

"On The Terrace"

"Dowdy, old-fashioned Cincinnati gets a new hotel this week."¹ This was the opening sentence to a *Time Magazine* article of July 19, 1948 about our city's new Terrace Plaza Hotel. Although the magazine article went on to describe owner John J. Emery's hotel as "revolutionary", few in Cincinnati could get beyond the magazine's derogatory use of the words "dowdy" and "old-fashioned" to describe our "Queen City of the West". Many newspaper articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editors were written in response to this perceived slight by the Eastern establishment's elite. To be sure, Cincinnati in 1948 was still a place where one could find celluloid collars and chimney sweeps wearing their badge of honor, a plug hat.² However, the Chamber of Commerce took *Time Magazine's* comments as a slap across the proverbial facade, and they suffered acutely. Almost from Cincinnati's beginning, the city has had to contend with remarks which have been less than complimentary; Mrs. Trollope - one of Cincinnati's chief irritants - comes readily to mind. In 1948, our citizenry had well over a hundred years of dealing with such impudent remarks by simply casting them aside like yesterday's rubbish in order to return to our community's noteworthy state of serenity. *The Cincinnati Enquirer's* July 21, 1948 editorial commented on *Time Magazine's* slur by noting that they continued to maintain their "unsurpassed reputation for skill with the incidental pejorative phrase." The editor created a "laundry list" of our city's "old-fashioned" accomplishments, by noting our reputation (at least at that time) for good government; maintaining a first rank symphony orchestra; the only full summer season of Grand Opera in the United States; the smallest city in the country to support major-league baseball (and do so no matter where the club stands); leading a movement to create a nine-state compact to clean up streams in the Ohio River valley; no subversive, anti-American cliques which have infiltrated Manhattan and Hollywood;

the only city in America to own a major railroad; to have created the finest railroad terminal in the world; and by having one of the nation's better records for community support of charitable and welfare drives. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* editorial concluded by saying that they suspected a good many other American cities might like to trade some of their bizarre trappings of modernity for what we've got here in Cincinnati.³ By writing this editorial, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* provided the necessary tonic to allow the citizenry to return to normalcy and enjoy the many qualities, accomplishments, and amenities that bless our city, regardless of the outside world's pique of jealousy and vexation.

What created this controversy was the Terrace Plaza Hotel, an \$18,000,000.00 investment and commitment to a dream of one of Cincinnati's great leaders, John Josiah Emery, Jr. Born in 1898 in New York, Mr. Emery was a member of a wealthy, privileged family who traced their roots back to the early days of our nation. Mr. Emery's grandfather, Thomas, was born in England and emigrated to America in 1832 with his family. Settling in Cincinnati - then, the fastest growing city in America, - Thomas titled himself an "estate and money agent" and made a speciality of purchasing country seats situated a half mile to eight miles from the city. One of these with 16 acres of land was named "Eglantine Cottage", situated a quarter mile beyond Cheviot and spoken of as an "ornate" cottage.⁴ Thomas Emery embarked in the manufacture of lard oils and candles and, with a difficult start, was flourishing by 1845. Thomas tragically lost his life in 1851, when he fell through a hatchway of his plant.⁵ His two sons, Thomas J. and John J. (John J. Emery, Jr's uncle and father respectively) seized the reigns of power and brilliantly ran the family's growing fortune.⁶ From its beginnings in farmland and

industrial investments, Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc. branched into ownership of hotels and apartment houses. They erected one of the first apartment buildings in the city – “flats” as they were known - in 1881 and called it “The Lombardy”, located at 318-326 West Fourth Street. Designed by noted architect Samuel Hannaford, “The Lombardy” was a very fashionable address that included William Howard Taft as an early tenant during his bachelor days.⁷ In 1877, they completed their Hotel Emery which was located where the current Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza complex stands today. The Hotel Emery had an arcade running through it from Vine to Race Streets paralleling Fifth Street, with 70 fashionable stores at street level and offices above, all within a four-story skylit structure.⁸ A novelty in America at that time, it was based upon the arcades of London, but made to be much more appealing by creating its own steam heating, electric, and ice-making plants.⁹ These modern innovations allowed patrons to shop in a pleasant, temperature-controlled environment, removed from the weather and separated from the noises and stench of the city's busy streets. This idea gave birth to our current Arcade in the same location and eventually led to the concept of shopping centers, popularized in post-World War II America. In 1882, they soon built another hotel, the eight-story “Palace”, which became the tallest building in Cincinnati when it opened and continues as one of our city's finest hotels, located at the northwest corner of Sixth and Vine Streets.

