Mod

Henry L. Kamphoefner: His Years at OU and Beyond, Part 2

Posted by lrostochil on Jul 16, 2015 in Mod Blog |

by Lynne Rostochil

By the early 1940s, Henry L. Kamphoefner was one of the OU Architecture department's most popular and prolific professors and his work was gaining a lot of national attention. In addition to his home being featured in the May 1944 Pencil Points magazine, another of his designs was featured in the April 1944 issue of the periodical. During a time when spare dollars were a rarity and most often went to war-related projects, Kamphoefner's economical design for an addition to the Cleveland County Health Department was certainly newsworthy.

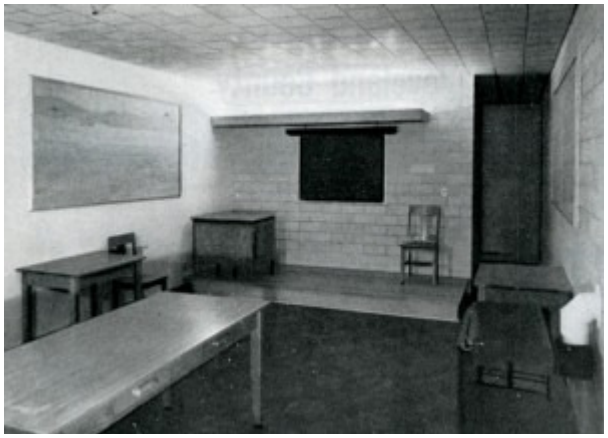
Here's the article:

The problem was to provide practically double the existing space for health offices, all within set limits available in an old building. Although assigned to new uses, the existing quarters remained as they were, except for a new coat of paint. The new offices, located in a space that formerly was a community hall, were laid out from scratch:

Health needs of Cleveland County had increased many fold in recent years. War projects upped the County's population from 27,728 in 1940 to 31,028 in 1943. Some 20,000 sailors are stationed at nearby Navy bases. As soon as funds were granted for expansion of health facilities, the plans were drawn and the contract let. Work started in the middle of July and was completed 10 weeks later.

The in-sloping face of the reception desk is surfaced with 3/4" tongue and groove strips, vertically applied; the counter top is 3/4" plywood. Under the counter top, along the entire interior face of the desk, is a shelf that helps keep the work surface clear of miscellaneous accumulations.

In this remodeled area, the 14-foot ceilings of the old hall were lowered to 9 feet; windows were lowered and widened. The bare cement floor was covered with asphalt tile. Otherwise, changes involved only placement of partitions and installation of equipment. Cost of general construction came to slightly more than $7,000 (around $96,000 in 2015 dollars).



This photograph of the lecture room was taken before chairs were installed. On X-ray clinic days or ties for other special types of examination, the room is cleared and folding screens are set up within the space to form a series of individual dressing rooms.

In order to keep carpentry at a minimum, at the recommendation of the WPB, smooth-finish hollow tile was used for walls and partitions. All mouldings and finish detail were eliminated. Most of the lighting is concealed, thus avoiding use of expensive — and scarce — metal fixtures.

A definite limitation existed in the fact that comparatively little of the enclosing wall area is along the exterior of the building; hence extreme care had to be exercised in selecting for these interior locations areas which would suffer least from lack of direct outside light.

General work space

The oblique partition between nurse's and doctor's consultation rooms was worked out to handle the special function of each space. Included in centrally located reception desk and waiting room area is space for the office files, accessible to all concerned. The lecture hall has an opening for a projector, operated from the supply room. Blackboard, bulletin board, projection screen, and speaker's platform are integral parts of the room design.

This lecture hall is a room of many uses. One afternoon a week, a maternity class meets here; on infant, pre-school, and general clinic days, demonstrations and films are shown. It also serves as a meeting place for various health committees.

The doctor's office

Nurses room at right; "baby bins" at left

Kamphoefner also wrote an article in the American Journal of Public Health about this project — you can read the article here.

