

BX Headquarters Was a Mid-Century Classic and an Early Arrival on Dublin Rd.

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

BX members attending the association's annual Open House last month entered a remodeled lobby with contemporary colors, new artwork and a stunning, hand-crafted reception desk.

It was a much-needed update for the 67-year old building, despite having several renovations over the decades. As the first impression for visitors, a lobby can reflect much about an organization.



The lobby of the current Dublin Rd. headquarters was renovated during the summer of 2017 and now features a new, hand-crafted receptionist desk

Imagine the impact made on Builders Exchange members who walked through the same doors on October 26, 1950 for the dedication of their just-completed headquarters at 1175 Dublin Rd. After 58 years of renting space in various locations, the Exchange finally had “our dream come true,” wrote 1950 Board President Ralph H. Anderson (W. E. Anderson Sons Co.) in *The Builders Exchange News* magazine that month.



When the Builders Exchange completed its new headquarters in the fall of 1950, it was in a developing commercial area of Dublin Rd. Exchange volunteers had been working on the project since 1947, when President Parker Garwick appointed the first building committee: Clarence Trapp, Bill Halligan, Al Harness, Earl Case and Chairman Ralph H. Anderson.

the Great Depression and World War II finally over, the local construction industry was exploding with growth – and so was the Builders Exchange.

Four years earlier, Anderson had been instrumental in helping the Exchange secure the property – then owned by The American Aggregates Corp., a firm with which W.E. Anderson Sons had a long-time business relationship. Still on the outskirts of the city, the acreage had been part of farmland owned by the Walcutts, an early Columbus family. An old stone house still stood on the land in 1946, when the BX board began discussions about acquiring it. American Aggregates was excavating sand and gravel at the site, which would create a large lake at the back of the parcel.

The late 1940s were a time of tremendous optimism and expansion for most American cities, and Columbus was no exception. With

Then housed in makeshift offices at the back of the old Riviera Restaurant, 350 N. Sandusky St., the BX was, at last, able to plan for the future. Along with more membership dues, a tremendous revenue generator for the Exchange was its annual Home Show. Started in the 1920s during another upswing period for Central Ohio, the event had been shelved during the depression and war years. But baby-boom families needed homes and again flocked to the exhibition, building the bank account of the BX as lead sponsor.

Even so, assistance was needed to buy the desirable Dublin Rd. land, which had 400 feet of frontage and was 300 feet deep, terminating at the lake. The price was \$25 a front foot – or \$10,000 total. BX members were asked to pledge to purchase one or more feet, and to assign their pledge to the Exchange. In a matter of days, 298 firms and individuals stepped up and contributed the property for the association.

Six BX member architectural firms submitted sketches in a competition to design the building. The board hired Inscho, Brand & Inscho to do the work, Anderson wrote, adding, “Then began the free-for-all so familiar to builders and architects. Nearly everyone had something to add. ‘Make this and that bigger – be sure to include these features.’ We had quite a building on paper – remember?”

Eventually, concepts such as a 400-seat auditorium, commissioning original art work for the walls and an in-house bowling alley were removed from the plans to keep the budget in check. Again, the Exchange turned to its members to finance \$50,000 of the project’s estimated \$65,000 cost. Working with The City National Bank and Trust Company, the BX launched a campaign and sold 20-year bonds in denominations of \$50 to 155 individuals and companies, paying 4% interest.



Ralph H. Anderson (W.E. Anderson Sons Co.) wrote the story in the magazine commemorating the opening of the new BX headquarters, titled, “Long Time Dream Materializes in Our New Home.” Anderson was a key leader throughout the process: from early discussions in 1946 with the former property owner, The American Aggregates Corp., through chairing the building committee and finally, serving as BX board president the year the building was complete.

Headquarters is significant achievement for local association

The groundbreaking ceremony for the building on November 1, 1949, was televised by Chet Long on WBNS-TV, which had been on the air for less than a month. A photo in the *The Columbus Citizen* that day reported, “twenty-four members of the Columbus Builders Exchange threw dirt with a reckless abandon Tuesday at groundbreaking ceremonies for the exchange’s new home at Dublin Rd. and Urlin Ave.”

City, county and state dignitaries were at the groundbreaking and many returned for the building dedication a year later. The facility they toured that night was enthusiastically described in *The Builders Exchange News* special dedication issue:

“We’re driving out Dublin Road and have passed the light at Grandview Avenue. Things are beginning to look new...across the road is Mike Fleisch’s beautiful new Grandview Inn and next Wendt-Bristol’s smart laboratory building... Slow down and let’s look at that new building on the left, yes, the one in sun-tan brick and native stone that stands out like a pretty girl on a naval base. ‘Builders Exchange of Columbus’ say the gleaming stainless steel letters over the entrance. Say – that’s our new headquarters. Let’s stop in and have a look.