John J. Emery, Jr's uncle and aunt, Thomas J. (1830-1906) and Mary Muhlenberg Hopkins Emery (1844-1927) continued to flourish in Cincinnati, while his father moved to New York to pursue his business acumen while maintaining his ownership in the family's concerns in Cincinnati. John J. Emery, Jr. ("Jack" to his friends) grew up in the splendor of Manhattan and summers spent at fashionable Bar Harbor, Maine. He attended the finest schools including

Groton, Harvard, and Oxford (the real one!).

Before he was born, Jack's first cousin, Sheldon, (son of Thomas J. and Mary Emery) died in 1890 of a brief illness and was the last surviving child of this prosperous family.¹⁰ Realizing the sad fact that they had outlasted the lives of their two sons, Thomas and Mary executed an agreement in 1895 with Thomas, recently married brother, John, to leave their fortune to him and, hopefully, a future male heir.¹¹ Three years later, Jack was born, his life and fortune set for him.

Growing up knowing that his future success resided in Cincinnati real estate and industry, Jack came to Cincinnati in 1924 at the age of 26 to help his widowed Aunt Mary oversee the ambitious construction of the planned community of Mariemont, named after her. This move allowed him to manage the Emery financial empire firsthand and shape it into a new, more powerful and successful corporation.¹²

In order to fully comprehend the significance of the Terrace Plaza Hotel, one must first analyze the creation of the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza Hotel complex. Upon arrival in the city, Jack realized that the family's Hotel Emery and Arcade on Fifth Street between Vine and Race Streets was too valuable a piece of property to be restricted to a 176 room hotel, four-story arcade, and the early Carew Building, a nine-story office structure.¹³ This parcel of land, overlooking Fountain Square, was the heart of the city: no other piece of property downtown could be a rival, since it was surrounded by the best retail and financial establishments. In 1926-27, the planning of the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza complex began. On August 24, 1929 -

right before the Great Depression hit - Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc. announced a \$30 million dollar real estate deal to erect the largest building complex of its kind in the United States. Envisioned as a "city within a city", this hotel, office, retail complex allowed thousands of people daily to move under roof without ever having to venture outside: this was made true with an automated, hydraulic lift, multi-level garage built as an integral part of this design. It enabled workers and shoppers to leave by car from their garages at home and disembark in this garage downtown without having to contend with the city's variable climate year round. This new 49-story office building shared the block with the 800 room, 28-story Netherland Plaza Hotel, the aforementioned garage, two department stores, an arcade, and restaurants. The fact that the project proceeded, in spite of the Depression, was a vote of confidence in the future of Cincinnati.¹⁴

Erroneously, many people have said that the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza complex was based upon New York's Rockefeller Center. In actuality, the planning for the Cincinnati project began in 1926-27 with its completion in 1930 for the office tower and 1931 for the hotel. In contrast, Rockefeller Center's planning did not begin until 1930 when plans to move Madison Square Garden to this Fifth Avenue location fell through due to the Depression. Construction of Rockefeller Center began in 1932, with most of it completed by 1938.¹⁵ Clearly, Cincinnati's "city within a city" concept predates the New York project by four years in the planning and by seven to eight years in the construction. "Dowdy, old-fashioned Cincinnati" once again beat New York, but who's counting!

Jack Emery, who owned the land, hired Chicagoan Walter W. Ahlschlager, with the assistance of the New York firm of Delano and Aldrich, to design the complex; Col. William

Starrett of Starrett Brothers, Inc. of New York was Emery's partner who built and was intended to manage the complex. Starrett was well-known as the builder of Washington, D.C.'s Union Station, the Lincoln Memorial, the Empire State Building (completed in May, 1931), and Penn Station in New York.¹⁶

Jack's vision of this complex and what it would mean for the city caused him to make some bold, financial decisions. When the bank refused to help finance this proposal, he, convinced of its success, sold all of his stocks and securities and invested it in the project. Thus, the plans and financing for the complex were in place right before the stock market collapse. Had Jack not sold his stocks and securities, much, if not all, of it would have been lost. Because the project could move forward, it became one of the city's largest employers between 1929 and 1931 when so many were in need of employment.¹⁷ As part of his agreement with Starrett Brothers, Inc., Jack stipulated that if Starrett missed his payments to Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc., they would lose their investment and it would revert to Emery. By November, 1932, at the height of the Depression and overextended with other projects around the country, Starrett Brothers turned the complex over to Emery.¹⁸ Incredibly, Jack started the planning of this project in his late 20's with the completion of it at the age of 33 - a tender age for such high financing and tough negotiations.

