

MILLER: that the university is going to expand considerably from what all of the people are talking about."

JH: Well now what did Uncle Warren and . . . was Allison Vrydagh then in the firm, too? It was Miller and Vrydagh, wasn't it?

MILLER: Um hm. Well, about that time, as coincidence again so seems to happen in life, Ralph Yeager had been doing the work at Indiana State. When the firm split up, I think that that's the area that he developed and that was his contact under Ralph Tiley, the president of the university at that time. And Ralph Yeager . . . and I want to make a few comments about this. Ralph Yeager did two buildings there: a classroom building -- and this was along 6th Street -- and an administration building. People want to go by and look at those. They haven't changed very much.

JH: Now, this is Dreiser Hall.

MILLER: (hesitates) I guess it is.

JH: Yes.

MILLER: Yeah. I guess it is.

The two buildings are separated by a large flight of steps and they're connected together I would say that probably Yeager was following more the contemporary design line than Miller and Vrydagh were doing at that time. Allison Vrydagh had become more the designer in the firm, although in a small partnership both partners really work on a building. But I think Allison sort of took the lead, and I think he was a little less comfortable with the very modern kind of things that were just coming out after World War II.

Ralph, Jr. was back out of the University of Illinois where he had been trained in this, and so they launched into what was Terre Haute's sort of first beginnings with a really contemporary or moderne statement. "Modern" with an "e" on the end of it, statement -- the use of glass block.

We were under the influence then . . . quite a bit was being done in South America and Italy, and I think these two buildings sort of reflect it. They have a certain starkness to them. To some people they still had a reflection of being what had been deroga-

MILLER: torily termed "Mussolini modern." They were too . . .

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MILLER: Well, it had been said sometimes that this was derogatorily termed the period of Mussolini modern. I don't think it had that kind of formality, and it certainly wasn't heavy-handed in the use of columns. But it had a number of little quirks about it such as the use of the concrete block and the little small porte-cocheres that came out. A very thin concrete, you know, with a single column, particularly, was a sort of a trademark of the new technology of the day. It also reflected the economics in the sense that we were really skinning the ornament off buildings and had been doing so more and more. The art deco was a very heavily ornamented period, and the nice thing about the art deco work of both the Federal Building and the Sheldon Swope Gallery is that a lot of that was original. It was done from drawings that the architect did. And it was one of a kind. Well, we were really beginning to lose that capability in the economics of our Then, they wanted sort of a fresh new look for what was the emerging Indiana State. Now, as architects are subject to politics, why then the Miller-Vrydagh firm was assigned a building with the advent of Dr. Holmstedt as the president, and a sort of a switch or change occurred.

JH: Do you think this was a matter of making it equitable in a sense that Yeager had been doing so therefore . . .

MILLER: I think that is true. I think that all universities sort of spread things around in more normal kind of times, you know.

JH: I think, maybe, I also would like to ask if it were necessary on the part of the architect to solicit work? Did you go out and sell your product in a sense?

MILLER: Well, you asked for an interview, and you appeared before the Board or you talked to your friends on the Board, if you wanted to be in that position. And I'm sure that Warren did this. I wasn't quite sure what got the job for him. It was a home economics building.

MILLER: And so I received a plea letter in England. I had just returned . . . we had just returned from our big trip. I received this letter that said that he and Allison would welcome me in the partnership if I would come back because this work was beginning. And as I was prone to be more toward the design end than the business end, why, they felt that they needed somebody that had been trained in the moderne movement. Following World War II, why, the beaux arts system, which most architects had been trained in for generations (laughs), was sort of overthrown by what was now the Mies Van der Rohe /which/ had come to this country from the Bauhaus and had had great influence. Frank Lloyd Wright had had great influence. There were a raft of others that are less well known to the lay public. The Marcel Breuers of Harvard and the José Serts, also of Harvard.

And then at the University of Pennsylvania when I went to school, why, there was an unknown man there at that time by the name of Louis Kahn. And Lou Kahn would . . . because the University of Pennsylvania really used practicing architects to teach architecture, which is the best system in my way of thinking, why, Lou Kahn would come frequently to be a critic and judge. Of course, he has gone; /but/ in his late years /he/ was finally recognized as one of the great American geniuses in the contemporary movement. And this was after I was out of school and beyond.

JH: Well, given this Home Economics building then, did you have pretty much free rein in this . . .

MILLER: Um hmm.

JH: . . . or were you constrained by . . .

MILLER: Very much free rein. And, of course, I was back from having seen all of the things in Scandinavia and England, and it reflects that very much. Those things were of great influence, particularly the large glass window of the staircase. It also reflects (commences to laugh) a disdain for the cost of energy, because we just had no problems with it then. If you'll look at that staircase with its single light sort of hanging in it, why, that's a crib from much of what the

MILLER: Scandinavians had been doing. And it was an experimental thing, technologically, really, because it was one of the first panel wall installations in this community, if not in Indiana.

