maybe eight or ten years. So when he returned he set out to build, on Perkins and Will's behalf, a healthy hospital practice.

Blum: Did this all happened in 1957?

Brubaker: Yes. Perkins and Will's very first hospital was Rockford Hospital, which was not bad. Todd was their consultant and it was finished in 1953. So four years later they were doing hospitals. Now some of the hospitals were not choice jobs and some were. Todd was trying to drum up business to change the perception of hospitals more as a work of art than some people thought of them. Old Main and university buildings are often thought to be handsome buildings in the community but very few hospitals enjoy that image.

Blum: And he set out to change that?

Brubaker: Yeah.

Blum: I've heard stories about Perkins and Will in the early years when there was teatime and penny pitching. There were all these things that seemed to bind the office together and give it a remarkable spirit and atmosphere.

Brubaker: Well, I'm about the last one of those people.

Blum: Were you part of all that camaraderie?

Brubaker: Oh, I was part of the penny pitching and I was part of our teatimes. The other thing that I did at that point was I had already been a designer and a project manager and I was becoming an officer in the new corporation—it was a partnership originally and then it changed its corporate structure with stockholders and all that...

Blum: Did that change bring the rather informal customs to an end?

Brubaker: Oh, no, goodness no. This office was at 309 W. Jackson and it was in the garment district and the top floor was designed as a club. That's where the Perkins and Will offices were. The building stepped back occasionally and that's where the little roofs were that were good for our breaks.

Blum: That's where the penny pitching took place?

Brubaker: Yes.

Blum: Why did that end? Did the office get too big?

Brubaker: Well, maybe some people thought the office got too big. In 1955 the office was one hundred people.

Blum: That's a lot of penny-pitchers.

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: Did you feel that the spirit of the office was unusual?

Brubaker: Well, I felt it was unusual. Mies was already having his effect; he really influenced the students at IIT and everyone did everything Mies's way. Well, Skidmore did that to a certain extent, too. The only firm that resisted it vocally was Perkins and Will.

Blum: Why did they resist?

Brubaker: Well, I think that as far as Larry was concerned, his first love in architecture—and Phil's, too—was houses. So the preference for a domestic scale and a home-like atmosphere, with simple, home-like, comfortable

materials—the use of wood and brick, as opposed to metal and glass—just shows the Perkins and Will background in residential work.

Blum: But they didn't really get on the map until they designed Crow Island School.

Brubaker: They had designed fifty-some houses by that time and a lot of them were in Winnetka. So when the Winnetka School District decided to build a school, it was obvious they were going to be on their short list. So they were on the list and they won the commission because the superintendent of schools said, "I really like you guys but you don't have enough experience. Why can't you team up with somebody? In fact, why don't you team up with somebody who's world-famous? Then we'll all be happy." So that's what they did.

Blum: Well, Larry tells the story of being pretty nervous about approaching Mr. Saarinen. But he did and it worked. Crow Island was the job that put them on the map. It wasn't because of designing however many previous residences.

Brubaker: No, they were not models of modern architecture in the residential area. They were brick houses and well designed. I have a friend who lives in one of them and they love it. Phil Will's own house made the cover of *Architectural Record* or one of those magazines.

Blum: Well, that was a modern design. His was not a traditional house.

Brubaker: Right. I lived in it for six months while he went to Europe or someplace, I don't remember.

Blum: Knowing of Perkins and Will's reputation for schoolwork when you joined in 1950, did that focus appeal to you?

Honda: Their main business was schools; in 1950 it was known as a school firm. But at about that time was also when Perkins and Will built its first hospital, Rockford Hospital, and they did their first high school, Barrington High

School, in the early 1950s. They had previously designed Benjamin Electric Company, in Des Plaines, which was an industrial building.

Blum: So they were not only doing elementary schools but also high schools, hospitals, and commercial work?

Brubaker: Right and we haven't even talked about the fact that they had expanded to the East Coast and the northeastern United States.

Blum: Well, I'm trying to get a picture of what Perkins and Will was like when you joined them full-time in 1950.

Brubaker: Well, have you run into this fact? Perkins and Will hired the management consultants Booz, Allen and Hamilton. Did you run into that?

Blum: Yes, but I understand that was a few years before 1950.

Brubaker: Yes, they gave them advice on marketing strategy, which was just the kind of advice that some young firms could take now. One of their bits of advice was to spend money to have your buildings photographed in the finest way possible because that's your secret to getting your work published.

Blum: So who was their photographer of choice?

Brubaker: Oh, that's a perfect question, Hedrich-Blessing. Larry Perkins became a bosom buddy of Hedrich-Blessing. Jack Hedrich is still around here, I think.

Blum: Bill is living in Arizona but Jack is still in the Chicago area.

Brubaker: Then another element—these were all very much public relations and promotion type of things—there was a third kind of individual you need, who was a public-relations person. They got him, too, and he was Hal Burnett.

Blum: So it was Burnett's responsibility to go out and publicize Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Yeah, right. He would open some doors and get our buildings published.

Blum: So this was really advice to expand, to get buildings photographed and put them in front of the public, go out and shake the bushes for work, to really become a large firm. Was getting big a deliberate effort on their part?

Brubaker: This is something interesting, too, the firm was founded in 1935 but only got busy after the war. Then they got many non-school type projects, and I think the variety of jobs is just amazing. Only a couple of years later Southern Illinois University at Carbondale hired them to do the Thompson Point dormitories. Those are very handsome buildings today—it was before my time, but I'll take credit for them anytime, they are beautiful buildings. In the 1950s they had jobs like the Presbyterian College in St. Petersburg, and the International Mineral and Chemical Company in Skokie, and the Lutheran Brotherhood, an eight-story skyscraper in downtown Minneapolis.

Blum: And at Perkins' and Will's alma mater, did they build anything at Cornell University?

Brubaker: Yes, they did Hollister Hall, one of the academic buildings later in the 1950s. All these buildings we've just been talking about were sort of on the line between the time when I was there for summer work and when I came as a full-time employee. I've always been involved in Southern Illinois University but Cornell I haven't—I was surrounded by too many Cornell people. Presbyterian College (now Eckerd College) was my project—my design and my management. It is a new college from the ground up on the West Coast of Florida.

Blum: When you were hired by Perkins and Will in 1950, what did you expect your job to be?

Brubaker: Well, when I was hired the second summer, it was to work out in the field and to get my boots muddy.

Blum: Did you envision a future with the firm?

Brubaker: That's another category we can talk about. The changing mix of projects, starting out with commercial buildings, and college and university buildings, and transportation projects. Part of the over-emphasis on school work was created by me. Since I'm interested in schools and actively involved in them, other markets don't have a chance if they don't play their cards right.

Blum: Were you and Larry sort of like brothers? School work was his interest, too. Larry has said that in a way he was trying to emulate his father who had been a very prominent and respected school architect.

Brubaker: I never met him.

Blum: He died in 1941. Dwight Perkins, according to Larry, would go out and give talks at meetings and just generally make his work known in that way. Larry seems to have done the same thing. Did you inherit that role from Larry?

Brubaker: Yes, I guess I did. That's what I've been doing. I make a lot of speeches and I've been invited to speak at more clubs and universities than I can remember.

Blum: You not only speak, but you write a lot. Much of your "writing" is not with words but with sketches. Do you think with your pencil?

Brubaker: I think so. That's a good question. I do think with my pencil.

Blum: That's unusual, I think. A lot of what I've read that you have authored are not only sketches of buildings but conceptual layouts—not a picture but more a diagram of ideas and how the parts all mesh.

Brubaker: Mies and Frank Lloyd Wright and Corbusier all thought that way. They didn't just sit down at the drawing board and start drawing; they had an idea first. That idea took form in their mind and it was transmitted to others by means of sketches and writing and, more recently, photography.

Blum: Is that how it works for you?

Brubaker: Yes, I guess so.

Blum: Well, here at the Art Institute, we're very familiar with your sketches because we have a book that is a bound volume of your sketches done during meetings for the First National Bank project.

Brubaker: You still have that? Good.

Blum: Of course. It's a great addition to our library.

Brubaker: That's a real problem, because architects don't do a very good job of recording their conceptual ideas. There ought to be hundreds of these project and grand tour sketches for people to enjoy.

Blum: Do you mean travel sketches?

Brubaker: Yes.

Blum: Well, we have some travel sketches of yours from England and Egypt in our collection in the Department of Architecture.

Brubaker: We do a terrible job in our office of record keeping.

Blum: Do you mean in keeping track of paper material?

Brubaker: Yeah, I'm the only one who seems to be interested in the history of the firm. Ralph comes close to it; he's pretty good about it. We ought to celebrate our accomplishments more often.

Blum: Well, you've got a good start on the history to date in the notes you've compiled for yourself for our sessions. Now, may we go back to Booz Allen and Hamilton? They were a consulting firm and they suggested useful ways in which Perkins and Will could expand.

Brubaker: Right. This is just a little aside, but I have a favorite pitch, my one-, two-, three-, four-dimensional growth plan. Here's how you grow: you grow just because of a growth in volume. There are more people in town, more people mean more babies, and more babies mean more classrooms and more seats. That's growth in volume. Another way is to have diversification in services: instead of just architecture you include engineering and interior design and construction management. We've got things to talk about in all of those areas.

Blum: Did Perkins and Will grow in those ways?

Brubaker: It did indeed. Most dramatically in interior space design.

Blum: When did that come about?

Brubaker: Well, it was sort of the early 1960s, I think.

Blum: As Perkins and Will was on their way to becoming a larger firm did some internal changes take place as a result of that?

Brubaker: Well, the change that occurred is that we became a corporation and that gave us more flexibility.

Blum: Perkins and Will was first organized as a partnership?

Brubaker: Yes. Then there's the new markets to expand into. We started out with schools, then community colleges, then colleges and universities; those are each a new market. It's only a short hop to include healthcare and hospitals. The names of the hospitals are often university hospitals, like Northwestern Memorial University hospital. Then the last of the growth ideas, which we did—we did all of these after Booz Allen, Hamilton—the fourth big expansion was to move from the Midwest to the Great Lakes states to the northeastern part of the United States to national and international markets.

Blum: Those are great suggestions, but how do you do that? What is the nitty-gritty kind of work to make it happen?

Brubaker: Well, the way it happens is that you make yourself known to people in the profession. The school superintendent in Mishawaka, Indiana, gets a job in India and when he needs to build a school he doesn't think of the school that he had back home but he does think of the architect.

Blum: And Perkins and Will gets hired in that way?

Brubaker: Yes, we did.

Blum: So a lot of the speechmaking that you did and a lot of the writing that you did was, in a way, nurturing this network that you hope to build.

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: I notice that much of your writing/sketching was published not in architectural journals but in educational journals. Why?

Brubaker: Well, that's where the invitations come from. Architects want to reach the readers who will hire them.

Blum: Why did you not also published in journals that were read by the architectural community.

Brubaker: Well, there are just scads of words, pages, published every day on education—vast volumes of published words—but almost no sketches, no photographs, no graphics, no plans, no cross-sections, no diagrams, all that stuff is left behind. I think that's a shame. Educators know how to talk to each other but they don't know how to talk to architects.

Blum: Did you feel that you would like to try to change that?

Brubaker: Yes. I wrote an article—it's about a sixty-page article—in *Nation's School*, which was a McGraw-Hill publication.

Blum: What was the topic?

Brubaker: Well, it was about individualized instruction. It was about the fact that educators were talking to each other at their conferences about individualized instruction but there weren't any models where they could go and observe something. We decided that you couldn't direct anyone to good examples, so I decided to visualize a school that did satisfy the individual learning enthusiasts. It was a very successful article.

Blum: In the sixty pages, were there many drawings of your virtual school?

Brubaker: An amazing number of drawings. I don't know where on earth I found time to do that many drawings.

Blum: I have seen many of your shorter articles that were almost all sketches with only a few explanatory directions or words. So with this article you tried to help change what you saw as a problem?

Brubaker: Yes.

Blum: When you were designing Jones Commercial High School, you were also writing articles about highrise and lowrise for student dormitories. Did one expression often stimulate another?

Brubaker: Jones Commercial High school is an excellent example of a flexible building. It's like a modern office building and it could be changed overnight from offices to student dormitories to student residence halls and classrooms. It has a core in the middle so around the perimeter you get views and light. From the inside you don't, because it's mostly a service core.

Blum: Well, I was wondering if as you were writing about the highrise and lowrise dorms were you incorporating some of those ideas into your design for Jones Commercial High School?

Brubaker: Jones Commercial is a very good example of what I talking about because Larry Perkins and Benjamin Willis, the superintendent of schools, were very good friends. Why were they good friends? Well, they went to the same conferences. Larry joined the club. I have to remind my associates sometimes that if you don't join the clubs then you're missing out on something.

Blum: Do you mean a business opportunity?

Brubaker: Yeah. An opportunity to design something.

Blum: Did you join the clubs to meet people who hired architects?

Brubaker: I'm the single most conspicuous practitioner of that idea.

Blum: Well, I think you're not alone. Other people in other firms did the same thing. I guess it's just part of having a successful architectural project. Did you know that Commercial High School is now Jones Academic Magnet School? It's a four-year college-prep program now. At the time you designed it was it intended to be a business school.

Brubaker: It was a work-study business school. You worked half a day and you studied half a day.

Blum: Why was it located in downtown Chicago?

Brubaker: It was right under the elevated and right over the subway, which means that it had instant accessibility and it's a very rational building. I'd like to see it done again. Incidentally, it was designed with the possibility to economically add another five or ten stories. The school board had some real estate people on it at that time and they said that the downtown real estate was so expensive that it would be a shame to have only six floors in the building.

Blum: I read that it could be expanded to twenty-two stories.

Brubaker: I have a feeling that that is an exaggerated claim.

Blum: But is the idea of the statement correct

Brubaker: Yes, whether it's ten or twenty-two... What we did was we had some extra conference rooms in the core with the idea that in the first ten years of the school's life these would just be very handy rooms to have and, ultimately, they would be gobbled up with elevator shafts and so on.

Blum: But was the foundation strong enough to take more floors?

Brubaker: The foundations were designed specifically to take the tower.

Blum: So expansion was built into the original concept. Were there other reasons it was located in downtown Chicago?

Brubaker: Mainly because of accessibility. Of course, it has a dining room on one side at ground level and a physical education facility on the other.

Blum: Was it designed as a campus with playfields and other sports facilities that high school usually have?

Brubaker: Well, of course you're only a block or two away from Grant Park. The play areas are inside the building in the gym which is on the second floor.

Blum: Was the high school located downtown designed with the idea that the students would be able to take advantage of the cultural opportunities in Grant Park as well as the public library nearby?

Brubaker: Yes. It still makes a lot of sense and it still is a good idea and I hope that it gets used more often. There's no reason why education can't be multi-locational.

Blum: What do you mean?

Brubaker: Well, if you visit Northwestern or Purdue or the University of Wisconsin campus, they are like that. Multi-locational simply means that you're not cooped up in one location during your entire study day. You can circulate around and see the city and go to the courts and go to museums.

Blum: Is this really an idea that works for schools in urban locations?

Brubaker: It does.

Blum: Is it true that Jones Commercial was the first school that was designed by computer?

Brubaker: Not totally designed, but there was a computer used in some of the planning. The computer began to be used in the 1960s.

Blum: Well, Jones Commercial was done in 1967.

Brubaker: Let's say it was computer-assisted, not computer-designed. The First National Bank, for example, was highly dependent on computers. It was finished in 1969.

Blum: Well, Jones was done at about the same time, just a little earlier. Was providing for security a big issue when Jones Commercial was designed?

Brubaker: Well, I suppose today that school security is obviously a growing concern. There are two things that are fighting for more attention: one is security and the other is the community school idea that says to people in the neighborhood, "Come on in. Enjoy our facilities. Take some courses." Those two concepts are in opposition.

Blum: How have you worked them out?

Brubaker: I don't know. That's going to take another study, I'm afraid. That's a very good question.

Blum: With Jones Commercial, was it in your thinking then to provide for handicapped access or use of electronic devices and equipment?

Brubaker: Those things are fairly new and neither of them are strong pioneers in new ways of thinking.

Blum: There is now a disabilities law for handicapped access. Was it not operative when Jones Commercial was built?

Brubaker: It was not.

Blum: When you see Jones Commercial today, are you pleased with what you see?

Brubaker: I am. I think it's held up very well. It's just like Carl Schurz, that has held up well.

Blum: Well that's true. That school was one of Dwight Perkins' most important schools, some say his best.

Blum: Would you do Jones the same way now if you were given an opportunity to design it?

Brubaker: Yes, I think this is a case where I would do it the same way. You know how Mies said, "You don't have to invent a new architecture everyday"? Well, this is sort of refining and doing a better job on an idea and then letting the next idea influence the next school.

Blum: Someone has said that "Perkins and Will is a school authority. You're called in to do the master planning and then a local architect is given the job of building." How do you respond to that?

Brubaker: That was an awful problem for us and also an opportunity for us to influence more buildings and more people. But the idea of associate architects is something that we've accepted and have been involved in more than most architects, I would say.

[Tape 2: Side 1]

Blum: Bill, before we move on, can we backtrack just a bit and talk about the expansion that you witnessed and that Perkins and Will experienced, say, from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s? You said that it was a very conscious effort to expand on Larry and Phil's part.

Brubaker: Yeah, and Todd Wheeler got involved in that, too, because he conceptualized something he called the World Building Corporation [WBC]. Most of the reaction in the office was "Oh, here goes Todd again off on his World Building Corporation." It was an attempt to get all the disciplines under one roof and under one organization and not to stop at architecture and engineering but to include construction management, program management, interior design, landscape architecture, city planning, campus planning...

Blum: Well, when you look at that idea today, it doesn't seem so outrageous.

Brubaker: It's been taken up and used by others and sometimes quite successfully.

Blum: Was it that he was sort of pushing an idea that had already taken hold in terms of Perkins and Will's expansion, or was this something original?

Brubaker: Well, Todd liked to think of himself as a dreamer and a long-range planner and a person who was going to have a beneficial effect on the world.

Blum: But would you say that no one really took him seriously in the firm?