From the beginning, the Carew Tower, the Arcade, and the Netherland Plaza Hotel have been recognized as some of the finest examples of the Art Deco Style. No expense was spared: the use of rare Brazilian rosewood; Italian marbles; custom-designed pierced nickel-silver light fixtures; Rookwood tile mosaics; murals; the two-story Hall of Mirrors Ballroom with its Fleur de Peche marble walls and gold plated mirrors; the Pavilion Caprice Ballroom with its futuristic

Jules Verne-like sunbursts of bronze light-fixtures encircling the room; an indoor ice skating rink; and so much more.¹⁹

It should be noted that while this was being built, Jack had also hired Delano and Aldrich to design his 1200 acre Indian Hill estate of “Peterloon” for his family. Designed as the perfect English or Virginia Georgian Manor house, its understated elegance and sophistication came to epitomize what life in Indian Hill was all about.²⁰ It is truly amazing to comprehend that this enormous estate was being constructed while the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza project was also underway.

Jack had married Irene Langhorne Gibson Post, the daughter of the famous late 19th - early 20th century artist, Charles Dana Gibson, and his wife, Irene Langhorne. The latter was the “Gibson Girl” who personified Edwardian beauty and worldliness, and her sister Nancy was Lady Astor, the first woman to sit in the British Parliament. His sisters also married well with one marrying the Duc de Talleyrand-Perigord and the other marrying the Grand Duke Dimitri (born a Romanov, later changed to Ilyinsky).²¹

From the outset, Jack always regretted that he didn’t make the Netherland Plaza Hotel with four hundred more guest rooms which would have given it a total of 1200. He felt that the hotel was so popular, in spite of the terrible economy, that he would have been able to fill the rooms. This thought continued to nag at him throughout the 1930's, but financing for an addition would have been nearly impossible - even for him. By the 1940's, World War II had commenced and materials and manpower had to be devoted to this effort. In spite of this, Jack began

planning for his next major accomplishment with the hope that it could become a reality once the war was won. Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc. owned a half block parcel of land just north of the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza Hotel complex on the south side of Sixth Street between Vine and Race. Occupied by rather non-descript, low rise structures, Jack felt that this parcel held great promise since its Vine Street corner overlooked Fountain Square and its Race Street edge was midway along the city's important retail district between McAlpin's and Pogue's on Fourth Street and the John Shillito Co. on Seventh Street. In 1943 at the height of the war, Jack approached J.C. Penney with the idea of building for them a 200,000 square foot department store at Sixth and Race Streets.²² Always the accomplished salesman, Jack sold Penney's on the idea of a downtown store, even though he had no design drawings or plans, nor did he know when construction could begin, given the war effort. In spite of this, Penney's had confidence in him and knew that he would build them a quality store whenever the war was concluded.

In beginning the planning process for this Sixth Street site in 1946, Jack contacted five or six architectural firms and asked them to make a proposal on what the best use of the property would be. Established in 1936, a young, New York firm, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (known by its initials as S.O.M.), was selected, because they conceived an ingenious plan for this long, yet narrow, site which was restricted by zoning and building height constraints. Because the property was so narrow, the entire parcel on the first floor would have to be utilized for office and retail with no possibility of a ground level setback which would have allowed for more daylight on Sixth Street. Since the site's entire footprint was being extended all the way to the edges of the sidewalk, height restrictions were imposed by zoning. S.O.M. cleverly overcame this problem by stepping back the structure above its office/retail base and placing a hotel on top.

This stepping back (or “terracing”) of the structure’s design led to the hotel’s name: the Terrace Plaza. S.O.M.’s design allowed the first seven floors to have offices and retail, made the eighth floor the “sky lobby” for the hotel (first of its kind in the world) with restaurants, a meeting room, and a gift shop, floors nine through nineteen for 400 hotel rooms, and the top 20th floor reserved for the finest restaurant in Cincinnati, offering unobstructed views of the city.

