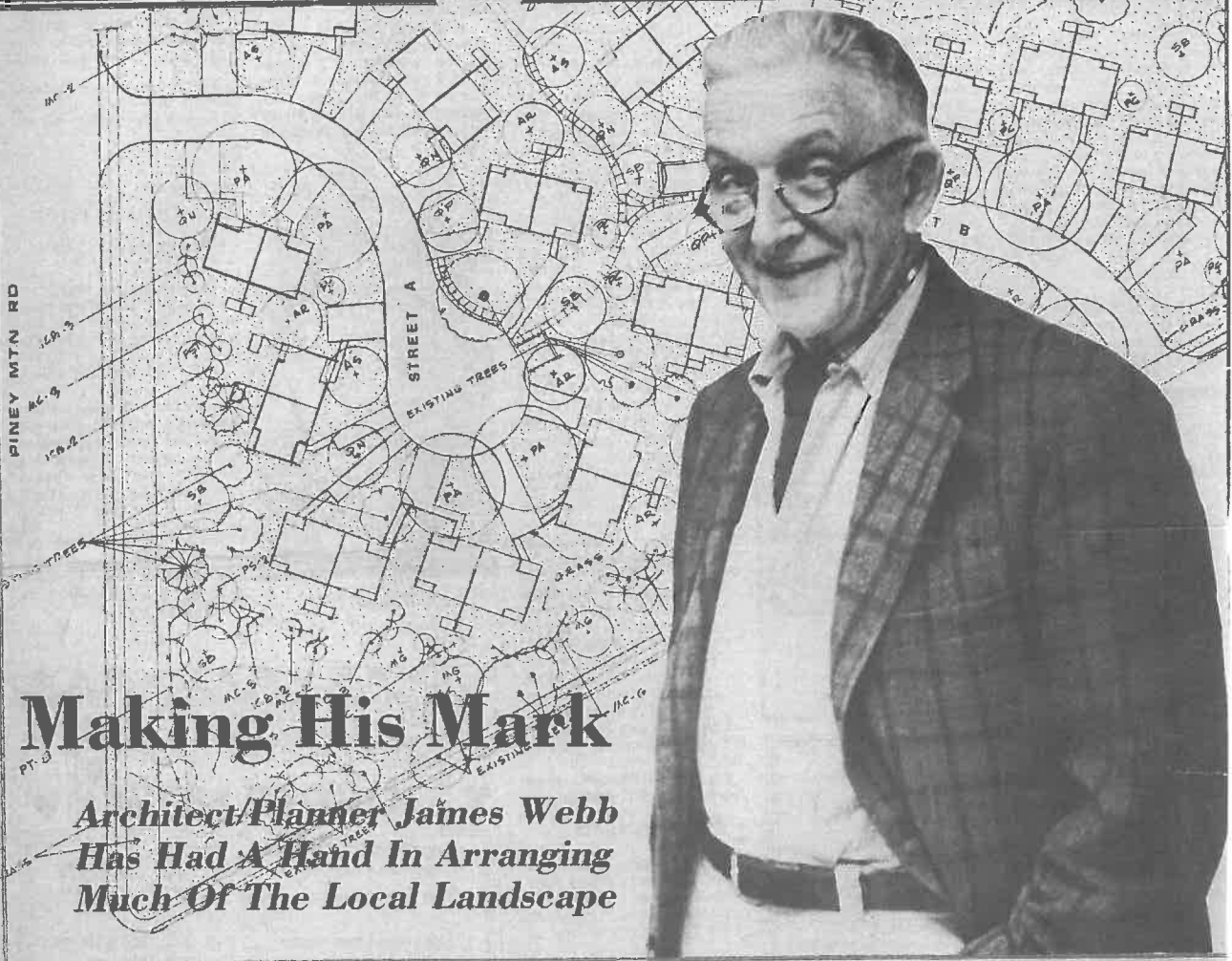


Living



Making His Mark

**Architect/Planner James Webb
Has Had A Hand In Arranging
Much Of The Local Landscape**

By **RICHARD BURNETT**
Staff Writer

James Webb likes to think that he's made his mark on Chapel Hill and North Carolina.

And only a brief glance at his accomplishments of the past 77 years reveals strong evidence that he has.

His behind-the-scenes work as an architect and UNC planning professor has played a part in some of the most significant developments in town, regional and state history.

From the Research Triangle Park, the state capital facility in Raleigh and Appalachian State University to Southeastern Baptist Seminary, Carmichael Auditorium and the Horace Williams House, all have been shaped to some degree by the quiet hand of James Webb.

But Webb would be quick to tell you he had plenty of help.

Notable Chapel Hill citizens, past and present, find credit in Webb's discussion of his work: Frank Graham, Howard Odum, John A. Parker, Stuart Chapin, Watts Hill Sr., George Simpson, Don Stewart and Bob Anderson, just to name a few.

