

THE ARCHI
OF ALPHA RHO CHI

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Alpha Rho Chi fraternity was founded at the Universities of Illinois and Michigan on April 11, 1914. It is a social undergraduate fraternity limiting its membership to students of architecture, architectural engineering, landscape architecture, or the allied arts, enrolled in the departments leading to a bachelor's degree. The name Alpha Rho Chi is derived from the first five letters in Architecture. The title of the magazine is derived from the same source.

WILLARD E. FRASER, Managing Editor

IMPRESSIONS OF MEXICO

Gained in a Five Month Sojourn South of the Border,
Spring and Summer, 1940

By RALPH W. HAMMETT, Mnesicles '19, Associate Professor and
Lecturer in History of Architecture, University of Michigan

THE further my family and I went in Mexico and the longer we stayed, the more impressed we became with the great differences that exist between this country and our own. Also the more impressed we were with our former ignorance and that of the average "gringo" about this country. Land of Mañana, where people put so much off until tomorrow, where people seem lazy, and yet where people work the hard way and till every available inch of soil, even to almost perpendicular mountain sides. Land that is still primitive and medieval, yet a land that is leading this continent, if not this hemisphere, in the so-called modern movement. Land where freedom has been ground in the dust, where dictators and politicians have grafted the very soul from the people, yet land making great strides in education and social reforms. Land of bull fights, tequila and gun play, yet people of utmost compassion, sympathy and tenderness. "Poor Americanos de Estados Unidos, they are so worried, so tired, they do not take time to live, they are so nervous." Odd to have people treat us with compassion; we who supply the world with bathtubs and automobiles.

We had also thought that the Mexicans were, on the whole, a rather dirty people, morally and bodily. True it takes all kinds to make a country, but Mexican women always seem to be washing, and no wash day is complete without a personal bath and bath for each member of the family. In rural sections much of the bathing is taken nature's way in some mountain stream, even at the side of the road. But they must be clean. In the cities there are luxurious bath establishments and most homes boast of bathing and washing facilities. Every town of any size has its municipal pool and bath house equipped with showers and supplied with soap and hot and cold running water. Palmolive is sold in most out of the way markets. Public Health Depart-

ments have been established in all of the larger centers and are now crusading in the most remote districts.

Morally also the Mexicans have a very high code. Admitted that public health records show statistics of venereal disease that would factually prove otherwise, it is nevertheless true that women are never accosted on the streets, no soliciting is done and there are no shows of the Parisian type countenanced in Mexico City or any other part of the country. Sisters and sweethearts are given a great deal of social freedom but are always carefully chaperoned. Parties, dances, theater going, even night clubbing is always done in company with older people. Everyone takes the situation in good fun; oldsters enter into the spirit quite as much as the young people, and often foot the bills.

It was also a surprise to find the Mexicans so interested in athletics. The picture that had been given was that their only pastime was viewing of bull fights and possibly horse back riding. It is true that there is no sport that stirs a Mexican's blood quite as much as a bull fight, especially if there are expert toreros, well bred bulls, plenty of cerveza—Spanish word for beer—bands playing, flower bedecked women and a hot Sunday afternoon. But they also like baseball and softball is now sweeping the country. Even in the most out of the way mountain villages that are reached only on horseback, I inevitably found out-door basketball courts next to new school houses. If we of the United States will continue as the true Good Neighbor, keep Standard Oil out and the Rockefeller Foundation in, Mexico will become a neighbor to be proud of. Most of us north of the border are enamoured with Mexico now and indications are that it is going to improve. It is on the threshold of a Renaissance.

As soon as the traveller crosses the border at Laredo, over

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the excellent Pan-American Highway that now reaches most of the important spots in Mexico, he senses an immediate change: semi-arid desert, burros, sombreros, so many people trudging the road-side carrying huge bundles or packs on their backs, occasionally a luxurious car but never a tin-lizzie as is often encountered in Texas or Iowa. There are many adobe windowless houses with thatched roofs, which if it were not for the very bright sun would be very dismal inside. But despite the cluttered yard, there are many potted plants clustered around the doorways and acacia trees blooming overhead and pink or red hibiscus bushes near the fence. After all they are much nicer than the terrifically drab windowless shacks that are passed in Arkansas, shacks of the share croppers—Grapes of Wrath!

Monterey is not too exciting: an industrial city not typically Mexican. Here are steel mills, oil refineries and the great breweries of the famous Cerveza Monterey and Carta Blanca. To see the real Mexico the traveller should hurry on to the plateau.