Many have wondered through the years how S.O.M. received this commission, considering that they had no hotel experience whatsoever.²³ At this point in time, Thomas Emery’s Sons, Inc. had approximately seventy-five years of experience in hotel management, and so Jack felt that he and his company would lend the expertise to this part of the planning for the Terrace Plaza.²⁴ They did not need to be told by architects how to run a hotel: what they needed from architects is a dramatic design. Thus, S.O.M.’s lack of experience in designing hotels was seen almost as an advantage, since they would approach the Terrace Plaza Hotel with fresh concepts and not with jaded, preconceived notions based upon years of building hotels in a certain way.²⁵

S.O.M.’s plan for the office/retail base was as follows: on the west end of the block, J.C. Penney’s seven-story department store with 200,000 square feet was placed, while the east end was balanced with an 80,000 square foot, five-story Bond Clothes, Inc. store designed by Miami architect, Morris Lapidus, for its interior. Office space occupying the two floors above Bond’s five equaled the adjacent seven floors of Penney’s. By accommodating these two major retailers, there was no square footage left over for the hotel on the ground floor for a lobby. S.O.M. knew that it was imperative that retail be located at street level with as many store windows for display

as possible. By studying Emery's Netherland Plaza Hotel's design, S.O.M. realized that its hotel lobby, restaurants, and kitchen did not need to be located on the first floor. At the Netherland, its designer Ahlschlager, with the assistance of Delano and Aldrich, determined that the lobby and support services could be placed on the second floor by utilizing elevators to transfer guests, luggage, and food deliveries. This allowed the ground level to be maximized for the leasing of retail space - a developer's dream. By placing the lobby and support services on the second floor at the Netherland, it used less valuable square footage for purposes which really did not require a direct connection with the street. S.O.M. determined that once a hotel lobby has been moved from the ground floor and elevators are being utilized, then it really could be located on any level. This realization is how the Terrace Plaza received its "sky lobby" on the eighth floor. With the architect's step-back of the upper hotel portion of the building, a terrace was created accommodating an outdoor restaurant with greenery: an obvious homage to modernist visionaries Le Corbusier and Tony Garnier's Cité Industrielle from the early part of the twentieth century.²⁶ Guests and workers in surrounding office buildings looking down upon this eighth floor rooftop were treated to this "celestial" park, and this was infinitely more attractive than seeing one more flat asphalt roof. The building's step-back allowed more daylight to penetrate this downtown canyon, and brought a lively, animated space high above the street by placing an outdoor restaurant on the terrace in the summer and an ice skating rink in the winter.²⁷ Functionally, this terrace also greatly enhanced the hotel rooms, because it caused city noises from the street level to ricochet away from hotel windows, permitting guests to have restful sleep. From the standpoint of its exterior design, the profile of the Terrace Plaza Hotel recalls the step backs evident in the earlier Art Deco design of the Carew Tower / Netherland Plaza Hotel and created a visual tie between Emery's two hotels, separated by just a block. The

Terrace Plaza was really the addition to the Netherland that Jack had been desiring ever since he realized that he needed an extra four hundred guest rooms.²⁸ As the Netherland filled its 800 rooms (which it did consistently in the 1930's and 1940's), Jack could steer guests to his new Terrace Plaza Hotel for the additional overflow. To Jack's delight, hiring S.O.M. and approving their creative design for the new hotel allowed it to become a destination in itself. Guests clamored to be able to stay at this ultramodern, International Style hotel and proved that spending a little extra for good design could greatly enhance the financial bottom-line.

In the approximate twenty years between the time that the Netherland and Terrace Plaza Hotels were designed, the former's Art Deco Style had passed out of fashion, even though the Netherland's inherent beauty transcended stylistic trends and continued to be a popular destination. However, Jack knew that the Terrace Plaza Hotel's architecture needed to adopt a new modern style that would enable it to become a trendsetter. S.O.M.'s senior partners, Louis Skidmore, Nathaniel Owings, and John Merrill, were confirmed modernists who each greatly admired Europe's developing International Style and its revolutionary design concepts of the Bauhaus. One of the iconic images of the International Style is Lever House, designed (after the completion of the Terrace Plaza Hotel) between 1950-1952 by S.O.M.'s younger partner Gordon Bunshaft, who assisted in the design of the Terrace Plaza. Bunshaft's Lever House, as the corporate headquarters in New York for Lever Brothers, was really the first successful commercialization of Mies van der Rohe's dictum "less is more" by merging the geometry of steel and glass for the building's exterior skin and creating transparency between inside and outside. Its design was perceived as such a success by architects, developers, and the public that imitations of this office building could be found across the nation and worldwide by the end of

