

# Neighboring Notable

By **GLENN SUMPTER**

"Even before I went to the First grade, I wanted to be an architect," says James N. Sherrill. "An architect with a son about my age lived across the street, and we used to hang around his father's office quite a bit. I guess I just got pencil dust on my fingers and it never did come off."

This boyhood ambition has led to some of the most striking and widely acclaimed architecture in the Hickory area. Since James N. Sherrill came to Hickory in 1951, his designs have won recognition in national magazines, five awards from the American Institute of Architects, and widespread praise from people who appreciate original and intuitive architectural design.

## **Feels Civic Responsibility**

The man behind these buildings is a quiet soft-spoken father of five children, who likes to discuss his work in terms of problems and solutions. He is a man with strong ideas who feels that he has a duty to make the town he lives in more attractive to the eye.

Mr. Sherrill is a native of Winston-Salem, a graduate of Reynolds High school in Winston-Salem and the husband of a Winston-Salem girl. He met



**JAMES N. SHERRILL**

Connie Scott while he was working as a soda jerk in a dairy bar during the summer vacation from High school. She worked in the office. They were married some years after this High school meeting, while Mr. Sherrill was in college. Their first child, James, Jr. is 16. The other children are Susan, 14;

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Steven, 11; Fran, 8; and Amy 3.

Between High School and college Mr. Sherrill spent nearly three years with the U. S. Navy. Mr. Sherrill was stationed at the Naval Air Station at Key West, Fla., and toured much of the East Coast with the station's basketball and tennis teams. He also made five trips to Cuba while in service. The time in Florida and in Cuba left him permanently influenced by the style and imagination displayed by the contemporary architects of these areas.

"I saw," he says, "a great deal of architecture in both areas, that made a lasting impression on me."

## Enrolled At N. C. State

He took those impressions and his interest in sports with him to North Carolina State College, where he enrolled in 1946. He studied in the college's School of Design and lettered for two years on the tennis team. This dual interest in architecture and athletics continued until architectural studies grew more time-consuming and Mr. Sherrill was called in for a conference with the dean. "He told me," says Mr. Sherrill, "that I could decide to be either an athlete or an architect, but not both."

This conversation is recalled with sort of a slow smile. The decision was evidently not a difficult one and the tennis team's loss was the School of Design's gain.

It is worth noting, however, that while athletics have receded to a minor role in Mr. Sherrill's life—they have not disappeared completely. As he will quickly prove, if asked about a certain hole-in-one posted last February on the Catawba County Country Club's No. 3 green by one James N. Sherrill, amateur golfer.

He spent his Summers from 1947 to 1951, working in the offices of Raleigh architects and upon his graduation in 1951 came to Hickory to work for Clemmer and Horton. "I had a chance to go most anywhere I wanted to," he says, explaining the move to Hickory, "but North Carolina is my State and that's where I wanted to work. I knew Clemmer and Horton were doing good work, so I came to Hickory."

## Several Winning Designs

His work for Clemmer and Horton led to award-winning de-

signs for the First Federal Savings and Loan Building in Conover, the Catawba Dairy Bar on Highway 64-70-321, which is no longer in operation, the P. E. Monroe Auditorium on the Lenoir Rhyne campus, and the Terminal Building at Hickory Airport.

He set up his own office in Hickory in 1958, and soon won another award for the Northwestern Walk-up, Drive-up Branch Bank in Hickory.

He sums up his approach to his work in these words: "I try to arrive at a good solution to the design of the space and traffic flow problem with a structural envelope that is pleasing to the client and satisfying to me."

Perhaps it is this approach that gives a fresh, original quality to Mr. Sherrill's work. He seems completely unfettered by questions of style both in design and in his conversation. He thinks in terms of the building's function and of designs that will enhance that function. "The best solution to any design problem is always a simple solution," he says. By seeking simple solutions to the problems of architectural design, he creates work that is clean and uncluttered in its form. As for aesthetics, he holds the belief that a good design is aesthetically pleasing just as surely as a bad design is unpleasant to look at.

## Has Painting As Hobby

Aesthetics are an important facet of Mr. Sherrill's life both in his work and during his leisure hours. His hobby is painting, and he has achieved considerable recognition in the North Carolina art world. His paintings have been shown in Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Asheville, Greensboro, Statesville, Blowing Rock and Hickory.

He does both two-dimensional and three-dimensional painting in what would probably be described as the abstract and abstract-impressionist schools. Describing Mr. Sherrill's painting, Hickory artist John Brady has said: "The work is principally involved with simplicity." Other descriptions have pointed out that Mr. Sherrill as an artist concerns himself primarily with form—form in a structural and color sense. It is evident that James Sherrill, artist, and James Sherrill, architect, hold a common aesthetic approach

Mr. Sherrill says that his hobby has great therapeutic value. "When I'm working on a design, I have to try to please everyone. I need a design that will solve the particular problems of a particular structure that is aesthetically pleasing to the client and to myself. All this has to be accomplished within the bounds of a budget and finished by a certain deadline. When it's all done, then I'm ready to sit down and do some painting—to work on my own schedule and turn out a finished product that has to please no one but me."

## Busy On State Job

At the time that this reporter talked to Mr. Sherrill, he was surrounded by the plans for the new addition to Gardner Hall on the campus of North Carolina State of the University of North Carolina at Raleigh, a \$1,822,108 job for which he is the architect. "When a job like this is finished," he said, "then I really feel like doing some painting." The Sherrill artistic talent is evidently hereditary since three of the Sherrill children have won prizes in school art contests. "I have five paintings with ribbons on them at home," says the proud father, "all painted by the children."

The task of pleasing everyone can sometimes be quite difficult. In fact, sometimes, the solution to a problem can be beyond expectation. An example is the award-winning Monroe Auditorium at Lenoir Rhyne. One of the outstanding attributes of this theatre is its acoustics. Sound carries so well to an audience in this auditorium, that one local speaker described the sensation of speaking from the stage as, "feeling the sound