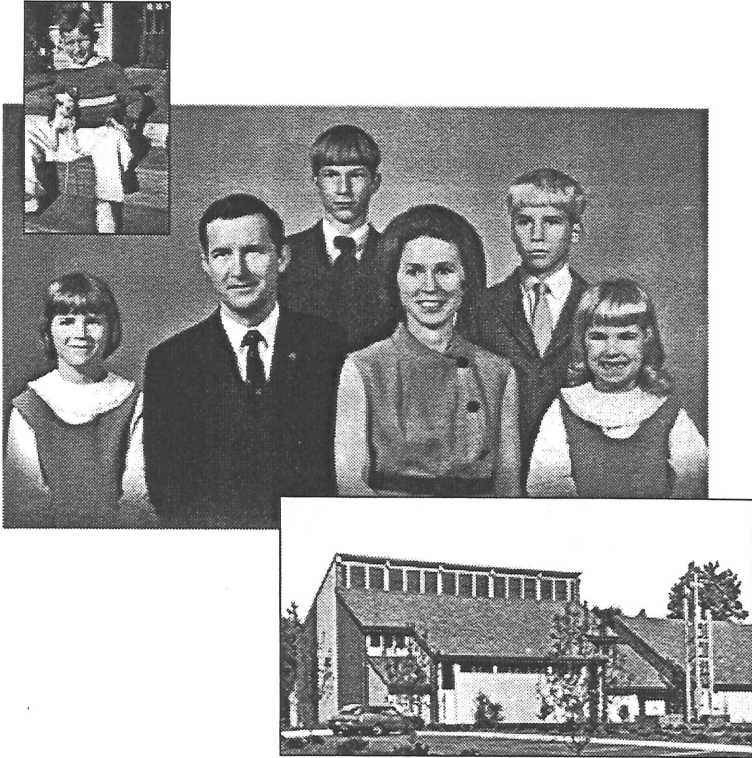


TO: GEORGE M. SMART, JR
OCT. 29, 2010
FROM: J. AUBREY KIRBY, AIA
WITH GRATITUDE



Faith, Hope & Hard Work:

The Life Adventures of
J. Aubrey Kirby, Architect

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Written by Fam Brownlee, Jr.
as told to by J. Aubrey Kirby**

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Preface

As a child growing up in Winston-Salem, I was exposed to a wide range of "architecture." For the first three years, I lived on Jefferson Street in a typical Ardmore house. Then, when my father came home from World War II, I lived, for a time, in a garage apartment on Brent Street.

But when my second sister was born, we moved around the corner into a shingled cottage on Arlington Street, soon to be renamed Ardsley Street. My father lived in that house from the late 1940s until barely a year before he died in early 2004.

Ardmore, perhaps the most architecturally diverse neighborhood in the Triad, was my home base. There I stayed until I moved, as a young adult, into my first apartment, a renovated barn on Powers Drive, off Ransom Road in northwest Winston-Salem.

That offbeat place may be where I got my first inkling that architecture and people are connected. Among my neighbors were one, Rick Schock, who collected and raised peafowl; one, J.D. Alexander, a Wake Forest graduate student who would later find himself involved, as an editor at the Washington Post, in the Watergate Scandal; one, Renn Drum, who made it through Wake Forest law school, passed the bar exam and immediately sued the state of North Carolina to force the reapportionment of the state legislature, and against daunting odds, won, thus becoming a law school teaching tool forever; and one, Duncan Noble, who would go on to found the North Carolina School of the Arts production of "The Nutcracker" ballet, which has become a regional Christmas tradition.

But there was much more. My earliest memory, maybe I was two or so, is a Sunday visit to my grandparents' farm. We turned off of Ebert Street onto a dusty dirt track with a lush grass median. And I said "What are we going down this old road for?" On the left was a row of pecan trees, then an acre of strawberry plants. On the right was a barbed wire fence, and beyond, the fields and barn (still standing – you can see it from the intersection of Ebert Street and Silas Creek Parkway) belonging to Caesar Ebert. We topped the rise and started down and I saw a classic Piedmont farmhouse, surrounded by

flowers and a magnolia tree in bloom, a kitchen garden, a "smokehouse," a chicken coop and some acres of young corn, a scattering of farm dogs and cats.

And more. Since we were members of Ardmore Moravian Church, I found my way to Salem, where I encountered a dazzling array of architecture ranging from the oldest Moravian buildings to the "castle" where Bishop Pfol and his wife, Bessie, lived. And once my friends and I got our bicycles, we rode regularly out along Stratford and Reynolda Roads, past the "mansions" of the rich, to Crystal Lake. The mansions seemed cold and forbidding, but Crystal Lake, with its rowboat pond, twenty-four foot diving board and pavilion with juke box where the older crowd danced the jitterbug, the shag and the beach boogie, was a wonder. We didn't realize then that there were at least a thousand Crystal Lakes across the breadth of America. Later, at Reynolds High School, I would find those Buena Vista mansions less daunting when I started dating some of the girls who lived in them.

Later yet, as a 1960s U.S. Navy recruit on my way to Viet Nam, I discovered the architecture of old town San Diego and 1920s Los Angeles and even earlier San Francisco. Not to mention Old Mexico, the Pacific northwest, Alaska, Hawaii, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and French Indochina. For a time in Viet Nam I lived and worked in an early 20th century villa outside Can Tho, the former home of a province chieftain, and began to appreciate what architecture could do for us, because its relatively primitive, by U.S. standards, amenities, exceeded by far those of 99% of current Vietnamese civilians.

Yet in all that time, like most people, I never really thought about "architecture." It wasn't until I finished graduate school and began work on my book *Winston-Salem: A Pictorial History*, that I found the need to understand architecture. Thanks to that book, I was forced to meet a number of architects. And I was fortunate enough to make a few of them my friends. Three stand out.

Luther Lashmit was the first. Perhaps our greatest architect. But as he was quick to point out "I just had better opportunities." Maybe so, but his accomplishments were legion: the Durham Life Insurance Building in Raleigh,

Graylyn, the North Carolina Supreme Court building in Raleigh, Dick Reynolds' "Ship House," and many others. He taught me much of what I know about the theory of architecture. But what I truly treasure about him is his terrific sense of humor. I wish I had videotaped him on the day that we took our tour of downtown churches, starting with First Presbyterian and ending with St. Paul's Episcopal.

Tom Calloway was the second. A protoge of Lashmit, and Lashmit's successor Michael Newman, he taught me architectural history and the intellectual sources of modern design. My favorite Calloway building is probably the Workplace at the North Carolina School of the Arts, but his own house, built near Whitaker School and drawn from the plantation architecture of earlier times, is a wonder.

The third was Aubrey Kirby, who was just developing an interest in energy conservation and solar solutions. His own office building on South Broad Street was a pioneering experiment in passive solar architecture. His Southside branch of the Forsyth County Public library was a triumph of environmental concern. And his Kingswood United Methodist Church near Rural Hall was a testament to the adaptive modernism of his spirituality.

But as with Lashmit and Calloway, it was the man behind the buildings that I found truly interesting. And it wasn't until late 2004 when I embarked on the project that resulted in this little book that I really came to know the man J. Aubrey Kirby. His early life reads like a classic American Horatio Alger story, the overcoming of difficulties by grit and determination. And as with Lashmit, there is an element of luck. My favorite part of the Kirby story may well be how he met Nancy, his future wife. Or perhaps the extraordinary first day of the launching of the firm J. Aubrey Kirby, Architect, when he acquired, like twin bolts out of the blue, not one, but two providential jobs.

But looking at his life as a whole, two qualities come to mind. Steadfastness and spirituality. Read on and you will see what I mean.

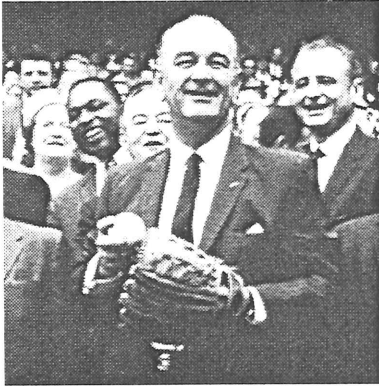
Fam Brownlee, Jr.
April 30, 2005

The Beginning-1964

1964 was not a normal year in America. Not that Americans weren't acting normal, complaining about taxes, the weather, rock 'n' roll and the recent one cent increase, to a nickel, in the price of a first class postage stamp.

But the nation was still in shock from the assassination of their young President, John F. Kennedy. His vice-president, Lyndon B. Johnson, was an unknown quantity. And there was trouble brewing elsewhere.

By the end of the year, Johnson would send troops on a peacekeeping mission to the Dominican Republic. And the Chinese would add a third front to the already intense Cold War by testing their first atomic weapons. And then there was this place called Viet Nam, formerly a part of the French



Indochina colony, that most Americans had never heard of.