the 1950's. Bunshaft and this building's design helped establish S.O.M.'s corporate style which is still evident today in their timeless, good design.²⁹ Other buildings, besides the Terrace Plaza, designed by S.O.M. in Cincinnati include Chemed, AT&T, Convergys/Cincinnati Bell, P.N.C. Bank at Fifth and Main Streets, an expansion and remodeling of Procter and Gamble's corporate headquarters and its Sixth Street garage, the University of Cincinnati's Edwards Center, the Hills Corporate Centre Building in Blue Ash, and Miami University's Art Museum in Oxford. It should be noted that S.O.M.'s founding senior partner, Louis Skidmore, was from the Cincinnati area, having been born in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. In fact, it may have been his early association working for the Cincinnati architectural firm of Kruckemeyer and Strong in 1920 that helped Skidmore receive the Terrace Plaza Hotel commission: Edward Kruckemeyer and Charles Strong had a long history doing work for Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc.'s projects, and recommended Louis Skidmore to Jack and his vice president, Ellsworth Ireland, for their consideration.³⁰ As further evidence of Strong's and Skidmore's friendship and admiration, I own an etching of the Temple of Luxor in Egypt drawn by Skidmore and given to Strong in 1927 with the personal inscription: "To Chuck, From Skid". It has further meaning personally because this work of art was a present from Walter Langsam to me, since he knew that I had worked as an architectural co-op student at the S.O.M. headquarters in Chicago in 1979.

Once S.O.M. received the commission to design the Terrace Plaza, Louis Skidmore assembled a talented team of designers, who were given extraordinary responsibilities given their youth. Because of his connection to Cincinnati, Skidmore was the senior partner overseeing the project with William S. Brown as the partner-in-charge, William Hartmann was Design Coordinator, Natalie de Blois as his architectural design assistant and a woman who became a

trailblazer for others in the profession, and Benjamin Baldwin as the interior designer. In addition, noted designer Ward Bennett was hired as a consultant to design light sconces for The Gourmet Room.³¹ S.O.M. designed everything that went into the hotel, including furniture, fabrics, china, matchbooks, silverware, uniforms, and even the liquor bottles of the Emery's private-label Kentucky bourbon whiskey!³² Being given this latitude by the owner was quite extraordinary and showed Jack's confidence in his selection of S.O.M. and his desire to make a dramatic design statement. Coincidentally, the only other project that gave such sweeping responsibilities to its designer was The Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia which selected noted New York interior decorator, author, and socialite Dorothy Draper to not just redecorate the hotel, but to reinvent it. Both The Greenbrier and The Terrace Plaza - absolute opposites in terms of their design approaches and philosophies - opened in 1948 to rave reviews and much acclaim. However, being given these sweeping design privileges was not the norm, and remains, even today, an exception rather than the rule.

The Terrace Plaza Hotel was one of the first public buildings in America to commission contemporary works of art specifically for its interiors.³³ Four locations in the hotel were targeted by S.O.M.'s interior designer, Benjamin Baldwin, to receive major installations: the main lobby, the Skyline Room (the major hotel dining room), the back bar wall of The Terrace Garden restaurant and lounge (all located on the eighth floor), and, at the very top of the hotel, the featured wall of the exclusive French restaurant, The Gourmet Room. While researching for the recent Saul Steinberg exhibition which included a history of the Terrace Plaza and Jack Emery, as well as a display of the hotel's ephemera, Stephen Bonadies, the former Deputy Director and Head Conservator of the Cincinnati Art Museum (now with the Virginia Museum

of Fine Arts in Richmond) and I discovered how the artists were selected for this project. In recent years, there had been much speculation about who had advised and recommended the artists chosen by Jack for this project, with some believing it was S.O.M., while others thought that it could have been Philip Adams, the former Cincinnati Art Museum director. The latter was a friend of Jack's and the Emerys had close ties to the Art Museum: Jack was a member of its Board of Trustees from 1926 to his death in 1976 as well as its President, Chairman, major donor, and contributor.³⁴ The Adams-Emery Wing of the Art Museum in fact is named in his honor along with his friend, the former museum director. Also, his Aunt Mary gave generously to the museum and helped it to become known internationally for its outstanding Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish and English masterpieces of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Upon further research, it turned out that both S.O.M. and Adams influenced the selection process of the artists.³⁵ Correspondence found in museum files clearly showed that Adams guided Jack in selecting Joan Miró for The Gourmet Room mural by advising him to use a trusted art advisor in Paris named Theodore M. Schempp. After considering the possibilities of using Georges Braque and Raoul Dufy, Miró was selected. The mural, which extended 30 feet along a sweeping, curved surface eight and a half feet high and placed above the banquettes, was the only opaque wall in the restaurant on the 20th floor of the hotel: the other three-fourths of the room was entirely floor-to-ceiling glass placed on an angle so as to minimize reflections in the glass at night in order to best see the spectacular panoramic view of the city, as well as to improve the acoustic quality of the space. Perched precariously over the corner's edge of the hotel as if it were a flying saucer ready for take-off, The Gourmet Room was dedicated in the pursuit of the highest gastronomic pleasures. Jack, from the very beginning, knew that the restaurant would not make a profit for him given its few tables (only 56 seats) and very high standards. However,

he also realized that a restaurant of this caliber would set the tone for the entire hotel; it became internationally known and was a consistent Mobil 5 Star award winner along with its competitors, the Maisonette and Pigall's. Miró, the Spanish surrealist, painted The Gourmet Room's mural with a background of rich cerulean blue upon which were placed a vibrant cosmos of undulating lines and imaginative, colorful shapes.³⁶