“...The lobby. Gleaming terrazzo floors, walls attractively tinted or natural wood, acoustical ceiling with indirect lighting. That microphone on Ruth’s desk can summon members from any part of the building. ...The men’s room? Right over here on the left. No, not that door. That’s to the ladies powder room. Imagine – a ladies powder room in The Builders Exchange.

“... This cozy room on the west side is living quarters for our two house boys. Perhaps you haven’t met them. This is Bob Byrne and Norman Fuchs. They’re sophomores at OSU. Besides their other duties about the property, one of them will always be on guard when the building is closed.



The Nov. 1950 BX magazine cover featured the flag raising ceremony during the dedication of the Exchange building the month before. More than 600 guests attended, including Columbus Mayor James A. Rhodes, who went on to become a four-term Ohio governor. The photo was taken by Gordon Kuster, Jr., of the *Ohio State Journal* and had appeared in the Oct. 27 newspaper.

“The next room in the southwest corner is perhaps the most important room in the building. It’s our new plan room. Quite a jump from that dingy room at the old quarters... Let’s try not to disturb those 12 or 15 men working here. The entire ceiling is a honeycomb of baffles diffusing the light of seven rows of fluorescent tubes.

“...Having mentioned the lounge, let’s see it next. And close your mouth. It’s real – I mean the lounge and everything. What colors, what comfort, what a fireplace! Oak crisscross block floor, beautiful, isn’t it? A library corner, in natural walnut. Full windows in wood facing the lake at the rear. Television.



The magazine reported that the new plan room “is perhaps the most important room in the building. Quite a jump from that dingy room at the old quarters! ... and look at that ceiling. The entire ceiling is a honeycomb of baffles diffusing the light of seven rows of fluorescent tubes. That Modernfold door at the east end can be pushed back to open the entire end of the room facing the lounge when there is call for such an occasion.”

“Now down two more steps to the dining and refreshment area. To the left? That’s a bar, grandfather. How do you like the quilted effect of that plastic fabric on the front of the bar? The gay red of the plastic matches the coloring on the walls in the bar alcove. Looks daring, doesn’t it?

“The big room to the right, here? This dining room should be popular for noon lunches. Seats about 50 at one time. Now we’ve reached the east end where we find the kitchen. Plenty of cupboards, serving counters (plastic tops), steam table, coffee urn, stainless steel gas range and refrigerators. George Ricciardi



The largest room in the new headquarters was this spacious lounge, which boasted a large fireplace, comfortable chairs, plenty of newspapers, many ash trays and a rarity in the 1950s: a television set.

will hold forth here. He’s the man who operates the Dinette Restaurant on Grandview Avenue near Fifth. Darned good food at prices that give you some change out of a buck. Promises same policies here.”

More than 600 members and guest attended that historic open house, including Mayor James A. Rhodes. After official ceremonies ended, “everyone immediately retired to the refreshment tent and started consuming a part of the many gallons of beer that eventually went ‘down the hatch’,” the November newsletter reported. “The evening progressed smoothly from then until around midnight when the end of a perfect day arrived.”

Prior attempts at building headquarters failed

Perhaps the reason Exchange members were so proud of opening their own headquarters was the memory of other, unsuccessful attempts in the past to achieve that goal. The most recent effort had started with the same level of excitement and ambition, only to be derailed by the painful reality of the Great Depression.

Just two decades earlier, the Builders Exchange was thriving in another heady climate of construction: opportunities seemed endless for BX companies and their organization during the "Roaring Twenties" in Columbus. Association leaders made a dramatic announcement in January 1929: the Exchange would build a 12-story structure on the east bank of the Scioto River, just south of Main Street in the new downtown "Civic Center."

Sketches of the high-rise building were widely distributed, along with the case for member support. In addition to a larger plan room, conference rooms, offices, kitchen and dining room space, the skyscraper would be home to exhibits of building materials, to offices of manufacturers' agents, and to other industry-related associations.

Led by Board President Haig M.

Boyajohn (Boyajohn & Barr), the board had selected property with great potential – four parcels bordered by Rich, Canal, Scioto and Cherry streets, just northeast of the proposed Main Street Bridge. "The site has a frontage of 165 feet on the river front and is adjacent to the site which will probably be selected by the State office building commission for the proposed \$6 million state office building," *The Columbus Builder* magazine reported.

The same article noted the BX headquarters would be an L-shaped, limestone building, with approximately 7,000 square feet of floor space on each of the 12 floors. A three-story tower would top off the building, which was estimated to cost \$500,000. (Compare this to the 4,000- square-foot facility ultimately built 20 years later!)

