ASLA'S 62nd ANNUAL MEETING

January 1962
Dear Bill,

I, too, was sorry that you weren’t able to get to Boulder for the ASLA meeting; I had been looking forward to seeing you there. It was a delightful spot for a meeting, possibly the most attractive since the one at Ojai, California.

The Harvest House is a relatively small hotel which we preempted completely. In fact, we spilled over into other accommodations. Fortunately the hotel is on a fairly adequate site and has magnificent views of the mountains, particularly from the top floor where the meetings took place.

A mountain stream flows through the hotel grounds; an easy walk leads to the campus of the University of Colorado. This was the only ASLA meeting that I remember where the actual landscape forcefully reminded everyone in the meeting—and reminded them constantly—of what they were supposed to be doing. The tremendous scenery also inspired a worth-while feeling of humility among some of us.

On the other side of the hotel a particularly poorly designed shopping center added a note of negative inspiration.

Considering the location, the attendance was quite good. Some 143 fellows and members attended—14 per cent of the total in comparison with 188 or 20 per cent of the total at New York. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia were represented. Perhaps more than usual, the meeting was a family affair with many wives and children in evidence. If a prize were to be awarded, and it probably should be, it would go to Mr. and Mrs. John De Lay who were accompanied by their seven children.

The meeting was preceded by a three-day session of the Board of Trustees, who plowed their way through heavy agenda and who, at the end, list the following accomplished orAnyway nudged along a little:

1. A reorganization of the Society’s national officers and committees with committees grouped into three divisions with each under the direction of a vice-president and with the offices of secretary and treasurer combined.

2. A new system (and better, we hope) for advancement to Fellowship.

3. A program of “Outdoor Living Awards” to be carried on in cooperation with House and Home magazine.

4. New committees on federal legislation, insurance, and finance.


The Board talked about, formally and informally, but did not face up to, three great problems confronting the Society:

1. Motives—Strong leadership is needed to show the common purposes that should unite landscape architects engaged in such diverse activities as private practice, government work such as the National Park Service, teaching, regional planning, and garden design. Almost all members, no matter what they do, are discouraged by the fact that the Society in toto, most of the time, appears to be engaged in activities not directly of interest to them.

2. Money—We don’t have nearly enough money to do the job and are afraid to try to get it apparently because one or two disgruntled souls might resign. We, being smaller, should pay more than the AIA, which we don’t do, and might really consider paying as much as the bricklayers’ union boys do.

3. Move—The move from Boston to Washington (which some of us call the endeavor to drag the ASLA into the 20th Century) has been fairly traumatic. It will take two or three years to get this all shaken down and operating smoothly.

A national meeting is for the purpose of seeing old friends and discussing problems of mutual interest. The “program” is really an interference with these more important matters and thus, per se, can never hope to be successful. The program at Boulder was better than most and not as good as some that we have had.

Unusual were the two really good speeches of “welcome,” one from James Hickman, Mayor of Boulder, and the other from Dr. Edward L. Clark, Director of Natural Resources of the State of Colorado. Both dealt with basic problems

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of preserving scenic beauty and making it available to the public—problems emphasized by the beautiful scenery outside the window.

The three days of meetings had three kinds of things happening—speeches, panels, and tours.

Speeches are inevitable it seems. At noon on Monday, Patrick Horsbrugh of the University of Nebraska (but recently of England) gave a profound analysis of the problems of bringing about an improved human environment and of educating the people we shall need to see that this is done. He proposed a seven-year course with the first 18 months devoted to landscape comprehension, followed by eight special courses in such parts of the problem as civil engineering, architecture, climatology, etc. Land development has always meant politics, Mr. Horsbrugh said, and the dilemma is political as well as technical.

For some reason there were no speeches on Tuesday, but the program committee made up for this by scheduling two on Wednesday. At noon Professor Robert Mitchell spoke on “The Dream and the Reality.” Now, I have admired Bob and his work for many years, and also have had the opportunity of studying under him; I have disagreed with him before publicly, and so I know he won’t mind my saying that the parts of his speech I could understand, I could not agree with. Anyway, Bill, you are not a planner so I won’t try to explain this speech to you. It will be published and you may read it.