The other works of art for the hotel it turned out were suggested by S.O.M. Saul Steinberg, best known for his *New Yorker* cartoons, was a friend of Benjamin Baldwin who met each other in Washington when they were both serving in the Navy. Steinberg, a Rumanian-born artist, was commissioned to design a mural 120 feet long, 16 feet high satirizing life in Cincinnati for the one long wall in The Skyline Room. Diners had the choice of looking out the window and seeing Cincinnati, or they could look in the opposite direction and see the city through the eyes of the artist. Steinberg's mural portrayed a panorama of city architecture, bridges, and life with the interweaving of very amusing caricatures of people dancing, dining, and preening on its vast canvas surface. The mural's black ink lines against the ivory background, with just hints of color strategically placed, emphasized the cartoon-like theme of light heartedness in depicting the city and citizens, and the piece brought pure joy to all that viewed it.³⁷

In the Terrace Garden restaurant and lounge, Jim Davis was hired to design a long wall above the back bar. Historically, such walls were usually mirrored, but, in this case, the artist created colorful plexiglass geometric forms which were dramatically spot lit from different angles, throwing shadows and reflections on the wall as the lights changed.³⁸ Again, Baldwin as

a student had met Davis when the artist was a professor at Princeton, and he felt that Davis was well-suited for this commission.³⁹

Upon arrival on the eighth floor lobby, the pièce de résistance was placed opposite the hotel elevators: Alexander Calder was commissioned to design his hanging mobile, “Twenty Leaves and an Apple”. This moving piece of sculpture was composed of piano wire and sheet metal all painted black except for the one red apple. It looks like one of Calder’s drawings, except it has been given rhythm and space in the third dimension: the slightest gust of air will set the forms in motion, recalling the branches of a tree. With overhead spotlights (a new innovation at the time) shining on Calder’s mobile, subtle shadows were cast against a nearby wall of white marble.⁴⁰ In order to secure the mobile commission, Calder made a tie out of colorful felt shapes stitched together, and anchored by a long piece of bathroom tub chain at the bottom of the tie, linking it to a multi-colored metal wheel at its center which could spin around. Down the front, Calder stitched the designer’s name, “Benjamin Baldwin, Architect”, and the purpose of this creation was to have him wear it during the client presentation. Everyone at the meeting roared with approval at the sight of the tie, and Baldwin got the mobile commission for Calder.⁴¹

Some have wondered why murals were commissioned for the hotel project instead of framed works of art. Cincinnati has a long history of mural painting, beginning with Robert Duncanson’s murals in the Foyer of the Taft Museum of Art, painted in 1850-52. Also, Jack’s sister, Mrs. Benjamin Moore, hired José Marie Sert in 1926 to design a 120 foot long mural surrounding the walls of the Reception Room at her Long Island home of “Chelsea”.⁴² With the suggestion of murals from S.O.M. and Philip Adams, Jack must have felt very comfortable with

the concept, especially since he had already used them successfully at the Netherland Plaza.

Jack had high aspirations for the Terrace Plaza, and he wanted only the best for his hotel. Nothing was ordered without intensive research: this included a full-size mock-up of a typical hotel room built inside a suite at the old Savoy Plaza on New York's Fifth Avenue.⁴³ Much study was done on room sizes, a multi-purpose heating and air conditioning system, lighting treatments, and color schemes and their psychological effects. The hotel rooms were radically different for the time. They were designed to be multi-purpose: in the daytime, they appeared to be a living room; at night, the couches converted to become a bed with a press of a button. Desks could be a bar or a luggage rack and acted as a room divider as well. Jack made every effort to use local companies such as Formica and Ficks Reed. In fact, the last major commission for Rookwood Pottery was making monogrammed ashtrays specifically designed for the hotel. As much as possible, furniture in the bedrooms was built-in, and there were no floor lamps or cords in order to reduce hazards and breakage. Lighting was designed for specific tasks, such as spotlights for reading areas and make-up lights for the bathrooms.⁴⁴

