

Marin County Civic Center, Work of Frank Lloyd Wright Is Dedicated

By WILEY MALONEY

United Press International
San Rafael, Calif. (UPI)—The late architectural genius Frank Lloyd Wright said it "will be a cornerstone in the culture of the nation."

It has been called another Taj Mahal, a glorified Hollywood diner and a taxpayers' nightmare.

It's the just-dedicated Marin county civic center, one of the last great works of Wright, who died April 9, 1959.

Controversy keynoted the \$5.25 million, Byzantine-like structure long before ground was broken in January, 1961.

In the hills of Marin county 20 miles north of San Francisco.

And when the building was

partially completed, an economy-minded bloc on the county board of supervisors ordered construction halted. The order was rescinded a week later under pressure of public opinion.

The county administration building is only the first unit of a four-step plan for the

center which ultimately will cost another 5 to 6 million dollars.

Wright's strong pencil strokes, now brought to reality, dominate the landscape. The center is a 700-foot long rectangular building arcing across two hills with one end rising to a dome and a slender

217-foot tower topped by a radio spire.

The Byzantine motif is suggested by a roof of Mediterranean blue accented with anodized gold and softened by beige-colored concrete walls. The idea was to match California skies with the sun-burned hills.

The building rests close to the notorious San Andreas fault and is believed to be as earthquake-proof as the famed Wright-designed Imperial hotel in Tokyo.

Other features of the completed building include:

The entrance arch (Wright called it a "pendant crescent") under which motorists can get out and step on an escalator to the first floor.

The central mall running the length of the building and admitting natural lighting through a plastic skylight.

The outside balconies along the entire length of the three levels giving access between offices and protection from sun and rain to the glass areas five feet behind them.

The building will house only the county's administrative offices and a library. The second unit, yet to be built, will be for the courts and law enforcement agencies and will be of identical design to join the completed unit and sharing the rotunda to form a flying V. A health and welfare unit will parallel these structures and occupy 60 acres while 80 additional acres will be used for a fair grounds and recreation.

The project weathered one of the storms that habitually swirled around Wright's flowing white mane, but this one started even before the aging architect came into the picture.

Before a contract was signed in 1957 with Wright, then 87, more than five years was spent in making a decision whether to build an addition to the old court house or locate in a new area. Thousands of dollars were lost because of an expired land option.

Two bond issues were defeated and 24 architects were interviewed before Wright was appointed.

The ground breaking came in January, 1961, but the storms still raged. Three new supervisors were elected and two joined a third economy-minded holdover to halt construction.

"It is not a \$4.5 million project," one of them said, "but one of \$12 million... merely a monument to Frank Lloyd Wright."

They suggested that the building now under construction

be converted into a county hospital. Civic-minded residents protested and formed a group to push the project through. Wright, meantime, had died and William Wesley Peters, vice president of the Frank Lloyd Wright foundation, became chief architect assisted by Aaron Green, a Wright student and a San Francisco architect.

One more hurdle remained. A two-month building trades strike early this year further delayed progress on the unit which had been planned for completion last spring.

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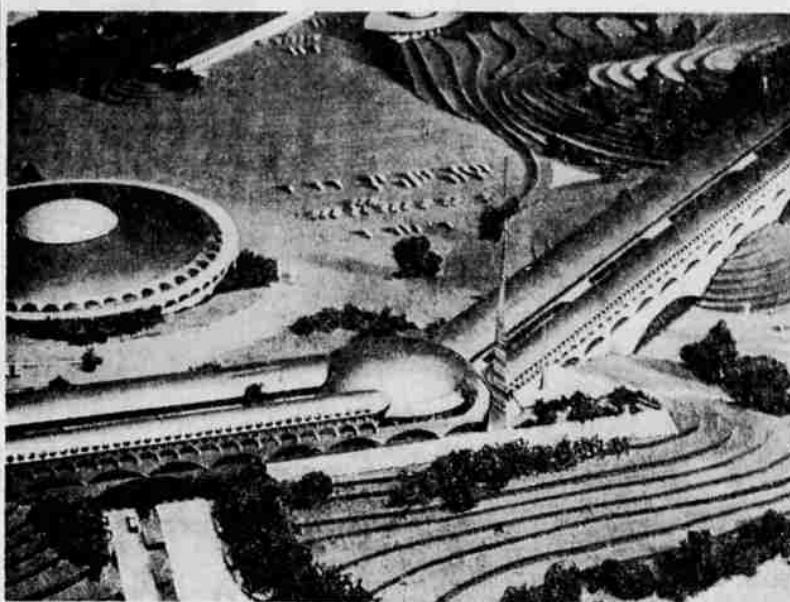
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WORKS OF WRIGHT—A little north of San Rafael, Calif., in the hills of Marin county, one of the last works of the later architectural genius Frank Lloyd Wright was dedicated Saturday. The Marin County Civic Center, which Wright said "will be a

cornerstone in the culture of the nation," was called everything from another Taj Mahal to a glorified Hollywood diner long before ground was broken for the project in January, 1961. This is an artist's conception of the Center. (UPI)

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