Brubaker: I'm afraid that's true.

Blum: But there were actual things that did happen and it seems that they were very much in accord with his idea for the World Building Corporation.

Brubaker: As I mentioned before, we expanded in four areas all of them purposefully and in a planned way. The first way we grew was simply in existing markets and existing services got larger—there were more people in the world and more people in Chicago, more people in the Midwest and more opportunities. Another method of growth is in diversification of services we offered. Instead of just having only design we were promoting engineering and interior design, in particular.

Blum: So were those new departments that Perkins and Will added?

Brubaker: Right. Then there were new, different markets. Instead of just schools, it was schools and community colleges and colleges and universities. Those new markets are very close to health-care markets, because some projects are difficult to categorize as being either universities or health-care facilities.

Blum: How are they similar?

Brubaker: They are quite similar and they usually have some of the same people on their boards. The new Northwestern Memorial Hospital is run by a board of directors

Blum: How does that work with the professional staff?

Brubaker: It's structured in a way that board members, some of them being corporate board members also, bring their corporate expertise to the job. Then there's another kind of expansion and that's geographic expansion, when you purposefully set out to acquire or develop new offices in new locations.

Blum: Doesn't that sort of grow out of the job? If you get a job in Alaska, it might be a good idea to open an office there.

Brubaker: Yeah, right. Well, that's part of it.

Blum: What was the first office outside of Chicago that Perkins and Will opened?

Brubaker: In White Plains, New York. There's a reason for White Plains. We got a couple of jobs there early on.

Blum: Were they school jobs?

Brubaker: Yes, the Heathcote School in Scarsdale, for instance, was one of the very first out-of-region jobs. Heathcote was a very innovative school in which Larry Perkins had a very personal interest and we did it Larry's way. One thing I'm sure you've run into was the fact that there were conflicts in terms of who gets to have their ideas followed through and who gets credit. Scarsdale was a good example.

Blum: What was unique about Larry's way?

Brubaker: The building he visualized for Scarsdale was the one that got built. It was very residential in character, small-scale, nice gardens, nice relationship to the residential area around it. There was nothing mechanistic about it at all, nothing Miesian about it. It was just Larry's interest in this easy-to-understand, small-scale, child-scale architecture that he liked.

Blum: Were there objections to that?

Brubaker: There are objections and other opinions on almost every job. Let's switch over for a minute and talk about a job that Larry did not like. The job he didn't like when he was working at Perkins and Will was Knight Junior College in Warwick, Rhode Island. It looks like a Le Corbusier building. It's raw concrete. Larry never liked raw concrete because he thought it was a very ugly material when it got wet. He wasn't afraid to stand up and say so. You have to know Larry well enough to know that he didn't mind taking a swing at something he didn't like. The Knight campus was a megastructure.

It was in the language of Le Corbusier and his exposed concrete. I had visited it last year and I found it almost unchanged in twenty years. It was amazing.

Blum: Was the Knight campus a job that Perkins and Will collaborated on with another firm?

Brubaker: Knight campus did have a local associate architect; they were Robinson Green Beretta, and Harkness and Geddes.

Blum: Who was the design head that brought forth this Corbusian idea?

Brubaker: It was Bob Riley. He represented everything that Larry didn't believe in.

Blum: He was at Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: He was in the White Plains office.

Blum: He designed the Corbusian-like campus?

Brubaker: Yeah, with raw concrete; it was very dramatic. I happen to like the building and I was delighted to go back and see that they were taking care of it. But you can't do it both ways. You have to decide which idea is going to survive for a particular job and then you hope another job comes along where you can try your other idea on.

Blum: Well, now that forty years or so have elapsed and you think back about the Scarsdale school that was executed in accord with Larry's ideas, how has that worn?

Brubaker: I, unfortunately, haven't been there for ten or fifteen years.

Blum: Well, the last time you were there, was it still a viable solution for that situation, in your opinion?

Brubaker: I think it's probably worn well. I've never heard of anything that they've messed up by putting an unfortunate addition on.

Blum: Has the community been happy with that school?

Brubaker: The community has been happy with it from all I know. Scarsdale is the home of many architects so it gets a lot of critical analysis.

Blum: And do you think the Knight campus was also the right solution?

Brubaker: It was. Knight campus is the name of the Rhode Island community college. It's a state-sponsored community college, just like Grand Rapids has a state-sponsored junior college. Every town or suburb in Illinois has access to a community college. It's something that people don't think of, but there are a lot of them.

Blum: On both of these jobs there were associate architects. Why was it necessary to have an associate?

Brubaker: It was the client. Usually the client insists on a local associate on the theory that it's a local project and a lot of the fee ought to flow to local people. The local consultants know the ground conditions. Frankly I think it's mostly defensible. Even within an office with two hundred people there can be two hundred different opinions on a subject. So it seems to be just as okay to have those different opinions come from one firm, just like it is okay to have those opinions come from a number of firms. The reason we had an office in White Plains, New York, was that was where the clients were, that was where the action was, and that's where they needed our specialized knowledge and specialized interests in schools.

Blum: White Plains was not in the middle of a big urban center.

Brubaker: White Plains was out at the suburban edge. The theory there was that the jobs were all suburban jobs. New York wasn't building new urban schools yet at that time and the suburbs were building lots of schools.

Blum: What was happening in the Chicago area? Perkins and Will began with a suburban school in Winnetka.

Brubaker: The same was true. For years there weren't any new elementary schools in the city; they came along later. The suburbs caught on first. For a while we had an office in White Plains and an office in New York City, right in the heart of Manhattan. The reason for that was that when John Lindsey was mayor he said that he would like to assign us a lot of hospital work. But we sure as hell weren't going to do it in White Plains; we were going to do it in New York City. So in no time at all we had a New York office.

Blum: So that was a Perkins and Will expansion decision?

Brubaker: Yes. What came of that was lots of long-range planning work for hospitals in the city.

Blum: This was another way to expand?

Brubaker: Yes, right.

Blum: One of the things that was in the air in the 1960s was the issue of minority employees. Did Perkins and Will have any African-American architects on staff?

Brubaker: We had a few engineers and architects and other staff members. I guess the usual thought was that they tend to open their own offices. We had been a part of a lot of other firms' growth. You could list the projects with asterisks. While we're on the subject of other offices, White Plains and New York City were reasonably successful at times. They weren't always profitable. In the

meantime we opened up two other offices: one in San Francisco and one in Fort Lauderdale. Neither one of those survived hard times and economics. We did some interesting buildings with these teams but they didn't become permanent. But that's all right, too, because the office tends to become specifically aimed at one market.

Blum: Was it the intention of Perkins and Will to open these offices as project offices or to try and maintain them as permanent?

Brubaker: The idea to begin with was to make them permanent. In Florida there was a huge condominium building boom going on and we enjoyed the first part of that, but it came to an abrupt halt and people suddenly weren't building any condominiums whatsoever, so we closed the office. The same thing was true in San Francisco; the economic conditions were bad for a year and we cheerfully closed the office when it was appropriate and when our work was finished on specific projects. So I don't think that's a reason for embarrassment to be more responsive to local needs.

Blum: As all of this expansion was going on, in Chicago or in your outlying branch offices, were there women on staff?

Brubaker: Yes, architecture has been a better career for women than anyone could have imagined. It started out more in the interior design area. We have had women who have been partners for years. Joselyn Frederick, for instance, has been working over here on the Northwestern University Medical Center campus.

Blum: Is she is one of your long-time architects?

Brubaker: Yes, she's a hospital expert. I'm not a hospital expert; I'm an education expert and office building expert. She fills the hospital role and does it very well.

Blum: Larry tried very hard to be a school expert, as his father had been. Was there a strong push in the master plan for someone to become a hospital expert and someone else to be a school expert and so on?

Brubaker: Yes, it was a conscious effort. The team that gathered around Todd Wheeler was a team specifically devoted to health care. Although Todd was a key element in Crow Island, he chose to recognize the health-care market as being big and booming, which it was. It was big and booming in the 1960s and 1970s. It's more complicated than that, but unfortunately the hospital practice sagged when the nature of what they were doing changed. Hospitals closed, hospitals opened, they merged. All of that created a need for reevaluation of the physical facilities. Todd was a key player in that.

Blum: Well, he had spent years away from Perkins and Will in the hospital field before he came back in 1957.

Brubaker: He spent them first as being the Illinois State Architect.

Blum: Was he not the architect of the University of Illinois Medical Center?

Brubaker: Yeah, he was. He planned a square mile, more or less, where a whole bunch of health facilities were built. Not only the Cook County Hospital, which was an old building, but new ones like the Veterans' Administration and, more recently, the Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital. There are some great names connected with those projects.

Blum: Was he involved in that?

Brubaker: Yes, he was, as far as I can remember. Now, there were some interesting things going on meanwhile. Another market was developing concurrently and that was commercial work. I limit it to office buildings because I have been limited to office buildings. We don't design shopping centers.

Blum: Don't because you won't?

Brubaker: Because others were more firmly entrenched and could offer experience.

Blum: Well, if one of your old, repeat clients had come to you and said, "I'm going to build a shopping center and I want you to design it," what would Perkins and Will have done?

Brubaker: We did have that experience but our experience had mixed results. Marshall Field and Company, in probably the 1950s, bought the property for a huge shopping center at Old Orchard. They hired Perkins and Will even though one of the general partners in the shopping center was one of our competitors.

Blum: Do you mean one of the general partners was an architect?

Brubaker: Yes, it was Loeb Schlossman. They were the architects but they gave us the job of being the design architects. I think it was kind of interesting. That was a joint venture and there were other firms involved.

Blum: So what was the limit of Perkins and Will's participation in Old Orchard?

Brubaker: Planning and design, primarily, as opposed to construction documents.

Blum: But the building, the construction itself, was that handled by Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: No, we didn't do the actual construction. We just designed the buildings and the contractors take bids and submit their prices.

Blum: Did Perkins and Will oversee the building of Old Orchard?

Brubaker: Yeah. Then at the same time, the same outfit hired us to design a shopping center in Milwaukee. I can't remember the name of it but it was in the suburbs. Now Milwaukee has a real winner in something that Chicago was not able to pull off—the downtown shopping center in Milwaukee is pretty nice. It links old buildings and new buildings with bridges over the streets and it's along the river and it's quite pleasant.

Blum: You began by saying that Perkins and Will did not do shopping centers because they lacked the experience. Now, are you saying that it was an unpleasant experience?

Brubaker: No, it was just tougher. It was tougher competition.

Blum: Did Perkins and Will have enough work to do without shopping centers that you could afford to pass it by?

Brubaker: The most complicated contract and agreement was the building of 900 North Michigan—that's where Bloomingdale's is. That job took many architects, not because Perkins and Will wanted them but because the owner wanted them.

Blum: Before we get to that, we have talked a bit about Jones Commercial High School, which was built in 1967. At about the same time in the late 1960s, let's go to a suburban school job, New Trier West High School. New Trier, like many other schools, had exhausted their resources in their old facility.

Brubaker: They had forty-five hundred students.

Blum: The question, as I remember it, was should they expand the existing facility or build another school in another location? I think the thinking was very clear that they should build another school.

Brubaker: The demographers really misled everyone. The New Trier enrollment was supposed to increase to six thousand students. Evanston High School was

supposed to evolve to six thousand students. Neither of those figures was ever reached. The Evanston plan was to build a school within a school on the house plan idea. Instead of putting six thousand students all jammed up together, you spread them out and they had their own teams and their own resource center, and their own dining room, but on one campus.

Blum: But New Trier opted for two distinct campuses.

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: Well, it's interesting to compare the Evanston and New Trier solutions to seemingly similar problems.

Brubaker: They're archrivals.

Blum: Why do you think the solutions were so different?

Brubaker: I worked on New Trier and Evanston both. Larry Perkins was more emotionally involved in Evanston and I was more emotionally involved in New Trier, which I live across the street from.

Blum: As I recall, the superintendent of the schools at that time was Bill Cornog. He was a very, very strong personality.

Brubaker: He had a scholarly, liberal arts emphasis. One of the things that rubbed Larry the wrong way was that he thought that kids shouldn't be limited to liberal arts and that they ought to have an opportunity to learn how to make things out of metal and use tools. He and Larry had two different philosophies. However, they did get together on the planning of the new school and that's about the time that I entered the picture, when this debate was going on.

Blum: Where did you come down in the debate?

Brubaker: Oh, I was completely devoted to New Trier West as a more exciting building.

Blum: I was asking about the difference between Larry and Bill Cornog's philosophy.

Brubaker: New Trier is a good example of a comprehensive high school and I favor comprehensive high schools. Kids shouldn't be shunted off into career specialties at too young an age. It would be better for them to look around and see what some of the opportunities are and what the needs are and learn more about jobs.

Blum: So do you think that all the opportunities and the facilities to go with them should be offered?

Brubaker: Yes. Now, if it's a big school system, then it's certainly reasonable to have each school have its own character. There are good examples of that in Chicago. Walt Disney Magnet School is a good example. Whitney Young Magnet High School can teach lots of lessons. First of all it has a rather dramatic site because it bridges over Jackson Boulevard, which goes all the way into the Loop. If you get on the boulevard and drive straight west, then you go under the school and the bridges that connect it all together.

Blum: Was Whitney Young a Perkins and Will school?

Brubaker: Whitney Young is a Perkins and Will school, Disney Magnet is a Perkins and Will school, and Jones Commercial is a Perkins and Will school.

Blum: Bill, getting back to New Trier West and Evanston, which were worked on at about the same time in the late 1960s, the solutions were very different but the problem, which was overcrowding, was the same. Could we talk a bit about New Trier West? How did The Architects Collaborative come into the picture?

Brubaker: Okay, this is another case where the owner determines the mix as far as the architects and the engineers are concerned.

Blum: Were you called in first?

Brubaker: I really don't know who was called in first. But I had recognized a close relationship with TAC. Chip Harkness, who was the leading architect at TAC, was invited by the owner to join us, with our blessing.

Blum: Who was the owner?

Brubaker: The Board of Education of New Trier. We took it from there. They gave us a great deal of freedom, in fact. It's both a very functional and very attractive building.

Blum: Yes, it's like a university campus.

Brubaker: It was purposely designed to have the feel of higher education and not juvenilize it too much.

Blum: This was to please the needs of the school system?

Brubaker: Educators love to have conferences on individualized instruction. I wrote about a thirty-page article on individualized instruction, showing the kind of furniture and buildings and spaces and ideas that this would generate. It's not anything unique.

Blum: Are you talking about individualized instruction within a large school system?

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: New Trier experimented with such a system and they called it the Center for Self-Directed Learning. The idea for such an approach came out of new educational ideas at the time. What did that mean in terms of the architecture of the building?

Brubaker: Well, I think that the adjustments that were necessary had been made. We recognized that there were going to be more communications and more electrical services needed, more flexibility in the kind of furniture that it needed.

Blum: Part of what this center did, which I suppose is typical of many independent study programs, is that the students spend part-time in school and part-time out of school. If they were interested in an engineering project, for example, they could find an engineer and do work for him, or whatever was involved to fulfill the off-site terms of the project.

Brubaker: Not too many of those good ideas survived.

Blum: Well, the center survives.

Brubaker: It does?

Blum: Yes. I don't know that it thrives, but it survives. The center was started a long time ago when my son was in high school, so I remember that well. Now, may we go back to New Trier? The new New Trier was seven different buildings connected by bridges, is that how you would describe it?

Brubaker: More or less. It was bridges and tunnels.

Blum: Where did the Prairie School-look come from?

Brubaker: Really by way of Frank Lloyd Wright. Perkins and Will had an already-established reputation of using modest materials in a straightforward manner

and using regional materials, not hauling in brick from California but using brick from Illinois. TAC was brought in to collaborate. I think that there was no doubt about it, it was an excellent job in collaborating. That's what the name of their firm is The Architects Collaborative. And the fact that the two key guys were friends namely Chip Harkness and myself. We wanted to make it work and we did make it work.

Blum: Where were the edges where Perkins and Will's responsibility stopped and TAC picked up or vice versa?

Brubaker: We did this just like a college campus would do it. If you gave all the buildings at UIC to one firm, they wouldn't be able to do it. There isn't that much talent in one firm.

Blum: Was this a smooth operation between the two firms?

Brubaker: It was a very effective cooperation. Walter Gropius was not an active part of the team. Larry was an active part even though he was getting up in years.

Blum: Was Phil involved at all?

Brubaker: Not really. He probably was heavily involved with the national AIA by then.

Blum: Well, you've said that the architectural firms meshed smoothly. How did the architectural component—both of the firms—work with the client? The client was not one person; it was a committee. How did that work?

Brubaker: Well, I don't think it's too newsworthy. It's good practice but it's not a unique practice.

Blum: Who had the final say?

Brubaker: It never came up. We did not have any final says at New Trier. As we work our way into bigger buildings in this discussion there are a couple of real whoppers where disagreements did occur and somebody had to blow the whistle and say, "Let's step back and see if we can try it again."

Blum: New Trier West, as you said, never reached its projected population.

Brubaker: Evanston didn't either; it was designed for six thousand students but it never got above five thousand.

Blum: But New Trier at some point was turned into something else.

Brubaker: Yes, a community center. Incidentally, I joined the community center, but I've never been over there for a program.

Blum: How did the building work for its new use as a community center?

Brubaker: It worked like a charm. They didn't have to spend much to adapt it. The only thing they had to spend money on of any significance was adding air-conditioning. Now it's hard to remember but before the mid-1960s not too many school buildings were air-conditioned, that was a real innovation. It had already happened in Florida and Texas and California where it was, of course, hot, but it hadn't really taken over in Chicago.

Blum: So New Trier was not air-conditioned initially?

Brubaker: No, that's one of the expenses they have to go through now. On the other hand, they are fooling around with the idea of buying an old industrial building and you can multiply that by a number of times by your expenditures.

Blum: Do I understand correctly that New Trier West is about to be brought back as a school again?

Brubaker: That is absolutely right.

Blum: So this is a building that has been...