Innovation was the hallmark of this project: it was one of the first buildings to use completely automatic elevators; heat pipes were installed outside in the sidewalks to melt snow and ice; use of a universal fire alarm and an internal audio-communication system broadcast throughout the building.⁴⁵ For the lower portion of the structure reserved for office and retail, floors two through seven were windowless, because stores didn't need windows above street level - they only caused merchandise to fade. Regarding offices, it was felt that windows were merely distractions from the work being done, and this was the justification for them to be

windowless, too. Our Literary Club member, Alex Stolley, had his advertising firm in that building when it was then known as Farson, Huff, and Northlick, and my father also worked for the firm at that time as well. Another discovery that I made while doing research for the Art Museum's exhibition was that Lever Brothers leased an office in the Terrace Plaza in 1948.⁴⁶ This would have certainly made Lever Brothers aware of S.O.M.'s talents and may have led to the firm being hired a few years later in the design of their Park Avenue headquarters in New York.

Because so many of the hotel's novel innovations were well-received by the public, they soon became standard for other hotels and buildings. When these things were unveiled in 1948, no other building in the world was quite like it. In time, the novelty wore off, and it became just another hotel. In 1956, Jack sold the Terrace Plaza to Hilton Hotel Corporation with the caveat that the murals and mobile would remain in the hotel until Hilton decided to redecorate.⁴⁷ Hilton, by the way, had decided it did not want the artwork as part of its purchase, because it didn't want to have to pay the insurance. In hindsight, the artwork today would be worth much more than the building or the land! Generously, Jack donated the Miró, Steinberg, and Calder to the Cincinnati Art Museum in 1965, and they have become some of its most significant holdings.⁴⁸

Hilton continued the ownership of the hotel until it was sold to AT&T who desired the office/retail portion of the building as their equipment and conference center, and used the hotel rooms for visitors. Eventually in the 1990's, the hotel became the Crowne Plaza, a division of Holiday Inn.⁴⁹ In recent years, it was purchased by a New York hotel group called Hampshire, and they ran it as a hotel with no restaurants. On October 31, 2008, the hotel was abruptly closed

and was put up for sale.⁵⁰

The fate of the Terrace Plaza is uncertain, while a new owner is sought. Investors had speculated that the hotel could be turned into condominiums, but there was no interest.⁵¹

Cincinnati Preservation Association is leading an effort to bring awareness to the public about this historic and significant structure, and hope that a developer sympathetic to its International Style will purchase and restore it to its original glory. In the meantime, the Terrace Plaza awaits its future, looking dowdy and old-fashioned in Downtown Cincinnati.

By: Stewart Shillito Maxwell, Jr.

The Literary Club

October 5, 2009

Footnotes

1. *Time Magazine*, “Hotels: New Landmark”; July 19, 1948; (Time, Inc. publisher, New York), P. 94.
2. Alvin F. Harlow, *The Serene Cincinnatians* (E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., New York, 1950), P. 9.
3. *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, “Threadbare Insult”; July 21, 1948 (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, publisher, Cincinnati); P. 4.
4. Harlow, *The Serene Cincinnatians*, P. 397.
5. Ibid, P. 398.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Millard F. Rogers, Jr., *Rich in Good Works* (The University of Akron Press, Akron, 2001), P. 32.
11. Ibid., PP. 39-40.
12. Ibid., P. 88.
13. Ibid., P. 19.
14. “History of the Netherland Plaza: Walking Tour and Pocket History Pamphlet”, 2005.
15. Lou Gody, *The W.P.A Guide to New York City* (The Guilds Committee for Federal Writers’ Publications, Inc., New York, 1939; reprint: Random House, Inc., New York, 1992), PP. 333-341.
16. "History of the Netherland Plaza”, et. al.
17. Ibid.