On the way the tourist must pass through the tropics that are rather dry and semi-arid in late winter and spring, but after the rains, a veritable jungle of vine covered trees and lush undergrowth. The second day from Laredo, about five hundred miles below the border, the automobilist starts to climb. In a distance of one hundred and ten miles, it is necessary to rise from fifty feet above sea level to ten thousand feet in order to get through the mountain pass. Such mountain scenery! But there is a good wide road all of the way, and though there are innumerable turns, there is never a grade over six per cent.

On the plateau the altitude averages between six and eight thousand feet—Mexico City is seven thousand five hundred—hence, the climate and verdure are temperate. They have summer rains and cool, ideal falls, winters cool and dry and springtime that is delightfully warm though very dusty. The thermometer seldom goes above eighty-five at midday and is always around fifty at night.

The last hundred miles into Mexico City are interesting because of the many villages that are passed. All of these villages have a Spanish flavor, plaster covered adobe walls, red tile roofs and always three or four Spanish colonial churches. Such picturesque churches! Tile domes, renaissance bell towers and richly decorated portals! They seemed almost more Spanish than Spain itself. I took several photographs and was tempted to take more, but there were so many of them. Every town, every cross road had one or two. Some were falling into disrepair, but most of them are well kept up. They are controlled by the state now, though candles are burning on most of the altars and people are still bearing flowers to the Virgin. At a little town of Actopan, I noticed that the central church was very early in style: sixteenth century Plateresque. I was told that it was one of the four missionary monasteries established at the time of Cortez, three years after the conquest, 1524, and that the present building was completed prior to 1550-51. The interior of this church was most interesting, real gothic rib vaulting.

Mexico City was a joyful surprise. I drove into the metropolis on a Sunday afternoon for the first time and was immediately impressed by the beautiful boulevards and European atmosphere. Could I be driving my car in Paris? Was this really on the American continent? I drove down the Paseo de la Reforma—as beautiful as the Champs Elysees—through Juarez past the Opera—why, this was like the Place de l'Opera in the old days of Paris; into rather narrow streets like most of the side streets of the French capital and directly to the little hotel that we had had recommended to us, Hotel Monte Carlo. This also was just like

those little left bank hotels in Paris that were—and we hope still are—so charming. My family and I knew immediately that we were going to have fun here. We were lodged in a nice front room with comfortable beds and private bath; and the food was delicious.

Regarding food we were prepared for the worst. I had been told that we would have difficulty in getting good food in Mexico, we'd probably have to live on Chile con Carne, tortillas and frijoles—beans. All the books told me that the natives live on tortillas—unflavored corn griddle cakes—hot sauces and queer meats. I was sure we were in for it, but for the five months that we were in Mexico, we did not alter our diet from that at home. Except for the elimination of fresh lettuce, radishes and fresh fruit that can not be peeled or cooked, we enjoyed our food immensely. We were warned not to overeat, and told to take a siesta after the hearty noon-day meal in order to avoid indigestion that is prevalent in high altitudes. We followed instructions and had good health and a wonderful time. We enjoyed our hotel food and eating at restaurants in Mexico City is fully as pleasant as in most foreign places.

There is much to see. Our first point to visit was the zocalo—city square—with the great cathedral, the city hall and the national palace. We were interested also in the zocalo for the immense amount of traffic that it carries, the six lane thoroughfares that circle about it, the maze of traffic lights, street cars, automobiles and busses. We were greatly impressed by the flowers, fountains and palms, the street vendors and the large numbers of people that are here at all hours of the day and night.

I knew that the city had been built on an old lake bed and that the foundations are none too secure unless builders go down eighty or more feet to bed rock. Having lived in Chicago, I expected to see buildings that had settled but hardly expected to see the great cathedral, the largest in the western hemisphere, settled so that the floor is now below the street level. But the cathedral is very beautiful and grand: Spanish renaissance of the seventeenth century. The interior was a bit startling with its superfluous amount of gold leaf—I had forgotten how gorgeous these renaissance churches usually are, and this one surpasses most. The National Palace was interesting—covers about four city blocks in area and is several stories high. This also has settled so that one end is four feet below the other, but being so large in area, it is hardly noticeable. The building has been planned around numerous courts and presents many different sections, additions and alterations. Here we found our first Diego Rivera murals on the grand staircase; but there are almost miles of Rivera and Orosco murals in Mexico—all of them masterpieces.

Such a city! Old palaces, colonial churches, markets; boulevards, smart shops, ultra modern theaters, hotels; modern schools, hospitals, clubs; streets of ultra apartments; parks, play grounds with all kinds of equipment, swimming pools and riding academies. Yes it's fun to live and vacation in the Mexican capital.

A visit to the National Museum rather startled me with the amount of archeological sculpture that they have on display. Most of the work is from the plateau and I was impressed by these early pre-conquest cultures. I had heard of the fall of Montezuma and knew that there was a great barbaric nation here before the white man but I had thought that the best was to be found only in Yucatan and Peru, and that the Toltec and Aztec work in Mexico was most crude by comparison. That was also a mistake, for though this work is fearful and blood-curdling in its ferocity, it is well finished and represents a very advanced technique.