Brubaker: Demographers are not very good about long-range projections, so you've got to exercise a little caution here. The idea is that the campus should remain a community center for four or five years while it undergoes the necessary remodeling and adding air-conditioning and all that. Then it will be converted, easily, to a high school again.

Blum: So that's the current word on the status of New Trier.

Brubaker: That's the current word.

Blum: Well, you must feel quite proud of the idea that it can be converted so easily as needs change.

Brubaker: Yes, flexibility is the answer. One of my favorite speeches has to do with making buildings flexible and learning something from the modern office building. When the office building is built, no one knows who the tenants are going to be, so there's no one to talk to and you can't find out who the tenants are going to be. In the Northwestern Medical Center downtown a whole office building was standing idle, a blank and empty building, brand new. So what did they do? They turned it into a hotel. That's far-out. That would have been considered an outrageous proposition ten years ago.

Blum: But industrial buildings that you wouldn't have expected anyone to want to live in are now these wonderful loft apartments. It's adaptive reuse that has saved so many buildings from demolition. Evanston, on the other hand, needed more room, but they didn't want to build a second campus, or they didn't have the space, what was the problem?

Brubaker: Evanston had a problem. Having one school worked for them. Having two schools was a great concern in the community that one would become black and the other white. Or one would be Jewish and one Protestant. You know all the typical possibilities.

[Tape 2: Side 2]

Blum: So the village of Evanston opted to expand their campus. Was that a result of the social issues that existed in the community?

Brubaker: Well, the social issues are very complex in Evanston; they are not very complex in Winnetka.

Blum: Well, why was the solution for one campus the best one in Evanston?

Brubaker: Well, it's kind of hard to remember, but in Evanston there was the fear that the second school would be an inferior school. The idea was that a six thousand-student school was unmanageable and anything smaller than that would be more expensive and more subject to criticism. And besides, there weren't really any sites available. Evanston doesn't have a lot of available open space. Now, at New Trier, it was wise to buy the property that they bought and obviously it's changed a good deal over the last few years and it's going to continue to change in the future.

Blum: With the Evanston expansion, as I understand it, it wasn't that the initial building continued to grow wings but that there were other buildings built on the campus grounds. How would you describe it?

Brubaker: Everything was built at once; it wasn't phased in. It's more like a college campus. There's a social science building, a math building, a library building, and all of these buildings then have underground or bridge connections so that you can move from one part of the campus to another when it's raining.

Blum: Well, Evanston sounds like it's similar to the New Trier arrangement.

Brubaker: New Trier and Evanston are surprisingly similar in many ways.

Blum: If the capacity that Evanston was planned for—you say it was six thousand students—was never reached, was there anything done with the additional, unused space?

Brubaker: I'm not sure what they did with the surplus space. They probably have community agencies that rent it.

Blum: Were either of these schools built with the idea that the community would use it after hours?

Brubaker: That's pretty much in the literature. I think it's safe to say that all leading schools and advanced schools are community-use facilities.

Blum: Wasn't Evanston High School originally built by Dwight Perkins?

Brubaker: He was the architect, yes. But there are two Dwight Perkins to keep in mind: one was the private practice Dwight Perkins who could take a job like the Evanston Township High School. The other Dwight Perkins was the Chicago school board architect, highly bombarded by politics, name-calling, and dissatisfaction. However, he just went on to design some very masterful schools, but they were very controversial and he finally got canned.

Blum: Well, I have seen the newspaper headline when he was dismissed. Was Evanston built Dwight Perkins as a private practitioner or as the official school board architect?

Brubaker: He was the Chicago school board architect. But he wasn't commissioned by the Chicago school board to do a school in Evanston—that would have been

totally out of the question—so it must have been his private firm, Perkins, Fellows and Hamilton.

Blum: Was Larry involved in the expansion of Evanston High School?

Brubaker: Yes, he was

Blum: Was there an associate architect on this job?

Brubaker: On Evanston there was not an associate architect; it was strictly Perkins and Will. We were primarily responsible for the design. The old part of the building existed so it was adding to a rather formal composition of the existing building. One of the things that they did right was that they bought the right amount of land. If the school is ever going to reach five or six thousand students again, then it's got the real estate and that's a lesson for other school boards to take heed of.

Blum: Is there a pattern to the demographics?

Brubaker: Well, they all go up and down.

Blum: In the 1960s, when Jones Commercial was being built and New Trier and Evanston were expanding, it was a time in our country when there was great unrest. There was the Vietnam war, the civil rights struggle, women were pushing the envelope, and there were assassinations. For many years this dissatisfaction had built up and it surfaced. Also, Corbusier died, Mies died, Gropius died; all these acknowledged masters in architecture died. How was this upheaval felt at Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Oh, I don't think we had great unrest. In the first place, when everyone's busy and there are job opportunities, jobs were plentiful. In the 1960s there was a boom period in school design; the 1970s was not. The 1970s were hit by the demographers predicting that the population was going to go down.

School boards all read those same programs. But in the 1980s, things came back to life again.

Blum: Someone has said that about this time, after Martin Luther King's death, that informal groups formed in some architectural offices—like SOM—to discuss these problems in an effort to try to better understand and to try to help in whatever ways it could. Did Perkins and Will ever have such discussions?

Brubaker: I'd say surprisingly few, if any. We were not involved—if anybody was involved, I was personally—but I can't vouch for the others.

Blum: Well, was there a desire in the firm to sensitize people to the existing racial problems that could spill over in architectural offices?

Brubaker: I think that there was very little sensitizing going on, then or now.

Blum: In 1970, Perkins and Will changed their corporate structure from a partnership to an incorporation. What did that mean?

Brubaker: That's all pretty complicated. It meant that the lawyers were satisfied but it didn't mean that it revolutionized the way we did business or designed buildings.

Blum: Was it business as usual but with more partners?

Brubaker: Well, in corporations it is easier to add and subtract people.

Blum: You became a partner in 1958. That was a quick rise in the hierarchy, because you had only joined Perkins and Will in 1950.

Brubaker: Yes, as I think I told you yesterday, the state of Illinois even saw to it that I got the license early.

Blum: In 1971 and 1972, the three original founders, Todd, Larry, and Phil, retired. Was it coincidence that they all retired within a year or two of one another?

Brubaker: Well, I don't know how much they planned this together, but I would say that it was not a coincidence but not a product of a plan.

Blum: Larry has said that he felt like he was a fifth wheel and was almost forced to retire.

Brubaker: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't have put it so strongly. Retiring is a very traumatic experience. I announced that I was retiring about two years ago. Last year in January we had a big party, it was my retirement dinner.

Blum: And you came back to work the next day. Well, I don't know what Larry did with his time afterwards, but he had a not too pleasant memory of retiring. Of course, he lived many years after retiring in 1972. You mentioned the Disney Magnet School before.

Brubaker: Yes, a magnet school is one that attracts people from different parts of the city, like a magnet. It's an idea that has been demonstrated in Chicago probably better than any place else. The three outstanding jobs that you mentioned—Disney, Whitney Young, and Jones—are all my babies. I was either the designer, the project manager, or the partner-in-charge in each one of them. I take particular pride in those schools.

Blum: In designing a magnet school, are there special requirements on the physical plant and on the designer to satisfy those requirements?

Brubaker: Yeah, I think it demands a higher level of adaptability. These school programs change from time to time—Jones being a good example—it's being updated now. They are working with an existing building that they have used for many years and, like tenants, they are going to change the walls and

bring in new furniture and new electrical and new communications facilities and they will have a school that will last for another fifty years.

Blum: At Disney, because it was to be a magnet school from the beginning, were there any innovative things that were done that were new for schools?

Brubaker: I think the most innovative thing was the use of folding partitions to make rooms smaller or larger and walls that could be rolled around. Teachers were given a whole new deal in that every teacher was given not only a classroom but an office, a workroom too. On the other hand, the idea was not to give each teacher his or her own private office but had the advantage of the bigger space so that they could tell what their colleagues are doing and see what interesting things were being produced.

Blum: Was team-teaching built into part of the concept?

Brubaker: Team-teaching would apply.

Blum: Disney was kindergarten through sixth grade, did they offer team-teaching?

Brubaker: Yes, and it's a pretty good example of team-teaching. Instead of having a series of thirty-foot by thirty-foot square classrooms, they had ninety-foot by ninety-foot spaces and everything inside of that space was flexible and partitionable—it was like a dental office where there are small things going on inside a big shell.

Blum: And there were two or more teachers assigned to each large space?

Brubaker: Yes, they'd try to encourage the use of teacher aides. I'm sorry I don't know enough details about this. A lot of these things in these schools are about trying to get the teacher a better deal. Most teachers don't even have access to a telephone. Can you imagine doing business without a telephone?

Blum: I never knew a teacher who had a telephone in her classroom but the school office had them.

Brubaker: Disney had one big room that's like a television studio. It's a multipurpose room, except it's bigger and more elaborate.

Blum: How did that work for children?

Brubaker: It was like a black-box theatre, but there's more stuff in it.

Blum: Was there special-sized furniture for the youngsters as Crow Island had?

Brubaker: Yes, this was for first, second, third graders—these were little kids—and the fact is that they sit on the floor most of the time. But they used smaller furniture, the counters are lower, the lavatories are lower.

Blum: Were children's chairs specially designed for those rooms?

Brubaker: Well, not really. They were specially selected. No one designed a new chair. That's one of my gripes right now, that nobody has designed any new furniture for schools. I find it hard to believe but that's true.

Blum: I read some of the articles that you have written and one of the ideas that keeps coming up is the use of "pods." Would you explain that concept?

Brubaker: Well, it's just the idea of breaking up the space into smaller, more adaptable, more personalized spaces. "Pod" sounds a little more humanistic than some other terminologies.

Blum: As I remember your diagrams, there were four children to a space and each one had an individual desk and next to that group was another group of four desks and children.

Brubaker: That's my favorite unbuilt idea: that a room half as big as the one we're in right now serves as a teacher's home base, with resources, computers, electronics, and maybe coat-hanging, depending on the climate. When students come in the morning, because there's so much interest in security, everyone checks in at home base. There would only be five people, so it's easy to keep track. Then announcements and attendance, the computer can very easily keep track all of this.

Blum: When Disney built in the 1970s, was it equipped with computer terminals?

Brubaker: There was a minimal number. Most of the faculty was learning how to use them, even more than the students were. The faculty had to get used to it.

Blum: But was the school equipped with enough power and outlets to use them?

Brubaker: It was.

Blum: Was Disney one of the first schools where that was a consideration?

Brubaker: Someone else will have to answer that question. I don't really know who was first on that score.

Blum: Another idea that keeps coming up in the writings that you authored is the "turf" concept. Was that part of Disney?

Brubaker: The pods were five people's "turf."

Blum: Oh, so they were the same?

Brubaker: Yes, there was just room enough for five chairs. At that point you're a little crowded, but you're only there for a short time. Then two or three people will leave to go to the gym and one person goes to the library and one person goes to the science labs and then there's only one or two people left and for

them it's luxurious. I've really tried to design a system where it can be economically shown that individual study space makes sense. "Turf" implies "this is my territory—keep out!" "Pod" maybe sounds a little less confrontational.

Blum: It's curious because "pod" is the same word with the same idea behind it as what Bertrand Goldberg was calling spaces in his hospital design. He was thinking that a group of ten rooms or so was a "pod." It's curious that the same word comes up in school and hospital design.

Brubaker: I have to stop and think that over. I think that Northwestern Hospital is dying to tear his building down. Prentice is their least satisfactory building.

Blum: I think it has been decided to take it down. Would you agree that throughout your career, you have been known as a specialist in schools?

Brubaker: Yes, that plus some university planning and university building. We haven't even talked about university buildings yet.

Blum: I'm sort of wondering inasmuch as you've been deeply involved in some very prominent schools in Chicago and elsewhere, do you have an idea of where school design is going?

Brubaker: Well, I think that it's learning its lessons of flexibility and adaptability and redeployment of space. I think that is the most significant. This is what happens in office buildings all the time. I think that we're all going to learn that things aren't fixed and that there's choice and you have to plan for it.

Blum: Are you saying that flexibility should be built into the concept?

Brubaker: Yes.

[Tape 3: Side 1]

Blum: Bill, we've talked about many of the schools.

Brubaker: But we haven't touched on the community colleges and universities.

Blum: Not yet. We have been following your career chronologically. Along with the schools that you worked on in the 1960s, you did a building, a commercial building, in Chicago that is well known and of lasting importance to the city. That building is the First National Bank. Will you walk us through that project step by step?

Brubaker: Sure.

Blum: Is it true that Mies was originally offered that job?

Brubaker: I am not aware of that at all.

Blum: What about SOM?

Brubaker: The bank was mad at SOM, there was no way they would hire SOM.

Blum: Who was mad at them?

Brubaker: The executive committee of the First National Bank of Chicago.

Blum: And they were responsible for selecting and directing this project?

Brubaker: The bankers really admired C. F. Murphy Associates and their architects and they were on friendly terms.

Blum: Was this because of the Civic Center that Jacques Brownson had designed and they had built?

Brubaker: Yes, the Civic Center and the Federal Center and many other semi-public buildings in Chicago were a product of the joint venture of professionals coming from several different firms. When you start adding in the interior designers and the structural engineers... One thing I've tried to do is be a little more generous with credit to engineers. So the bank approached us and they obviously met with us, specifically Larry Perkins, Phil Will, and myself.

Blum: Was it a private interview?

Brubaker: I don't know how private the interviews were, because I only attended one of them, ours. But we had a very compact, efficient, well-managed interview. Shortly after that they asked C. F. Murphy and Perkins and Will if we would be interested in associating and doing a joint venture. They asked both firms if they would be willing to do that. The guy at the bank that we were working for really liked our U. S. Gypsum building.

Blum: Well, I know that was a design that was dear to Larry's heart.

Brubaker: Larry and Phil both were really very attached to the U. S. Gypsum building. Of course, the architects at SOM couldn't stand it; it was too romantic. It was an interesting problem that the bank had. There was no way that the bank was going to consider SOM. If they had a meeting with them, it was just a token one. The bank was looking for new talent. It's still going on and it seems that it's going on in Chicago more than any place else. Now the choice jobs go to out-of-towners, not the well-established Chicago firms.

Blum: How do you feel about that?

Brubaker: I don't like it when I'm on the receiving end of that activity. I think it's terrible that we've lost so many jobs. But there's nothing that you really can do. It's the bank's real estate people who feel that that is their best investment and they tell their stockholders "We're going to get this architect, Koolhaas,

and that's what we recommend." "Well, if that's too much for them, then how about Perkins and Will?" They go through this process. Anyway, in a relatively short time—meaning only a week or so—the bank chose C. F. Murphy and Perkins and Will to work with the bank, the two senior people being Mr. Murphy himself and Mr. Perkins. Then there was a third character in each case, namely me, as a project manager, and also the other person that's important in this front-end analysis was Carter Manny. Carter, at that time, was still working with C. F. Murphy Associates, in addition to all his other duties. He is a fine fellow; we got along just like that. It doesn't always happen that way; lots of times associations don't work and they end with people at their throats. This worked like a charm. Sooner or later, you're going to ask me, "Yes, but who was the designer, the single designer?"

Blum: Oh, eventually we're going to talk about that.

Brubaker: Eventually I'm going to have to point out that in this case there was not one single designer that you can identify; it was a collaboration. At the same time we were having just the same type of collaboration on New Trier. The New Trier design and working drawings went simultaneously with the bank project. They were both within a couple of years of each other, although the bank project was spread out over more years.

Blum: For both jobs were the projects done by two firms or associated firms?

Brubaker: Both jobs were. The official title, which I didn't have any problem with whatsoever—after all Mr. Murphy is one of the outstanding architects in the country—was Architects for the First National Bank of Chicago: C. F. Murphy Associates and the Perkins and Will Partnership. That's the actual title for our collaboration. So it was one sentence that identified the team.

Blum: So there wasn't a third umbrella name?

Brubaker: I had to do a lot of these pages my the sketchbook over because I left out C. F. Murphy sometimes and I let somebody else sneak in on the credit line.

Blum: Bill, for the benefit of our reader we should explain that we are looking at a book that is a compilation of all the sketches that you made daily as a record of the job.

Brubaker: There are almost no graphics that aren't in that book. I didn't give very wide distribution to the book. A copy went to the Art Institute and the Chicago Historical Society and to the bankers and a couple of attorneys that the bank assigned to the job to be sure that there wasn't anything damaging.

Blum: Well, this is really a unique visual record of the project as it developed.

Brubaker: A lot of it is not architecture, a lot of it has to do with banking. For instance, when this building was designed, we didn't use credit cards as we do today—there was not a big system of credit cards. It's kind of hard to imagine a bank without credit cards. So they built Two First National Bank to take the overflow. First National Bank also owns the Two First National Bank building, which is on the west side of Clark Street.

Blum: May we get back to the formal arrangement? The two firms, having been selected by the bank...rather, it has been published that Perkins and Will was chosen first and they selected C. F. Murphy.

Brubaker: I think that's probably okay. The reason being that when you choose an architect for a big project, a lot of it comes from the heart. It's not all mechanical, it's not all financial. Part of it is that you feel it in your gut, either "I love this building" or "I hate this building." There are all sort of emotions. The fact is that Bob Wilmouth, the bank's chief executive and the one assigned to work with us, was a joy. Bob Wilmouth and his associates really liked the work that they saw Perkins and Will doing. We had just finished the headquarters for International Minerals and Chemical Company in Skokie

and we were working on the Northern Trust Bank building. This building is just north of the Sears Tower entrance, where all the buses stop and that unusable plaza is.

Blum: And they admired that building?

Brubaker: Yes, they all admired that building, so I'd say, if anything, we had a slight edge. Now, with the First National Bank commission it came down to a sort of an honorary position to be listed on the letterhead as one of the key players. Why would C. F. Murphy be first? Well, it was an honorary position and Mr. Murphy was retired and he didn't come to many of the meetings but he gets first credit.

Blum: On the title page too they get the first place. It was reported in articles that were published that Murphy got fifty-five percent of the money and Perkins and Will received forty-five percent. Why was it not a fifty-fifty deal?