Dr. Martin

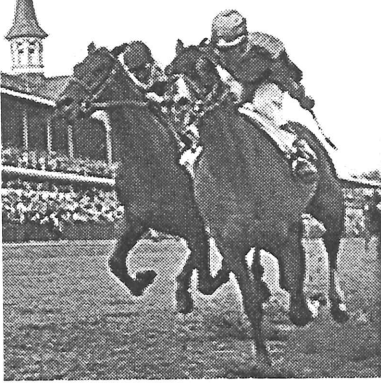
Luther King received the Nobel Peace Prize and LBJ signed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, but in Mississippi, three young civil rights workers were murdered by the Ku

Klux Klan. And in another far away land, a young man named Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison for acts of sabotage against the South African government.

Despite all this, there was much to celebrate. The first World's Fair to be hosted by the US since 1930 opened in Flushing Meadows on the outskirts of New York city. And later in the year, Japan, which had been scheduled to host the cancelled 1940 Olympic Games, would finally host the 1964 edition, where American Al Oerter would win an unprecedented third consecutive Olympic discus gold medal.

UCLA beat Duke 98-83 to win the first of eleven NCAA basketball championships. Northern Dancer won the Kentucky

Derby. And the Yankees lost their second straight World Series, to the St. Louis Cardinals. It would be the last for their great center fielder Mickey Mantle.



In a piece of bad news for citizens whose economic well being depended upon the tobacco industry, US Surgeon General Luther Terry affirmed that cigarette smoking causes cancer. But US and Soviet

scientists shared the Nobel Prize in Physics for their work on lasers, a technology that would revolutionize such diverse areas as medicine, space exploration, communications, and entertainment.

French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre turned down the Nobel Prize in literature. Ed Sullivan launched what would be called the British Invasion when he presented a floppy haired rock band known as the Beatles on his Sunday night TV show. Bob Dylan's nasal twang was making him one of the new pop music icons. "Tom Jones" won the Academy Award for best picture. And in New York, architects Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth & Sons introduced their completed design for an ambitious new project to be known as the World Trade Center.

Meanwhile, in Winston-Salem, NC, a young architect was preparing to launch an ambitious new project of his own. On November 2, he announced the establishment of J. Aubrey Kirby & Associates. He might not have gotten as much attention as he'd hoped, because the very next day, Lyndon Johnson piled up a record sixteen million vote margin to bury Republican Senator Barry Goldwater in the biggest landslide in American history.

But it would be the beginning of a true forty year adventure, one that would leave Kirby's indelible imprint on the architectural landscape of northwest North Carolina.

The First Beginning – Depths of the Depression

In the mythology of humankind, the end of winter is a time of anticipation and hope, looking forward to the sunnier days of spring and summer. But in the 1930s, there was little to anticipate and not much more hope for the citizens of the United States of America and much of the rest of the world. The Great Depression was tightening its grip on most aspects of everyday life.

If a man was lucky, he had a job. James Claudius Kirby was lucky. He had a job. And he had married the girl of his dreams, Mary Helen Rhyne, whose great uncle Daniel Efried Rhyne had played a major role in the development of Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, N.C. They lived on 729 Hawthorne Lane in Charlotte, N.C.

At 9:15 on Sunday morning, January 31, at Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. He weighed six pounds and thirteen ounces. They named him James Aubrey. By his own account, Aubrey was a normal boy who enjoyed doing the things that normal boys do. He had a little wagon and a toy rabbit.



Mother and Daddy

When Jim and Mary Helen had married, Jim was traveling throughout western North Carolina as a wholesale shoe representative. When Aubrey was born, he took a job with the Pilot Insurance Company to “get off the road” and be able to spend more time with his family. They moved to 208

King Street in Gastonia some time during Aubrey's pre-school years.

But during Aubrey's first year in school, tragedy struck the Kirby family. Aubrey's mother contracted tuberculosis and had to enter the sanitarium in Black Mountain, near Asheville, N.C.

Then Jim Kirby got another job that summer, working at a gas station that also had a restaurant and cottages for rent on U.S. highway 74 west of Gastonia, N.C. They lived in one of the cottages and ate at the restaurant. Jim Kirby tried raising Aubrey on his own, but it was more than he could handle.

So Aubrey spent part of that summer on his great uncle Harvey White's large hog farm near Charlotte. Then he moved to Pacolet, South Carolina, about ten miles southwest of Spartanburg off U. S. highway 176, to live with Jim Kirby's younger brother Nathan and his wife, Dora. The three of them lived in a two room upstairs apartment. It had a kitchen and a living room/bedroom. The toilet facilities were out back in a "small house," and bathing was accomplished using a small pan filled with warm water.

"They had no children, and very little money," Aubrey

says. "And Dora probably resented having me. My whole world was the apartment, the church, the school, the country store and the feed and flour mill, where another of Jim Kirby's brothers, Harley, worked; all within a three block area. This was the only truly unfortunate part of my childhood – and it wasn't *that* bad."

And it was meant to be only a temporary arrangement, until Jim Kirby could bring him back home. But then a second tragedy intervened. Jim Kirby had a massive stroke. He survived, but the



Aubrey & mother at 729 Hawthorne Lane, Charlotte, NC

entire right side of his body was paralyzed. He was forced to move to the Veteran's Home in Mountain Home, near Johnson City, Tennessee, where he would remain until his death in 1958 at age 63.

Aubrey ended up living with Nathan and Dora for about a year. Clearly a more permanent arrangement had to be made. So Aubrey's mother put him on the train.

"She attached a little tag with my name, and probably her brother's name and phone number," Aubrey recalls. "I was like a living package to be delivered. I don't think I moved out of my seat all the way from Gastonia to Atlanta."

Next stop, College Park, Georgia, an Atlanta suburb, to live with Uncle Plato and Aunt Miriam.

"They couldn't have treated me better," Aubrey says. "I had a little three-year-old 'brother,' Plato S. Rhyne, Jr., my first cousin, playmates my own age, Bubba and Kay, and Aunt Miriam began teaching me to play the piano. Plato Junior's brother, Bruce, named for our grandfather, Bruce G. Rhyne, was born a few years later. I probably would have stayed there through high school and probably gone to Georgia Tech, Uncle Plato's *alma mater*."



On the hog farm
near Charlotte

But – across two oceans other arrangements were being made. In Europe, Adolf Hitler's panzers were rolling through Czechoslovakia and Poland and the plains of Belgium and France. And across the Pacific, Imperial Japan was establishing its Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and plotting a stunning aerial attack on a remote military station most Americans had never heard of – Pearl Harbor, on the island of Oahu, Hawaii.

"Uncle Plato was in the Army reserve," Aubrey says. "He got called up, and that changed everything. Guess what – it was time to pack up again."

So Aubrey would move to his fifth home and fourth

school in three different states in about four years. During most of that time, Aubrey did not see either of his parents. The ancient Greeks had invented the concept of "stoicism." Aubrey became their best pupil.

"During all this shuffling around, I just went along, caused no trouble," Aubrey recalls. "I missed my parents, but I took things in stride; and no crying or homesickness. As we say today 'whatever'."

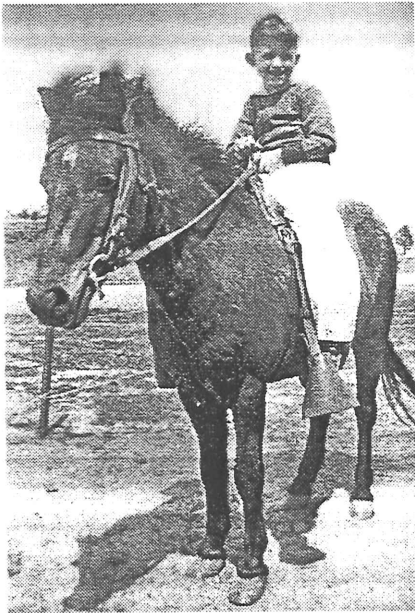
So he finished the fourth grade at the Alexander Schools, Inc. in Union Mills, about halfway between Marion and Rutherford, North Carolina on U. S. highway 121. But he didn't live at the boarding school.

"The Pratts took in some of the boys," he says. "So I lived in their house with three or four other boys and the Pratt's daughter Betty Belk. We did a lot of chores: gardening,

hauling firewood, taking care of the chickens, hogs and the cow."

But they also had time for fun. Aubrey recalls it as a Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn lifestyle. There were two black and white cats, fishing and swimming in the Second Broad River, making rabbit traps and toys out of whatever they could find and adventures with beasts, wild and otherwise.

"I remember one snowy night the hogs got out and ran



Pony ride at Gastonia carnival

wild," Aubrey says. "I didn't take time to put my shoes on. That was a wild night. And one day, down by the river, we

killed a snake that threw up a whole frog."

They made slingshots out of good dogwood forks, old inner-tube rubber and bits of leather from discarded shoes; scooters from old skate wheels and boards and learned to roll barrel hoops using coat hanger wire instead of a stick to propel them. They shot a lot of marbles, using a ball bearing, known as a "steel," for a shooter. And they made self-propelled "tractors" by notching an empty spool of thread, putting a rubber band through the hole and a stick on the other side.