During the war years, Kamphoefner also designed a temporary band shell for the Oklahoma State Symphony to use for its summer concert series — here's an Oklahoman photo of the architect and a model of his creation:

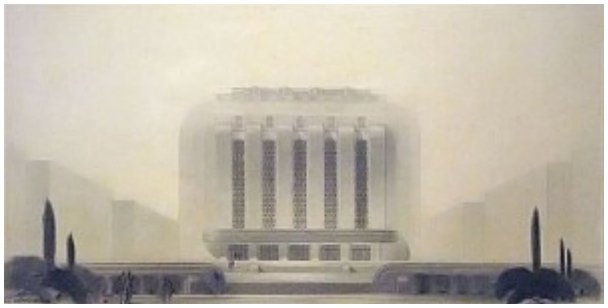
Unlike most band shells — including ones that he designed earlier in his career — this one sported a flat

instead of curved roof and a convex curve with fins to allow the music to waft out in all directions so that even the patron farthest from the music would be able to hear it clearly. I'm not sure if the band shell was ever constructed, but here's a more conventional curved design for the Oleson Park Music Pavilion in Iowa that Kamphoefner designed, perhaps just before his arrival in Norman — it was built in 1938 and added to the National Register in 2003:

Definitely a man with opinions, Kamphoefner let his impressions of the teaching methods associated with the Beaux Arts Institute of Design be known in the June 1944 issue of Pencil Points. After years of teaching the Beaux Arts method, Kamphoefner's rebellious nature emerged when he called for a reexamination of the institution and its value. It's a fascinating opinion piece and well worth a read — just click to enlarge:


Views

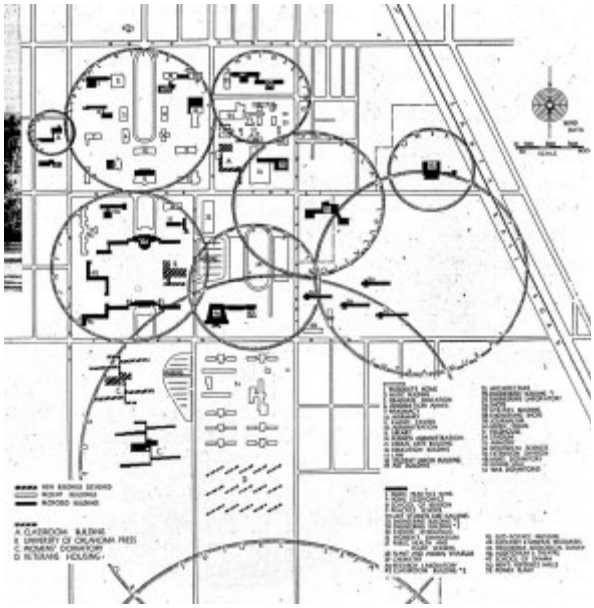
Within a few years, several universities moved away from the Beaux Arts model and toward more modern and creative methods of instruction. I did find this unidentified and very uncharacteristically traditional Kamphoefner drawing online that might have been his award-winning Beaux Arts entry from 1932:

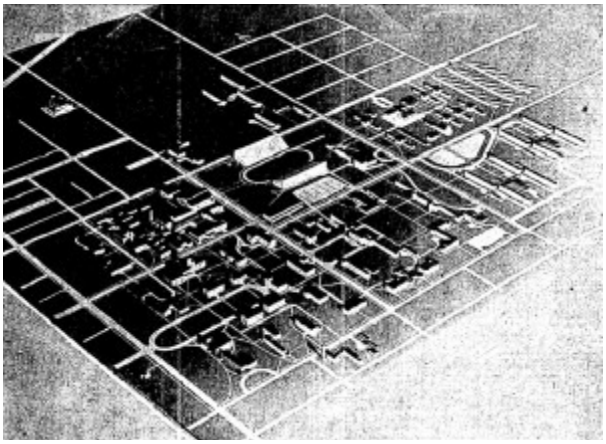


The popular professor became "acting director of the School of Architecture from 1942 to 1944. Kamphoefner had a penchant for command and by 1945 was effectively the dean of the architectural school. Joe Smay, the school's founder in 1926 and the actual dean, was nearing retirement, and in the words of Duncan Stuart (Kamphoefner's fellow faculty member at Oklahoma), Smay 'didn't like 'deaning' that much' and preferred the golf course. In 2002, Stuart further recalled how Henry Kamphoefner reacted to the administrative power vacuum: Henry, who liked to run things, just took over. The fact that he didn't have the title [of dean] didn't seem to worry him all that much."*

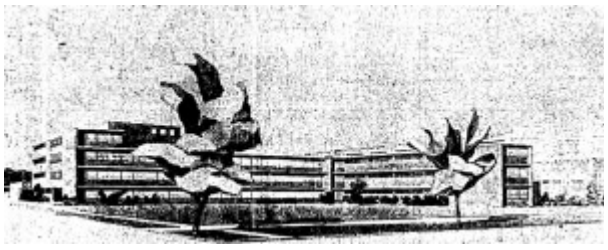
(It is interesting to note that in the OU School of Architecture brochure I found in 2013 and blogged about, Kamphoefner is listed as chairman for the School of Architecture from 1944-1947, as you can see here.)

By 1944, Kamphoefner was OU's de facto School of Architecture chairman, as well as official Coordinator of Campus Planning. In his new position as campus planner, he immediately gathered fellow architecture professors James W. Fitzgibbon and Martin S. Kermacy and worked with them to design a completely new OU campus that would be rolled out in phases over three decades. The trio's first collaboration, a 96-unit married housing complex, had already been approved with construction set to begin in 1945, so when they unveiled their grand plan for a thoroughly modern campus, it's not surprising that the powers at OU reacted enthusiastically. What might have been surprising, though, was the abundance of national and even international praise the plan received after it was published in the September 1945 issue of Architectural Forum.





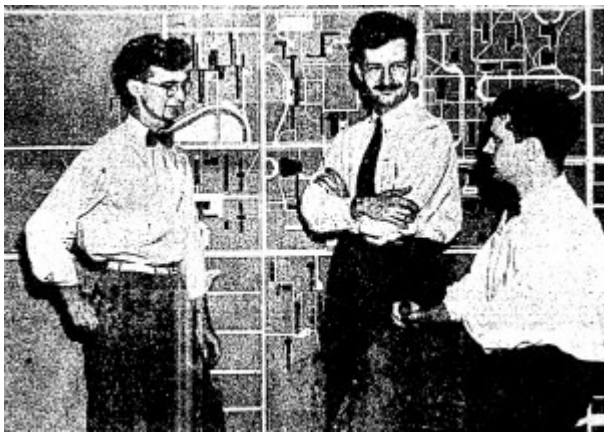
The "breathtaking" plan, according to Architectural Forum, called for the OU campus to be divided into 10 zones with areas of similar study clustered together. Kamphoefner and his design cohorts called the existing Gothic-styled buildings impractical for Oklahoma's weather — they were more suited to cold, damp climes, Kamphoefner claimed. In an Oklahoman article, Kamphoefner explains that "an effort has been made to plant a little bit of Oxford on the OU campus. We're making an effort to fit the architectural plan to its environment." In other words, adios Gothic — hello Mod! Here's an example of the style of architecture Kamphoefner looked forward to seeing on the OU campus:



Kamphoefner had this to say about the new architecture he outlined in the campus plan: "If we satisfy the requirements of our buildings, create simple, workable structures, orient these structures to the sunlight, the prevailing winds, and the physical characteristics of the property, we will find very little need for serious discussion of 'style.' We should prefer to justify the building as an expression and embodiment of the life and structure within rather than as an 'authentic' reproduction or rejuvenation of a past style."*