The best temples and pyramids on the plateau are to be seen at

Teotihuacan, thirty-five miles north of Mexico City; though the largest of all man-made pyramids is at Cholula, about seventy-miles east near Puebla. This largest one measures twelve hundred by thirteen hundred feet at the base and was over five hundred feet high. It was partially destroyed by the conquistadores who built a church on the top in place of the ancient altar. The pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at Teotihuacan are well preserved. Why were they built? Were they tombs like those of Egypt, or places for sacred fire and sacrifice? The latter supplies the answer. It is said that they were built of pyramidal form to simulate the volcano, and that the archaic pyramids were round. These being of later times, Toltec after 900 A.D., were square and stepped to the top like the ziggurats of Ancient Mesopotamia. The similarities are uncanny though from the point of time and distance apart, there is no connection between the two civilizations.

One hundred miles south of Mexico City is Tasco, the little Spanish Colonial town where we lived for three months. Beautiful! Like Toaromina in Sicily. Though not able to boast the beautiful sea, Tasco is just as picturesque. Marvellous eighteenth

century cathedral built by Borda, the multi-millionaire from Spain who for a few years made this town a place of wealth and luxury. Like the hill towns of Italy, its palaces are now in disrepair and used for hotels, shops and cocktail lounges. But Tasco has beauty that will always remain, and being under the control of the State Department of Fine Arts, no alterations can be made in this town that will mar its architectural colonial charm. No one should go to Mexico without seeing and spending a little time here.

Then of course, there are Guadalajara, and Morelia, Lake Patzcuara, Puebla, Fortin, Oaxaca and many other places of interest. Queer names, a different people; old, new, squalid and ultra but always beautiful, always restful. Mountains, sea-shore, art and architecture.

I have heard of some people who don't like Mexico; but I do and my family does. Given time and a little money, there is no place more foreign or more friendly than our neighbor, South of the Border, down Mexico Way.

EDITORIAL COMMENT—OR EQUAL

WE WOULD like to be able to say that the desultory appearances of THE ARCHI are the result of defense measures, sabotage, or at least a small fire. Actually it will have to be laid to (four words censored here) coupled with a modicum of plain indolence. All of us should be entitled to our own private bottleneck now-a-days and THE ARCHI unfortunately is ours.

• Mr. Oswald C. Hering was the editor of the *Delta Kappa Epsilon Quarterly* and an architect in New York City. Recently in the above mentioned magazine he had this to say about architecture:

"We are not so sure that the prevalent style of architecture should be termed 'modern.' Most of it is nothing to be proud of. Here and there an architect has evolved beautiful forms indicative of the changes that have come about in the life of the people. But there is still a good deal of groping, and the profession is choked with incompetents who are foisting their atrocious wares on a puzzled if not gullible public. We doubt if the current Dry Goods Packing Case school of architecture will prevail for any considerable length of time.

"One reason against the use of the word 'modern' is that it has no precedent. When Louis XIV died and was succeeded by his grandson Louis XV, the architecture of France underwent a change, as it did again when Louis XVI, reigned. Similarly successive changes occurred in the styles employed in England under Elizabeth, Anne, the early Georges, and Victoria. In no case was the new style called 'modern.'

"Yet one hesitates to apply the term 'Rooseveltian' to the mostly cock-eyed architecture of the past seven years in America, although Republicans and Al Smith might find it acceptable.

"No doubt, in time, the wheat will be culled from the chaff. When and if the people of the U.S.A. settle down to a sane and wholesome life, an American architecture will emerge having a distinctive style. Whether or not it will be beautiful will depend on the development of the American character."

We must disagree with Mr. Hering's opinions. We certainly agree that our profession has its proportion of incompetence,

but it seems to us to be equally obvious in the work of those who have retired into their ivory towers with their well-worn set of Vignola plates. We fancy ourself as young rather than middle-aged, but it seems years that we have heard these pro and con arguments. Not since the death of Mr. H. Van Buren Macgonigal has the case for the traditional expression of architectural form been presented with much conviction. Since we have been out of school we have seen three or four influences at work on American building. It seems to us they have been the later work of Mr. Goodhue, the decoration of the Paris exposition of the middle twenties, the International Style, and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. While the result in a good many examples is indubitably cock-eyed, it is infinitely more stimulating to us than what went before. It is very easy to confuse nostalgia with critical discrimination. Phidias, we do not doubt, had to take a little shoving around from the building committee.

