

Church Architecture Department--beginning and growth
by Hardie Bass

This is Marion Keegan, Sunday School Board archivist interviewing Hardie Bass who is chief architect of the Church Architecture Department of the Sunday School Board for almost 25 years. From 1945 until his retirement in 1969.

Keegan: Hardie, it's always good to have you back in Nashville to see us. How do you enjoy living in Savannah?

Bass: I like it very much. I like it very much.

Keegan: It's a nice place to retire, isn't it?

Bass: It is a nice place to retire.

Keegan: How long have you been down there now?

Bass: About four years. Since I left the Board around the first of January, 1970.

Keegan: Do you live in the old part of the city. the restored part?

Bass: No. It cost too much to live in those old houses, or even renovate them and rebuild them because actually it cost more than new construction than renovate the old house. So we live in an apartment just about halfway between the downtown area and the new part of the city.

Keegan: Now Julia tells me that you have a nice big room that you use partly as an office for your present stuff, architectural activity.

Bass: Right. I use the room in the daytime and she uses it at night.

Keegan: Oh me. Well, how is the restoration down there getting along?

Bass: It is doing very well. It has been very successful in the restoration, considering the fact that no Federal Government money goes into this restoration work. Historical Savannah Foundation is entirely dependent on private funds. The sale of these older buildings to people who are interested in restoring them themselves. So, it is controlled locally, and I wish there were more funds available because actually the houses are deteriorating faster than they are able to restore them with the financial funds available.

Keegan: Well, so many love to go down there on trips from here and all parts of the nation to see this restoration going on down there. Ahhh, just as a little bit of a background of you personally, ahhh, what about your mother and father? You grew up in a preachers home, did you?

Bass: I grew up in a preacher home, and in fact, I told somebody that I went to church nine months before I was born. That just about covers it. We lived in Texas, and I was interested in construction and engineering from the earliest time I can remember. I had a job as a water boy on a Christian Church construction in Terrell, Texas the summer I was nine years old, and then the next summer I had a job of taking the pipe organ pipes out of the boxes, and arranging them neatly in sequence and length and so forth in a row to help them manage all of the pipe work. So, I have been interested in construction ever since I can remember.

Keegan: How old were you about this time?

Bass: About nine or ten years old.

Keegan: My goodness, you did start early. Where was your father a pastor?

Bass: Well, he was like most Baptist preachers, he pastored all over Texas, Terrell Texas. That is where I was finished high school, and he was pastor at Texas and Milford, Texas. Later he came to Alabama, First Baptist Church, he pastored there. He was pastor at that time when I finished . . . University.

Keegan: In . . . you went on from there to Georgia Tech?

Bass: Right. I coached football and taught high school for a year. Did more coaching football than I did teaching high school for a year, but then I went on to Georgia Tech in Atlanta and took my architecture work.

Keegan: My goodness. Well, tell us about your first day here at the Sunday School Board and how conditions were, and why you felt like you would like to work at the Sunday School Board.

Bass: Well let's run back a little bit of time.

Keegan: Well, what year was that?

Bass: Oh, about 1938 or 1939, the church of which I was a member in Decatur First Baptist Church had a fire in the auditorium, and they wanted to get the choir and baptistry changed, because the choir was up high and the baptistry was low. So, they contacted the previous architect to design the building to help. He was working with them and died. After his death they came to me and wanted me to finish up the job and so on. I really encouraged them to make the change of relocating the choir and the baptistry, I mentioned above, rather than simply restoring them at the locations where they were. I did do that work and agreed with what I had suggested, and of course, there was a big gothic window above the choir. When the baptistry was put up there all of this gothic window was exposed, whereas prior to that time they didn't even know that there was a window up there. So really we had a very fortunate in the success of that change. Everytime I got in touch with the Church Architecture Department about

some information pertaining to the details and the mechanics of baptistries and the arrangements and so on.

Then later, about 1942 or 1943, we were living in Marietta, Georgia, where our firm, where the Architecture for the Marietta We were approached by the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Marietta about helping start a mission work among the three thousand families who had come to Marietta. Dr. Brown was his name, and I believe he is still living. So, Dr. Brown had a small Committee. He started looking around and found this old . . . residence We were able to get that. Dr. Brown and the other two members on the Committee put all of the responsibility on me to get the information about the building. What could be done with it, the ground, and the improvements, and all. I wrote to Nashville to the Sunday School Board for some information, the latest information. That was when Mr. Harold got on the train and came down to see us. He could ride that train without having to spend the night on that train. So, he came down to see us and the Committee started encouraging me to come up here at the end of the war. That was in 1943, I guess.