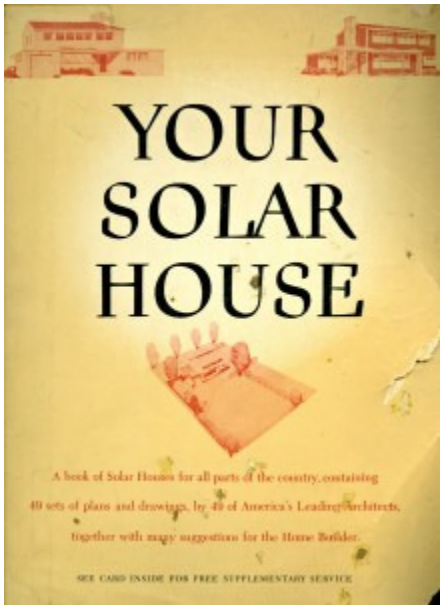
And here's a photo of the three campus planners looking very pleased with themselves, indeed — that's

Kermacy on the left, Kamphoefner in the middle, and Fitzgibbon on the right:



To see how well (or not well) Kamphoefner's modern plan fared, I highly recommend checking out this great and very humorous blog post on greatmirror.com about the architecture on the OU campus. It's a great read … and there are lots of photos, too!

While the OU plan made the rounds in architectural circles and was called "the first large-scale rethinking of collegiate architecture to go into construction" by The Oklahoman, Kamphoefner was busy at work on a completely different kind of project. He was selected by the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass company to design a home as Oklahoma's entry for an upcoming book, *Your Solar House*:

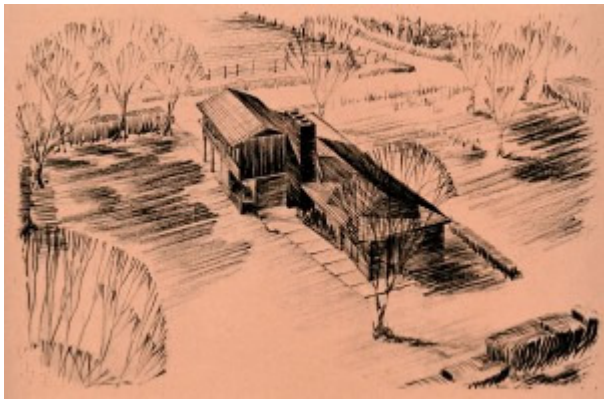


All 48 states and the District of Columbia would be represented in the book, and the criteria for each architect's design stated that homes should be "inspired by its own locality," cost no more than $15,000 (by prewar standards) to build, and "should lift their faces to the sun through extensive windows, or even walls of glass, not only to enlist solar energy as an auxiliary heating plant but chiefly to unite interiors with the out-of-doors in a spacious, cheer-filled atmosphere." Here's what Kamphoefner came up with:

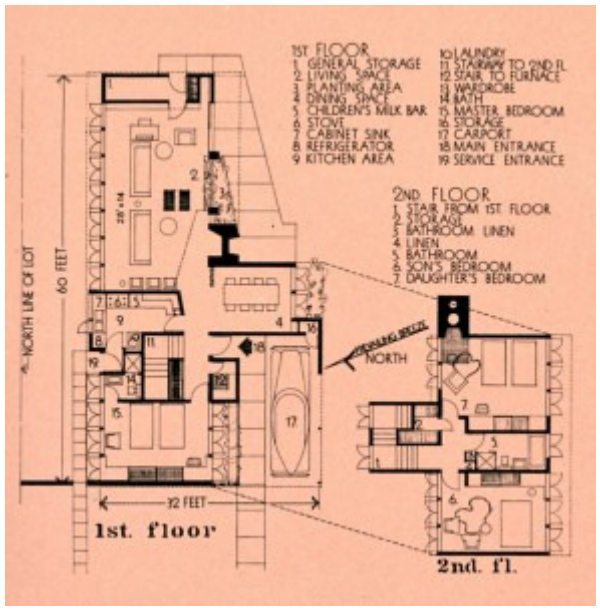
And here's the verbiage that goes along with the drawings (by Nat Baker and John H. Lattimor):

The Oklahoma solar house has been designed for an inside lot 100 feet wide by 150 feet deep, and fronting on the east side of an urban street. Houses on this type of plot are often planned so badly that the specified lot offers a challenge to the designer.