"We'd take slingshots and squirrels that we'd caught to school and trade or sell them to the boarding students for spending money," Aubrey says. "Mrs. Lillian Pratt would cook the rabbits we caught for supper. We'd make capes out of old feed sacks and jump out of the barn loft, or use an old umbrella for a parachute and jump out of a tree. They didn't work very well."



Aubrey on bike in Union Mills

Of course there was school, which took precious time from the "good stuff." And more chores: helping with the hog killing, churning butter, selling Mrs. Pratt's lunches to passing

train crews.

But there was also time for trips to Rutherford in Mrs. Pratt's 1939 Oldsmobile. They had their high points – movies! – and their low points – visits to the dentist who didn't have Novocain!

"I liked singing in the church choir with Billy Cothran," Aubrey says. "Our voices hadn't changed yet, so we could hit higher notes than most of the ladies. That changed when we turned thirteen or so. And I liked making things – a holster for my toy gun from an old leather boot and pokeberry ink. We'd use a rooster's tail feather for a pen."

Finally, Aubrey had a stable and nurturing environment. It lasted all the way through World War II and into 1946. Then Mr. Otto Pratt died, and again, things changed. The powers that be decided that Aubrey would move to The Children's Home in Winston-Salem. "Whatever."

Interlude – Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

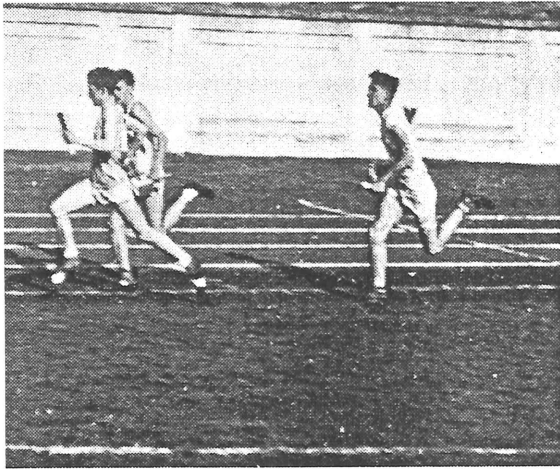
"I had to leave behind my cat," Aubrey recalls. "And my new bicycle. I was told that the cat grieved for a while and then ran away. And I had recently lost my brand new knife in the river.

"And just before I left for Winston-Salem, my mother bought me some nice new colorful shirts. One of the first things that they did at The Home was take those shirts away, because nobody was allowed to have better things than anyone else, but that was OK.

"I'd only been at The Home for a few days when an older boy asked for some of a candy bar I had. Since I couldn't share with everyone, I refused. Since he was the runt of his class and always getting picked on, he liked to give the younger boys a hard time. So he jumped me. He got me down on the ground – maybe you could say he beat me up – but not without getting almost as good as he gave. After that I was never in a fight again. Word gets around, I guess."

The Second Beginning – 1946

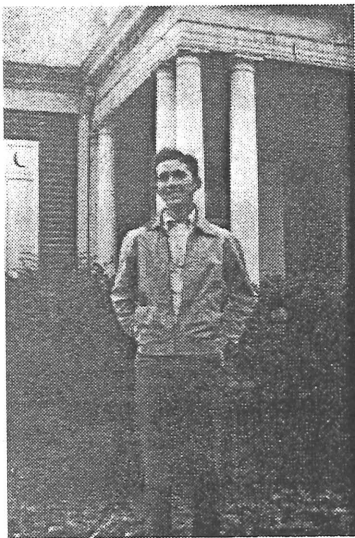
When Aubrey came to Winston-Salem in 1946 to take up residence at The Children's Home, he should have experienced culture shock on a grand scale, moving from a mountain village with its tiny schools and churches to a city with a grand cathedral and a huge high school. And he acquired about four hundred new brothers and sisters overnight. At the home, he immersed himself in the daily routine, carrying his share of the load in chores, schoolwork and extracurricular activities. He joined the Methodist Youth Fellowship and remained active throughout high school in other church activities.



Aubrey leads the way at the Duke Relays

People said he was too small for football, but he played four years at half-back under the legendary Home coach Wilburn Clary. He also played basketball and baseball for two years, but coach Clary's favorite punishment for infractions was running laps around the ball field. One day in his junior year Aubrey was late for baseball practice because he's been watching the Reynolds High School track team work out.

"So I'm out there running twenty laps, maybe five miles," Aubrey says. "And I thought, if I'm going to do all this running I might as well be on the track team. So my junior year I started running the 220 and 440 yard dashes for coach Leonard Philo at Reynolds."



The Children's Home

"After the Home itself, my life was influenced by two institutions, R. J. Reynolds High School and Centenary United Methodist Church," Aubrey says. "They both worked to bring out the positive things in me, and that influence has remained to this day."

Of course, sometimes the signals were mixed. One Reynolds teacher, Mrs. Evelyn Garrison, told him that she could see the "light of intelligence" shining in his eyes. But another told him that he was "an ignoramus personified."

"I had to look that up," Aubrey says. "I mean personified. I knew what ignoramus meant." Whatever.

One of his Sunday school teachers at Centenary, Miss Lena Goff, took a special interest in Aubrey. She suggested that he might make a good minister.

"I did well to keep myself on a relatively straight and narrow path," Aubrey says. "I didn't think I'd be much help to others. I also thought I had too much worldly ambition and tenacity to be a minister."

Maybe he was right. The motto under his senior picture in the high school annual reads "He always has his fun."

Which brings us to girls.

"In high school I dated several girls on an irregular basis, but nothing serious like 'going steady' for more than a few weeks. I really was too busy with school, athletics, chores and church. I did, however, know what type of girl I was looking for— one who had good moral character, intelligence and good looks, not an easy combination to find. And once having found her, the question would arise as to whether she would have me or not. I came real close to missing her at college."

A kidney injury during the latter part of his senior football season put Aubrey in the hospital. He was out of school for six weeks. His teachers sent him his homework assignments, but there was a problem.

"I was missing driving class," he says. "So I had to drive in my imagination. In my mind's eye I would drive up Summit Street hill, the steepest in Winston-Salem, stop, change gears, and continue. I didn't have any trouble getting my license."

At Reynolds he took a college prep course, with an emphasis on math and science. In ninth grade he was put into S-1, a class of the "brightest of the bright." But he'd never seriously studied in Union Mills. So the next year he was demoted to a lower section. That didn't sit well with him, so he decided to get down to business. He was put back in S-1 in the eleventh grade.

That year he took his first mechanical drawing course, and mesmerized by the intricate and demanding marvels of that craft set his career course in the direction of engineering and architecture. When he graduated from Reynolds, he considered a scholarship offer from Brevard College, but decided to accept a combination self-help / academic scholarship to High Point College.

"I left Winston-Salem with a steamer trunk — which I still have — packed with all my earthly belongings, sixty dollars in

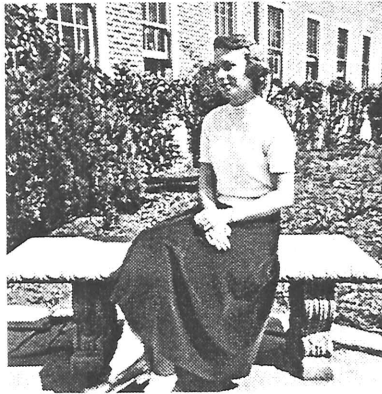
cash and a dream that I would return someday as an architect," he recalls.

Interlude – Summer time, and the living is easy?

"That summer I went to College Park, where Uncle Plato had gotten me a job as a lineman's helper with Southern Bell. But I missed my best friend from the Home, Olin Hall. He got me a job as a laborer for Frank L. Blum Construction Company in Winston-Salem. We also did some pipeline work. It was hard, dangerous work and the other workers were a rough crowd. And at night, we worked in the snack bar at the Flamingo Drive-in Theater.

College Days – 1950s

The transition from high school to college can be a trying one, but Aubrey had little trouble adjusting. In the spring of his freshman year he was elected president of the rising sophomore class. He worked in the college kitchen both semesters, and after Christmas found a part time job with local architects Voorhees & Everhart. He made seventy-five cents an hour, minimum wage. That spring he had proposed to his future wife, Nancy, and she had accepted. She had had other young men interested in her before coming to college, so he had to act quickly. "The wolves were knocking at the door," he says.



Nancy at High Point College

But High Point had no degree in architecture or engineering, and money was a constant problem.

"At the end of the summer I hitchhiked about a thousand miles to check on a job with the Dupont Company in Aiken,

South Carolina. I decided to go see my mother in Atlanta, so I thumbed a ride on a Thomas School Bus out of High Point. They dropped me off in some little town in South Carolina and I started thumbing. I thumbed until well after nightfall. Then I found a cheap hotel, went to a movie, got up at five AM and started thumbing again. But I wasn't getting any rides, so I walked and thumbed and thumbed and walked. I walked across whatever county I started in, then another one, and into a third before I got a ride. I don't know how far I walked, but it was a long way. The man who picked me up was astonished."