The program was under the direction of Stanley White, an ex-professor, so that the third speech was, of course, by a professor, too. Dr. Richard Beideman, professor of Zoology at the University of Colorado, gave a most entertaining, illustrated talk on the plant and animal ecology of the Colorado area as the feature of the annual dinner.

So much for the speeches, what about the panels? The “panel” is a program device that is popular because it enables lots of names to get on the program (in this case including mine), and is supposed to encourage audience participation. The panel discussions at Boulder illustrated, here and there, the pitfalls of this device, including:

1. Many of the “names” didn’t show up.
2. Many who did were unprepared.
3. The program was always behind schedule so that there wasn’t time for audience participation anyway.

Despite these pitfalls which dogged all of the panels, there were several real contributions that were made.

One was John B. Jackson’s call for fundamental research into the different ways different peoples enjoy their environment. We are designing environment without really knowing what we are doing. Why, for example, do people “black-out” to our poor environment and not react to it. (Several of us at the meeting would have been delighted to hear Mr. Jackson talk all three days.)

be ashamed of it) and to be proud that we, as landscape architects do design gardens. He recalled the Khan’s injunction to design Peking as a garden.

And finally, Clarence Hammond’s words on the care and feeding of clients were both entertaining and instructive, a rare combination.

Insofar as the tours were concerned, they were reported to be very good. I did not go on any. Years of attendance at annual meetings of various kinds have convinced me that professional societies simply cannot put on a satisfactory tour. No doubt I miss some good ones, and may have here by following this policy. The tours explored downtown Denver (the urban landscape), the Air Force Academy (man against nature), and Rocky Mountain National Park (man with nature). No matter where they went, there was beautiful scenery; that in Rocky Mountain National Park is surely among the most spectacular in the world.

Finally, to appraise the program, it was not as good as that at Chicago or New York. It lacked a good, strong central theme; it needed a man of commanding ability such as William Whyte at Chicago; it needed, generally, to stay more on some track and not try to be “all things to all men” and thus not be much to anyone. The panel discussions, for example, should have stayed more on their respective subjects.

And, as I said before, the program does interfere with enjoyment of such a conference. For example, I joined John Simonds and Doug Baylis for breakfast one morning and found them discussing ways and means of getting a good park design approved in a big city. It was a fascinating discussion. Everyone at the meeting should have heard it. But this, and numerous others like it, were not on the program.” Perhaps what we need is an annual meeting without a program and without any tours!

I should not overlook mentioning Norm Newton’s fine summary of his terms as president (and treasurer) of the ASLA, the professional and student exhibits which improve every year, the trade exhibits—in a tent on the lawn—and the look of relief on the faces of the hard-working local committee as they saw us leaving the hotel after the meeting was all over.

The ASLA at Boulder had a dismaying, general feeling of frustration. As a friend of mine said: “Why on earth do these people spend so much money to spend three days just crying on each others’ shoulders?” You would think after listening to several days’ of talk, that landscape architecture was about to burst its last gasp. The architects are about to take the very food out of our mouths at the same time that the planners are pulling the rug out from under our feet. You would think no one loved trees or grass, or birds or bees anywhere but us “voices crying in the wilderness.”

All of this was said, over and over and over, by well-fed

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prosperous professionals almost all of whom, public and private, are doing more important work than they can satisfactorily handle. This feeling of frustration is not sense; it has to go. We have, in relation to our size certainly, if not absolutely, the most influential of the design professions. We should stand up and go to work and stop wasting so much time moaning and groaning.

The forum on Society affairs held on the last afternoon of the Boulder meeting indicated again the need for leadership and better communications. The Society is fortunate to have Lynn Harriss in Washington (would you want his job?) and to have so able a spokesman as Grady Clay editing the Quarterly. Further, the profession has vast resources of ability and leadership not being put to effective use in Society affairs. Money is a problem but not the only one. Somehow, the Boulder meeting, which should have inspired us all to go forth with renewed confidence, optimism, and vigor didn’t, it seemed to me, lift our sights quite high enough.

But you would have enjoyed being there, Bill; the people and the scenery made it most worth while.

Yours sincerely,

Eldridge Lovelace
Secretary, ASLA