An AIA Architect

By DAVID L. PERKINS

AIA, Architect

The letters "A.I.A." behind a name signify to the general public that such a person occupies a special position; any school child knows that these initials are reserved for physicians. The same goes for the abbreviation "C.P.A." which is almost as widely recognized and understood. But what about these letters "A.I.A." following a name? Just what do these curious alphabetic appendages mean?

More than ninety per cent of Acadia's registered architect, comprising three letters, indicating simply that they are members in good standing of the professional society for architects, The American Institute of Architects. The A.I.A., founded in 1857, may be compared as such to the American Medical Association for doctors, founded two hundred years earlier, or the American Bar Association for lawyers, whose beginning was eighteen years later. As professional societies go, it is in its fifty-first year. Until early in the nineteenth century, there were not many professional architects in the United States, although the profession had flourished in other countries for thousands of years. Most of our earlier buildings were designed by amateur architects who were also something else. The classic example is Thomas Jefferson, who was architect for the University of Virginia, several plantation homes and contributed designs for the State House in Richmond, Virginia and the National Capitol in Washington, all in addition to his regular job as statesman.

Needless to say, not all the early American designers were men of Mr. Jefferson's awesome proportion and, by the time the A.I.A. was founded, there was a very real need in this country for the establishment of standards of practice for the profession. Thus the A.I.A. did. The Institute, then and now, requires of its members the highest standards of professional competence, moral duty and human character any profession can devise. Its activities encompass many fields.

The A.I.A. has been largely responsible for the writing of architectural licensing laws in each of the fifty states, which require every applicant to demonstrate his knowledge and competence before he can practice architecture.

Today, there are more than sixty schools of architecture in the United States. The A.I.A. has assisted in the formulation of curriculum, standards of accreditation and maintains an office of Educational Programs which answers about two thousand career guidance inquiries each year. In addition, the A.I.A. administers a larger number of scholarship and fellowship funds for serving students, involving more than $50,000 per year. Probably the largest single service performed by this multifaceted organization has been the establishment of ethical standards of practice for architects. No member of the A.I.A. will render professional services without compensation. Knoblingly compete with any other architect on the basis of fees.

Offer his services in a competition, except a formally authorized A.I.A. authorized competition.

Knowingly injure the professional reputation of another architect.

Undertake a commission for which he knows another architect has been employed.

Use paid advertising or misleading publicity.

The net effect of these mandatory standards of practice has been, over the years, not only to elevate the profession, but to protect the public, which is more important.

In addition to its activities in licensing, education and ethical practice, the Institute constantly has committees at work on such diverse problems as construction research, urban design, school and hospital design, human safety, housing, historic buildings and other areas affecting the general welfare.

Under the primatour of the A.A.I., any Lafayette architect who bear the initials "A.I.A." after his name contribute to and is guided by the high principles of this organization and is a better architect for it.

The American Institute of Architects

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