So he left High Point College and three more years of fully paid education to follow his dream. In the fall he went to work for the Dupont Company as a graphic designer and surveyor's rodman at the Atomic Energy Commission's Savannah River Project near Aiken, South Carolina. "I was so broke, I had to live in my twelve-year-old car, a 1939 Mercury, in Augusta, Georgia for a week until I got my first paycheck," he says. "It was either pay rent or eat. I chose to eat. I would park the car on a side street near the YMCA so I could use their toilet facilities. And I bathed and shaved at a barbershop.

"Late one night I was looking in the window of a jewelry store for an engagement ring. A couple of cops came by in their cruiser and started quizzing me about why I was there. I explained what I had in mind and they believed me, but told me to move on anyway, because if the store was broken into by someone else, I might become the prime suspect. Another night, I was awakened by someone tapping on my window. It was the cops again. They told me I couldn't spend the night in my car on a public street. So I moved a few blocks away, hopefully off their beat."

"I was singing in the choir at First Presbyterian Church, and there I met a man who knew a lady who ran a boarding house in Augusta. She agreed to "carry" me for a week until I got my first paycheck. My "room" was really just a space behind a door-height partition, so I was sleeping at the end of a hallway, but it was a step up from the car. I commuted in a car pool to Aiken, which was a three hour round trip. We worked long hours, sometimes six days a week, but the money was real good."

The following year, now a married man, Aubrey worked in High Point while his new bride finished her degree at High Point College.

Finally, in September, 1953, he entered N.C. State College in Raleigh. Of course, money continued to be a problem. "One year we were living in a one bedroom apartment at 606-D Smedes Place in Cameron Village and I was in summer school full time," he says. "I began class at 5:30 AM and finished in mid-morning. Then I put in an eight hour day with local architectural firm Haskins & Rice. And on the side, I was designing my first house project."

He had a small scholarship funded by profits from the college bookstore. But when he reported the income from his job at Haskins & Rice, he was disqualified from receiving any more scholarship help.

"I learned a valuable lesson," he says. "When you try to help yourself, you may not get help otherwise. The lesson was: don't wait for someone else to help you. Do it yourself!"

After finishing four years at N.C. State in 1957, he took his fifth, or professional, year at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, and in 1958 received his Bachelor of Architecture degree.

It's Off to Work We Go – 1958

Although he had a standing job offer with the Raleigh firm of Haskins & Rice, and another offer of an instructorship at Oklahoma State to work on his masters degree, Aubrey came home to Winston-Salem during the 1957 Christmas holiday break to try to find a student loan and to interview with several local companies. An associate at the Twin City's oldest firm, Lashmit, James, Brown & Pollock, was leaving, and Luther Lashmit offered Aubrey the position. He took it and went to work in the summer of 1958.

"We rented a two bedroom apartment at 2535-D Miller Park Circle in the Miller Park Apartments off Queen Street. About a year later we bought our first house at 159 Lawndale Drive, where we lived until 1964.

"Basically, I did design and construction documents, supervised by architects Lashmit and Bill James, the best

draftsman I've ever known," he says. "It was good experience with a lot of variety."

The first building that Aubrey made a major contribution to was the Grace Brunson Elementary School on Hawthorne Road. Other important buildings that he worked on included the First Christian Church on Country Club Road, Forsyth Memorial Hospital and the original Goodwill Industries building on Coliseum Drive.

At Christmas in 1959, he took a week's vacation and spent it at the Forsyth County Public Library, studying for the last of seven professional architect's exams. He made a 98, and on February 27, 1960, became at last, after almost ten long, hard years, a licensed architect.

But the hierarchy was set in Lashmit's firm and there was no room at the top. After three and one-half years, Aubrey decided to make a move. Lashmit mentioned that another young architect, Fred W. Butner, Jr., was expanding. So in early 1962, Aubrey became Butner's first associate architect.

Only nine weeks later, Bill James, at fifty Lashmit's youngest partner, died suddenly in his sleep. Had Aubrey stayed with Lashmit, he probably would have been offered a partnership.

"As things turned out," Aubrey says, "It was good. I would always have wondered if I could have made it on my own."

He had been with Butner only a few weeks when Butner was offered a trip to Europe by the Lions Club. He took it, and Aubrey found himself in charge. To his surprise, everything went fine.

"Fred was gone almost a month," he says. "It gave me a chance to see if I could handle a staff and the other responsibilities of running an architectural firm. Later, that experience would encourage me to set up my own office, which was what I always really wanted."

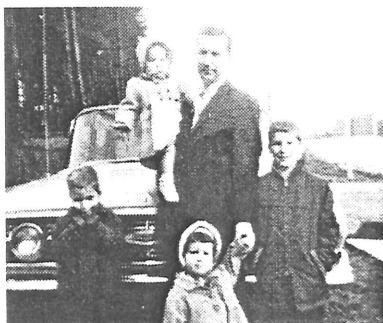
The two biggest projects that Aubrey worked on with Butner were the Forsyth County Health and Welfare Building and West Forsyth High School. But slowly he was pushing toward his goal. Finally, after almost three years, in 1964, he took the leap.

"I gave Fred several weeks notice," Aubrey says. "He asked what it would take to get me to stay. I never gave him an answer. I couldn't turn back. I'd been planning this move for fourteen years."

"I was probably a fool" – 1964

"I was probably a fool," Aubrey says. "I had a wife and four children, a mortgage, little money in the bank and no contacts. But I was getting older and I felt it was time."

So with high hopes and not a little trepidation, he rented a one room office at 620 1/2 West Fourth Street. His scheduled opening date was November 2. The day before, a boiler



Aubrey and children

exploded in the Smith Cottage at The Children's Home and the building was badly damaged by fire.

"Thank goodness, none of the children were injured," Aubrey says. "The morning of November 3, Thomas Lambeth, superintendent of The Home called and asked if I would design a

replacement. The commission did a lot for my morale, but can you imagine how excited I was that one of my first two projects would be designing a building for my old Home?"

He had a quarter of a million dollar job. But there was more to come. The Krispy Kreme Doughnut Company was just beginning a major expansion program. Aubrey had done some preliminary design on the side for a Krispy Kreme project in Atlanta. Contractor Herb West was doing most of Krispy Kreme's building at the time. He recommended that Aubrey be hired as the architect for the expansion. So in the afternoon of that second extraordinary day, Aubrey officially accepted the Krispy Kreme contract to design their largest building yet. He would eventually do more than twenty-five buildings for them.

By his fourth month, he had to hire a technical assistant. And then, near the end of the first year, he got his third break. The Northwest Development Corporation was building the Southeast's tallest office tower in downtown Winston-Salem. The architects, Cameron Associates of Charlotte, needed a local firm to do the interior planning as space was leased. Al Cameron offered Aubrey the job and he moved his office from the tiny two room walk-up on Fourth Street to the fourteenth floor of the glittering glass and steel Wachovia Building. It was a big job, but even more important were the contacts that Aubrey made, especially with one of the building's first tenants, Ferrell Realty.



Typical Krispy Kreme building

That led to a series of apartment projects, including Colony Place, Fairchild Hills and the Regency. By the end of 1965, Aubrey had a staff of four and his firm was already an established part of the community.

Nancy – 1950

But Aubrey had had his most important associate right from the start. On one of his first nights at High Point College, way back in 1950, he had attended a freshman mixer. To close out the evening, a matching game was played to provide the female students with escorts back to their dormitories.

If you know the Cinderella story, you know this one. It was a popular thing in the 1940s and 50s. Each girl put one of her shoes in a pile in the center of the room. Each boy took a shoe, then searched out the owner. Like most college boys of the time, Aubrey thought it was a silly game, but reluctantly and arbitrarily picked up a shoe. The owner of that shoe was one Nancy Ellen Ridge, from Randolph County, N.C. "And that was that," he says. "It was the biggest day of my life! How lucky can one be?"

Nancy's life until then had been entirely different from Aubrey's. Her mother died in childbirth when she was four, but she was brought up, along with two older brothers—John D. Ridge and Joseph O. Ridge—by her father and a loving step-mother, Verla.

"Verla—I called her Mama Ridge—didn't have a selfish bone in her body," Aubrey says. "And she passed on that trait to Nancy. Nancy also has a sincere modesty, which to this day she doesn't realize. Nancy was literally born on the farm, and lived on the farm until she went off to college."



Aubrey and Nancy at
Pre-wedding party

Aubrey and Nancy were married twenty-two months later. They had both just turned twenty. But education and economics made their early days together into days apart.

"For our wedding, Aubrey came up from Augusta on Friday," Nancy says. "We were married on Saturday, July 12, 1952, and went to Augusta on Sunday so he could be back at work on Monday morning—a real short honeymoon."

The original plan had called for Aubrey to enter Georgia Tech that

fall, but they decided that Nancy should finish her degree in business administration first, so after two months, she returned to High Point College. Aubrey quit his job with Dupont and went back to work for Voorhees & Everhart, Architects. For the next year they lived in a two room apartment at 620 Hamilton Street in the William and Mary Apartments in High Point.