Brubaker: Oh, I have completely forgotten about that. It's not unusual. I think that is true, though. I don't know if the percentages are right, but I think they come close to being right. So, lacking any other evidence, I'd say that's okay. Now, the other thing that they requested that we do is establish a new office for this collaboration. They did not want us to mix it up with our other work. We were doing hospitals and college and university buildings at the time and international work. They were somewhat hesitant to encourage us to do more outside work. So we came up with the idea of taking a floor in the old First National Bank building, which was where the plaza is now, and we set up shop there. The name of the first was "The First National Bank of Chicago." I kept getting the name wrong, because I kept forgetting to capitalize "the."

Blum: Before the sketches began and everything began to take shape, Phil Will suggested a brainstorming weekend.

Brubaker: Yes, that was a great weekend.

Blum: For what reason did Phil suggest it?

Brubaker: He was the president of the national American Institute of Architects and because someone was ill he got the job for four years, instead of one or two years, as was usual.

Blum: Why do you think he thought it was advisable to have this brainstorming session.

Brubaker: If this building were built today, it would be a billion dollars, okay? At that time it cost only a couple of hundred million. But it could be a billion-dollar project now and you don't spend that kind of money without knowing what was going on. It's really that simple. So here it is in the sketchbook, it was June 25th to the 28th, 1964, and here's the introduction. My concept sketches begin with a world and goes down to the block and the house size.

Blum: So you go from the general to the specific?

Brubaker: Yes, here's O'Hare Field, the heartland of America, the Great Lakes, the Chicago metropolitan region, the city of Chicago, the Loop, the Civic Center, the First National Bank, Federal Center, et cetera.

Blum: So this was for the purpose of defining the job?

Brubaker: It was. I agreed to take notes, but to do it in my way. Everybody said that was fine.

Blum: Where was the weekend spent?

Brubaker: It was in Chicago and we had to arrange for meals and accommodations. I think we went out sometimes, but I'm not sure.

Blum: Did the Graham Foundation have any input in this arrangement?

Brubaker No, but of course Carter did.

Blum: Well, before the Graham Foundation itself took shape, a brainstorming weekend was held and they invited people from all over...

Brubaker: Here are the participants: Grady Clay; August Heckscher, from the Twentieth Century Fund; Phil Will; John Burchard from MIT, who was an educator; Roger Revell, who was a businessman; Roger Brown; Catherine Bauer Wurster—I think Mr. Wurster died and his wife took over—and Doug Haskell, who was the editor of *Architectural Record*. These are all my easy-to-read one-pagers.

Blum: Who selected whom was to be invited?

Brubaker: Well, they were selected by the bank committee, and the bank committee consisted of Christopher Wilson and Bob Wilmouth. Now, as far as their relative order goes, Chris Wilson was the senior of the two. Bob Wilmouth ran everything except money matters. That was very common in banking—you get the president of the bank and then you've got the operations people. The operations thing is where they do savings, policy, and financial. Then somebody else does all the other stuff—the other stuff being running the cafeteria, security, Brinks trucks—that was Bob Wilmouth. Bob had a secretary who followed him around and followed up on everything that he had to say.

Blum: Who selected, for instance, John Burchard and asked him to come and participate in the brainstorming weekend?

Brubaker: That was a combination of people from Perkins and Will and C. F. Murphy. I think we would have a hard time piecing together who specifically suggested whom. They all were enthusiastic about coming to Chicago and participating.

Blum: Well, I wondered who was from within the First National Bank and Perkins and Will and Murphy.

Brubaker: There's another person whose name we're missing and that is the chairman of the bank and he was Homer Livingston. He was an active chairman of the bank. There are some bank presidents and high-level types that are just for show. He wasn't like that at all; he was interested in this building.

Blum: Well, it was going to be a very important step for the bank.

Brubaker: An aside—when his daughter got married I was invited to the party to give a slide show on Chicago architecture to entertain the wedding party.

Blum: Well, that was unusual entertainment for a wedding party. And about the three-day brainstorming sessions, what were some of the topics of discussion?

Brubaker: Where is the world going? What is banking going to be like? That's where Bob Wilmouth made some really good speeches on the future of the credit card. He was more of a nuts-and-bolts person but he was very much involved in banking policy at that point.

Blum: Had the credit card surfaced at that time? Where exactly was it?

Brubaker: Well, I can't remember whether I even had one or not then.

Blum: But this was at the beginning. Were you aware of its implications for design of bank buildings?

Brubaker: Oh, yes.

Blum: What came out of this brainstorming conference?

Brubaker: What came out of it were my notes, my notebook.

Blum: And what ideas?

Brubaker: It's hard to say whether any of the ideas of that conference came to anything. I suspect that it had a relatively low impact. In the first place, the bank didn't want any notice for the brainstorming sessions where we could talk freely and about what their motives were; their motives were not publicity, their motives were to think.

Blum: In a somewhat related situation, before the Graham Foundation took shape, there was a brainstorming session. I think it was held in Aspen. They invited John Burchard and others to come just share ideas and have an exchange. Out of that brainstorming the Graham Foundation took shape.

Brubaker: Let me show you something interesting here in this book. The concept of the great space and the concept of the tower with sloping walls was a concept that was recognized and promoted well before formal design approval was made. I visualized a building that would be identified as on the single, most important location, and therefore the most important building in the central business district in Chicago. It looks like it was planned that way, but it wasn't planned that way at all. It was the subject of good luck. We didn't know what the federal, and the state and the county and all the public owners of the buildings were going to warm up to.

Blum: You've pointed out in these sketches that the idea of a sloping-side configuration seems to be there right from the beginning.

Brubaker: Right. One of the things that we recognized, and particularly that I recognized, was the fact that bankers needed huge, wide-open lower floors for banking transactions. Insurance companies and other tenants, like

lawyers, want higher narrow floors because they are high-paid people and they all want windows in their offices and they hold views in high esteem.

Blum: Why do bankers need large floors?

Brubaker: Because at that time—it was before credit cards—all banking was done with little paper checks, which I still have some of. The bankers needed flexibility. Everything was in a period of flux. We designed something like twenty-five processing plants for Deluxe Check Printers—we, Perkins and Will, did. It was not as a part of this project but they had been our client and they were building check-printing facilities all over the world, actually.

Blum: So, out of this brainstorming session, what ideas were generated?

Brubaker: A lot of ideas were generated. Part of the task was to make Chicago have a lively center, in lieu of a dull banking district. The trouble with banks is that regardless of how good the architecture is, they're not really exciting places to visit. The bankers in this case were very insistent that they build a plaza, for instance. We did not dream up the idea of a plaza. That credit goes to Rockefeller Center and other New York buildings with plazas. There were not big plazas in Chicago but we visited New York. We made a couple of trips there and walked around and we had lunch with the bankers and really became familiar with the idea of a plaza.

Blum: Was this built into the program from the beginning?

Brubaker: Right from the beginning. The bankers, namely Wilmouth and Wilson, had already reached the conclusion that this was the ideal spot for a plaza. It's never all in shade; it's on the south side of the building. Plazas are nice, summer or winter, if they're sunny. They had figured that out that there was a logical sequence to the entire project. The logical sequence was that the first thing to do was to tear down the old bank and have the bank space in temporary quarters—in this case it was the Fair Store.

Blum: The First National Bank moved to the Fair Store?

Brubaker: Yes, it was in the Fair Store. That's where they did the check processing and all that.

Blum: But now I know the building the Perkins and Will built is on the north side of the block. Where was the old building situated?

Brubaker: The old building was right up to the sidewalk and it filled out the whole block.

Blum: On the south side?

Brubaker: Well, on the south side and the north side, too. There wasn't any open space on the north side, that was the location of the Morrison Hotel. The Morrison Hotel was the world's biggest hotel and it was obsolete as could be. No one wanted to stay there any longer. We made some serious attempts to recycle it, to turn it into an office building, but it didn't work. Office buildings have eight-foot ceilings and that's too low to get the ducts and everything in.

Blum: Did you want to use it as part of the bank, or recycle it as a hotel?

Brubaker: Well, any of those ideas were open. We explored the idea of recycling it to a new function or to make a better hotel out of it. But neither one... None of the architects really had their hearts set on that one but maybe Larry.

Blum: He wanted to save it?

Brubaker: He was more interested in saving it than the rest of us were.

Blum: I understand that Larry had an idea that it would be good to treat the block like a British flag.

Brubaker: Yep, that sounds like a genuine Perkinsism. I don't remember who came up with that one--whether I came up with it or Larry came up with it, or someone else did. But with the flag configuration there would be the half-block to the north and there would be the half-block to the south, and nothing but a miserable alley between the two. The property is bounded by Clark and Dearborn, and Madison and Monroe. The Monroe Street side is sunny and we wanted it to be sunny, not in shade. We wanted the biggest possible room of the building on the ground floor level and then we wanted an open plaza, with some activities and shops in it. Now tenants can change so rapidly. So this opens this whole space up and it's a multi-level plaza it has seats coming down like steps, it has clusters of trees and it has the Chagall mural and the entrance to the restaurant down below the plaza. The idea here is variety, excitement, et cetera.

Blum: It seems to me that the variety and the excitement come in the plaza. Was that intended also for the building itself?

Brubaker: Well, what we did was we raised the first floor up to the sidewalk level, so we took a sidewalk and a circulation route that was up at the second level and then later on the bank added the bridge.

Blum: That's the bridge over Madison Street connecting to the Three First National building?

Brubaker: Yes. Then we also did a study for a huge bank building that would have cut out the Marquette Building, the Bell Savings and Loan, and the Italian Village. With all of these big buildings here, the people at the Italian Village gave us a very hard time. They wanted to stay in the restaurant business, not be in the banking business.

Blum: Are you saying that you thought of demolishing the buildings that housed the Italian Village and those other businesses?

Brubaker: Yes. It was just one study and it didn't work for us. Now it's the Xerox Center with a Shaper Image store on the ground level but at the time the whole block had some low stuff in the middle and offices around that.

Blum: But you say that all that would have been demolished in your plan?

Brubaker: Well, the Italian Village gave us a hard time. They said that they wanted nothing to do with this. I think they were very wise. That is a nicer block exactly like it is than it would have been if yet another skyscraper had been built across the street from First National. So, my hat's off to the Italian Village.

Blum: What was the other building?

Brubaker: It's Commonwealth Edison. And this one has been various buildings—Bell Savings was on this corner. Inland Steel is on the corner of Dearborn and Monroe. I went to a meeting when it was finished. Walter Netsch is a friend of mine but Bruce Graham is not and they both worked on it. Somebody asked Walter what he thought of that plaza across the street. He sort of looked out the window and he said, "Well, it looks like a stone quarry." But I took that as a warm reception.

Blum: A veiled compliment?

Brubaker: Yeah.

Blum: But the Inland Steel building was finished long before.

Brubaker: It was finished in the early 1960s and the bank opened in the late 1960s. As this stuff shows you, we explored ground level plazas, sunken level plazas.

Blum: If the plaza was integral to the original plan, why was work on the plaza begun so long after the building was finished?

Brubaker: There was an extended period there of planning time when the bank was moving out of their old building and moving into the new building and demolishing the old building and putting caissons in for future underground development. All of that stuff took another year. I guess that's the way I remember that.

Blum: Did Murphy and Perkins and Will do the plaza together?

Brubaker: Murphy and Perkins and Will did the plaza. Also, Carter took a special interest in the Chagall and was really, among others in the art world, instrumental in getting Chagall attached to this project.

Blum: There are some other names that have surfaced in connection with the project, other than the top echelon of Perkins and Will, Stan Gladych, for example.

Brubaker: He was one of the designers but he was not the only designer. He joined the team six months after the design was almost finished, so we have to take that information about Mr. Gladych with a grain of salt.

Blum: And Jim Ferris?

Brubaker: Ditto. He was also a chief there. There were many designers. Jim Ferris was one of the key designers, Stan Gladych was one of the key designers, and I'm one of the key designers. My partner, Al Kisielius, was too but he was more of the nuts-and-bolts man, though. He was responsible for engineering and building systems.

Blum: So he was with Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Yes, and unfortunately he died during the project.

Blum: Another name that comes to mind is John Gallagher.

Brubaker: John was involved with the construction company and I can't remember whether he was involved with Perkins and Will or not. He's the kind of guy I always send a Christmas card to and we stay in touch and we see each other in the Loop once a year. He was part of the team. I really can't remember whose payroll he was on.

Blum: So this project was really the product of many, many, many hands and minds.

Brubaker: It was complicated. All big buildings are complicated, but this one was especially complicated because of the unusual things like the truck spiral services coiling down from Clark Street and going to the vaults and delivering the Coca-Cola and paper and canceled checks, et cetera. That all makes it very complex. Compared with the First National Bank, we could have designed the Blue Cross-Blue Shield building with our eyes closed.

Blum: Do you consider that to be a simpler building with fewer functions?

Brubaker: I do. Did you hear about the birthday party that bankers had for the First National building? Well, about six months or a year ago, they invited everyone they could think of who had been involved in the building: architects, engineers, contractors, suppliers, their best customers. We were all invited for a night out at the bank.

Blum: What anniversary was it?

Brubaker: Maybe it was forty years, I'll have to stop and figure that out. But it was black tie and it was very elegant. They warned us ahead of time that there was going to be one short speech by the chairman, who would be thanking

everyone. He added a little something when he said that the building was the most successful building in Chicago and “thanks a lot!” I thought it was a great idea, however many years later it was. There is a film and you would certainly be qualified to borrow a copy of it, if they don’t want to give one to the Art Institute. It was done by a camera crew of about ten people, with big bucks, and I don’t know what their motive was in doing such an elaborate thing.

Blum: They filmed the celebration?

Brubaker: No, they just gathered the people together that evening for a very nice dinner and there was no entertainment. It was a thank you party.

Blum: Are Chris Wilson and Bob Wilmouth still at the bank?

Brubaker: Chris Wilson went out to New Mexico or Arizona and died. Bob Wilmouth is, I think, alive and well and living in the northwest suburbs. Bob Wilmouth has had jobs like president of the Chicago Board of Trade and a few things like that. The Chicago Historical Society had a program on bankers and the history of banks in the United States and Wilmouth was very helpful in talking his people in the banking field into loaning material.

Blum: In the film they made, did they interview people?

Brubaker: They interviewed people, not unlike what you’re doing here. They interviewed Carter Manny and myself for the major speeches—this is the workshop I’m talking about here. I’m trying to think if I have a copy of the film. They did a great job on it.

Blum: Well, it sounds like they still love the building. As the process of the project began by getting ideas out on the table, sharing them, altering them, were you sitting in the meetings making your notes?

Brubaker: Right. I missed very few meetings.

Blum: Do your notes reflect the ideas that were being discussed?

Brubaker: Oh, they sure did.

Blum: Or were they ideas that you came to the meeting with?

Brubaker: Both. People, I found, actually did take my notes home and read them. That's why the curved, swooping shape survived, because it's too easy to say, No, let's do it the Mies's way. Well, it wasn't a Miesian program. In Chicago, all office buildings were beginning to look alike; they were all metal and glass. This building was granite and the granite has behaved beautifully. It did not have the problems that Amoco had. Thank you for not including Amoco in your study.

Blum: But we're not finished.

Brubaker: Well, I'll beg off that one.

Blum: The sloping side was a very unusual shape for a building in Chicago. In 1950, years before First National, I.M. Pei had done a study for the New York Stock Exchange with sloping sides.

Brubaker: Right, yeah. I acknowledge that in here. Others have done the same. That falls into the category of knowing what's going on and not reinventing the wheel.

Blum: Did the shape of Pei's design exert any influence on this project?

Brubaker: Yeah. The big building has the sloping sides and therefore has the big floor space. The upper floors of the building have floors of about twenty thousand square feet. The lower floor has about thirty or forty thousand square feet.

They wanted lots of room for tellers. Now if you go into the bank, you don't need a lot of tellers. People are not using tellers like they used to. There will be only a handful of people.

Blum: Considering what you're saying and the program that you were working with...

[Tape 3: Side 2]

Brubaker: What we wanted to do was to design a building that was not a copy of a Mies building and not a copy of what was going on in Europe or even around the rest of the United States. What we were trying to do was analyze a new kind of a problem and come up with a new kind of solution. I think we did do that.

Blum: If what you were solving was a problem that needed a lot of space on the ground floor and less space on the top floors...

Brubaker: Narrower upper floors. The top thirty floors of the building are lawyers' offices.

Blum: Wouldn't a Sears Tower-type solution have worked?

Brubaker: I think that the Sears Tower would not have been satisfactory because the floors there are too big.

Blum: I'm not suggesting an exact translation, but to have used the design concept of having more space on the ground and less as the building rises.

Brubaker: Well, I think that we found a happy medium. Since they owned the entire block, we could have had a series of small buildings, for instance.

Blum: Oh, was that one of the ideas?

- Brubaker: That was one of the ideas. And then to link them across with future bridges and tie the box together. But then we made a policy decision that there would be no more bridges—“we” meaning the architects and the city of Chicago and any other interested party.
- Blum: Why no more bridges?
- Brubaker: Because everyone was disappointed in IDS Center and the Minneapolis, Minnesota, experiment.
- Blum: What was dissapointing about Philip Johnson’s building?
- Brubaker: There just weren’t enough people going around to populate three sets of sidewalks: bridge traffic, sidewalk traffic and tunnel traffic. Incidentally, when the bridges shut down at night, the stores had to shut down too, because the stores are completely dependent on the sidewalk system.
- Blum: When Larry referred to the sketches that you made at meetings, he called them “idea sketches.” Does that suggest that a lot of what is in your sketchbook came from your ideas and may not have reflected others?
- Brubaker: What I tried to do was be fair and give credits where appropriate. On the other hand, I tried to maintain our original stance that we were going to have a collaborative office with people coming from dozens of different directions with each one bringing special talent to the job. I think that we were successful in doing that, as a matter of fact.
- Blum: Larry had a comment that I would like you to explain. He said, “Brubaker had a scheme that I regret did not get built.”
- Brubaker: Oh, that was simply the idea of not having an exterior, open-air plaza, but to have an enclosed mall, like Minneapolis, actually.

Blum: Within the building?