This house has been placed close to the street and to the north lot line, but the design has been worked out carefully to screen the house in those two directions. There are no windows on the east or west sides. The plan opens well to the south and the side and rear of the lot, for maximum privacy and view across the lawn.



The house was designed for relaxed, informal living. The main-entrance vestibule serves as a pivot point off which all rooms work, and passage to or from any room is possible without disturbing any other part of the house. The living-dining area may open into a single unified space when the occasion demands. The storage wall is used throughout the house, and ample, strategically placed storage spaces are provided.

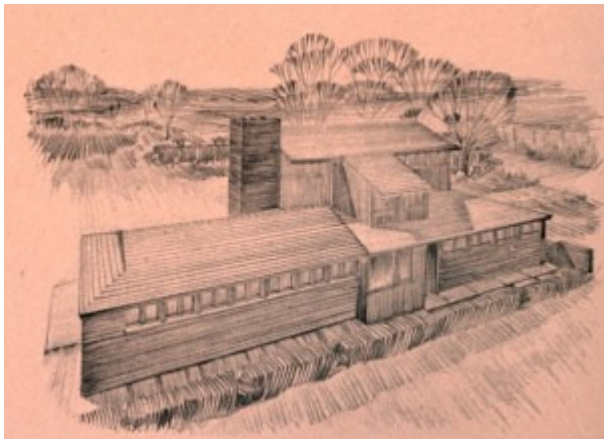


Since the climate here is mild and most rains come from the north and east, the carport is brought into the house but left open on the west and south. Visitors arriving by automobile may enter the house under cover.

Exterior finishes are common brick and redwood siding. The pitched roofs are red-cedar shingles, and the flat roofs are tar and gravel. Interior finishes are chiefly of plywoods with plaster ceilings and hardwood floors. Simple fabrics will be used to screen the windows at night.

Glass is used freely in the exterior walls, but in large amounts only where it can be protected from the summer sun and in no area where the family's privacy will be violated. Translucent-glass louvers are used to screen the lower bedroom windows from view while admitting light and air.

Planting is an integral part of the architecture as used in the areas next to the house and throughout the plot. It screens and softens specific areas, and enriches space.



Once again, the press raved about a Kamphoefner design, and The Oklahoman declared that the home, which contained many elements the architect had experimented with his own house in Norman, would be built in Oklahoma City. I'm not sure if it was built — does anyone out there in Mod Squad land know?

By 1948, Kamphoefner had been at OU for 11 years. He was at the top of his game there when he, along with four other professors, suddenly resigned in January 1948 and announced that they all would be moving to North Carolina State University. Along with Kamphoefner, three other architecture professors — James Fitzgibbon, Edward Walter Waugh, and George Matsumoto — would make the trip to NCSU. The fifth professor was Duncan Stuart from the Art Department.

Why did Kamphoefner leave OU? An offer to become the first dean of the newly formed School of Design there was certainly enticing, and he told an Oklahoman reporter that "North Carolina offers greater opportunities to develop a first rate school of architecture." While it is true that the move would nearly double Kamphoefner's salary from $4,600 a year to $9,000 and give him the rare chance to create his department almost from scratch, it is also true that OU's reigning star professor was not enamored with newcomer and fellow spotlight grabber, Bruce Goff, who arrived on campus in January 1947. While many

have suggested that Kamphoefner and his fellow departing professors had a problem with Goff's sexual orientation, maybe Kamphoefner just figured that one big fish on campus was enough … or maybe he was ready for a new challenge … or maybe his reasons for leaving were a combination of all of the above.