Keegan: To join the department up here?

Bass: To join the department up here. I told him when the war was over with I would talk with him. He kept on insisting I come up here and give him some commitments so that he could make some further commitments for the department. I think about, well, the first of January, 1945, I told him that he could count on me coming up here at the end of the war. We came up here the 1st of July, 1945. The first day here in August was really an experience. We were up on the attic floor of the Eighth Avenue building. We had to climb the last floor from the fourth floor up to the fifth floor by steps.

Keegan: Yeah.

Bass: You remember those steps?

Keegan: Yeah. We now call that building, The Frost Building.

Bass: That's right. No insulation in the roof or sidewalk.

Keegan: That was nice and cool.

Bass: No air condition.

Keegan: Nice and hot. (Laughter)

Bass: Do you remember next door there was a . . . ?

Keegan: Yeah.

Bass: They burned coal. Everyday about 1:00 they would burn all of the trash even in the middle of summer. That chimney and all came over into our department.

Keegan: You were kind of forced with the windows open because there was no air condition.

Bass: That's right. It was so hot that we use to wrap the plastic sheets around our arms with our sleeves rolled up. We would wrap these plastic sheets around our arms and put rubber bands on them so the perspiration would not mess up the About that time Mr. Harold was there and Mrs. Allen, his secretary, or former secretary.

Keegan: That is Elizabeth Allen?

Bass: Elizabeth Allen, right. Charlie Lee Anderson had just come from the seminary. Mr. Knave, Mrs. Walker, no Mrs. Walker wasn't there then she came with us a little later from the Training Union Department.

Keegan: Was Dorothy there?

Bass:

Keegan:

Bass: Harold came with us after the end of War II. Mr. Edward . . . had died about 1944.

Keegan: I see. He was a real outstanding architect.

Bass: He had been in practice here in Nashville for 34 years, and had a lot of experience in designing church buildings. One of the problem was that you had to have an architect in the department in order to call it a Church Architect Department. In fact, issues have been brought up so they always tried to keep an architect in the department in some way. Mr. was in the Navy at that time, but had been identified as the architect of that department for several months. Mr. was the so called architect at the time that I came.

Keegan: These didn't necessarily have to spend all of their time here at the Board?

Bass: That's right. They were more or less consultant architect.

Keegan: When you came, you were full-time here?

Bass: That's right. I was the first full-time chief architect . Later Mr. Hogan got his architectural license, a year or two later, and our big problem was, from the beginning, we were "behind." We had more calls to work than we were able to take care of. We had the small quarters, up there, and it was so crowded in this room that literally you could walk all over the room on top of the drafting tables.

Keegan: How many drafts? About how many?

Bass: I would say not over four at one time. Really, we were not able to get any more drafts because we had no space for it. It was rough. It was hot in the summer time and hot in the winter time.

Keegan: Yeah.

Bass: But, the work that we were doing, you have not asked about that yet, but the work that we were doing was to the programs and help the churches analyze their program needs and then we would study those program needs ourselves in the drafting room and translate those program needs into building spaces, and tie those building spaces all together into arrangements for a building. Then we would send these sketches to the churches and receive their comments or suggestions. Then we would revise the sketches Then we would come to a mutual conclusion and agreement, and then we would encourage them to get a local . . . to work and draw specifications . . . and carry on through with the construction and completion of the building.

Keegan: So, the information at the Sunday School Board, the Architecture Department provided was one of what space they would need for the type of educational work they would do?

Bass: Not only but the work of the church.

Keegan: The church work. Right.

Bass: Library, offices, choir, music, fellowship, recreation, etc. Worship, of course.

Keegan: Who was out on the field, promoting and consulting with the churches?

Bass: Until about 1950-53, Mr. Harold was the only one on the field. He stayed in the office, actually all the time. We had so many visitors in Nashville.

Keegan: You didn't need much promotion, did you?

Bass: Well,

Keegan: You just needed

Bass:

Keegan: Right. What has been your responsibility toward planning, executing, and so forth about the assemblies, which we now call the Conference Centers? In planning for buildings, and actually laying out what we have in Ridgecrest and Glorieta?