WEBB CAME to Chapel Hill almost 40 years ago after receiving a degree in planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At that time UNC was just beginning its program in city and regional planning, and Webb became the department's first official faculty member. Later, with Webb, John Parker and Stuart Chapin, the department would be recognized as one of the top five in the country.

"I enjoyed my teaching career," recalled Webb, who retired in 1975 after 29 years

with the University. "Our department became sort of an outreach service to the entire state as far as planning, demonstration projects and studies. Of course, we did a lot of work with actual situations."

While teaching at UNC, Webb began his own private practice in architectural planning. Through his private business and his work with the University, he influenced growth and development throughout North Carolina.

But the story of James Webb begins many years before his success here.

From the heat of Mexico where he was born to the orange groves of California where he grew up, Webb has seen many sides to life. The son of a mining businessman who did much of his work in Mexico, Webb and his family moved to the San Gabriel Valley in California when he was five.

"My father died in Mexico when he couldn't get proper medical treatment for a busted appendix," Webb recalled. "The revolution was going on there and they wouldn't let him out of the country."

So Webb, his mother and brother moved to a California ranch where they made a living from working 10 acres of orange groves. "From that experience, I guess I'm sort of a country boy at heart," he said.

HIS INTEREST in designing and building things came from those days of ranch chores, keeping up the home and helping maintain the family, according to Webb.

Then his days of orange farming came to an end.

"The Depression caught up with us," Webb said, "and we had to go out and get jobs."

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Making His Mark

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While Webb worked at his first job, he clerking for the Federal Land Bank, the family sought to sell what had become a very unprofitable orange grove ranch. Finally, just before the stock market crash of 1929, they sold it at a good price, paid off the mortgage and moved to Berkeley.

Webb then began studies at Pomona College in metallurgy and mining. "It was thought that since I was the oldest son, it would be nice that I should follow in my father's footsteps," he recalled.

But Webb had no interest in the metal business, and after one year at Pomona he joined his brother at the University of California at Berkeley where they both studied architecture.

After three years at Berkeley, he interrupted his studies to get a job with a building materials manufacturing firm.

"I worked in the cost engineering area of the business," he said. "It involved doing time-motion studies at various factories and analyzing them for efficiency. It was actually pretty much of a grease monkey job; most of the people in my department were Stanford Business School grads, and I was just the go-fer."

He soon left that firm and, after the start of World War II, reentered Berkeley to finish his degree. Webb eventually worked for two San Francisco architects including William Wurster, who became nationally famous for his innovations in the field.

HIS WORK there was inter-

rupted by the draft. But during basic training he was diagnosed to have a form of incipient tuberculosis and his army career was soon over. Nevertheless, Webb did qualify for service educational benefits and chose to attend M.I.T.

Finally, in 1946, Webb finished his M.I.T. degree and joined the UNC faculty.

Not long after coming to UNC, Webb started his architectural firm as a part-time venture. "The University looked a little askance upon it at first," he recalled. "But I was able to maintain my scholarly responsibilities while still promoting my private office part-time and during the summers."

Actually, the private practice became an educational outlet for many of Webb's students who were hired to work there. Some of them, including Chapel Hill architects Don Stewart and Bob Anderson, went on to establish their own practices.

"We brought students in here where we spent times with them and they could learn a lot," Webb said.

In addition to working with major local and statewide projects, the firm also designed some 125 to 150 homes in Chapel Hill, according to Webb. Faculty members such as Institute of Government founder Albert Coates, former UNC dean Cecil Shepes and journalist Walter Spearman as well as many Duke professors had Webb design their homes. He also designed the home of Appalachian State president W.D. Plemons and acted as ASU's campus planner



WEBB CHECKS over a design with his step-son, Archie Kelly. (Staff photo — Richard Burnette)

There's been some fairly sophisticated design that has gone into it as far as trying to stay sympathetic to Chapel Hill structures."

Nevertheless, Webb said a more sensible location for the complex would have been in the west part of town where the flow of development has been going in

recent years. "It just seems like it's out of key with the times and with logic," he said. "But I don't hope the investors any harm, I hope it makes it."

Webb continues an active planning practice and has recently completed design of subsidized housing complexes in the Piney Mountain Road and Church Street areas. He also keeps busy with other varied interests such as landscape design, historic renovations, gardening and antique car collecting.

"I just keep rockin' along here," he said. "If I last as long as my mother-in-law (former Library Science School dean Lucile Henderson, 90) I'll have many more chances to serve Chapel Hill."