18. Geoffrey J. Giglierano and Deborah A. Overmyer, *The Bicentennial Guide to Greater Cincinnati: A Portrait of Two Hundred Years* (The Cincinnati Historical Society Publishers, Cincinnati, 1998), P. 42.
19. “History of the Netherland Plaza”, et. al.
20. Walter E. Langsam, *Great Houses of the Queen City* (The Cincinnati Historical Society, Cincinnati, 1997), P. 119.
21. Ibid., P. 118.
22. *Fortune Magazine*, “Arrival in Cincinnati: Great Art Makes a Smart Hotel”; October 1948 (Time, Inc. publishers, New York), P. 117.
23. Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936* (Electa Publishers, Milan, 2006), P. 58.
24. *Fortune Magazine*, “Arrival in Cincinnati: Great Art Make a Smart Hotel”; P. 117.
25. Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936*; P. 58.
26. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Harvard College Publishers, Cambridge, 1941; reprinted 1971), P. 331.
27. Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936*; P. 58.
28. *Fortune Magazine*, “Arrival in Cincinnati: Great Art Makes a Smart Hotel”; P. 156.
29. Gerd Hatje, *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1964), P. 261.
30. Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936*; P. 306.
31. Ibid., P. 322.
32. Benjamin Baldwin, *Benjamin Baldwin: An Autobiography in Design* (W. W. Norton & Co., New York and London, 1995), P. 28.
33. Ibid.
34. Millard F. Rogers, Jr., *Art Palace of The West* (Cincinnati Art Museum publication, Cincinnati, 1981), P. 87.
35. *Harper’s Magazine*, “Everything Up to Date in Cincinnati”, June, 1948 Volume 1177 (*Harper’s Magazine* Publishers, New York); P. 576.
36. Carol H. Macht, *Cincinnati Landmarks* (Cincinnati Art Museum publication, Cincinnati,

- 1976), P. 51.
37. Ibid.
 38. *Fortune Magazine*, “Arrival in Cincinnati: Great Art Makes a Smart Hotel”; P. 115.
 39. Benjamin Baldwin, *Benjamin Baldwin: An Autobiography in Design*; P. 28.
 40. Carol H. Macht, *Cincinnati Landmarks*; P. 51.
 41. Benjamin Baldwin, *Benjamin Baldwin: An Autobiography in Design*; PP. 28-29.
 42. Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Delano & Aldrich* (W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 2003), P. 39.
 43. Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936*; P. 306.
 44. Carol H. Macht, *Cincinnati Landmarks*; P. 51.
 45. Ibid.
 46. *Time Magazine*, “Hotels: New Landmark”; P. 94.
 47. Carol H. Macht, *Cincinnati Landmarks*; P. 52.
 48. Ibid.
 49. *City Beat*, “Terrace Hotel”; November 19-25, 2008 (*City Beat Publishers*, Cincinnati), P. 43.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Ibid.

Bibliography

- Adams, Nicholas. *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Experiment Since 1936*. Milan: Electa Publishers, 2006.
- Baldwin, Benjamin. *Benjamin Baldwin: An Autobiography in Design*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995
- The Cincinnati Enquirer*. "Threadbare Insult", July 21, 1948. Cincinnati: *The Cincinnati Enquirer* Publishers, P. 4.
- City Beat*. "Terrace Hotel", November 19-25, 2008. Cincinnati: *City Beat* Publishers, P. 43.
- Fortune Magazine*. "Arrival in Cincinnati: Great Art Makes a Smart Hotel", October, 1948. New York: Time, Inc., PP. 115; 117; 156.
- Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Publishers, 1941; reprinted: 1971.
- Giglierano, Geoffrey J. and Overmeyer, Deborah A. *The Bicentennial Guide to Greater Cincinnati: A Portrait of Two Hundred Years*. Cincinnati: The Cincinnati Historical Society Publishers, 1988.
- Gody, Lou. *The W.P.A. Guide to New York City*. New York: The Guild's Committee for Federal Writers' Publications, Inc., 1939; reprinted: Random House, 1992.
- Graff, Harry. *The W.P.A. Guide to Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: The Wiesen-Hart Press, 1943.
- Greinacher, Udo, et. al. *50 from the 50's: Modern Architecture and Interiors in Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: Urban Currents Publishers, 2008.
- Harlow, Alvin F. *The Serene Cincinnatians*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1950.
- Harper's Magazine*. "Everything's Up to Date in Cincinnati", June, 1948 Volume 1177. New York: *Harper's Magazine* Publishers, PP. 574-576.
- Hatje, Gerd. *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1964.
- "History of the Netherland Plaza: Walking Tour and Pocket History Pamphlet". Cincinnati: 2005.
- Langsam, Walter E. *Great Houses of The Queen City*. Cincinnati: The Cincinnati Historical Society, 1997.
- Macht, Carol H. *Cincinnati Landmarks*. Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum publication, 1976.
- Pennoyer, Peter and Walker, Anne. *The Architecture of Delano & Aldrich*. New York: W. W.

Norton & Co., 2003.

Rogers, Millard F. *Art Palace of The West*. Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum publication, 1981.

Rogers, Millard F. *Rich in Good Works*. Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2001.

Time Magazine. "Hotels: New Landmark", July 19, 1948. New York: Time, Inc. publishers, P. 94.