I did find an interesting quote that makes me think it was more the challenge that sent Kamphoefner on his way. An article in the May 16, 1948 edition of The Oklahoman discusses the improbability of someone like Goff, who did not have a degree in architecture or in any other field, becoming chairman of OU's School of Architecture. Here's what the reporter claims happened: "We understand it took considerable talk on the part of Henry L. Kamphoefner, former head of the department, to convince President Cross that such a concession as to degrees would not jeopardize the scholastic standing of the department." If this statement is correct, the resigning chairman actually fought for Goff despite their supposed enmity toward each other.

Here's another interesting tidbit I found about the Kamphoefner/Goff relationship. According to the National Register nomination for the Ledbetter house, which was prepared by Goff scholar and Professor Emeritus of Architecture at OU, Arn Henderson, it was Kamphoefner who recommended Goff for the commission. "Goff was recommended for the commission by Henry Kamphoefner, a colleague instrumental in Goff's return to Oklahoma." So, apparently there was a mutual respect between Goff and Kamphoefner, even though there may not have been a friendship between the two men.

As further evidence that Goff may not have been the reason he left OU, Kamphoefner had been looking for a way out of Oklahoma for perhaps a year before the NCSU offer. Even though Kamphoefner thought that OU had a great school in the making, "he felt that the philosophical weight of the Beaux-Arts was still too oppressive at Oklahoma and he still dreamed of a chance to revise fully the teaching of architecture. Kamphoefner had applied to Yale for a professorship and had heard rumors that he was in the running to be head of Yale's architectural program."* He had also looked at going to other universities when the offer came in from NCSU, which came with the promise of complete creative control, a much higher salary, a new car, and other too-good-to-be-true amenities.

Also, I owe a big thanks to Nelson Brackin, who found the issue of the Sooner magazine that announces Kamphoefner and pals' mass exodus from OU. Read the article here.

So, with everything settled in Norman with Goff as the new chairman, Kamphoefner and his posse headed off to North Carolina while Bruce Goff took his place at OU, and both men would go on to create two of the most prestigious and successful architecture programs in the country.

In our final installment on Kamphoefner and his career, we'll discuss his years at North Carolina State University, but I want to end this post with a Kamphoefner quote I find especially appealing. Always a man with an opinion, Kamphoefner wrote a critique in The Oklahoman in 1947 that blasted a book written by California architect Paul Williams entitled *New Homes for Today*. Our pal Kamphoefner hated the book (the designs in it were too boring and staid, he thought) but in the review, he very succinctly and eloquently shared his philosophy about modern architecture:

"… there are no rules for modern architecture other than that it is a reflection of modern life, an attitude toward life which begins with living people and their physical and emotional needs and tries to meet them as logically as possible with the best available methods."

* Quote came from David Louis Sterrett Brook's dissertation, "Henry Leveke Kamphoefner, the Modernist, Dean of the North Carolina State University School of Design, 1948-1972. Go here to access it — the dissertation provides a very detailed biography of Kamphoefner and his years at NCSU is quite an interesting read.

Addendum 7/17/2015:

Mod Squadder James David Barnes kindly added his insightful recollections about Fitzgibbon's take on the mass exodus of Kamphoefner and his crew from OU in 1948 and gave me permission to share them here. Thank you!

It was my privilege to have been an architecture student once enrolled in studio courses taught both by James W. Fitzgibbon (spring, 1972) and Bruce Goff (fall, 1976). Both were great story-tellers. I don't remember Goff ever talking about his years at OU, but I can well remember Fitzgibbon talking about Goff and about the Kamphoefner group's decision to leave O.U. Jim Fitzgibbon had been on the architecture faculty since the early 1940s, and left with Kamphoefner to go to North Carolina in 1948.

For the most part, what I remember of Fitzgibbon's version of the 1948 split of the O.U. Architecture faculty is the same as what Lynne Rostochil's blog reports in its history of Henry Kamphoefner. There are differences in emphasis, as follows.