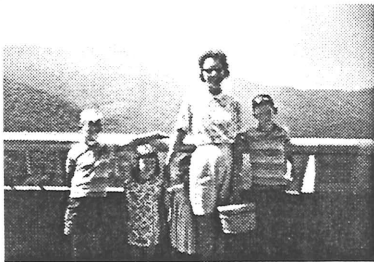
"To save money, we sold our 1950 Mercury two-door," Aubrey recalls. "Nancy caught the bus to school and I walked about four or five blocks to work."

The following fall, Aubrey enrolled in the architecture program at N.C. State. And thus began a modern commuter marriage.

"I was told by a recent architecture school graduate that one could not work part-time and get through architectural school," Aubrey says. "But I had no other option." Whatever.

"Nancy was living in the dorm at High Point with Edith Rollins (Teague)," Aubrey says. "And I was living in the dorm at State with another architectural major, Norman Zimmerman. We would meet most weekends at her father's house in Randolph County, near High Point."

Nancy got her B.S. in business administration in 1954. "I moved to Raleigh and got a teaching job to help put Aubrey through school," she says. "He worked part-time in several local architects' offices. After he finished at State, he took me and our eight month old son Rick halfway across the country in order to get some more architectural education at Oklahoma State."



Nancy and children

Nancy has borne four children – one in each season of the year – Rick (winter), Mark (summer), Ann (fall) and Beth (spring), all named for one of their four grandparents. She has also served the Kirby firm as book-

keeper and corporate secretary / treasurer. Aubrey jokes that he married her because she was a business major, but she says

she hadn't even declared a major when he proposed. "She has been my main asset," Aubrey says. "Both in and out of the architectural practice."

Total Architecture (Part 1)

From the second year until the late 1980s, Aubrey's firm employed from five to seven people. He likes it just that size. "If I get any bigger, I could not give the kind of personal attention that I like," he says. "I firmly believe that my total architecture concept gives the client the best value for his dollar."

In this era of spiraling energy costs and ecological concerns, architects are faced with more and more difficult problems. In both areas, Aubrey is in step with the times, if not a little ahead. "Rural spaces have always had a heavy influence on me," he says. "The use of varying materials and the placement of buildings by untrained people is what architecture is all about. In that context, everything had a purpose and everything was in harmony with the environment. I tried to follow that idea in designing our own house in 1971. The roofline was adapted from chicken coops that I had seen. And careful attention was paid to siting. By cutting as few trees as possible, we caused little disturbance to the environment and gave ourselves a great deal of privacy at the same time. High windows on the front and sides contributed to that privacy and also made furniture placement more flexible. Large glass areas in the back let in light and afford a view. The interior spaces have high and low ceilings for contrast and drama."



460 Archer Road

This house was in sharp contrast to the house that he had

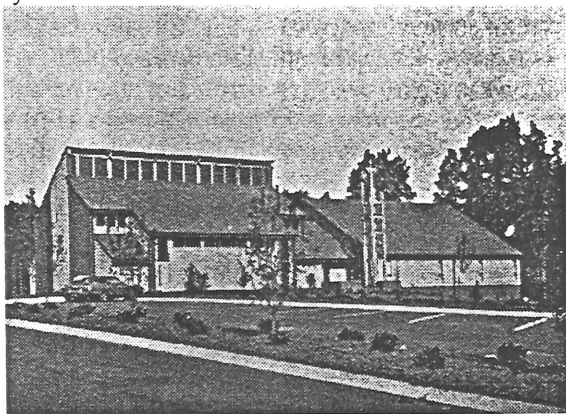
designed for his family seven years earlier at 1110 Yorkshire Road. Because it had been intended for resale, it had a much more conventional design.

Aubrey has followed the same precepts in other buildings. The Southside Branch of the Forsyth County Public Library was done in 1969.

"Now there is nothing spectacular about the building itself," Aubrey says. "But there were a lot of beautiful trees on the site, so we made an efficient contemporary box and just slid it in there. We had to cut only one tree."

That last sentence is delivered with more than a trace of pride. Jill Hinkley-Noble, a librarian and poet who works in the building, agrees. "It's my favorite building in Winston-Salem," she says. "It's a privilege to work there."

That same pride shows when Aubrey talks about his award winning design for Kingswood United Methodist Church (1975) near Rural Hall. "Churches in rural settings should not look like churches in urban settings," he says. "The Kingswood Church takes elements from barns and other farm buildings. And we set it well back on the site to give it plenty of space. It is clearly a contemporary building, but it is just as clearly a rural church."



Kingswood United Methodist Church

Kingswood won Aubrey an award from the rural church division of the Duke Endowment.

Aubrey is just as much at home in the urban landscape. In 1975 he designed the Winston-Salem Fire Department's Central Station on North Marshall Street. "Here we had to deal with the built environment," he says. "The Benton Convention Center (designed by the internationally noted firm of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum) is the dominant building in the area, so we tried to carry the design down the hill by repeating the general roof lines in the fire station."



Fire Station #1

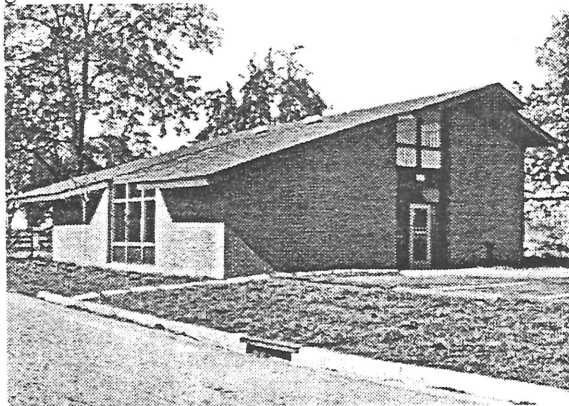
Fidelity to the built environment is also evident in other major projects, such as the addition to Luther Lashmit's Forsyth County Public Library on West Fifth Street, the renovation and addition to Piedmont Federal Savings & Loan Association, Buildings #4 and 5 at Forsyth Medical Park and additions to Aubrey's Kingswood United Methodist and Northwest Baptist Churches.

Solarchitecture

But it is in the second area of contention, energy conservation and attendant cost factors, that Aubrey began to take a clear lead in western North Carolina. Faced with dwindling fuel resources, skyrocketing energy costs and international turmoil, people the world over must find ways to make their buildings livable with minimal use of fuel. Aubrey found at least a partial solution in basic design guidelines.

In 1969, he had moved his offices from the Wachovia Building to 1066 West Fourth Street. But for some time he had been thinking about building a new space for his firm.

He was so confident that his solution would work that he took a considerable risk by designing his own office building in 1978 at 234 South Broad Street to conform to truly energy efficient guidelines. When it was completed, the Duke Power Company gave it a rating as "all-electric, solar," the first such rating in the Piedmont Triad area.



Passive solar office, 234 South Broad Street

"The idea is quite simple," Aubrey says. "Using conventional materials, we design a heavily insulated building in any style desired, keeping window space to a minimum, except on the south facing side. The key is the triple glazed atrium, a walk-in, air-to-air passive solar collector, which faces south. In the summer, the wide roof overhang and a removable cover over the atrium help shield the building from the sun's heat. In winter, the atrium, with its cover removed, is exposed to the sun and gathers heat, which is circulated throughout the building by a system that includes louvers, fans and a heat pump."

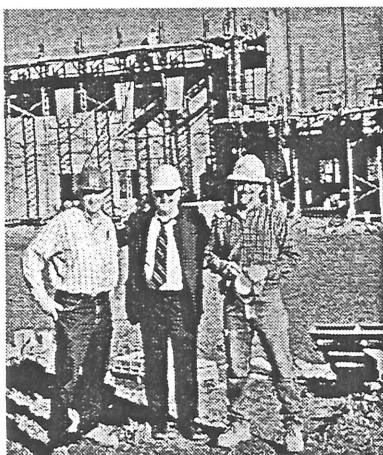
Aubrey calls his solution "solarchitecture." It is designed to work without the need for expensive solar collector panels. The intent is to save energy, and by so doing, save money. The building provided a 50-plus% percent energy saving according

to Duke Power Company.

In 1981, then governor James B. Hunt, Jr. presented Aubrey with the Governor's Energy Achievement Award.

Construction Management

It was that concern for saving his clients money that led Aubrey into pioneering another field, construction management. In the 1980s, he created a new division of his firm, JAK Construction Managers (JAK/CM). JAK/CM was intended to offer clients two advantages over the more



James Reinhardt, superintendent, Aubrey and Shane Damell, mason, at the Carolina Farm Credit administrative office, Statesville, NC.

traditional contraction methods of building.

The first was added control over the project. The client was able to deal directly with any subcontractor (roofers, concrete finishers, painters, electricians, plumbers, etc), thereby ensuring that the results would satisfy them, while JAK/CM assumed the day-to-day management and coordination of the project.

The second, and perhaps, more important, advantage related to money. "The US government was one of the most progressive users of construction management services," Aubrey says. "When we saw their estimate that CM could save 5 to 10% on construction costs, we decided to give it a try. CM worked. It saved the clients money and gave them the

buildings that they wanted. For instance, in building a sanctuary addition to Friedberg Moravian Church we returned approximately \$100,000 on a three-quarter of a million dollar project."