Brubaker: Yes. In that plan we would have had the major space as an indoor space, rather than an outdoor space.

Blum: What was the thinking behind that?

Brubaker: Other people were reaching the same conclusion in projects that endured rigorous weather, like in Minneapolis. An outdoor plaza just wouldn't be used enough to justify it was what the critics had to say. Frankly, I liked the outside gathering place.

Blum: Well, it invites the public to share it. Inside may not have had given the public the same welcoming message. Considering that this was built in the 1960s, was the renewal of the downtown area an issue that was built in to this project?

Brubaker: Yeah, that's in my book of sketches, too. A lot of that is in the book. We tried to identify what was happening and what would likely happen in the next few years. Therefore we would take appropriate action. I'm trying to think of some good examples. We rejected, as I said, the pedestrian bridge idea. Underground passageways were another story. We decided that if owners of buildings on either side of the block wanted to tie this together with an underground passage, it would not be a problem aesthetically. An overhead bridge would have been a problem.

Blum: Was an underground passage looked on favorably because of the weather or for security reasons.

Brubaker: Oh, it was because of the weather.

Blum: So it really was like the network of surface streets that worked in the Loop area. I realize that this is a commercial building, but what about bringing people back to the Loop and renewing downtown?

Brubaker: That has happened by the efforts of many people. Just think about how many office buildings have recently been converted by the School of the Art Institute for dormitories.

Blum: Well, that's true, but I'm asking about this issue was treated in the 1960s.

Brubaker: In the 1960s, this was a business center and it was not written in our program that we were going to change the nature of downtown by bringing people with kids and schools and whatnot.

Blum: Well, there were restaurants, which were open in the bank building after-hours. Was there a little theatre also?

Brubaker: There was a little theatre in the bank, yes. It was a popular place to meet. That's where "Bright New City" used to meet.

Blum: The plaza itself had planned programs, which was very nice, for a while. They invited the public to come use the plaza and have their lunch.

Brubaker: The bank has done wonders and it's too bad that they can't do more right now, but the fact is that the entertainment was exciting and wonderful in the summertime but expensive. I think it was worth it and I think it continues to be worth it, but somebody has to write the check.

Blum: That's true. As this project was working its way to completion, there was a conflict between Murphy and Perkins and Will about the facing material. How do you remember that?

Brubaker: That is a very easy one to summarize. Larry asked us, like he did in hundreds of other instances, to try this idea or that idea, and a lot of his ideas worked and a lot of them were incorporated. The only one that everybody balked at was his idea of making the primary vertical columns white and using darker stone for the spandrels and the wall between the columns.

Blum: Reminiscent of the U.S. Gypsum building?

Brubaker: Yes.

Blum: But I understand that the contrast appealed to the bank people.

Brubaker: Well, it did, and they took a trip around and looked at other buildings and Carter, I think, did a good job in presenting the one-material idea. I think we resolved it the right way.

Blum: Are you happy with the final solution?

Brubaker: I'm happy with it. If it were subtly different, with two shades of gray, I think it would be better, but just the whole idea of black and white sounds entirely too stark for me.

Blum: Is it with time that you have come to favor the one-material solution, or did you favor it at the time?

Brubaker: One-material buildings are one of the key elements in 1960s architecture. One material, one color. The libraries and university buildings that I.M. Pei and a dozen other architects worked on in the 1960s almost invariably used brick inside and outside and used it in a very straightforward manner. With the coming of Robert Venturi, young architects—we can blame the young architects instead of blaming the senior leadership—the young architects around the country really complicated life. You know, Chicago does not have a really good postmodern building.

Blum: Are you saying that they complicated it because they used a variety of materials?

Brubaker: Well, they used an undisciplined variety. I remember visiting the Portland Building in Portland, Oregon, that Michael Graves did. I had already read the reviews of it, so they weren't my own ideas, but it was disappointing. Now, very recently, we seem to be returning to a richer mix based on simpler elements.

Blum: At the time, what was your thinking? When the two-color solution and the one-color solution were both proposed, what was your thinking, considering that you were on the Perkins and Will team?

Brubaker: I did not bless the idea of two colors in stone.

Blum: Did Larry know that?

Brubaker: Oh, I'm sure that he did. But, as I say, Larry has a good track record. He suggested a lot of ideas. That particular one though, rubbed Carter Manny the wrong way even though his own right-hand man, Jim Ferris, had conceived of the idea independently.

Blum: A two-color scheme?

Brubaker: Yes. Jim released an announcement to the press that published the white and black scheme without the rest of us even knowing it.

Blum: Jim Ferris did that? Or did the bank do that?

Brubaker: Jim Ferris was a bit of a problem in that regard. You've got to remember what the ground rules were. The ground rules were "let's look at the

alternatives, let's do it a new way not just to be new but let's accept a new way of doing things." I feel strongly that we made the right decision.

Blum: So you're satisfied with the result?

Brubaker: Oh yes. Let me add to that that the bank is clad in one material on the outside and that is granite from central Texas. This gray granite was available in large quantities, and that's one of the key elements—you can't select a granite that's going to run out of that color halfway up. So the bankers liked our recommendation of this gray. However, the name of the granite was "Texas Pink." The bankers pointed out that we sure as hell were not going to build a building in Chicago made out of something called "Texas Pink." So we changed the name. One telephone call was all it took. So in one giant step the company changed its catalog listing and everything else from "Texas Pink" to "Bankers' Gray."

Blum: The name changed but the material remained the same?

Brubaker: Right. Now the sidewalks are granite, the plaza is granite, the steps and the seats are granite, and the drinking fountains and polished surfaces are smooth granite that has been polished, but it's all a single material.

Blum: But it's really "Texas Pink."

Brubaker: Next time you're in there, just look really carefully and you'll see flecks of pink in the granite. But the effect isn't really overall pink.

Blum: After the building was fairly well completed, you said there was about a year's hiatus before the plaza got underway. What was the thinking about the plaza?

Brubaker: Well, I'm not sure I've got the time right on that but that was the next step.

Blum: Why was the plaza not at street level?

Brubaker: Because we had as one of our consultants to the project, the guy who takes pictures of people in plazas, William Whyte. All of his research pointed out—he used Rockefeller Center as the most successful example—that an elevated plaza doesn't get used because you can't see it if you're walking by or passing in a taxi. You have a vague idea that something's there, but an elevated plaza is a bad idea. A street level plaza is better and a submerged plaza is the best. If you like that idea then go see Rockefeller Center. It's just about as simple as that and the argument didn't last any longer than that; we all rallied around that. We were exploring other ideas and at a certain point we had to say "enough exploring, we've got to get on with construction."

Blum: So the depressed plaza appealed to everyone?

Brubaker: It serves as an amphitheater and that just works like a charm.

Blum: I understand that the fountain in the plaza is computer controlled and was designed by a consultant for the Disney company.

Brubaker: It was done by Sam Hamel. Probably he's from California, but I can't tell you that he's with Disney.

Blum: So in the depressed plaza there was a place for the Chagall mosaic and the fountain?

Brubaker: Plus two restaurants were facing it too, so you get a view from inside of the restaurants.

Blum: What about the smaller building that's on the Clark Street side?

Brubaker: That was originally designed for tellers. The reason that was going to be tellers was that their competitors were only one block away on LaSalle Street.

They didn't like the idea of having thousands of people going by each day and not being able to stop in to make a quick withdrawal or deposit.

Blum: Why couldn't they do it right in the bank?

Brubaker: It wasn't big enough; there was not enough space.

Blum: So they outgrew the space very quickly?

Brubaker: Yes. And, of course, now twenty years later it's quite the opposite and they can't figure out what to do with all the space. I've had some brief conversations with people in the bank. My suggestion was to turn it into an art gallery on the second floor because of the success of the Philip Morris building in New York, which has a branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art. It's sort of a junior Whitney at 42nd Street and Grand Central Station. I don't know what's happened to that idea.

Blum: And First National Bank certainly has the art collection to exhibit.

Brubaker: They have an unusual corporate art collection.

Blum: And they certainly take maintenance very seriously. Were you in on the Chagall selection?

Brubaker: No, not really. That was Carter's baby. Carter was involved in not only selecting the sculptor but also going over and talking to him and getting acquainted and getting his services arranged.

Blum: Were other artists considered to do a piece for the plaza?

Brubaker: Not that I'm aware of.

Blum: Well, how do you feel about the First National Bank plaza in a very prominent Chicago location built by Chicago architects with a piece of artwork by a French artist?

Brubaker: Well, Chagall is French, Picasso is French, Dubuffet is French. Then there's that funny little Miró piece between the First United Methodist Church and the Brunswick building. Well, you can't get more French than that.

Blum: You're absolutely right. I was really thinking of the Federal Center plaza, with the Calder.

Brubaker: The Calder is nice, but it's the same piece of sculpture that's in Grand Rapids and three or four other cities around the country. It would have been good if he had broadened his appeal to a little wider audience.

Blum: So you have no feelings about a French work of art in a public space that was really not only American but very much Chicago?

Brubaker: I think that the whole area there is so successful that I can hardly think of a criticism.

Blum: How do you like the Chagall with the vitrine that now covers it?

Brubaker: I think it looks good and protects it.

Blum: Were the interiors of the First National bank done by your interiors department?

Brubaker: The public spaces were all done by Perkins and Will, but not with Murphy though. We did those separately.

Blum: Was that done by the Interior Space Design, Inc. division?

Brubaker: Well, IDS participated in the architectural design team. You know, you don't like to cut them out of a job.

Blum: Was the IDS division the interiors department of Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Yes. It was a department at first and then it became a branch corporation. That's where the word "incorporated" came from.

Blum: Was IDS free to take in outside work?

Brubaker: Oh yeah. They did. They revolutionized interior design because that caused hundreds of architects to go into the interior design business to the distress of the old, established interior design firms.

Blum: The interior decorators?

Brubaker: Right.

Blum: How would you sum up your assessment of the First National Bank job: the building, the plaza, the interior, the collaboration?

Brubaker: Well, I think that this is a good example of the Chicago design community helping to generate some fresh ideas. It's not a Miesian building; it's not a SOM building. It's a C.F. Murphy and Perkins and Will building and it works. It worked at 333 West Wacker—that was a Perkins and Will plus Kohn Pedersen Fox building. It worked on the other combinations, probably the least known of which is the Bloomingdale's building at 900 North Michigan. Most people haven't the foggiest idea who designed that building. And there are those who would just as soon not emphasize it.

Blum: Well now, we're moving on to a collaboration with Kohn Pedersen Fox, at 333 West Wacker, which is the green glass building that follows the curve of the Chicago river. Was that your first collaboration with them?

Brubaker: It was the first, and again, it was the owner of the building who asked us to team up with them. It's such a familiar theme that I've got to emphasize how that works. The owner interviewed Perkins and Will and the owner interviewed Kohn Pedersen and Fox and they liked both firms' work. They thought that our work was pretty conservative, actually, and they asked us whether we would consider teaming up together into a single joint venture. The answer eventually came out to be "Yes, we would like to do that," but only after lots of soul-searching in the office. It's tough on your own design team if you see design opportunities get away. But that has been a very popular building for the public.

Blum: Do you mean that the soul-searching within Perkins and Will was whether or not to collaborate with a firm that was going to do and get credit for the design?

Brubaker: Yeah, right. We also worked with them on 900 North Michigan and we are the architects of record. Now, that is a boring subject and only of interest to lawyers. Not very many people know and not very many people care that that is technically a Perkins and Will building.

Blum: What does it mean when you're the architect of record?

Brubaker: That means that you file the building plans in city hall in such a way that there are various names on it so you can find the material later.

Blum: Then the 900 building was the second collaboration with Kohn Pedersen Fox?

Brubaker: Well, there was the building next to 333 West Wacker, the 225 West Wacker building too.

Blum: So after you did 333 West Wacker with Kohn Pederson Fox, there was another building. Was collaboration with KPF, from the beginning, a happy collaboration?

Brubaker: It sure was a happy collaboration—you can just see how much work we did after that. 333 was the first and then we did 225 and 900. They were so happy they came back to us for more.

Blum: When you got to the second and third jobs with KPF, did they select you, did you select them, or did the owner select both firms? How did that work?

Brubaker: Usually it's the owner who selects both firms.

Blum: Did that happen with 900 North Michigan?

Brubaker: It did. If you work with lots of architects on other jobs it is pretty easy to put together a team that you have faith in. That's almost standard operating procedure. It's true in hospitals and it's true in university buildings and it's true in commercial work.

Blum: The name of the designer of the 333 Wacker building was Alexander Ward. He was with KPF. Was he in Chicago much during the job?

Brubaker: I just don't really remember. My problem is that I was not in charge of those KPF buildings so I don't have an indelible impression of it.

Blum: What were the responsibilities of the two firms? Who did what?

Brubaker: Well, they were the designers, there's no question about it. At 333, KPF had the assignment from the owner to be the prime designer. Perkins and Will had the assignment to be the architect of record and to manage the consultants and the engineers. But the owner didn't believe that KPF had the

political savvy to push this through in Chicago as well as somebody else might.

Blum: Were the unions difficult to deal with?

Brubaker: I don't have any feelings about the unions.

Blum: Well, what was it about Chicago that would make it difficult for an outsider, say a New Yorker, to push a job through? Is it the unions, is it the politics, is it the zoning, is it the bureaucracy of city hall getting documents signed?

Brubaker: Yeah, and also the need to negotiate your way around the zoning ordinances. The zoning ordinances tell you that you have the right to build so much here and the right to build so much here and the right to build so much there. That's what the law says. Now, if you're a smart developer like Charles Shaw or somebody else, he might come in and say, "Well, that's a nice plan that you've got but here's an idea for three more buildings, but not as high and not as crowded either. I'll make you a deal: if you'll put in the streets and the sewers then I'll make the building." He makes it sound so attractive that nobody can say no. That's just the nature of the development world, which is pretty exciting. One of the most exciting developers is John Buck, and he's having an amazing effect on the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association properties. Also, in addition to those properties, which are along Michigan Avenue, he's doing things like recycling existing buildings, tearing down the old three- and four-floor buildings and building eight-story parking garages all over the place. There's a lot happening out there.

Blum: Are you saying that's because Buck is very effective at negotiating these deals?

Brubaker: I think he probably figured out that the opportunities for building significant projects were pretty good in Chicago and they weren't in Dallas. He is from Dallas. I suspect that he just did his research better than most people.

Blum: The 333 West Wacker building is not in the Chicago tradition, as we know it.

Brubaker: It comes closer to being off in a different direction, which I was explaining about the First National Bank building. Just doing another Miesian building was not a new direction. The Blue Cross-Blue Shield building is not very exciting, although I think it's a job well done. 333 does not distress me. We've seen waves of new ideas and if we're smart enough to focus on the good ideas and reject the bad ones, then we're making progress.

Blum: Could we speak about another collaboration, for an office building that you said you were glad we hadn't talk about? It's the Amoco building.

Brubaker: Sure.

Blum: How did the association with Edward Durell Stone come about?

Brubaker: Well, let me think about that. You know, Mrs. Edward Durell Stone, I think, had something to do with the fact that the General Motors building in New York City on 5th Avenue has white marble columns and dark spandrels. It's the first to have done that in modern times. I have heard that she was involved in that decision. But when Perkins and Will went to New York to look at this building and to find out how it worked... Well, the white-sheathed marble column was not unique, is what I'm trying to point out.

Blum: It has been said that the wife of the CEO of Standard Oil also had a voice in decisions about the building.

Brubaker: Yes, Mrs. Swearingen was also involved. She went to Italy to look at the stone quarry.

Blum: I'm a little unclear on this. How was this collaboration with Stone arranged?

Brubaker: I'm really trying to think and I'm not sure I know exactly.

Blum: I have heard, but I think it needs to be verified, that Todd Wheeler had met Edward Durell Stone during a hospital project that Stone had designed at Stanford University that Todd was called in to consult on.

Brubaker: Oh, I've seen the hospital at Stanford and it's a very nice hospital—it's romantic and it has arches and all the wonderful things that you associate with southern California. It looked like a mission. The thing that I remember more vividly is the fact that Ed Stone had this line of baloney that he talked about—he took the Standard Oil team around and he said, "I really love my building, my white marble building, here. I just like to come down here in the evening and just sit across the street and look at it." He came up with all sorts of garbage like that.

Blum: Which of his buildings was he talking about?

Brubaker: He was talking about the General Motors building in New York. That was when they were on the verge of hiring Stone for the Amoco building. That sounds kind of complicated, but it really isn't. Ed Stone got the job and he invited us to be the architects of record. He didn't have much of an office. He had a promotion-type office and he really couldn't do the job alone. He'd either have to hire numerous consultants or he'd have to hire a big firm that could follow through and he chose to hire a big firm to follow through.

Blum: Did he chose Perkins and Will because he had had a previous connection to you, perhaps through Todd?

Brubaker: About that I have no idea. It sounds authentic, because it is a handsome hospital and not many hospitals can be considered humanistic and warm.

Blum: Well, according to what I have read, building that hospital was going way over budget and Todd, as a hospital expert, was called in by Stanford to

analyze the situation and suggest where corners could be cut to reduce the expenses.

Brubaker: You know, that sounds good to me. It sounds authentic. But you have to forgive me that I don't know the details on that like I know the details on the higher education buildings that I worked on.

Blum: It would be interesting to know how the collaboration came about.

Brubaker: What you have heard may have been the event that caused Ed the next day, when the martinis had dropped off, to call Perkins and Will and ask for Mr. Wheeler and to take it from there. But I'm just speculating.

Blum: How would you evaluate the Amoco building? I know it has a new name now. How would you evaluate it in the context of Chicago architecture?

Brubaker: Well, the Amoco building is out by itself, not linked mentally, physically, or emotionally with the rest of the Loop. It does suffer from that a little bit. But the building is a better building than it gets credit for being. The building works. It's quite good looking. Not many architects agree with this but it's quite good looking with the right light and the right gardens. Have you been in the new gardens? They redid the plaza and it's really much better now.

Blum: There's a Harry Bertoia sculpture in the plaza.