Bass: The only trouble with Ridgecrest was that we should never have started there because it had very little available ground. Everything was on a hill going up or on a hill going down. In relation to the highway, it was just divided, and the property that we had

ran into two-halves, separated by a highway which had not been approved over the years, but we are still trying to live with it as best we can. The Ridgecrest grew out of the 1921 or 1922, and by 1937, I believe, the Sunday School Board took it over and assumed responsibility for it. They built an auditorium, the initial cost was \$75,000, and then from there on the Sunday School Board has the responsibility of furnishing the funds for the major construction . . . and the capital expenditures for those and the maintenance and upkeep and operation of all the assemblies without any assistance from any other Board or organization of the Southern Baptist Convention. What we had to do was to build a type of building that we needed for the program there and realizing that the building would only be used for 3 months to a year. Capital expenditure would have to be paid for fully by . . .

The first time I went to Ridgecrest was in 1946 of January. Dr. . . . and Dr. Ingram and Dr. Williams and I went over there. and I was the most discouraged fellow you ever saw. You see, Ridgecrest, in January, or any year, it looks bleak and bare. At that time it looked awfully bleak and bare. At that time we had to build a dining room was right over a creek that had been there all the time. So, we did some estimating on the building and so forth. I suggested some . . . a type of construction rather than a woodframe construction that they have had in all the building. I estimated about \$125,000 for the cost, and Dr. Hawkin hit the sky. He just couldn't believe that we were talking about \$125,000 for one building. I will say this, we finally understood each other and he carried through on his end of the line, getting the money, and he stayed with us on getting an improved building. Our big problem at Ridgecrest, since 1946, was tearing down or replacing the old building that was there. I don't think that we have had to replace any building that has been built since 1946 that I know of.

Keegan: One of your last big projects up there was to do a?

Bass: I believe, ahhh,

Keegan: One of the last ones?

Bass: Yeah, one of the last ones.

Keegan: Yeah, it is a big beautiful building.

Bass: That got more comments and from many people than any other building that we had done. Because, the center building and we had

Keegan: People felt such a personal attachment.

Bass: That's right. We were able to and very much more contemporary than anything else that we have done over there, but it worked out alright.

Keegan: Ridgecrest ought to was not completely a plan campus from the beginning.

Bass: I want to add one word here. We had the understanding from the North Carolina State Highway Department that the interstate would be relocated over the mountain, toward the old apple orchard and beyond the lake, beyond the boys camp, when it was to be built. We had that in writing, and that was agreed on and understood by the Sunday School Board Assemblies Committee and the Administration of the Sunday School Board before we started with Hall. If we, for any through lack of communications in changing the plans, the Highway Department would put the interstate immediately adjacent to the old highway assemblies which,

Keegan: Right there at Hall.

Bass: But, it was the new principle for the new auditorium 1973 being fully air conditioned indicates that we will maintain the present location and it will be highly desirable to air condition existing buildings and new construction.

Keegan: Yes. Have you seen the new auditorium? How do you like it?

Bass: I've seen the new auditorium. It follows the basic plan that we developed in 1951. This is simply the . . . of it. The only reason that we didn't go further in 1951 is because so many windows and doors were in the old building that unless we fire proofed the old building then we could not cut out those windows and doors. So that was a choice that we had to make at that time. At that time we made the choice of keeping the windows and doors, and leaving the building very much as it has been, from 1937 on. Now with the increasing technology and demands for more complete control of the environment or visuals and audios, the new auditorium is very much like an enlarged TV studio.

Keegan: I see. What has been the difference in developing the campus at Glorieta, New Mexico, would you say in contrast at Ridgecrest?

Bass: Fortunately, at Glorieta we have had one house on the property and one little dirt road from the highway to the old Breeze Ranch house, B R double E Z E.

Keegan: That still stands?

Bass: That still stands. We were able to get full on the property, and get all of the information that we needed before the master plan was done. We were able to identify sections or areas for different types of development and in different periods of development so that an area was identified for the auditorium and classrooms, or teaching rooms and so forth. Even though not all of those were built at one time. The same thing is true for administration and the dining hall and the sleeping accommodations of different types of sleeping and living accommodations. So, they were able to qualify what we had not been able to do at Ridgecrest.