Quilting Program Set In RTP

A quilting event is scheduled at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park. "A Garden of Quilts," a program that will focus on the image of the garden and its significance for women's lives in general and the making of quilts in particular, is set for Feb. 23-24, March

On March 2-3, Maude Wahlman, assistant professor of art

2-3 and 6-10

Webb's Architectural Firm Opened In 1949

Historical Notes

From The Chapel Hill Historic Society

One-quarter Pesian (Iranian, now) by ancestry, James Murray ("Jim") Webb was born in Aguascalientes in central Mexico. His maternal grandfather, Ali Omar Barkofcy, as a child fled Persia with his parents, political refugees, to Germany.

Ali grew up, became an engineer and began work in Mexico. He came to the U.S. around 1880 and married Martha Murray of Tennessee. From this union came a daughter, a junior Martha Murray Barkofcy, who in 1907 married Ray Hickey Webb, a metallurgist for the Guggenheim mineral interests in Mexico. Jim Webb was born there in 1908. Another son, John, was born in 1910. Jim was born an American because his parents had not given up their citizenship.

When Jim was five his father died and his mother moved to Colina, Calif., where he attended elementary and high school. He spent one year at Pomona College, then in 1927 transferred to the University of California at Berkeley to study architecture.

The Great Depression came and he had to stop study in 1930. He worked in various fields for a few years, then returned to Berkeley and received a degree in architecture in 1936.

He began work in San Francisco, joined the Army in 1942 in World War II and within a year developed pulmonary tuberculosis. His cure required a year. From 1944 to 1946 he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from which he received a master's degree in city planning. At MIT he met John A. Parker.

Webb had accepted a job as city planner for a California town when he received an urgent telegram from Robert Burton House, the Chancellor of UNC. The University was establishing a department of regional planning under Parker and House wanted Webb to come here as associate professor. This he did in

1946.

In the meantime his brother, John, had been working in San Francisco as an architect. In 1949 the brothers opened an office to practice their skills in a corner room of the old Methodist Church at the north-east corner of Henderson and Rosemary streets, then the property of Clarence Pickle. John left the firm in 1953.

Robert E. Stipe worked with Webb from 1955 to 1957 in city planning. In the latter year, Stipe left to join the faculty of the Institute of Government at UNC.

At about that time, Donald E. Stewart became an associate with the firm, and somewhat later Robert N. Anderson became one of the partners and in 1960 its name was changed to City Planning and Architectural Associates. In 1969 Webb withdrew from the partnership, which then moved to the Professional Building on Estes Drive. Jim remained at the original location on Rosemary Street and the next year the original firm name was re-established as "James M. Webb, AIA and AICP."

In 1973 Webb took on as an associate Roman Kolodij, an architect. Kolodij, of Ukrainian descent, was a 1955 graduate of Newberry (S.C.) High School. He earned the degree of chemical engineer at N.C. State in 1960 and received a master's in architecture at the University of Oregon in 1973.

From 1960 to 1968 he had served as architectural and designer-draftsman apprentice with the City Planning and Architectural Associates. In 1968 he had worked for a Durham architectural firm, the next year for one in Raleigh and in 1970 returned to Chapel Hill and Jim Webb. His graduate work consumed the 1971-1973 period, at the end of which time he became an associate with Webb.

When Jim Webb began his work here, his primary emphasis was

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... will be Harriet ... P.O. Box
3218, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514.

Architectural Firm

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sidential design. Over the years, more complicated projects involving larger construction have been undertaken in both building and planning. With his former firm or as an individual, these projects not only included homes but also sorority houses, the Frank Porter Graham School, the Chapel Hill Library, the Municipal Building and Fire Station, the Northside School addition, the UNC Faculty-Staff Recreation Association Facility as well as public housing.

Durham and Fayetteville have benefited from his work in city planning, as have the Research Triangle

Park, Chapel Hill's West Franklin Streetscape and Carrboro's Municipal Park. From 1950 to 1976 Webb was in charge of long-range planning for the campus of Appalachian State University.

It was mentioned that Webb began work in a corner room of the old Methodist Church. As demand increased, Webb and his group took on more space. Clarence Pickle died but his estate continued to rent the building to the firm. When the firm moved to Estes Drive Jim purchased the building in the early 1970s.

This church, the first of its denomination in Chapel Hill, was built in 1853. Later came an addition on the Henderson Street side and, still later, one at the rear. The building has had many uses. At one time the back part became a car repair shop. Webb has modernized all the building and converted the garage area into rental offices.

Webb taught at UNC until 1974, when he retired, at 66. He is now professor emeritus of architecture. He has found time to serve on a number of civic boards, as a member of the committee that helped establish the first zoning ordinance 30 years ago and, more recently, on the Committee reviewing the new ordinance.

Informant for this note: James M. Webb

— Ralph M. Watkins

• CONVENIENCE
HOURS:
7:00 a.m.-12:00

MEAT

BONELESS CHUCK
ROAST \$1.59
LB.....

RIB EYE
STEAK \$3.99
LB.....