Brubaker: The Bertoia didn't work well because it was a wind chime and the wind chime made a lot of noise but not enough to approach the noise level of the gushing water. So we had a terrible time on that. The Bertoia wind chime was just wiped out by the water. I think that Standard Oil is a frustrating project to speak about because you want to give the architects encouragement that they seem to want...

[Tape 4: Side 1]

Blum: It is well known that there were problems with the cladding of the Standard Oil Building.

Brubaker: There were problems.

Blum: Yes, and as a result of those problems, it was re-clad not in marble but in another material.

Brubaker: Granite, in white granite.

Blum: What was the problem?

Brubaker: Well, this, you know...

Blum: What I read is that it had been clad in Carrara white marble and it has been said that Mrs. Swearingen had a particular interest in using that material.

Brubaker: Well, this is difficult to talk about because it's a legal matter. We've been paying legal fees for years to...

Blum: Are you saying that the client sued the architects?

Brubaker: Yeah.

Blum: And is the legal action finished?

Brubaker: I'm not sure where we stand today. That would take a little more research.

Blum: Well, whose decision was it to re-clad it?

Brubaker: Well, what they did when they severed relations with the architects—Mr. Stone and Perkins and Will—they hired a firm of architects that work on problem projects. The building is a hollow tube that is quite innovative. It has an amazingly flexible interior. There are V-shaped perimeter columns that create the shell—it's like an egg crate—and they carry the utility lines and tubes. This leaves the interior column-free. The workrooms and elevators and stairs and toilets are in the core and the offices are around the perimeter on each floor. When you stand inside and look out, there's a window every five feet. That's a nice, happy balance

Blum: So you find that there are some redeeming features to the building aside from what is its most sensational failure, which is the cladding, that has caused so many problems.

Brubaker: The new North Carolina granite cladding is considered to be quite successful. The old Carrara marble cladding is very, very complicated and it would take a geologist to really explain. I'll give you the short geological summary here. What happened is that this white marble had been buried in the ground for millions of years and under great strain, which scientists can study. When they brought the marble out of the ground and sawed it into thin—not thin compared to what a lot of buildings have, this was actually quite generous thickness of the stone—when they sliced it, that relieved the pressure but exerted different pressures and temperatures on it. That curved and bent the stone. Instead of being absolutely flat, these new forces, after millions of years of being submerged in the ground in Italy, shaped the stone differently.

Blum: It sounds like wood warping.

Brubaker: It is. So that's an interesting problem.

Blum: Well, it seems that architects must know their geology as well as design.

Brubaker: Well, the stone that has been used in the new tower has behaved very well. Let's put it this way, I'm just as glad not to be involved in that one.

Blum: During the 1970s, it seems that much of what you wrote dealt with urban problems: growth in the center city, the central business district, malls, urban renewal, and city planning. What prompted this shift in your interest from educational matters to urban concerns?

Brubaker: I think that one should recognize the facts that, generally, architects do get involved in urban planning and do get involved in urban design and redevelopment. Architects frequently change jobs and become developers or work for developers. They are interested in improving the whole environment, which means not just architecture but transportation, civic buildings, and open space. So it's not too surprising to find that I would be interested in both architecture and planning.

Blum: Why did your shift in concern surface during the 1970s?

Brubaker: There were a couple of reasons. One was that suddenly federal aid was more available.

Blum: Federal aid to improve downtowns?

Brubaker: Yes, for downtowns and for urban renewal. The Housing Act of 1949 and succeeding years—it seemed like every couple of years there was another major housing act. Originally they were aimed at housing but then they went on to aid commerce and the arts and transportation.

Blum: Are you speaking about federal funds being plentiful during the 1970s?

Brubaker: Yes. Also, we discussed earlier that one particular professor, Hugo Leipziger Pierce, at the University of Texas, worked very hard to try to get me to do some graduate work in urban planning and not in architecture. I was

interested, but not interested enough to abandon my primary interest, and that was designing buildings.

Blum: Well, has it been only recently that planning has been part of an architectural education?

Brubaker: Certainly it has been part of it for decades, so I don't think it's a very recent thing.

Blum: Well, it was a separate field when you were in school and a field that you didn't take advantage of.

Brubaker: Right now it's a separate field at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, for instance. There is the school of architecture, there is the city-planning department, and there is landscape architecture. Many schools then added construction management as a separate curriculum. Some schools added interior design. Purdue was rather strange because they added interior design at what had been Ball State University and they put their new architecture school in Muncie, Indiana. Well, that may have been good for Muncie, but that's not where the jobs were. The school should have been at Purdue.

Blum: You wrote several articles addressed more to a general audience and you gave at the Union League Club about improving the central business district.

Brubaker: Yes, I had a couple of topics that I was often invited to address specifically. Among those topics was energy conservation. When the energy crisis occurred, I was well prepared. I also frequently, and still do, talk about Chicago architecture and particularly the rise of the skyscraper and the evolution of the highrise building in Chicago. But not, for instance, about the work of Frank Lloyd Wright because other people are interested in that and the work of various architects. But I was quite specifically interested in

Chicago architecture and its history. That seems kind of strange now because everyone's interested in Chicago architecture, but in 1950 it was more rare.

Blum: When your interest shifted to urban problems, what was the state of the educational field in the 1970s?

Brubaker: Well, the educational field was booming in the 1950s and in the 1960s and we did some of our biggest and best work during those years. There was a great demand and we were in the forefront of college and university design. By the 1970s, some dramatic changes occurred. The first was demographic: the demographers started informing their clients, the school boards, that they were wrong in their earlier projections and the population wasn't going to go up and get bigger and bigger, it was going to level off. What that meant was that people couldn't pass any more bond issues because there wasn't any demand for schools. The experts had told them that schools were going to grow forever and in their own experience and reading of others' experiences they knew they weren't going to grow forever, they were going to level off. So taking up some new interest was a smart thing to do. As school jobs declined, office building jobs increased. Some of the biggest and best office buildings were built in the 1960s. By the 1970s, they had overcome a few glitches in their markets.

Blum: Internally, at Perkins and Will, how was the turndown of the student population circumvented?

Brubaker: We welcomed and sought hospitals and university and college projects.

Blum: So Perkins and Will's interest sort of shifted into these other areas?

Brubaker: Well, we already had an interest in education. We had missed the healthcare field—I didn't even attempt to do that. I stuck with educational facilities.

Blum: Was Todd still with the firm?

Brubaker: Todd was still with the firm.

Blum: Until when?

Brubaker: He retired in 1971.

Blum: When Todd left the firm, did hospital commissions lessen or were healthcare clients so well established at Perkins and Will that they just continued?

Brubaker: They really just continued. The healthcare field had been built up and strengthened by Todd, specifically, with the idea of improving our practice, involving more young people and building up the healthcare jobs. We see that still today because we're working on the Northwestern University Medical Center right downtown here on the Near North Side. That goes way back to the Todd Wheeler days.

Blum: What do you mean?

Brubaker: Well, a lot of the people at Northwestern knew him and he was a likable person and was rather popular in the medical field. He wrote a really good book on planning hospitals, *Hospital Design and Function*. About ten years later someone else wrote a book on planning hospitals and there was a review of the book by a doctor critic who said, "Well, this book is quite a fine book, but we must remember that ten years ago Todd Wheeler wrote the best book ever on hospital planning." So Todd had very good public relations with the clients and the publishers both.

Blum: And Perkins and Will retained those connections?

Brubaker: Yeah, we became the biggest and best hospital planners in Chicago, certainly, and one of the three or four biggest and best in the country. Hospital people love making lists and making qualifying lists and saying "Evanston Hospital,

300 beds. Jones Hospital, 700 beds,” et cetera, and they like to make charts of everything. When it comes time to do the actual choosing, they review the charts and say, “Oh, well, that’s a big firm. They must be good.” So our sheer size has served us well.

Blum: Well, one certainly does wonder how clients make choices and I’m sure that a firm’s size is one factor if there is no prior connection to a firm. What about office buildings? Has Perkins and Will built many office buildings?

Brubaker: From the very beginning Perkins and Will built office buildings, designed office buildings, but they weren’t as famous and well known as others were, like Mies’s work. When I first joined the firm, there were projects in the office building area. The Lutheran Brotherhood office building was eight stories. It was in Minneapolis and it was the biggest office building in Minneapolis.

Blum: Ah, well, if you’re talking about big in Minneapolis, that’s not big in Chicago.

Brubaker: Right, but it’s interesting that they hired Perkins and Will. We did an office building for Scott Foresman, which is a publisher, and that’s a suburban office building in Glenview, which was very popular and looks sort of like New Trier West.

Blum: Was it a low campus-type plan?

Brubaker: The publishing business is one that we’ve always been involved in. We did something like thirty buildings for Deluxe Check Printers—thirty scattered throughout the United States to make them accessible to the customers. It’s just hard to remember what’s going on there, but everyone used a lot of checks. Let’s see... International Minerals and Chemical Corporation was a Perkins and Will office building, also in the suburbs but not quite as big as some of the suburban buildings—probably about eight or ten stories—in Skokie. You know, people liked a lot of our buildings. They might not like

Mies's black buildings, they might not like boxy buildings, but they did like U.S. Gypsum. It was a very popular building with the public and the press.

Blum: Why do you think U.S. Gypsum enjoyed such popularity?

Brubaker: Well, it was sort of romantic. It's based on the structure and crystalline pattern of the mineral gypsum.

Blum: Do you think that the average person knew that?

Brubaker: No, not the average person. It was a new kind of architecture and it was a time in the 1960s when people had seen too many suburban boxes.

Blum: Well, this was also set on an angle on its site.

Brubaker: It was on a square site, with diagonals going through it, with four wings. But its fatal problem was the fact that it did not have as much space as the law would allow. It was zoned, but the owner, U.S. Gypsum Company, didn't take advantage of the maximum allowed.

Blum: Are you talking about space for the building or just space around it?

Brubaker: I don't remember the square footages, but it was something like instead of having twenty thousand square feet per floor, it had ten thousand square feet per floor. Each floor could have been bigger, the building could have been taller, there could have been more floors. So eventually that means that we're going to see a taller building and a more intensely developed block there.

Blum: Which has happened.

Brubaker: The Gypsum building has been demolished. There's a new U.S. Gypsum building downtown that is on the same block as AT&T. It's down in the south end of the Loop and Skidmore designed it.

Blum: What is the feeling, or what was the feeling, within the firm when U.S. Gypsum—the one that Larry was so proud of—came down?

Brubaker: Larry was no longer very active at that point, so I don't really know.

Blum: Well, surely he knew about it.

Brubaker: Oh, he knew about it. He was disappointed, yeah. One doesn't like to see one's handiwork destroyed.

Blum: Off and on through these sessions, you have mentioned Mies and Skidmore. Who were Perkins and Will's competitors for jobs, considering the capacity that Perkins and Will has?

Brubaker: Well, our biggest and best competitor was Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. If you're going to compete with somebody, you might as well compete with the high-end of the spectrum and Skidmore is rather a corporate kind of office. It's the best example. Helmut Jahn is different; he calls all the shots in his office and it appears that he is in charge and he is on top of everything personally, and he is not as large as we are, but he's a good competitor.

Blum: How large is Perkins and Will today?

Brubaker: We're about two hundred people in Chicago and nationwide over four hundred. There are other particular kinds of competition, which are the specific building types, like hospitals. There are certain firms in the hospital field, that I can't think of right now, but are good competitors in the hospital field. We do not compete in housing because we've done relatively little in the field. What we have done, along with SOM and a couple of other firms, is to be responsible for some highrise multi-use, mixed-use developments.

Blum: Is that considered the housing field?

Brubaker: No, mixed-use meaning housing plus hotels plus shopping and parking and entertainment, which is exemplified by Loeb Schlosman and Hackl's pioneering Water Tower Place. You've got to give them credit—that's a very imaginative kind of building. A lot of people don't like it because of the white marble, but the building appears to work like a charm and you've got to give them credit for that.

Blum: What about a firm like Epstein and Son? They're very large and they're international.

Brubaker: Yes, they are. They work on an international market probably better than we do, probably. They have been involved in international work for a long time. Originally it was industrial and institutional. They, for instance, did a lot of food plants in Poland and Europe. But we don't meet with them head-on; we don't compete with them.

Blum: Were they never competitors because of the difference in the fields?

Brubaker: Some of it was just sheer luck, I'm sure. You don't plan all these things out ten years in advance; you take opportunities as they come along.

Blum: At one time during our sessions, you said that Perkins and Will would not accept shopping center commissions.

Brubaker: Oh, no, I didn't say that, certainly.

Blum: Well, then rephrase what I thought I heard you say.

Brubaker: 900 North Michigan Avenue is a huge shopping center and we're architects of record on the building. We did most of the work and we had lots of consultants advising us, at the owners' wish and at our wish. We love mixed-

use buildings. What we don't get are the lower cost apartment buildings and the lower cost shopping centers. We get the high-end.

Blum: Then I misunderstood what you said when you said, "after Old Orchard...."

Brubaker: Well, there was a long gap between Old Orchard and 900 North Michigan.

Blum: And they're very different projects.

Brubaker: Perkins and Will does accept and does seek malls. Right now we have work in the hotel field, which is something new for us. We've done a lot of resort hotel work and urban downtown hotel work. Those projects are probably not well known to the general public.

Blum: Are there any hotel buildings in Chicago that you can cite?

Brubaker: Well, again, going back to 900 North Michigan, it just happens to be Chicago's most expensive and best big hotel, that's all there is to it. That automatically puts us in the big leagues in the hotel field. We've designed big hotels in the Mideast, which are both resort hotels, as those countries try to build their economy back up. We have an office in Paris. The reason we have an office in Paris is because we have a lot of hotel work in Europe and we're using Paris as a home base. Let me just look and see if my business card says "Paris."

Blum: Will you please read the current Perkins and Will office locations?

Brubaker: All right. We have offices in Atlanta, Charlotte, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, and Paris.

Blum: Perkins and Will is certainly spread all over. I read, speaking of types of work, that when a partner in Perkins and Will became sixty-two, they could

veto clients. This was in the context of saying that Perkins and Will did not seek casino business. Is that a myth?

Brubaker: Well, we really haven't done any casino business in the United States. We have been involved with some casino work connected with hotels in the Mideast. I really don't know where that quote came from.

Blum: Oh, it was something I read. Is Hedrich-Blessing still the photographer of choice for Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Hedrich-Blessing has been our most popular photographer and the most loyal, working together and seeking work together for many years. Along the way some other photographers have worked with us, sometimes to save money. Hedrich-Blessing is expensive—they're the best and they're also the most expensive. They're old friends; they've stuck together a good deal over the years.

Blum: When Perkins and Will finishes a job, does it sometimes, or often, plan the landscaping too?

Brubaker: Hopefully we will control the landscaping every time we have the opportunity. Sometimes that means we do it with our landscape architects and sometimes that means that we hire out consultants that work with us, just like a new department. Right now we are not doing prime landscape work. For instance, the Chicago Academy of Sciences new building is a big landscaping job. The landscaping was done by a consultant, Carol Yetken, who is the wife of one of our designers.

Blum: Has Perkins and Will ever worked with prefab?

Brubaker: Larry Perkins and Phil Will, before they got involved in schools—probably in the 1940s that would make it—worked for some developers who were building wooden, modular homes. They weren't prefabs in the usual sense

that they were the kind of things that get blown away in hurricanes; they were good-looking, but factory-made and assembled on the site. When Operation Breakthrough came along about fifteen years ago, we were hired to coordinate the whole program. This was for the department of HUD, who gave grants to different groups to develop the design and build some prototype housing for lower-income people. You pass one of them every time you go out the Kennedy Expressway—it's called Noble Square.

Blum: These are townhouses?

Brubaker: They are small townhouses. Noble Square originally had flat roofs but they got tired of leaky roofs and put pitched roofs on it and it's more attractive, actually.

Blum: Was Noble Square done by Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: It was designed by Perkins and Will, right.

Blum: Has Perkins and Will worked with prefab or site-assembled materials since the early years?

Brubaker: Are you talking about housing?

Blum: Well, any type of structure that was prefabricated.

Brubaker: The most interesting example I'd call a prototype school. We designed a school for the New York City Board of Education a couple of years ago that used components that were then reused for the next school. In other words, we designed a good kitchen but when they built the second, third, fourth, and fifth schools, they didn't redesign the kitchen, they said that was our prototype kitchen and we want to use it and we like it. The same was for the auditorium and the gym and the science rooms. So it was a kit of parts and the New York Board of Education has built probably four such schools in the

Bronx and four such schools in Brooklyn. They've been widely published. You know, schools don't get the architectural attention that a lot of other building types do. You go through the magazines and you'd be overwhelmed by the number of museums that are published. But this particular school has gotten its share of publicity.

Blum: Did you have a hand in that?

Brubaker: I did. I worked on the project and I also took the initiative to ask the school board for the job and they gave it to us.

Blum: When was this?

Brubaker: Oh, about three years ago.

Blum: Do you think this is the way that schools will be designed in the future?

Brubaker: I doubt it. I think that we will have some prototype schools and they will give us variety. On the other hand, it's nice to see fresh ideas for the unique problems of a school site—Jones Commercial being a good example. No other school plan fits that property like the present one does.

Blum: Do you think that change in educational approaches and technology is what will make schools different from one another in the future?

Brubaker: I think that's happening already. I think that the school of the future will be, for instance, a community facility. It won't be locked up at five o'clock. The janitors' union locks up the buildings and goes home at night. In Winnetka, the schools are open—New Trier West and East both are ablaze with lights because people are using the schools as a community center.

Blum: Do you think that's going to happen more and more? What about Evanston?

Brubaker: I don't know what's happening at Evanston right now. The technology has already taken over part of the teaching task and flexibility is almost a demand now. Years ago, the home economics room was a home ec room and now it probably doesn't even exist. Home ec is out of favor and the space is being used for new programs.

Blum: There was a home economics room for girls and shop for boys, as I recall from my generation of high school classes.

Brubaker: Larry Perkins was a great advocate of learning with one's hands and learning by doing in the school—not making it after-hours but making it an integral part of the curriculum. He was a strong booster of vocational school but mostly learning about ceramics for art reasons and learning to weld so that you can make welded sculpture.