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New Exchange Building to be in Civic Center

*Will cost \$500,000 and be Twelve Stories
Will House Builders Exchange and Members
Permanent Material Display Planned*

With the two-fold purpose of providing modern facilities for the Columbus Builders' Exchange, and promoting good fellowship and closer relationship between those engaged in the building construction field, The Columbus Builders' Exchange have announced plans for a twelve-story structure to be erected on the east bank of the Scioto River, just south of Main street.

The structure, to be erected at an approximate cost of \$500,000, will provide ample accommodations not only for the offices of the Exchange, but also members of the Exchange and others engaged in various professions closely allied to the building field.

Site Selected

H. M. Boyajohn, of Boyajohn & Barr, contractors, and president of the Columbus Builders' Exchange, is president of The Columbus Builders' Exchange Co., the parent organization, which is sponsoring the project. The Exchange acquired the four lots through option and final purchase at an approximate cost of \$21,000. The property includes a portion of Cherry street which was vacated by the city council and given to the Exchange. The site has a frontage of 165 feet on the river front and will mark the southern extremity of the new civic center, and is adjacent to the site which will probably be selected by the State office building commission for the proposed \$6,000,000 state office building.

Twelve Stories

Through the vacating of Cherry street, the new home will be

bounded by four streets. The building will be 60 by 120 and will be of limestone construction. As shown in the accompanying sketch, prepared by R. C. Kempton, of the Allied Architects' Association, the building will be "L" shaped and will carry a three-story tower. It is estimated that approximately 7,000 square feet of floor space will be provided on each of the twelve floors.

Permanent Material Display Planned

Although preliminary plans, only, have

been drawn, it is expected that an architect will be named soon to make final definite plans for its construction. One of the outstanding features in the preliminary plans is that space will be set aside for permanent booths where building material dealers may display their materials at all times, so that both contractors and the public alike may inspect the latest in materials. Public exhibits of manufacturers will be confined to the first, second and mezzanine floors.

The upper floors of the building will be reserved for headquarters of the Exchange, together with members of the Exchange, while a section of the roof will be converted into a roof garden to be used for recreational purposes.

When completed, the proposed structure will compare favorably with similar structures in San Antonio, Texas, Los Angeles, Calif., Cincinnati, Chicago and Cleveland. No definite date has been set as to when actual construction of the building will be started.

In addition to Mr. Boyajohn as president of the parent organization, other officers are: H. K. Hill, of the Columbus Builders Supply Co., vice-president; Lloyd E. Morris, of the C. E. Morris Co., and John A. Kight, Jr., secretary-treasurer. Directors of the new organization include Mr. Boyajohn, Mr. Hill, Mr. Morris, J. M. Pritchard, of the Upper Arlington Co.; O. G. Mandt, of the Jaeger Machine Co.; Stephen Stepanian, of the Arrow Sand & Gravel Co., and W. A. Wells, of the Columbus Railway, Power & Light Co.



The headline in the Builders Exchange magazine boasted only part of the story: "New Exchange Building to be in Civic Center." The smaller subhead was also a revelation: "Will cost \$500,000 and be Twelve Stories." The rest of the story was told in the magazine's date: Aug. 1929, just two months before the stock market crash on "Black Tuesday" sent the U.S. into the worse economic depression in history. Not surprisingly, this headquarters dream did not materialize.



Unfortunately, the stock shares purchased by BX members in the early 1930s to fund a new headquarters in the new downtown Civic Center were rendered worthless by 1935, when the Exchange was forced to surrender its partially-purchased property to The Civic Center Realty Company.

To cover the \$21,500 cost of the Civic Center land, a holding company was formed to sell stock to companies who would in turn give the Exchange controlling interest. Several dozen businesses purchased shares in The Columbus Builders Exchange Company, with the largest buyers being F&R Lazarus & Co., the Columbus Dispatch, Boyajohn & Barr and Jaeger Machine Co.

Before even the land could be fully funded, the Great Depression intervened and collapsed the ambitious vision of BX leaders. In mid-1935, the holding company reached an agreement with The Civic Center Realty Company to take over the property and relieve the Exchange from all obligations.

Surprisingly, this six-year effort was not the first time BX members had rallied to build an association headquarters. Similar grand plans had been launched in 1921 and before that, in 1912 to house this unique group of construction professionals. It's a testament to the tenacity and determination of the industry that generations of Builders Exchange members kept trying and finally, succeeded.

And speaking of tenacity? Those 20-year bonds sold by the Exchange in 1950 to finance the building had been redeemed with interest less than four years later. With the headquarters paid in full, BX members held a celebratory "Bondfire" in the backyard and set them all ablaze.



A happy ending to the decades-long effort for a Builders Exchange headquarters came in 1954, with this "Bondfire" in the BX back yard. To help finance the association's facility on Dublin Rd., the BX had issued 20-year, first-mortgage bonds paying 4% interest. In less than four years after opening the building, all the bonds were redeemed and the facility's \$50,000 in debt was completely paid.