

MY FAVORITE BUILDING

By Mike Harris

As usual I try to channel my thoughts on my understanding of the subject title for the coming week. First thoughts, buildings are really symbols. In my time the symbols were an emanation of power. Three structures jump out at me, the Woolworth building is my earliest recollection, when my father took me to the top, telling me that this was the tallest building in the world. The next tallest building which was built some years later was the Chrysler building, soon surpassed by the Empire State building. While some structures were erected on foreign soil the Empire State building I think reigned supreme in America until the World Trade Center became number one. It is like a beauty pageant, what am I missing? The next year's beauty pageant makes this year's beauties unimpressive. I am missing something, so what? What favorites are enduring, the Smithsonian Museum, that's it!!

Museums: New York's museum of Natural History, the city's Museum of Art, the great museums of Europe, etc. So it's not beauty it's character. This makes more sense. What characteristic is lasting better to address my subject for this week. It is certainly not a beauty pageant, how about a lot of buildings with a common theme, museums, halls of fame, libraries!!

Libraries proliferate our literate society. They can be found in small communities, and larger cities. They can be themed to certain subjects. So it's not the building or structure it's the character and persona it proclaims and projects. Yes it's definitely libraries, so what is my favorite library? Over the years I have owned one card without fail, regardless of where I resided, a LIBRARY card. The first important one was from the New York City Public Library, which gave me entry to all its branches. Whoopee!! How well I remember the hours of pleasure and instruction I gained from that card. The next card was from the C.C.N.Y. library. Then the one I remember most was from the Norristown High School Library. Because of it I was fired from my job as a volunteer. I will always remember that card.

But let us not get sidetracked by an untoward incident. Let's look at what we are talking about. Venerable structures as they may reflect the inhabitants not only here but around the world. I recall in our visit to Europe which lasted a whole year, 83-84, we being tourists were not usually directed to libraries, but to museums and exhibitions. Yes we saw art galleries, the chapel with some fine quality masters. Europe is an old habitat of the human species, there certainly was a lot of residue of human habitation. It was not until later that I found out about the extensive libraries of the old universities. Libraries definitely win hands down wherever educated man lived and prospered.

I also was impressed with the lack of libraries in the Arab world. The rulers of these people tend to retain their power by limiting the amount of free knowledge available to the greater population. They educate their own in foreign countries and use their superior knowledge to maintain their power. Forget democracy – it can not exist without literate people, who might learn to think.

Yes, libraries regardless of how unimportant an edifice they inhabit are definitely my favorite buildings. What do you think? Aren't they marvelous places with superb character? Is it not true that character trumps beauty!!!