Blum: Is that your position as well?

Brubaker: I'm not quite as intense on that one as Larry was.

Blum: You spoke about hospitals and other type of buildings in the Middle East. How does a Chicago firm that branches out in the United States also obtain jobs elsewhere in the world?

Brubaker: Almost always we obtained a job in another part of the world because somebody has recommended us. The person who used to be the superintendent of schools in Evanston has gone off to Seoul, Korea. He's got a new job that's exciting for him; he hadn't done this before. They lived in Wilmette and he takes his wife and kids. He takes the job knowing full well they're only going to be there two or three years so they go as if they're already introduced. It's an adventure and something they enjoy. It takes very low-key salesmanship. The main things one should do is to let the rest of the world know that you're interested.

Blum: How does an architect do that?

Brubaker: Well, by publishing articles and making speeches and writing books and reading books and belonging to the clubs and belonging to the language club, if languages are in.

Blum: Why would a language club be helpful?

Brubaker: Well, a club organized around a foreign language. My wife got involved in that. The school did not teach French and did not want to teach French, so she went the board of education, overcame the red tape, to approve a French class, which she ran at Joseph Sears school across the street from New Trier. It was for younger children.

Blum: How would your wife teaching French reflect itself in Perkins and Will obtaining a job in the Mideast?

Brubaker: Well, there are hundreds of American overseas schools and those schools are all populated with people from places like Wilmette. Now, if you go that route, it means you're going to attend a lot of conferences and exotic places and it means you want to learn something and you're very highly motivated to learn about what's going outside of the United States. It means a lot of travel from here to there.

[Tape 4: Side 2]

Blum: You have said that teaching outside of the States was another world.

Brubaker: It's another kind of education experience. It takes a little different kind of abilities, actually. It takes more electronic equipment and it takes teachers with a little bit different training.

Blum: You've talked about the Mideast—has Perkins and Will done a school in the Mideast?

Brubaker: We have built a very nice school in Athens, Greece. We have a very nice university campus in Mexico City. Those are interesting projects and they involve, particularly in higher education, lots of people who are trained in the United States, even if they go back to live in their homeland.

Blum: Do you mean go back to Mexico?

Brubaker: I'm thinking of Asians, primarily. They are very good at this. They get a scholarship to study at Purdue or Michigan State or someplace like that and they are here for a few years and then go back to their country to work. In the meanwhile they have become our friends. We can work as associates on jobs in their country, where we come in as the outside experts. We're the designers and they are highly motivated to learn from us. It's pretty exciting work, actually.

Blum: So it's really networking?

Brubaker: Oh, yes it is.

Blum: You mentioned Athens and Mexico City as examples of educational facilities Perkins and Will built in foreign countries. Were you involved in the Athens project?

Brubaker: In a minor way.

Blum: Were you more involved in the Mexico City project?

Brubaker: I was very much involved in the Mexico City project, it's in a village called Chapingo, where there is a dried-up lake. Chapingo is the location for their National Center for Agricultural Education. The college board of directors

wanted to expand it but they didn't want a Mexico City architect to do it, they wanted our experience and our involvement. Again, it's easy to understand—it's a big field. In about three eras that I can remember in the last ten or twenty years when we've had a drop in building construction in the United States, international work boomed for us.

Blum: Did that take a deliberate effort on Perkins and Will's part to get the jobs?

Brubaker: It was deliberate on our part to let the world know that we had the expertise in colleges and universities and were interested.

Blum: With the National Center for Agricultural Education, did you find that working in another country risked some cultural misunderstandings?

Brubaker: No, not in this case. That was not even a problem. We've done a lot of housing in the Mideast, most of it in Saudi Arabia. We designed a whole new university in Saudi Arabia from the ground up and it's gorgeous. It has a men's campus and a women's campus and a ravine between the two. The sexes do not meet. The other thing is that the airport is farthest out from the city and the university is closer to town but still outside of the city limits. The downtown, the old part of the city, this is where most of the culture is. I've never been there because I can't go. I'm a Presbyterian and you've got to be an Arab to go. Catholics and Jews can't go either. Fortunately, people from our offices could come and go to the university campus from the airport and without passing through the old part of the city.

Blum: Well, this is perhaps a better example of cultural differences showing up. Americans don't have a reputation for being super-sensitive to other cultures. So, my question is, How were these cultural differences recognized and accommodated?

Brubaker: They were recognized. We found this to be true a number of times. We'd get all excited about the architecture of an old city—not in Saudi Arabia, but in

Egypt—and we would say to our associates here's what we'd like to do but we'd like to be influenced by you because you've been doing this for thousands of years and you know the climate and so on. But they don't want to use their experience from a thousand years ago; they want a good modern air-conditioned building. So we had to be careful that we don't misinterpret their wishes, because that has happened a number of times. They don't want their own culture; they want our engineering and our technical know-how.

Blum: Is that a way for them to enter the contemporary world, to use an American firm with all the most current technology?

Brubaker: Yes, it is for them because there's so much travel back and forth. I made a trip last year to Seoul, Korea. This seems like a long way to go to work on a job, but it was pleasant and the Koreans made the next trip to Chicago and that's exactly what they wanted. They want to see what we're doing and they want to take over the tasks themselves and the way you do that is to become familiar with the program.

Blum: As you work long-distance with architects in Seoul, Korea, are you connected by computer? How is it that all of this takes shape in a cooperative way?

Brubaker: We have found that the best way to communicate with some place in Asia is to use e-mail and overseas package services. We do a lot of that.

Blum: Can you send graphics that way?

Brubaker: You can send graphics overnight, that isn't a problem.

Blum: The world is just so amazingly small. Perkins and Will opened an office in Iran and closed it a couple of years later.

Brubaker: Well, they had a revolution and we weren't welcome any longer. We're now sort of looking around and trying to decide what our future is in a place like

Iran. I went to the ophthalmologist yesterday and met a new ophthalmologist, and her name is Dr. May Khadem. She works for Northwestern Medical. I asked her if she was related to Mosham Khadem and she said, "Oh, he's my brother." Mosham Khadem was one of our designers; he's now in New York. It's a small world.

Blum: You had moved up the corporate ladder ever since you became a partner in 1958.

Brubaker: I was a partner first, and then Perkins and Will became a corporation, so I became vice-president of the corporation.

Blum: At the time you were formally executive vice-president. You were then elected chairman of the board and president in 1985.

Brubaker: That's true. That's obviously a question as to whether I liked that job or was efficient at it. Actually, you've missed one in there—I was actually president twice. The first time I had a business manager who ran the office so I didn't spend my day doing administrative things, I worked as an architect.

Blum: In the beginning, when you first joined Perkins and Will, was there a business manager? Was John Goodall the manager?

Brubaker: Yeah, he was the original business manager there. He was our landlord at the Merchandise Mart but he was not an architect. I can't remember whether he survives or not. If so, I think he's in poor health.

Blum: Larry said that sometimes the manager wanted to do something because it was a good business decision but wasn't always so popular. Further, that Goodall was sort of testy sometimes. I bring this up because it was set in the overall structure almost from the beginning and you're saying that when you became president the first time you had a business manager.

Brubaker: The first time we were sort of like a university where the president had a business manager as his right-hand person. That's what we did and it freed me up to write articles. You've mentioned Herbert Proknow—he did the same thing at the First National Bank. He was the president of the First National Bank but he wasn't engaged personally in money matters. He was sort of a philosopher and refused to go to the bank in a limousine. As the president of one of the biggest banks in the world, you'd think he would be chauffeured, but he insisted on taking the bus and hopping on the Northwestern.

Blum: You were president once. Why did you not continue in that position?

Brubaker: Well, the second time I was—this was about a couple of years ago—elected by the board to be president with the understanding that I'd need some help, and with the understanding that this wasn't a permanent job. I was to think of it as getting some new ideas going.

Blum: Are you saying that the first time you were president you were freed from administrative responsibilities?

Brubaker: Well, on my first go-around on this job, Ed Colin was the business manager and president of the firm and I was president of a subsidiary, Perkins and Will Architects, which was the operating part of the business. I guess that's it.

Blum: So there were two separate entities?

Brubaker: There were more entities than that. We had an organization that was a mechanical engineering firm, an electrical engineering firm, a city-planning group, and a construction manager, which was not a success and it was a failure, so we decided to get out of it.

Blum: So Colin was in charge of all the other branches, but not architects?

Brubaker: That's more or less accurate.

Blum: In 1985, it was reported in the paper that Perkins and Will was purchased by a Lebanese engineering firm, Dar al Handassah.

Brubaker: This was a firm that we had worked with a good deal in the Mideast and when all the architects in Chicago were in financial trouble, including us, we made a more permanent arrangement with them. They essentially bought our stock and became the prime stockholders of Perkins and Will.

Blum: So then they are your bosses?

Brubaker: Yeah, along with money comes control. We're still on good speaking terms.

Blum: Are they still the primary stockholders? Are you still owned by them?

Brubaker: No, it's a corporation now?

Blum: At the time it was announced you said that the combination between this very large Lebanese engineering firm with Perkins and Will gives worldwide coverage.

Brubaker: Well, that's all right. It's not inevitable, but it's a logical thing to do. Particularly if you look at what's happening to business in the last couple of weeks, the mergers are unbelievable. Architecture and engineering are probably not going to escape those kinds of mergers.

Blum: Why do you think that's happening in architecture?

Brubaker: I'm not sure how much it is happening right now. It was very popular a couple of years ago, but I think that things have kind of slowed down.

Blum: It was reported that in 1984, the year before the merger, that Perkins and Will's earnings were sixteen million dollars. Wasn't that a big enough profit? What motivated Perkins and Will to become larger?

Brubaker: Well, I don't believe that number, first of all. I don't have anything with me that would verify or modify that sixteen million figure. You have to be very careful to know whether what you're reading is fees or profits after fees. I think I would have to dispute that.

Blum: Well, Perkins and Will was already large. It was already making a lot of money.

Brubaker: Well, we had shrunk a little, we were a firm in Chicago of three hundred people and now we're down to two hundred people. That's still makes us one of the biggest architects in the country though.

Blum: The merger between Dar al Handassah and Perkins and Will is already fourteen years old. It was announced in 1985.

Brubaker: I can't imagine that it's fourteen years old. Time flies.

Blum: Was that a good move for Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Yes, it was. It caused us to open an office in London a couple of years ago and now in Paris. It's more exciting and more interesting and we attract a number of people who are accustomed to working overseas and living overseas. Some people wouldn't like it but some do.

Blum: Has language been an obstacle?

Brubaker: Not very much, because people who hire us speak good English. They are very with it. We are dealing with very well educated people, specifically

educated in the English language. Language has not really been a problem at all.

Blum: Has Perkins and Will ever felt any constraints because of the merger? Are they completely autonomous?

Brubaker: I think it's absolutely unbelievably smooth running and the answer to your question is no, we don't have problems.

Blum: Sounds like it works.

Brubaker: In the last six months, of course, we have received an unusual number of awards, like firm-of-the-year-type awards. I think I told you that I was really supposed to be in London last week.

Blum: To receive an award?

Brubaker: Well, specifically, it was called the Humanitarian Award. I haven't seen the documents that have been prepared, but I will soon. It was to recognize work in civic organizations and professional organizations.

Blum: Was this an award for you personally?

Brubaker: Yeah. Of course that recognition means that I've gotten a lot of help from my friends.

Blum: Throughout your career, you have been a member of the American Institute of Architects. You joined very early in your career in 1953. You became a fellow in 1968. Why did you join in 1953? What did membership in that organization mean to you at that time?

Brubaker: Phil Will had a lot to do with it. He was president of the national AIA organization and urged his associates and partners and employees and staff

to join. We had some of the usual incentives, like the firm would pick up a certain part of the cost to the individual. It was with the help of my senior partner, Phil Will, that got me originally interested in the AIA.

Blum: Was it a prestige thing to be a member of the AIA?

Brubaker: No, not to be a member. There was prestige in being a fellow.

Blum: Yes, but that was later.

Brubaker: Anybody can join the AIA if they want to pay the dues.

Blum: What was the benefit to anyone to become a member of the AIA?

Brubaker: There's continuing education, first of all. And there's a certain social aspect to the whole thing. It's professionalization and it's ongoing learning. It's recognized to be useful to the individual and to the profession.

Blum: I've been told by several other architects that the AIA was just nonsense, that it was a prestige thing and it was a social thing and it didn't benefit the profession because the AIA didn't take a stand on anything when there was a controversy.

Brubaker: I've heard all those arguments and, like anything else, there's a little bit of truth in it, but it's grossly exaggerated.

Blum: You became a fellow in 1968.

Brubaker: It was a young age to become a fellow.

Blum: Yes. Was that after or during the First National Bank job?

Brubaker: Well, it was just after the First National Bank. If you take the First National Bank date as 1969, which was when the main tower was finished, I became a fellow during the job. The bank's underground vaults and services and parking and all that was finished a couple of years later.

Blum: So, in your opinion, is the AIA is an organization that has benefits for the profession?

Brubaker: Yes, it benefits the individual, it benefits the firm, and it benefits the community. It's like any other community service. You do it from the heart. To me it would be unthinkable not to participate in community affairs.

Blum: You were on AIA service committees right away, so you gave service. You were on the architecture and education committee and the regional and urban design committee.

Brubaker: Those are the two committees that I've been active in, right. Those are both good committees. Part of it is continuing education and part of it is marketing. We, in our work, do many projects in association with other firms. Now, if they didn't know us, they wouldn't give us that essential phone call and say, "Hey, it looks like there is somebody who's going to build a big office building down the street. Could we look at the project together?" At that point, you decide to say, "Yes, let's look at it together," or "Sorry, we're already looking at it."

Blum: They know who you are because you sort of...

Brubaker: I think I'm probably the best-known person in Perkins and Will.

Blum: Well, I was thinking of you as representing Perkins and Will, but you individually, as well.

Brubaker: I'm rather well known in the profession. But I have to give credit though to other architects who have supported me and worked with me on committees and who sought work together and successfully signed up new clients.

Blum: Aside from the professional benefits to Perkins and Will, what do you think the architecture and education committee, since you have been a member, has accomplished to benefit that facet of the architectural profession?

Brubaker: One of the things we've done, in an educational way, is to produce slide shows and films showing the design process in school design and other fields.

Blum: Whom were these films addressed to?

Brubaker: They were addressed to potential clients, to present to clients to upgrade their thinking, to the individual practitioner, because it's very important to keep up-to-date. Maybe you've noticed that there is a requirement now that architects, to keep up their licenses, must engage in fairly formal fundamental basic continuing education.

Blum: Must everyone participate in continuing education?

Brubaker: Yeah. These two committees that I was on were the best committees that the AIA had, as far as I'm concerned. We were ahead of the government agencies wanting to check up on you and encourage you to do more continuing education.

Blum: Did the AIA provide the classes or the courses that the practitioners could take to keep their licenses current?

Brubaker: Yeah, we have had, including programs at the Art Institute in the past year, programs regarding the broad subject of school design or more focused topics but addressed to a broader audience. It's not only schools, but

hospitals, office buildings and city planning. Some areas are not very active, like housing or prisons. I'm not aware of a prisons committee. The stimulating and interesting subjects are education and health-care.

Blum: Has there been anything important, in the design field for schools, that has come out of the years of courses or work or lectures or writing?

Brubaker: Oh, yes. And often I'm the speaker, or writer or the person who leads that new direction.

Blum: For example, what are some of the new ideas?

Brubaker: Well, for instance, I've been very interested in the concept of the school being the community center and not limiting it to a school but making it a place where particularly people in lower-class neighborhoods can have some social space.

Blum: How does that reflect itself in the design of the school?

Brubaker: It reflects itself in the design of the school by visualizing Water Tower Place and noticing that it has three or four different functions, not one function in a tower and another function somewhere else. Instead the functions are stacked and it's a mixed-use development. I like to think of the school as being a mixed-use development so that our kids get a view of what retailing is all about and art and science and mathematics—not to do it in only some place that says so-and-so High School over the front door, but to do it in a place that's a community center.

Blum: Are you saying that this idea needs a larger physical plant with specific areas for these functions?

Brubaker: Right, because you invite other organizations to come in and use the facilities. It's a two-way street. It also means that the school goes out and uses the facilities available in the community.

Blum: Well, that would suggest that the school itself doesn't have to be so big.

Brubaker: Getting on the bus and going to the Art Institute is a very good example of using the facilities of the city. It's pretty neat to see a bunch of small kids going through there, particularly when they're sitting on the floor and they have a good stimulating teacher. I feel like I'd like to join them and learn a few things myself.

Blum: I quite agree with you. Given that schools and urban planning have been your major interests, you've also joined and been active in other organizations dealing with problems in these fields outside of the AIA.

Brubaker: I have done a lot of that, and I hardly know where to start. I started to make a list. I've been quite interested and quite involved in an interesting organization called the Chicago Committee on Highrise Buildings. No other city in the country, including New York, has as good an organization that concerns itself with highrise buildings. It meets once a month for dinner, usually in the Chicago Athletic Association building, across the street. Unfortunately we don't meet on the top of a building, that would sort of double the cost of the meeting. That's an interesting activity. That has led me to many speaking engagements addressing other architects. That's an instance of where I'm addressing other architects who are potential associates. Over half of our office buildings were built with associate firms.

Blum: Aside from your hidden agenda, which is to encourage business for Perkins and Will, why is it important for you to be a member of this committee?

Brubaker: Well, the thing that I've gotten out of it is, first of all, real education on the subject. This is a hot subject and it's still a hot subject. If you'd asked me a

couple of years ago, Chicago was not a hot place for office buildings but now it is again.

Blum: Are you saying that's because there's a lack of office space available?

Brubaker: That's why the market's good. There's enough empty space now to encourage developers to borrow money and build new buildings, like the seventy-five story building at Water Tower Place or the new Blue Cross building. There are so many new housing towers in downtown that it's hard to keep track of them. They're mixed-use buildings, generally.

Blum: I guess that is a new idea for Chicago to have so many downtown buildings where people live. There was something listed in your biographical profile with which I wasn't familiar. You were a member of the Chicago Architectural Assistance Center. Would you explain what that is?