Keegan: And too, it was more spread out and you just found out that you needed to plan on a big scale?

Bass: They continued construction at Glorieta in different basic areas that has been identified in the beginning. They have proven very satisfactory, we have been able to carry a continuity, both in the planning and in the constructions and in the architectural design of the building. So they do not look out of . . . with each other.

Keegan: Yeah. It is just a beautiful, beautiful campus. You are very much to be congratulated for all you have done. Has this been a real satisfying experience for you to invest your life this way?

Bass: I told Dr. Sullivan the other day when I saw him, I spent about 25 million dollars from the Sunday School Board, from 1945 to 1970 in construction and I like it better every time I see it.

Keegan: That is wonderful! Doesn't that give you a good feeling? Well, you should be very happy in your retirement after spending some good years of your life to be proud of the accomplishment.

Bass: Well, thank you. I put out a group of buildings here at the Sunday School Board up against the buildings, as a group for any of the other commercial companies downtown, and I always felt that Baptist Buildings should indicate to people that we love our Lord and love His work and love what we are doing for Him. That is true not only of our denomination building, but also of our church buildings. Because there is nothing more embarrassing than a building that is not maintained properly or was not designed with good materials, or was designed with materials that requires so much upkeep and maintenance.

Keegan: Right. What was your responsibility in building here right in Nashville at the Sunday School Board? What did you do?

Bass: I had the pleasure of working directly with the Sunday School Board Administration, Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Crowe, and with the Building Committees of the Sunday School Board. Representing the Sunday School Board in connection with tying in with the architects and contractors and the managers at the centers. Our department, Church Architecture Department, did the . . . and floor plan arrangements and so forth and developed the preliminaries for these buildings. In working with architects here in town or elsewhere, we worked up the estimates of the cost and other full information so the budgets could be prepared by the Sunday School Board Administration and presented to the actual Sunday School Board itself

Keegan: How many millions of dollars are invested in buildings right here in the complex that we have here in Nashville would you say at the top of your head?

Bass: Ahhh, I would say the cost and the time total about 18 million dollars per year.

Keegan: Which would be much more than that right now.

Bass: Now, it would cost about, it would just about double that to rebuild what we have now. At Glorieta I would estimate that we

spend about 11 or 12 million dollars over the years. It would probably cost that much again to replace it on the present day market. At Ridgecrest we spent, perhaps, five or six million dollars on the same period of time. Of course at these assemblies you always have so much underground work, so much preparatory work such as water treatment . . . waterlines, sewer lines, sewerage treatment planning and . . . electrical services and all of that must be done before you can actually start the building.

Keegan: You just can't even see what is being done for a while, can you?

Bass: That is one of the things that Dr. Hawkins said.

Keegan: Yeah. That's right, I'm sure. It takes a lot of know how about architectural in buildings. You don't realize how much that takes. The first head of the Church Architectural Department which was done as a complete unit of a department in 1940 was . . Harold. What background did he have that made it good for him to be the head of this department?

Bass: He had been doing promotin work within the Sunday School Department and the Training Union Department in Texas prior to coming to the Sunday School Board. All the time that he was at the Sunday School Board from about 1925 to about 1940 he had been doing field work in promoting both Sunday School and Training Union work. During those years he saw the need for a leadership or someone to provide a leadership in the planning of buildings to accommodate the needs of the churches more directly than have been provided. Some attempts have been made to provide these needs, but never had there been one with, say concerted purpose of tying together all of the lose ends of the various educated departments into one department or one service of department to do this work. Frankly, I think that was just the greatest contribution was seeing the need and then talking about the department doing it.

Keegan: Yeah. To begin with, a long time ago, beginning even as far back as 1908, Harvey Beechum did a little bit concerning, helping churches with plans for buildings, and then P. E. Burrows followed up doing something as he could with the many other responsibilities. Of course, the full . . . coming with this department, the full department in 1940. Why do you think Southern Baptist need their own department of Church Architecture, or do you think that has been real necessary?

Bass: I think that it has been very desirable to have it. I think it has enabled some Baptists to maintain the leadership in the education program, both in quantity and in quality of over and above the other churches, and without any hesitancy, when you get a Committee and folks together in a Baptist church, everyone of them starts thinking of their own prejudice of their own likes and dislikes, and if nothing else then to simply establish a program of what is needed in various types and sizes of Baptist churches. The Church Architecture Department has done a good job. Now, continuing that

same thing and going into it a more intensively and more deeply, they have been able to provide a . . . leadership in this to the seminaries and to the colleges and to the various organizations of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Keegan: They have served in all states, the Southern Baptist Convention?