Other major construction management projects include work for the Surry County Board of Education and the Forsyth County Jail Annex, which was an interesting and challenging job because the county was under a court order to have the work done in the least possible time.

Total Architecture (Part 2)

Total architecture, as practiced by Aubrey Kirby, is about saving and satisfaction. Saving the environment, both natural and built. Saving energy. And saving the client's money, while providing them with the best building that money can buy. These kinds of savings produce satisfied clients. And satisfied clients are Aubrey Kirby's stock in trade. The firm has always done a variety of projects. There is no specialization, as the photographs illustrate.



Olive mausoleum,
Salem Cemetery

"Probably the most unusual project was a private

mausoleum in Salem Cemetery for the Olive family in 1967,” Kirby says. “Mrs. Olive’s will served as the program requirements for the project, which was to accommodate her and her son. And it was quite explicit. The ceiling had to be a minimum height, the vaults had to be a certain height off the floor and not stacked and the entry doors had to be a certain size with glass in them.

“I met the requirements to the letter of the will. The design is influenced by Greek temples, but is modern in style with no ogee curves or other ornaments of any kind. It turned out to be the smallest project I ever designed, less than a hundred square feet, but also the most expensive per square foot, \$150, compared, say, to schools, which at that time cost about \$15 per square foot.”

Another interesting project was the preliminary design for a columbarium at Centenary United Methodist Church in 1991. And yet another was the center part of the strollway in downtown Winston-Salem.



Strollway in
downtown
Winston-Salem

“It is a glorified path,” Kirby says, “that we enhanced with benches, light poles, niches and a variety of paving patterns. My part starts at West First Street, runs south downhill under Business 40, curves around several buildings, actually goes through one building and terminates at Brookstown Avenue. I thought we would have a lot of “red

tape” problems running a city project across federal and private property, but I was wrong, thank goodness.

40th Anniversary – 2004

November 2, 2004 marked the 40th anniversary of the firm. Since November 2, 1964 the firm has been continuously owned and managed by Aubrey Kirby. It is now one of perhaps half-a-dozen firms in North Carolina that have been managed by the same architect for forty or more years. It is the oldest in that category in Winston-Salem.

For the future, Aubrey, along with various consultants that he has worked with for at least twenty-five years, and of course, his most valued and trusted associate, Nancy, plans to give the public the same quality and value that is their legacy of forty years.

Family and Architecture – 1964-2004

It has been said that if a business or profession can survive the first four years, it is stabilized. That is not true of an architectural firm. It is a “feast or famine” world, and each day is a new challenge.

Each year until the early 70s, Aubrey attracted more work and added more personnel. Then the recession of 1973-74 hit. Inflation was running at 1% per month. The cost of borrowing money had skyrocketed to 20 1/2%. Building pretty much stopped. All over the country, architectural firms were closing down.



Nancy and
children at
Mount Vernon

Aubrey and Nancy, having sent their four children to

private schools part of the time, were facing the enormous cost of college educations. They also had money tied up in income producing properties. They asked their accountant what they could do until things got better.

“Keep the doors open!” the CPA said.

So that is what they tried to do.

Meanwhile, the children, ranging in age from early to late teens, were engaged in a plethora of activities – school, scouting, Methodist Youth Fellowship, sports, dancing lessons, part-time jobs, boy and girlfriends and so on. Nancy was on the road constantly. Days were long, beginning at 6:00 AM and continuing to whenever. It was a hectic, but most satisfying lifestyle.

Then, in the late 70s, the firm became busier than ever. There was another recession in the early 1980s, but the firm had several large projects already on the books. Then after almost ten years of adequate work another recession hit in the early 1990s, bringing with it four years of very limited work. Had it not been for prudent financial planning and savings, the firm would have had to dissolve and Aubrey would have been forced to retire. But by the mid-1990s the firm was again busier than ever. Feast or famine is indeed the reality of an architectural practice. In the first forty years, the firm has had approximately 325 commissions, an average of eight per year. However, at times there have been as many as thirty projects on the books at once.

“Because of the circumstances of my life, I have had to take some calculated risks,” Aubrey says. “But I tried not to put myself, and later, my family, into circumstances that would be detrimental to our well being. We have always had adequate clothing, nutritional food and a safe place to live.

“I did want to be the best that I could be, live life to the fullest, try to make everybody’s life better and be a fully rounded human being. I have also tried to justify the trust of those who nurtured and helped me along the way. None of us are self-made. Many have sacrificed for us and we should do the same for others. Otherwise, what’s the point of it all?

“For the foreseeable future I hope to do what I have done in the past – being of service to my family, clients, friends and God.”



Aubrey in wagon
729 Hawthorne Lane
Charlotte

208 King Street
Gastonia



Aubrey with Spot
208 King Street
Gastonia



Uncle Nathan & Aunt Dora's apartment
Pacolet



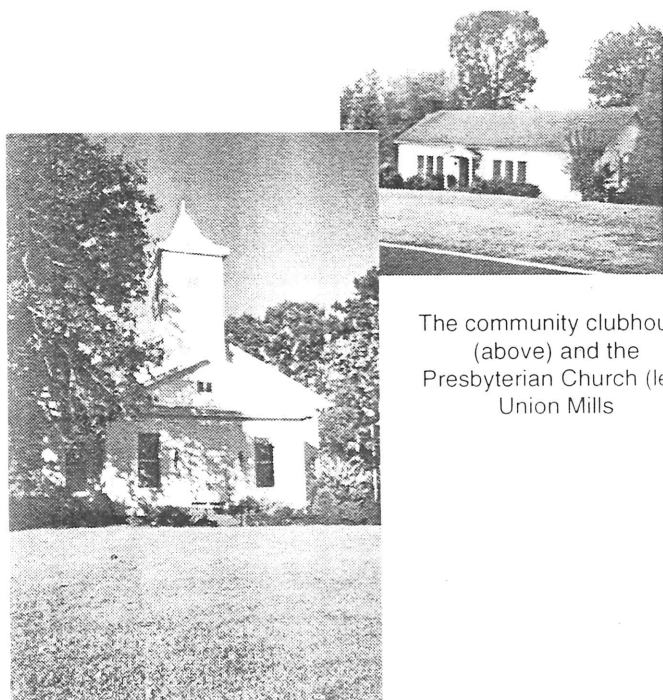
Bubba, Kay and Aubrey, in his Marine uniform