Brubaker: That is a very old good organization but I have not been involved in it for at least fifteen or twenty years. It's something I was involved in years ago. I probably was president of it, as a matter of fact. As far as I know it still exists.

Blum: What kind of work did this group do?

Brubaker: It helps people convert gas stations into day care centers. It's a historic preservation group—it recycles old buildings, but with heavy social purposes. For instance, single room occupancy housing and day care.

Blum: Was this an assistance center to help clients or architects?

Brubaker: It was to help the client and the architect, both, to give them both some education and to suggest where they might go to see some good examples and to give them a little push in the right direction.

Blum: That seems like a valuable service.

Brubaker: It is valuable. It just seems like such an obsolete reference now.

Blum: There is an organization that has been a cornerstone of preservation and architectural awareness for the public in Chicago and that's the Chicago Architectural Foundation.

Brubaker: I'm the former president of that, too. I'm the former president of many of those things.

Blum: The Chicago Architectural Foundation goes back many years and today it's more vital than it ever was.

Brubaker: I wasn't a founder of that, but I came close to it. I joined within a couple of years after it was off and running. Marian Despres was involved and there were a lot of people who were involved who are still around. As I say, I can't claim to be a founding father.

Blum: Why did you lend your support to that organization?

Brubaker: I thought that their goals were great. They were heavy on lectures and social affairs and trips and learning about what's going on in the city. It was sort of like "Know Your Chicago" which Mary Ward Wolkonsky was involved in.

Blum: Was CAF giving architectural tours around town when you became active?

Brubaker: Yes, they had already started that program.

Blum: Are you a preservationist at heart?

Brubaker: I am. I'm a preservationist at heart, by all means. I think it's really stimulating right now to walk across the Loop and see how many buildings are being

fixed up and preserved that didn't have a chance a few years ago. The new Hotel Burnham is really a knockout. Have you seen it?

Blum: That was the former Reliance building. No, I haven't been inside yet; I have just watched its transformation as I pass by on the bus.

Brubaker: It has very beautiful drapes in the window that just ties it all together. They just opened a few days ago and they're already accepting guests.

Blum: Well, downtown Chicago, after watching many of our very important building come down, is currently the recipient of much restoration and renovation of many of our older buildings.

Brubaker: My work in that area has also been involved with specific street groups or area groups like the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association. I've been very active in that—I still am—and I'm going to be active in it in the next few months. It looks after and criticizes and directs new development, it encourages good development and discourages bad development.

Blum: Do they have any real power?

Brubaker: No, they don't in the usual sense. But the power comes like this: the alderman, Burt Natarus, is very good about coming to the meetings and helping out, and he's got the power. So we whisper in his ear and say, "Hey, you ought to look into this."

Blum: Well, that's assuming the developers aren't whispering in his other ear. Being an architect and being interested in designing new facilities, were you a preservationist whole-heartedly? Or is there sort of a conflict in an architect's mind to think that you can preserve a building or tear it down and design and build something new?

[Tape 5: Side 1]

Brubaker: I know John Buck and I certainly don't agree with him on everything, but I certainly did agree with him that the building on Michigan Avenue—the McGraw-Hill building—could have been a site for a new building. I thought that it has drawn more attention to its value only because it as an old building. I testified at the Chicago City Council hearing and I was the only architect who spoke up in favor of tearing it down. Everybody else wanted to keep it. I agreed with Mr. Buck that it would be proper to give other ideas on that site more thought. He thanked me, but I just use that as an example of not thwarting development everywhere.

Blum: In your own personal life, you are the owner of a rather historic house.

Brubaker: Semi-historic. It doesn't have the credentials that a Frank Lloyd Wright house has but it's the next best thing. It's a Walter Burley Griffin house and it was built sometime between 1909 and 1911—we're not quite sure when.

Blum: It's been given the name of "Solid Rock."

Brubaker: It's called that because of its concrete construction. Reinforced concrete was new when it was built. It's interesting that Unity Temple, in Oak Park, has the same construction date, 1909-1911. Our house was a very modest use of concrete, whereas Unity Temple is really monumental.

Blum: Do you think that's just coincidental?

Brubaker: Oh, no, Wright was learning about reinforced concrete and he had two interesting jobs to do—one a house and the other a church.

Blum: But who constructed your house? Who would have used concrete?

Brubaker: Well, Walter Burley Griffin selected concrete as the material for the house and that's how it was built.

Blum: Do you think that Walter Burley Griffin and Frank Lloyd Wright had any exchange about the use of concrete and your house?

Brubaker: Probably not. Just after Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony won the competition for Canberra, they went off to Australia and never came back. Walter fell off some scaffolding and was killed. I don't know what has happened to her.

Blum: You have a sheet in front of you with of a drawing for your house. Is that the original plan?

Brubaker: Almost. There are two things missing here. One is the fact that the house was built reversed on the lot: what was going to be the north side became the south side and vice versa and east and west. As built, they flopped the plan over and went in the other direction.

Blum: Why do you think they did that?

Brubaker: I've never been able to find an answer to that. I don't know. The other thing that is not accurate that is of historic interest is that the drawing, which is a very fine pen and ink drawing, shows flat-roofed gardens on top. The original design did not have pitched roofs as it does now, but the house, evidently, had a flat roof that leaked. Flat roofs—I won't say that they always leak, but this one did. This drawing shows a very elegant series of flat roofs. Actually, what had happened was that the owner, in 1919, was tired of maintaining the roof so they got another Prairie School architect, Barry Byrne, to put a second floor on what had originally been a one floor-and-a-half story concept. Barry Byrne put a big, pitched roof on it at the owners' request. It looks pretty good. It's a house designed by a committee—not a promising idea, but they pulled it off. So I'd like to point out that it's not just Walter

Burley Griffin but it was Marion Mahony and Barry Byrne as well. For instance, we have the light fixtures that Alfonso Iannelli designed and had built. He often did light fixtures for Frank Lloyd Wright houses. We have a few of them.

Blum: Were they designed specifically for your house?

Brubaker: Yes. When we bought the house we really didn't know too much about the light fixtures but we found out from Will Hasbrouck who had one of them. Much to our surprise, he gave it to us. He's a fine fellow. What we had then was a house designed by a committee of three leading architects: a flat-roofed concept by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony and a pitched roof by Barry Byrne. I'd like to see it influence other houses in the Chicago area.

Blum: Did you ever have a desire to return the house to the original design with the roof terraces?

Brubaker: No. To do it well would cost a vast amount of money.

Blum: Is it true that this house was originally built as a speculative house by a developer called Mr. William F. Temple?

Brubaker: I think that's true.

Blum: He was developing quite a large bit of property in Winnetka at the time.

Brubaker: His name is on a lot of the documents.

Blum: How long have you owned the house?

Brubaker: Well, I have a forty-four-year-old son, which is the way I remember it, so I've been there for about forty-four years. Actually, we lived in Evanston in an

apartment for some of those years, so I guess we've lived there for about forty years.

Blum: What was it about the house that appealed to you?

Brubaker: Oh, being interested in Prairie School houses and having three kids in public schools, we were ideally situated from a school standpoint. This was forty years ago, and I think we paid about sixty-five thousand dollars.

Blum: Well, aside from its choice location near the schools that you needed, what appealed to you about the design of the house?

Brubaker: Well, I thought it was a Prairie School house that would be a very logical influence on other architecture. Incidentally, within a couple of blocks there is the work of a fourth architect—George Washington Maher. Then there are five or six other good prairie houses within a two-block circle.

Blum: Bill, you have received so many awards. You spoke of one that you recently received in absentia in London. In 1983 you were awarded the "Planner of the Year" award.

Brubaker: Right, that was from the Society for College and University Planning. I got a similar one from the Council of Educational Facility Planners. I was also president of the CEF. I've been invited to come back and talk this fall in Baltimore. It's interesting because when the organization met there last, I was president. So I've come full-circle.

Blum: When you became president of Perkins and Will, did that free you up to join all these organizations and speak and write and so on?

Brubaker: Yes. Probably I've been involved in too many organizations, you know. There's always that possibility.

Blum: In our collection of the Department of Architecture are some of your travel sketches from Egypt and England.

Brubaker: I was talking to somebody at the Chicago Historical Society and they expressed interest in the First National Bank notebooks and so I gave them the original drawings—all my spiral-bound notebooks.

Blum: Well, I suppose the Art Institute has the next best thing, which is a copy. Have you ever done any formal teaching at universities?

Brubaker: No, I've never been a professor. What I do is I talk and act as a visiting critic, but it's always a one-day stand kind of thing. I've never made a long-range commitment, like Jack Hartray does, for instance. I've never felt that I had the time or the interest, and I'm not sure I'd be very good at it.

Blum: I know that when Perkins and Will gave a dinner for you a year ago, there was someone on the agenda to speak about how you've been a mentor to him, Gaylaird Christopher. What was that about?

Brubaker: He's our partner in Los Angeles and Pasadena. He really believes—poor misled guy—that I've had an influence on his practice. He's a guy that I enjoy working with. His main interest is schools and he wrote a chapter in my most recent book.

Blum: I see a linkage. It was evident in past generations, but I also see it carrying forth into future generations. It seems that Dwight Perkins set an example for Larry, Larry set an example for you, and it seems that you have set an example for Gaylaird Christopher. Does he do the same kind of things that you have been doing?

Brubaker: He does. In fact, we're doing a little bit of that nationally, but there aren't enough hours in the day to go to eight offices. But we are trying—"we" meaning people like Gaylaird Christopher—to get everybody educated to

know more about their heritage and where we've been and where we might go.

Blum: We've jumped ahead to teaching and mentoring, but can we return to a subject we spoke about earlier to finish talking about your house? It seems to me that living in an historic house may exert certain pressures on the occupants. Did it on you?

Brubaker: Well, some of them are kind of practical. Some of them have to do with money. Restoring a house is a very expensive operation. Really, people with a lot of money can do a great job buying a house that not everybody else could buy, hiring a good architect, and finding the right contractors. A good example—I don't know why I'd think of this—is gutters. My house had, with its pitched roof, copper gutters when we moved in. They were custom-built to a specific profile that was used on this house. Those gutters cost about five times more than using off-the-shelf gutters. I've never been tempted to spend that kind of money on this house. Evidently the copper gutters had been put on in about 1910 or 1912.

Blum: Were they no longer functional?

Brubaker: They had been up for quite a while and they were leaking. They were not in very good condition. They had already been replaced at least once when the Walter Burley Griffin house was ten years old.

Blum: When you bought the house, did it have the copper gutters?

Brubaker: It had worn-out copper gutters. I did not have whatever the figure was—like ten thousand dollars or something like that—to repair the gutters. It hasn't bothered me though because the other ones work well.

Blum: Were there things that you discovered about spaces in the house that you really didn't know about until you lived there?

Brubaker: There were a few surprises. Old houses always have lots of surprises. We decided to air-condition the house a few years ago. We found out that it wasn't so easy to add air-conditioning to a house with radiators. You're better off if you have a hot-air system because you can add cooling coils and you can cool and heat with the same ductwork. It turns out that that was not a big economic burden because we had an attic where we could run pipes around in. There are little things like that which, in your enthusiasm for signing up to buy a piece of property, you might miss. Remember, I'm not a residential architect. If you're labeled "architect" it's hard to try to tell some people that you're not that kind of an architect.

Blum: Being an architect, with all the demands that the profession places on you, did your profession impact your family or influence your family?

Brubaker: Well, fortunately, everyone in my family is interested in architecture. Now that is not always the case. There are plenty of cases where, either with an old spouse or a new spouse, the architect's enthusiasm for good design isn't a shared interest. I'm lucky that my wife's interested and my three children are interested, although none of them are architects.

Blum: Are your children in any related professions?

Brubaker: They're all environmentalists, it seems. That's the main link. My daughter, Elizabeth, runs an organization and publishes a magazine in Canada on water and the ecological impact of different actions. My son, Robert, is very interested in the Sierra Club. My California son, Rogers, is definitely interested in design and architecture but is a professor of sociology at UCLA. It's a nice mix.

Blum: There must have been some strong interest in ecology and the environment in your home because two out of your three children are involved in that.

Brubaker: That's right.

Blum: Bill, as you look back at the fifty years that you've spent at Perkins and Will, how would you describe the changes that you've been witness to?

Brubaker: That's very difficult to summarize in a very short period of time. I think that one of the things that surprises me occasionally is the growth of the firm—it's not a personal thing but a business thing. I certainly didn't expect my working environment to grow to be ten offices, which it is now. I've got to remember that I am retired.

Blum: But you're still employed part-time, and certainly you're very loyal.

Brubaker: I think that the environment that I work in is larger, more structured, probably more innovative. I have to balance this with that out of hundreds of thousands of architects, a very small percentage of them have offices of more than two or three people.

Blum: And Perkins and Will has...?

Brubaker: About four hundred and some.

Blum: When you say four hundred is that under the name of Perkins and Will only, or is it on an extended basis including the Dar al Handassah firm?

Brubaker: It's on an extended basis, I guess you'd say. The total organization changes from time to time, but I guess it's four or five hundred, something like that now.

Blum: When you began it was how many?

Brubaker: Twenty-five.

Blum: In ways other than size, what other changes have you witnessed in the profession?

Brubaker: I don't think that its character has changed all that much. A walk up Michigan Avenue now is not that different than it was in 1950, when I started working full-time. The area is still dominated by the Wrigley building and the Tribune Tower and by a number of landmarks, and boats in the harbor. All of this tremendous change that has occurred hasn't really changed the character of Michigan Avenue, and I think that's of great interest.

Blum: So there's a consistency that you talk about, a continuation. If you picture the office of Perkins and Will, as it was in 1950 when you first joined, and you picture the office today, what are the big differences?

Brubaker: Surprisingly few differences, even with the computer, which is the biggest change of all. We do use the computer for design and collecting data and holding data and doing working drawings and specifications and marketing. We use it as much as any office does. We don't sell ourselves on the fact that we're the best and the biggest in computer use, but we might be. That is an example of continuity and not change. You want both and you want to be smart enough to recognize when change is important. A lot of things are different. There are many more women in our offices today. It used to be that female architects were in interior design exclusively and that is no longer the case with us. Often we have women who have worked on designs and go out in the field and bring the questions back to the engineers and they act as the project managers.

Blum: As you look back, can you identify the reasons that Perkins and Will was able to resist the Miesian vocabulary and also the postmodern vocabulary? These were more than fashions. They came and went but Perkins and Will didn't indulge them very much.

Brubaker: We missed the postmodern era, which was good. What we did instead, as did some other architects in Chicago, not just Perkins and Will, was instead of inventing new kinds of postmodern buildings, we rediscovered the interest and flexibility and excitement of some of the older buildings, the Reliance building being a really hot example. You know where the Metropolitan Planning Council is? It's across the street from the new Hotel Burnham. I was looking out the window yesterday at this building and the former Reliance building is just really exciting.

Blum: Where does the Metropolitan Planning Council meet?

Brubaker: They're in the building east of the Old Navy store. Old Navy is this ridiculous—that's all we needed was another Old Navy store and it's got this awful flashing arrow pointing to the entrance. The Metropolitan Planning Council has new space in that building further east at the elevated tracks.

Blum: Do you think that because Perkins and Will didn't jump in to follow these popular modes that they were able to look back and appreciate older buildings?

Brubaker: In this context two or three of our outstanding designers should be mentioned. Ralph Johnson, of course, is a superstar, there's just no question about it. He's a designer that other designers like to work with, who appreciate his talents. We have a second designer, who you've probably never heard of, David Hansen, who designed the new Sears corporate headquarters out in Hoffman Estates. He also designed the corporate headquarters for Kraft Foods. He also designs hospitals.

Blum: Well, Ralph Johnson is probably the most widely known of the designers at Perkins and Will today.

Brubaker: He is, right. Now Ralph also is the designer of the International Terminal at O'Hare, which is really the best international terminal I know of. Washington

has just built a new one, the Ronald Reagan Airport but our airport terminal is better than theirs, since you asked.

Blum: When you joined Perkins and Will, did you expect to have a career as a designer? Is that what you envisioned?

Brubaker: I think so. I still think of myself as a designer. I don't think that at any time I expected to be a business manager.

Blum: Well, you've done so many administrative things and you've been in the forefront of getting the word out for Perkins and Will, certainly in recent years. Do you have a dream project that you would like to do?

Brubaker: No, I don't think so.

Blum: What do you think your contribution has been to the profession and, more specifically, to Perkins and Will?

Brubaker: Oh, I think I'd like to be known best in the design area for making schools more exciting, more interesting, more challenging. By schools I mean elementary, secondary, colleges and universities. In our interview here we've spent very little time on colleges and universities, we've spent more time on elementary through high schools, which is fine. Colleges and university commissions are unique and they are very important projects.

Blum: What are the unique components of a college or university?

Brubaker: A college or university is really a small city—or a large city—in itself. You have all the transportation linkages and the open space. College campuses have the biggest pedestrian realms that we have in any place in the world. You're constantly bombarded by automobiles when you're in business districts and shopping centers and entertainment places and research parks and malls. What the college and the university bring you is the experience of

large, uninterrupted pedestrian ways, and green trees and bushes and lawns and open spaces. I think that's something we're going to see more of. I hope there will be more mayors like Mayor Richard Daley. He does get credit for worrying about our trees and open spaces. I think he's a good man.

Blum: As you say that, it's clear that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Your children seem to share your attitude. Bill, do you have a message for the next generation of architects?

Brubaker: I'd rather not try to improvise a statement right now.

Blum: For many days now we've met and we've talked about topics that I've identified from the literature as important in your career. But what would you like to speak about that we haven't already?

Brubaker: Well, I think we've touched on almost everything.

Blum: Well, I thank you very much. I know that these sessions have been very taxing and have required a great effort on your part and for that we're very appreciative. Thank you very much.

Brubaker: Thank you.

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American Institute of Architects, Chicago Chapter, President
American Institute of Architects, College of Fellows, Chancellor 1987-88
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Chicago Committee on Highrise Buildings, Member
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