JH: Now, what do you mean by this?

MILLER: Well, this was the wall to the north /that/ is of a blue metal porcelain, and glass which is inserted in an aluminum frame and was put up in sections; so it was a technologically devised way of providing a "skin." And the theory behind that building was that it was to be . . . it was an open-ended building. It could move off its ends in either direction to be expanded. As it turned out, that particular subject matter has not been one of the ones that grew in the University as it had previously, and so there has been no need to expand that building. But it could have been continued either on west or it could have been continued on south in the low wing. The proportions were . . . it was really one of the first, I suppose, international style of buildings that was done in the community. Its proportion of height of the two-story to the single-story wing is quite much what Saarinen was doing at Cranbrook at that time, except that he used the pitched roof systems up there. It had good scale. Tilt, you know.

JH: Yes. I think we need to know whether Indiana State had a sort of long-range grand plan or was there any opportunity to try to determine what other buildings might be in the area and make an overall plan?

MILLER: Aah, dear. Well, we had the plan you know, as I told you, from the late 1920s and I don't know who paid for that plan. It seems to me that in the '20s or the '30s Warren did two such major plans for this community. One was Wabash Avenue, and the National Road was seen going straight through and all the buildings were to be torn down on either side of Wabash Avenue and two what we call frontage roads put in on each side for local traffic. And this was to be tree-lined and was an elysée, you know. It was really handsome.

JH: Was this to be a mall type?

MILLER: This was a, well, it was . . . in the sense that the National Road would go through not as a boulevard, separated, but as a major street, and then there were these big planting spaces of trees and sidewalks and street furniture. Then there was another road with

MILLER: parking off of it, angled parking.

JH: So you wouldn't park on the National Road at all?

MILLER: So you wouldn't have parked on the National Road, and these were called the frontage roads, and then there was an arcade that you walked under, and then the buildings would have been behind that. Well, by this time the buildings . . . the back of the buildings would have been clear over on Ohio. You'd have just used up one-half of that city block.

Well, of course, it was a grand dream but it just never had any root of practicality. It was a very formalist statement. Oh, we would have had a Barcelona (laughs).

JH: (joins in laughter) It would have cost millions.

MILLER Yeah, it would have cost millions in those days, but the arcades would have really given the town such character that it probably wouldn't have changed because the concept was one of almost protecting people as they walked along from this kind of inclement weather.

The other thing he did was the thing for Indiana State which sort of came up in the butt of the town on Cherry Street. And that formal plan ran therefore north and south on its axis. By the time that I was then working with Dr. Holmstedt on this first building, there was no plan. Everything had been abandoned, and they were just really buying property wherever property was available. That was . . .

JH: Well, did you however secretly kind of keep this plan in mind at the time that you were first working there?

MILLER: No. We really didn't. There was just no feeling that that could be accomplished. Kenny Moulton was the vice-president . . . or wasn't vice-president then but was treasurer, and he felt that the best use of state money was to buy distressed property when it came up. And, of course, Indiana State by this point in time was surrounded by distressed property. It was really a . . . those buildings had deteriorated to the point that it was just . . . people . . . I don't think anybody could believe today the kind of impoverished living conditions that existed around that university.

JH: Yes, they were substandard . . .

MILLER: . . . in those early days.

JH: . . . rooming houses. They became really quite . . .

MILLER: Paid by the day as I remember. There were little tin boxes on the wall, and it really attracted a fairly low-life crowd along with the students. It wasn't a very healthy place.

The land west of 6th Street became available most quickly, really; and so that's where the big, new dormitories then started. And it wasn't too bad because there was room left in the main quadrangle to expand some buildings; and as we realized that the dorms were going to lie to the west of the campus, a plan did start to evolve where we thought that we would like to see the educational units confined between 6th and 7th and extending on across Chestnut Street. But the idea of the grand mall was out because Chestnut Street was terribly important in those days. There was a lot of industry up Chestnut Street that used Chestnut as the way of getting into the city. And . . .

JH: Of course, this is still under contention now.

MILLER: Yeah, that's true. Yeah.

JH: Chestnut Street is really the bone of contention in trying to solidify the campus.

MILLER: Now, about this time, Raleigh Holmstedt, the president, hired a firm of planners to come in. I think that it was the Brademas firm out of Mishawaka. And they did a master plan which showed Chestnut Street stopping at 7th Street and going into a very large curved street to the north and finally tying up with 3rd Street. But the curve would be such that it would give Indiana State a lot more land that they could put together, and they could get the traffic out of the middle of the campus. Well, that didn't work.

Then there was a scheme done, possibly by a group out of Michigan, that showed Chestnut Street being lowered so that cars could go underneath it and the pedestrian way would go across it at a given level. Well, that wouldn't work because there are so many utilities under there, it would have taken millions.