The Pratt house in Union Mills





Aubrey at
Pratt house
Union Mills



The community clubhouse
(above) and the
Presbyterian Church (left)
Union Mills



Family Christmas



Nancy & Aubrey's 50th wedding anniversary



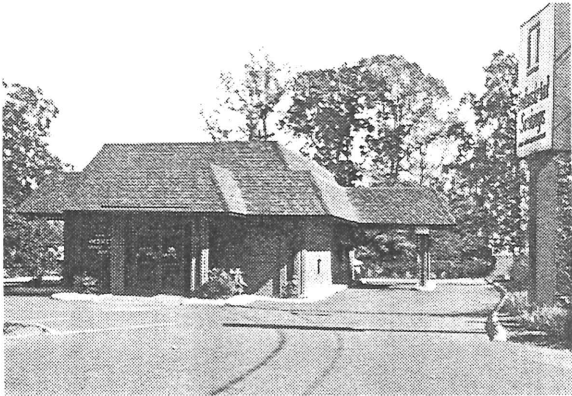
Nancy in office

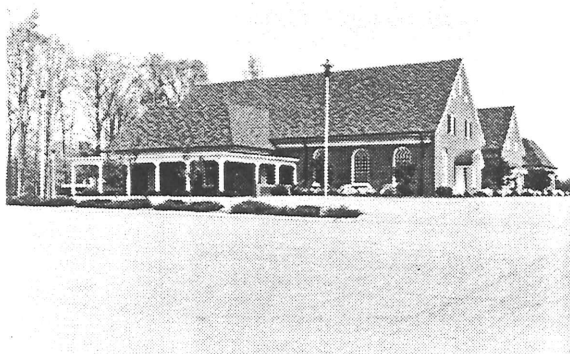
Central
Carolina
Motors



Aubrey at
drawing board

Industrial Federal Savings & Loan
Association

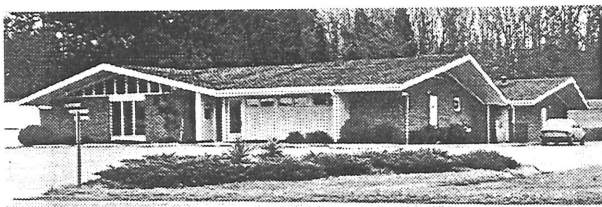




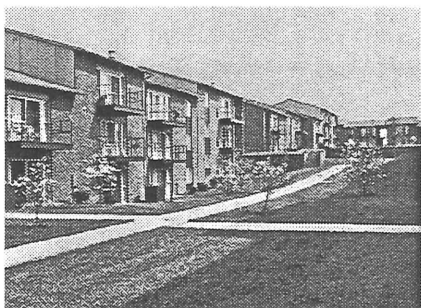
Vogler's, Reynolda Road



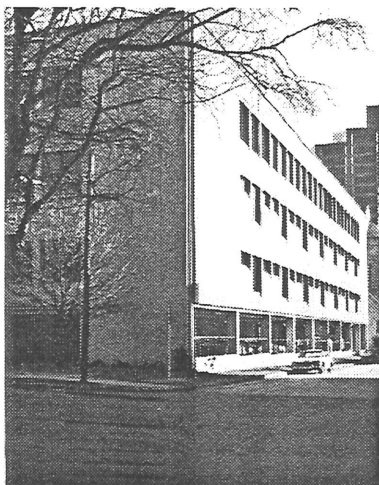
Crofts & Saunders Engineering



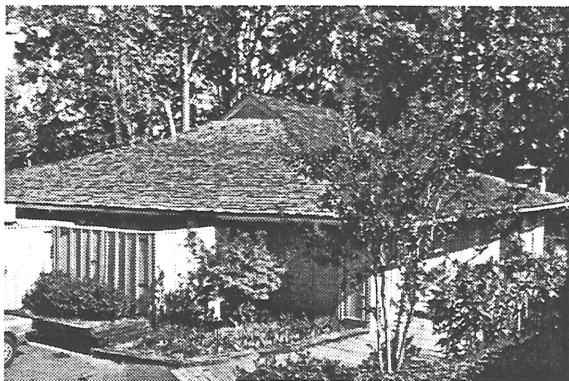
Old Town Veterinary Hospital



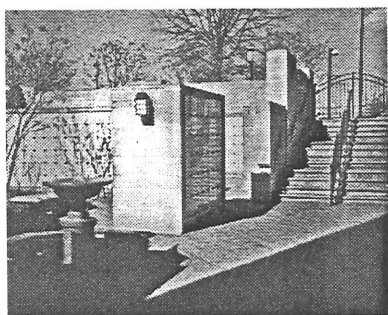
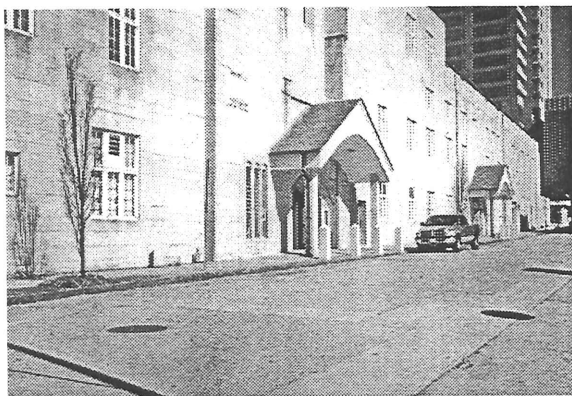
Regency
Apartments



Forsyth County
Public Library
West Fifth Street



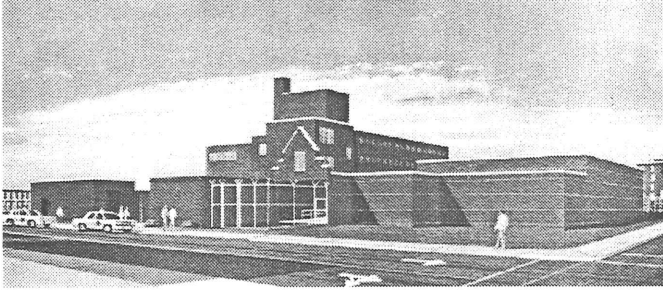
Ryan's Restaurant



Centenary United Methodist Church renovation (above) and columbarium (left)

Forsyth Medical Park

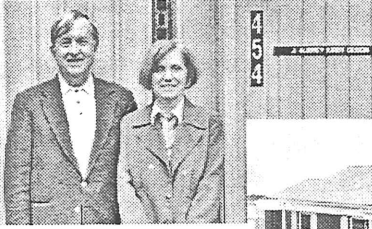




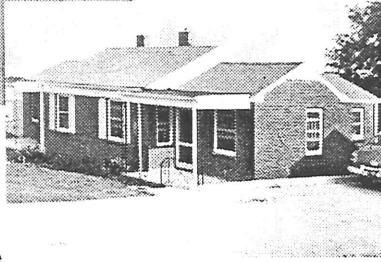
Forsyth County jail expansion



Smith Cottage at the Children's Home
The first contract for
J. Aubrey Kirby, architect



Aubrey and Nancy
at office at 454
Archer Road.



At right, their first
"housekeeping" home
in Augusta, Georgia.
They lived there for
two months.

Stories

In his lifetime, Aubrey Kirby has faced life threatening situations at least six times. The first time he was buried alive – voluntarily!

Buried Alive

While living on King street in Gastonia, about age seven, I asked a couple of boys to help me dig a grave to bury myself in. We dug the grave, I got in, put a feed sack over me and a straw in my mouth and the boys started covering me up with dirt. When I was covered, I lay there for a while, then jumped up, sending dirt flying everywhere. My life could have ended there if we had dug deeply enough, but it ended up being just another boy's adventure.

The Train

One day when I was living in Union Mills, I was walking on a wooden train trestle by myself. Off in the distance I heard the train whistle, so I started walking faster. As the train drew

nearer and nearer, I tried to run over the cross ties. I could hear the train right behind me, almost to the trestle, and I realized that I couldn't make it to the end of the trestle in time. What could I do?

Not give up, that was for sure. I thought about jumping off. Too high. I was thinking about climbing over the side and trying to hold on when I noticed the water barrels spaced along the trestle on little platforms that jutted out beyond the tracks. A nearby platform was missing its barrel. I sat down on the platform, wrapped my arms and legs around the banister, put my fingers in my ears, closed my eyes and held on for dear life.

The train hit the trestle, whistle screaming. I was buffeted by steam and the train's airstream. The noise was awful. But I just held on tighter. And then the train was gone, and I was still alive. I never told Mrs. Pratt, nor anyone else about this until I was grown and had children of my own. Never stop trying to find a way.

The Horse

One summer day in Union Mills I was at a friends farm. They had horses and I wanted to ride one from the barn to the road and back. On the way back the horse began galloping. I was riding bareback and there was nothing I could do to stop him. He headed straight for the barn, which had an entrance just barely high enough for him to go through. I was going to get smashed into the side of the barn. I thought about jumping off at full gallop, but that seemed too dangerous. So I grabbed the horse around the neck and swung down the way the Indians do in the movies when they're attacking the wagon train and held on for dear life. It worked and thankfully I didn't get my head knocked clean off. Use your head!

The Kidney

When I was in high school, after my kidney, which had been injured playing football, had been removed, I was recovering in the infirmary at The Children's Home. One night the nurse told me that my other kidney had become infected. Well, I didn't have a spare, but worrying wouldn't do me any good, so I went to sleep that night without any trepidation. I would

either live or die. The next morning, I woke up, very much alive. Do the best you can with what you have to work with.

The Lake

One summer while at The Children's Home, we went to Hanging Rock State Park in Stokes County. There was a high diving board out in the lake and I kept diving off, trying to touch the bottom of the lake. At first I didn't succeed, but I kept on trying. Finally my feet struck the bottom, and kept right on going. I sank into the muck to above my ankles. When I tried to push off, nothing happened. My feet were firmly stuck. I tried several more times. With my air all but gone, I made one final lunge, my feet broke free from the mud, and I rose to the surface. Never say die.

The Ocean

One summer Nancy and I were at the beach with our four children. Mark, the second child, and I were out in the ocean. He was about eight or ten, but the water was not over his head until we stepped in a hole. We tried to swim back to shallow water, but the current was very strong and Mark quickly tired, so I told him to hang onto my neck, which he did. But we were still making no headway. So I took Mark by the feet and gave him a big push that sent him into the shallow water. I figured at least he was safe, and maybe I soon would be too. I wasn't trying to be a hero. It was just my first thought as the best thing to do. Obviously, I got back safely as well. Never give up and never say die!

And a few more stories:

Future Architect?

When I was living with the Pratts in Union Mills, during part of the summer I would visit Mother in Gastonia. At that time she lived with her first cousin, Harry Cobb (his mother, a White, was my great aunt) and his wife, Maude. Uncle Harry, as I called him, was the mechanic for the street cars that ran between Gastonia and Charlotte. He could make or fix almost

anything. He had an extensive workshop in his basement. I loved making things there and in his shop at the street car yards. He marveled at what a little boy could make and I would swell with pride at such praise coming from a "pro." Whether I realized it or not at the time, that was probably where my interest in engineering, and thus, architecture, was kindled.

Tenacity

I was considered to be a fast runner in my youth. One day, when I was in elementary school in Union Mills, at recess, during a game of chase, I was running from a slower boy. Most chasers would give up and go after someone else, but not this boy. He stayed after me until I could run no more. It was sort of like the story of the hare and the tortoise. The boy wasn't fast, but he had tenacity. He taught me a valuable lesson. Never give up.