Fitzgibbon told us that Goff's rise to chairmanship and control of the OU Architecture program was the reason that the dissident group of faculty (and a few students) left for North Carolina. Fitzgibbon's objections to Goff were architectural: Goff approach to building design was too purely graphic and too devoid of interest in, or knowledge of, practical building construction. Goff's approach to clients was too single-mindedly manipulative. (Goff would open a drawer and show his fellow architectural faculty members house plans already drafted to minute detail – even naming the type of grass in the yard – but he would not show those drawings to his clients. Instead, Goff would slowly "sell" the plan verbally. If his clients objected as he described their new home, Goff refused to change a single detail — unknown to them, their house design had already been completely determined.) On the other hand, Fitzgibbon's stories had ample room for praise of Goff , his inventive imagination, his native gift for creating intriguing designs from scrap materials. Goff's love of music was also praised. Nevertheless, the definite feeling I recall is that the architecture teachers who left O.U. simply did not wish to be led by Goff – they did not embrace his design principles, they did not respect his methods. In short, I believe that they thought they were better architects than Goff. That they were academically trained, and Goff was not, must surely have been a point of further contention.

It is also my recollection that the group had "given-up" on the University of Oklahoma when they realized that Bruce Goff had won the support of the university president (I presume that being George Lynn Cross, who served as president of OU from 1943 to 1968). The O.U. president saw Goff as his "star architect", the native son of Oklahoma whose genius should be given upper reign. After the other faculty members realized that Goff was the new prophet of favor, Kamphoefner's group banded together and decided to leave.

It is also my recollection that the dissenting OU architecture faculty group decided to leave long before any offer from North Carolina surfaced. Fitzgibbon recalled them talking about possibly going to New Mexico and opening a "building-design laboratory" (a sort of Los Alamos of architectural design). My sense is that they had been casting around looking for something, and what surfaced was the offer from the North Carolina State University, in Raleigh, to come and open a new design department there. They grabbed it.

Goff's homosexuality was known to architecture students in 1971. As a young anxiously-closeted-homosexual myself, I listened to Fitzgibbon's criticisms of Goff with an ear for the slightest nuances of anti-homosexual moralizing, and I can only remember noticing that he made none. In an era when homosexuality was still typically considered a psychological illness, Goff's sexuality was absolutely never maligned by James Fitzgibbon. But while Jim Fitzgibbon scrupulously avoided hitting his architectural opponent "below the belt" I do recall Jim Fitzgibbon's wife telling one malicious tale. Margaret Fitzgibbon, herself a some-time OU art faculty assistant, one day told me about a building construction contractor (whose name I cannot remember) who wanted to be the builder of one of Goff's residential designs. Margaret told me that the young builder "knew what Bruce wanted", and he did "what it took" to get the

job. Clearly the insinuation was that Goff and his ilk were bad people, engaging in sexual misconduct. (Margaret tended to play a Gracie Allen role, the scattered-brained female — she and Fitz would publicly argue in a comic style. I knew Margaret well enough not to give her story too much credence). I don't think the architecture faculty split away because Bruce Goff was gay; plus I think they had decided long before 1971 that Goff's homosexuality should not the issue of their complaints. (It is noteworthy that the University's public concern about Goff's sexuality did not surface until 1955, seven years after dissenting architecture faculty members had left.) But during the late 1940s I can not imagine that Goff's sexual orientation would not have been used privately by his opponents' allies trying to smear his reputation, or by Goff's allies trying to portray him as the unjustly persecuted.

I had great admiration for Jim Fitzgibbon. After his unexpected death in 1985 (heart failure during sleep), I advised the Missouri Historical Society to investigate his memorabilia. Margaret Fitzgibbon gave them his entire archive, including a great deal of information about the various versions of Fuller's geodesic dome. Fitzgibbon wrote private diaries, and though I have never seen these journals, it is possible that the "James W. Fitzgibbon Collection" in St. Louis includes a written account of the great 1948 split of the O.U. Architecture faculty.