MILLER: And if there's one thing the state legislatures and cities hate to do is that they hate to put money into -- particularly in Indiana it seems -- they hate to put money into things that really don't show.
(laughs)

JH: (laughs)

MILLER: Particularly once they're there! You know.

JH: The underground.

MILLER: The underground.

So, in a sense we've just sort of . . . there was a plan of keeping . . . Then I did a plan for them. And we were toying with the idea of trying to take walkways up and over, but you would then have had to fence the campus so that it would look like Buchenwald, you know. (laughs) You'd have to put high fencing and barbed wire practically around because people just won't do . . . they won't walk up steps to go across a traffic area and walk down. So no solution has ever come about that has really relieved that problem. And, I must admit -- I suppose it's because the kids are young and agile -- they haven't lost very many (laughs) in that traffic. And then traffic has diminished over the years that have intervened, so it is really sort of less of a problem today than it was when we were designing. But we did keep . . . the plan that I devised did keep all of the academics along a line that ran on this north-south axis. The new science building was an extension of the campus, and then the firm of Weber and Curry did a classroom building just to the east of the new science building.

JH: And that's Holmstedt Hall.

MILLER: That's Holmstedt Hall.

JH: Did you do the science building?

MILLER: I did the science building. I did the bookstore.

JH: Yes. That came in . . .

MILLER: And the bookstore was a nice . . . that was a little different building, too, because we hired a sculptor, a thing you probably couldn't do again today (laughs). This was John Laska. [We hired him] to do a brick panel for us, and we then took this

MILLER: sculpted panel over to the Terre Haute Brick plant. And we had them make that panel in repetitive things; and if you'll look at the side of that building, why, you have quite a nice bas relief of art that is really incorporated into the building -- a thing that had not been done much in contemporary architecture. The arts have always been applied. They've been applied as a piece of sculpturing thought out afterwards. "Let's put a piece of sculpturing in front of the building," you know.

JH: Yes.

MILLER: Or they have art work hung on the inside, but it's the Renaissance concept of art work being incorporated directly into the building. It's something that we . . .

JH: So, [it is] an integral part of the piece?

MILLER: Yeah, an integral part of the piece was lost. And that was a thing that was . . . that I think was quite experimental, really.

JH: Well, Laska also has a sculpture in front of the science building.

MILLER: Yeah, and that was applied. That came along afterwards.

JH: Yes.

What time are we talking about? What is the date now?

MILLER: Well, O.K. We're talking about . . . the home economics building was probably done in '57. Built. It was designed as soon as I came back here in '55, but it was built around '56, '57.

Then the bookstore came along afterwards. The science building about the early '60s. In the science building we also did another thing which isn't present any more. We used a lot of . . . in the way the Museum of Modern Art did, we used some very good glass block walls along there. But they really proved in the long run to be impractical; and when we remodelled, why, many of these were removed not only because of the thermal buildup that was so strong in those blocks, but . . . and we were just getting into vandalism.

Well, the advent of vandalism is a social pheno-

MILLER: mena that affects architecture. We found that people were shooting these out, believe it or not, you know. They became a great target for everything from BBs to 22s. And so . . . I'm sort of getting ahead of my story in many ways; but when the campuses erupted in the late '60s, the rocks that we had placed around so many of these buildings to curtail maintenance, which was another economic measure You can't get buildings and grounds people and you can't get competent people so you turn to other forms of landscaping to reduce the continuing cost of maintenance. Then you find these rocks being used (laughs) to knock out your windows, and we had to take all the big rocks out and put in little pea gravel that couldn't be thrown with any force. These things really affect design, and they affect the look of space. It's a much different space if it has tanbark than if it has big cobbles, you know.

JH: I think the lay person doesn't really appreciate the reason for all of these changes.

MILLER: Oh, I'll say, I'll say. Brought to their attention, they do, but they just don't think about it like we all don't think in somebody else's field oftentimes.

JH: Well, now carrying on from there, let's hear more about the individual buildings and what the progression of . . .

MILLER: All right. I think that probably Indiana State has one of the nicest collections of residence halls. It also has a thing that some people see as being very good and some see as being bad. This is a point of view. Much of Indiana State really came about in that period between 1957 and 1970. It overwhelmed what had been there before. There was a building coming on line every year, you know. And so it has a homogeneity of style even though the Yeagers did, I think, two of the initial dormitories and Weber and Curry did the little, low Holmstedt Hall kind of thing. And they're . . . both of those are . . . well, I shouldn't say both. The Holmstedt Hall is more of a generic form. It's more organic and it has more sort of . . . it's not as pure a style. It has more little idiosyncracies into it of the designers thing. I don't think either Wayne Weber or John Curry were the purists or the historians that we were, and I don't think that they had quite the grace that the Yeager dormitory had in that