Bass: Right. Primarily, . . . house of knowledge and they have also served the architects. We have looked to them for leadership and the programs of the churches.

Keegan: How does the future look for this work?

Bass: Well, that is not my worry, but . . .

Keegan: Well, you are out there in this grass roots now.

Bass: I'm still working. I retired, but I'm a retreaded man. I'm still working with some churches. Of course, I have kept in touch with the Church Architecture Department . . . changes that have been made in the program for the last three or four years, and I find it very helpful to have the information . . . They have good standards with the churches, and the churches know them. The contacts that the department has had with the seminaries and going to the various seminaries over the years have paid off because pastors have come out and they look immediately to the Church Architecture Department for assistance and guidance.

Keegan; And they have respect for the work that they have done and are able to do. So, Dr. Rowland Crowder (?) is carrying on in a very fine fashion as the successor of Dr. Harold?

Bass: Well, not only Dr. Crowder . . . has the same responsibility, and feel the same responsibility because if he didn't feel that responsibility, why, there is so many other places you could make more money.

Keegan: Yes, that's true. Do you want to comment on this little comment that you made. Sometimes you get a little tired and things wouldn't be running so smoothly and you would say well, I don't know why I stay here at the Board, and quickly you would answer yourself, yes I do know, I'm working for the Lord and not for the people.

Bass: Well, after a number of years, I've worked in private architect offices and worked in private firms in the architect business. It was a shock, to me, to come to the Sunday School Board in 1945. Things just didn't move the same way, and decisions were not made the same way that they are in private businesses, especially in the private architectural business and construction businesses. It took so much involvement with the Sunday School Board Administration and the Board Committees, Building Committees, Glorieta and Ridgecrest Committees, and Church Committees were so involved that it takes a long time for it all to get together. I was just not geared that way.

Keegan: You were just not prepared that way.

Bass: So many of the decisions were made purely on the basis of a religious atmosphere, primarily, than a profit atmosphere. I came up here less than half of what I was making the previous year in 1945, and I was glad to do it at the time, and I regretted two or three times; but I finally realized that this work was more important than any individual. The work still continues to be more important than any individual or any group of individual. It is great work and bigger than any of us.

Keegan: Well, I believe that is the Christian feeling we have about the work is to do it in the spirit of service.

Bass: Well, I hope so.

Keegan: Serving the Lord, that's right.

Bass: One of the other things that I mentioned here is that I always look to, the smaller churches particularly, to see that they got their fair share of work and the direction and so forth. The smaller churches need help more so than the larger churches. The larger churches were able to hire trained personnel to lead their educational programs and music programs and etc. but the one person church that just has a pastor and no other trained help, I always felt that they needed help in my department, even more than the larger churches.

Keegan: I think that is one part with which you agreed with Dr. Hawkin. I've heard him so often say that we are here to serve the very last little church, way out in the country. Do you have anything else to add to this? Can you think of anything else?

Bass: It is a good department and it has done a good work. We are call the library now and I had the pleasure of doing some design work and everything else of renovating.

Keegan: You are really renovating that whole business?

Bass: 1963, or 64 or 65 . . .

Keegan: In 1965 is when we moved down here, so it began in 1963, I'm sure the plans

Bass: Yeah, it takes at least three years to get everything lined up.

Keegan: Well, you've done a beautiful job and . . . that works here appreciates it and everyone that comes in to do research or just to study and use the library comments on how beautiful it is and what a good place it is.

Bass: It took us about six or seven years to work out a master plan for this first floor at the Sunday School Board. The master plan

was developed with the idea that all employee services would be on one horizontal floor level running from Ninth Avenue to Tenth Avenue and I would say it has worked well, and looking back at the actual operation of it even in 1973, it works well. That's good planning.

Keegan: That's right. Thank you Hardie, this has been wonderful for you to be here and for you to do this for us.

Dr. Rowland Crowder is the head of the Church Architecture Department now in 1973. He followed W. A. Harold in this responsibility after the sudden death of Dr. Harold with a heart attack on February 26, 1971. Early in 1971 would have been the time for Dr. Harold's regular retirement. ?