Trying Harder

Many years after I left The Children's Home, Wilburn Clary's assistant football coach, Bill Edwards, told me that I would have been "a heck of a halfback" if I had just been a little bigger. But things worked out fine, because if I had been bigger and put more emphasis on football, my studies might have been somewhat neglected and I might never have gone to college.

Since I was smaller, I had to try harder than the bigger guys, thus reinforcing that same old lesson. Never give up until the whistle blows.

Insurmountable Odds

There have been a number of times when I found myself working against seemingly insurmountable odds. My first thought is always to try to find a way and not automatically give up. One of the most intense moments was when I enrolled in summer school at Oklahoma State University, expecting to graduate in six weeks. But then I was told that I had to have a one semester course in American government to graduate. My faculty adviser had somehow failed to include

that in my curriculum. I had taken many courses in history, religion, psychology, sociology, philosophy and so on, but none in American government. The course was not offered that summer, so I couldn't graduate on time. I was advised to get a job and take the course by correspondence.

But there were strict rules governing correspondence courses. They couldn't be completed in less than thirty days. And they had to be completed at least seven days before graduation.

Nancy and I were determined to find a solution.

I talked the powers that be into letting me start the correspondence course that summer along with my already full load. They said it couldn't be completed in time, but they would let me start.

Nancy and I talked it over, as we do with all important matters. We decided to do one lesson a day for thirty days and schedule the final exam a week or so before graduation. So I would attend my other classes, get out in the early afternoon, then study and write up a lesson for the correspondence course. I would go home, eat, then go back to school to work on my design thesis while Nancy typed up the lesson. She was also keeping house at our one room "vetville" barracks apartment and looking after Rick, our first-born, who was less than two years old.

When I got home real late at night, she would have the lesson ready and I would review it and get it ready to deliver the next morning on the way to class. We did this for thirty long days and nights. The course was completed on time, the exam taken and passed, and we went back to North Carolina with professional degree in hand.

I could never, ever have managed this without Nancy's help. She has as much tenacity as I do. Maybe more. They said it couldn't be done, and they were almost right. It certainly wasn't the last time in my life that I heard that refrain: "It can't be done." Well, maybe it can. Think positively, but realistically.

Hard Luck

Everybody in business has at least one hard luck story. Here is mine. By 1967 I had met Bobo Langston, the rental agent for the just-completed Wachovia building in downtown

Winston-Salem. He was thinking about developing a similar high rise, 28 or so stories, in Durham. I designed several preliminary interior schemes for the building and wanted the full job badly, but Bobo had reservations about my youth and inexperience. But I kept after him. Finally he relented. One Friday he told me that if I would use the same structural engineers who had designed the Wachovia building, the job was mine. We negotiated a fee and Bobo told me to make up a contract and he would sign it when he returned on Monday from his home in Charlotte. Bobo died the next day, on Saturday, and I attended his funeral on Monday. I lost a dear friend and a very, very large project. But in the end, it worked out OK.

Good Luck

Everyone in business also has some good luck stories. My first, other than the extraordinary second day of our practice, came in 1965. A number of developers were submitting proposals, including design services, for a large 228 unit apartment project on a fourteen acre site in Winston-Salem. Ferrell Realty asked me to do a preliminary design, for a very, very nominal fee, to go with their proposal. The agreement was that if their proposal succeeded, we would be the architects. The proposals were submitted and at a certain time and place, opened publicly. All of the other architects involved were present at the opening. I was busy elsewhere, working as usual. I got a call later that day from Ferrell Realty saying that our proposal had been chosen. That gave us, early in our practice, the first of many multi-million dollar projects. Of course, getting the work with the Wachovia Building was another stroke of good luck. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes you get rained out.



Bywords, Awards & Honors

Awards & Honors

Aubrey Kirby has been featured in many publications and has won several architectural awards.

In addition, he is listed in Marquis Who's Who in the South and Southwest (1982) and Who's Who in Finance and Industry (1991), Personalities of America and Personalities of the South.

He has served on many committees serving such organizations as Centenary United Methodist Church, the Twin City Kiwanis Club, the Winston-Salem section of the American Institute of Architects and the Winston-Salem Engineers Club. He has served on the Board of Visitors of High Point University.

In 1981, the Forsyth County Chapter of High Point College Alumni named him the Alumnus of the Year. Nancy Kirby won the same award in 1987.

Bywords

Religion

Religion has always been an important part of my and Nancy's life. But I have always considered it to be a private matter, not to be used in a business sense.

A number of years ago I was making a presentation to a church building committee and commented that I didn't want to try to use my personal or religious background to help me get the job. But I did want them to know that our firm had designed many churches, about eighty at that time. After the meeting, one committee member told me that the architect who had made his presentation just before mine had presented himself as a very sanctimonious individual. I learned later that he had gotten the job. So be it!

Marriage

To me, marriage is a partnership to which each partner brings their own strengths and talents, while sharing similar values and moral judgments. Each partner should put the well-being of the other above their own. I think this a major part of why Nancy and I have been together for so many wonderful years. Of course, she has had to put up with my "adventurous spirit," so I call our relationship "beauty and the beast."

Family

I value family very highly. As an only child – except for my four hundred or so brothers and sisters at The Children's Home – with a somewhat unsettled childhood, I have a special appreciation for a normal family with a father, mother, brothers and sisters. Many people consider the ideal family to consist of one boy and one girl. If that is true, then Nancy and I have two ideal families. All four of our children are college graduates, all married to college graduates. They have given

us eight grandchildren and three step-grandchildren. We are truly blessed.

Money

Making the largest possible amount of money has never been my top priority. To practice total architecture – conceptual design, technical drawings and specifications, administration of construction and of course, marketing and salesmanship, or “getting the job,” was and is the goal. Of course, enough money was needed to provide for my family, and to provide for some of the things I never had, such as a financially worry-free education for our four children. Nancy and I made a pact many years ago not to talk about money publicly.

I had a design professor who once said that if you do good architectural design, the money will take care of itself. I have found that to be, at least partially, true. Had I been interested in making the most money possible – how boring! – I would probably have stayed at High Point College on my fully funded scholarship, majored in business administration, then gotten a job with someone who was making a lot of money and learned on the job. No thanks!

Success

To me, success is not about money, fame or power. It is, rather, about whether or not one lives a morally balanced life involving family, business or profession and the wider society in general. How many so-called successful people in business have personal lives which are in a shambles? How many people who have fame or power live personal lives that are in constant turmoil? One has to give equal attention to all aspects of life to achieve the desired balance. It is not easy, but it is worth the effort.

Failure

Many years ago I read: “Those who succeed fail more than those who fail.” In other words, calculated, not random, risks have to be taken to achieve results. Do nothing, achieve

nothing – action and reaction. It has been my experience, learning the hard way, that one sometimes has to lose the battle in order to win the war. That may be a hard lesson, but it is essential in the long run. What really matters is how one reacts to such failures. True failure enters the picture when one fails and quits. Never give up!

Happiness

To me, happiness is a by-product of ones activities, not something that one would seek in a direct fashion. It comes from the way one lives life. Each of us may have a different approach, which may or may not achieve the desired results. Mine is achieved by being of service to my family, clients and society in general.

Change

What's wrong with change? Nothing, if it's for the better. If something isn't working, then change to something else. And it may not work the first time, so be prepared to change again. But if things are working, change just for the sake of change makes no sense. Each individual must decide if change is appropriate for a given situation. Good and bad never change.

Activity

I don't know who originally said this, but when all is said and done, there is more said than done.

Relationships / Respect

Nancy and I decided many years ago not to overlook those who, perhaps, are being overlooked or even avoided. They may be shy, or not pushy enough or be carrying heavy burdens. A kind word directed to such persons might be rewarding for all parties involved. Respect each person for the individual that they are.

Moderation

Success in life usually comes down to moderation. Whether it's diet, investments, politics, careers, patience, new ideas, religion or whatever, extremes usually don't fare well in the long run. Am I paraphrasing Shakespeare here: "Be not the first to try, nor the last to deny."

Death

We are all going to die. We all hope to die with the least amount of suffering, both for our loved ones and ourselves. We do not know for sure what the afterlife will be, but we have faith that it will be everything as promised in the Bible, if we have lived the best life that we could. That's enough to hope for, isn't it.

Afterword

During my many years as a student, employee and architect I have had the privilege to be associated with many intelligent, interesting and passionate people from a variety of businesses and professions. A few stand out in my mind – a philosophy professor, an attorney, a Methodist minister and a writer. Of course, the writer is Fam Brownlee.

I met Fam in the late 1970s. I do not know how I became aware of his talents – probably through a mutual acquaintance. Our firm was relatively young and expanding and we needed someone to help with some brochures describing our work and background. Fam did a great job, with a pleasant, professional attitude, so we used his abilities several times after that.

To celebrate our firm's fortieth anniversary, I naturally thought of Fam to help us, and help he did! I had not made contact with him for fifteen years. One of the hardest things I have ever done was to assist with my biography, because it is both professional and personal. But Fam knew me in both regards about as well as anyone, so he was my first and only choice.

I would like to dedicate this work to Fam's honor. It might be my life, but it's his writing, which *is* his life!

J. Aubrey Kirby
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