• In this issue there is an account of the New Union building at the University of Minnesota. The University of Illinois has also recently completed one. In our student days the Union was the place you went to buy dance tickets: a few Chinese students played ping-pong there and that was about all. As an alumnus of Illinois we feel we can justify a slight resentment that at least a nod was not given in the direction of the principles which are being set forth in the Department of Architecture a mile away from this building. These remarks may result in our being called out on the playing field at some future Homecoming, our diploma taken away, our buttons cut off, and our T-square broken over the knee of President Willard of the University. This structure contains an outlay for carving sufficient to endow a hundred scholarships and enough cut-glass chandeliers to re-stock Buckingham palace when the war is over. It will influence the tastes of the next twenty classes and there will be twelve thousand dollar caricatures of it the length of the State of Illinois for the next fifty years. As a background for the activities of ten thousand students in saddle shoes it seems to us hardly more appropriate than a reproduction of the Taj Mahal. If it isn't really so bad we will entertain letters of rebuttal from the boys at Anthonios.



ROBERT McCLAIN



GEORGE E. HOEDINGHAUS RETIRES
AS W.G.S.

Change in the Grand Council

GEORGE HOEDINGHAUS, Andronicus '33, has recently resigned as W.G.S. due to the pressure of other duties and Robert E. McClain, '38, also of Andronicus, has been appointed to succeed him. Brother Hoedinghaus has ably filled this post for three years and has been particularly interested in the furtherance of the Alpha Rho Chi Medal. The Fraternity thanks him for his good work in a job that is, by its nature, tedious at times and one that does not come to the attention of the average member.

Robert McClain is a graduate of the University of Southern California in the class of 1938 and is employed in the Supervising Architect's office of the University. He is a member of Scarab Fraternity. THE ARCHI wishes him success and enjoyment in his new assignment.



ALUMNI

Otis Winn, Anthemios '28, has been made an associate in the Detroit architectural firm of Lyndon and Smith. The new firm to be known as Lyndon, Smith & Winn is located at 13700 Woodward, Detroit. Winn had been for several years in the U.S.H.A. with headquarters in Detroit. The firm with which he is associating is well known throughout Michigan, particularly for their school work.

Harold I. Glasoe, Andronicus '29, is an accountant. His address—5748 Victoria Avenue, Los Angeles. "My work is very interesting and I intend to remain in it," he writes. He finds his hobby in water color and pen-and-ink drawing.

Student Union De Luxe

Courtesy Time

RARE in Eastern colleges but common in the Middle West is an institution known as the Student Union. Boasting dining halls, ballrooms, bowling alleys, soda fountains, lounges, music rooms, cinemas, night clubs, Student Unions in the last ten years have become the social centres of the huge State universities. Last week University of Minnesota capped them all with a new Union that rivaled the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

No rich man's college, Minnesota, second biggest U. S. university (first: California), is a vigorous, booming educational service station like Ohio State. Many of its 15,000-odd students are poor and doggedly hard-working. To build them a worthy social centre was an ambition of Minnesota's late great President Lotus Delta Coffman. Last fortnight Minnesota's students, faculty and alumni (aided by P.W.A.) made his wish a fact, dedicated the \$1,850,000 Coffman Memorial Union on the Mississippi's bluffs. Last week, Minnesota's boys and girls tramped over its thick red carpets, sprawled in its purple and cream chairs, marveled at its furnishings. They noted:

A two-story lounge with gold pillars, black marble fireplaces.
A two-story ballroom with ottomans, leather-covered doors.

A garden terrace overlooking the Mississippi, a tearoom, a cafeteria with 630 seats, twelve private dining rooms, a room for students who bring their lunch.

18,000 mailboxes, 30 bridge tables, 16 bowling alleys, 15 billiard tables.

A broadcasting system, 16 grand pianos, a Hammond electric organ.

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Minnesota's President Guy Stanton Ford. "Beautiful!" said Walter A. Jessup, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Said the university administration, anticipating outcries from frugal Minnesotans: "It costs no more to buy purple chairs than dull brown ones."

Robert F. Ganschinetz, Anthemios '30, was married last September to Miss Vera Hutter, a graduate of Trinity College, London, and Queensland University, Brisbane, Australia. They may be addressed at 416 North 19th Street, East St. Louis, Illinois. Bob is employed by the East St. Louis Park Board.

Anthemios migrations: Ken Smith '35, to 510 Fern Place, Washington, D.C. . . . Don Mayne '33, Sales Engineer for Seryel Corp. at New Orleans. . . . Richard Binfield '40, with Electric Boat Co., Groton, Connecticut. . . . With the army: Carl A. Gerfen '31, Officer at Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Lt. James F. Whisenand '33, pilot at Hamilton Field, California; Marvin (Burr) Patterson '28, at Cranbrook Academy, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.



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