

The Curse of Columbus: The Vanquished Airport of the Americas

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INTRODUCTION

One thinks naturally of the airport as an integral part of a connecting park system (...) though as yet (...) we only see a great field that has not yet found its logical place in either the civic structure or in the boundless system that is fast drawing all countries closer to one another.

– Albert Kelsey¹

In 1992, the Christopher Columbus Memorial Lighthouse was inaugurated in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic. This event had been postponed for more than 60 years. Originally intended to be part of an airport field, it now stands alone in a vast promontory facing the colonial city on the other side of the Ozama River. The Columbus Lighthouse was the product of an international competition organized by the Pan-American Union in 1928. At the time it was described as the largest international competition ever held. **Pencil Points** dedicated two pages to the results of the competition.² If constructed as intended, it would have been the first international air and sea transportation hub of the Americas, an experiment on contemporary practice. Instead, the Pan American Airways airport built in 1934 in Miami, Florida became known as the gateway to the Americas.

Not much has been written about the Memorial Lighthouse from a critical formal architectural perspective. This essay is not intended to fill this void, but rather to explore the circumstances in which the project took shape, and reached completion. It suggests that among the lessons lost, is the confirmation that architecture is often the consequence of political maneuvering and not exemplary design and construction. Also, that the most seemingly impossible proposals can be the ones actually affording a completely possible future.

The project was finished during Joaquín Ballaguer's presidency, amid great controversy. The inauguration was coordinated to

coincide with the celebration of the fifth centenary of the arrival of Columbus to the Americas. It was built to the detriment of the families who had settled in the area, and whose communities were razed to make room for the extensive esplanade that serves as the podium for the building.

After the monument's completion architects in the Dominican Republic uncovered the history of the competition. Emilio José Brea was among the architects commissioned in 1988 to design an exhibition on the history of the Lighthouse Memorial. Brea authored a seminal essay on the history of the competition, and has criticized the apathy shown by the international architectural community toward critical evaluation of the completed project in the 1990's.³

The competition is an important landmark in the history of architecture. It called for a global participation of all architects to develop a new building typology suited to a new way of life, the transcontinental air transportation hub. It counted with the participation of architects recognized for their utopias: Tony Garnier, Konstantine Melnikov, and Nicolai Ladovsky. In it collided the explosion in mechanized air movement and the fight to control newly created air routes, the idealism of a Pan-American community, the ambitions of a powerful military force, and natural catastrophe. The competition pushed architecture into the construction of a new world order.

Multiple reasons explain why the project was not completed as originally described in the competition program. The first is the nations' aggressive competitiveness for taking over transportation routes serving the centers of economic power. The competition called for an international air and sea transportation hub, potentially a major profit making operation. However, it was not clear who would control the operation of the airport. Second, the Dominican Republic had an unequal standing in the control of transportation routes, as well as in the production of airplanes. Newly formed air transportation companies in the U.S. were exploring landing sites, and markets. The main

manufacturers of airplanes and airships were in the United States, England, France, Germany, and Italy. Third, political disagreements among the governments of the American nations was causing geopolitical tensions, and hampering the exercise of goodwill among nations. Specifically, General Trujillo's coup in the Dominican Republic in 1931, and his repressive government exacerbated this situation. Fourth, massive funding was needed to support the construction of the project, which could not be undertaken single-handedly by any one nation. It had been agreed, member nations of the Pan-American Union were to share the financial responsibility for the project, but these commitments were unfulfilled. Fifth, in 1930 a hurricane ripped through the capital city of Santo Domingo demonstrating the devastating force of nature,⁴ and putting into question the wisdom of building an airport subject to such conditions. Sixth, the economic depression affecting the industrial nations of the world starting in 1929 created additional barriers to constructing the winning entry. Finally, there was the sheer obsolescence of the idea framing the competition. By 1937, passenger transportation on dirigibles had had disastrous consequences, and was being replaced by airplanes. A better understanding of the requirements for designing airports was taking shape through trial and error. Finally, it was decided that the site for the international transportation hub not be an intermediate point to facilitate transcontinental travel, but rather should be a destination.

RACING ON AERIAL SUPERHIGHWAYS

[Is] there not to be an architecture of the air, as there now is an architecture of the night...

– Albert Kelsey⁵

Jean Baptiste Marie Meusnier, French aeronautical theorist and general, was the inventor of the dirigible⁶, and the first to design “permanent airship hangars and portable canvas hangars for use in the field.”⁷ Meusnier recognized rigid frame flying vessels, when not in use, required developing new forms of storage space. The history of architecture first recorded airship related structures with Eugène Freyssinet's 1905 airship hangars in Orly. Hence, both Meusnier and Freyssinet can be considered to be the first airport architects.

During the First World war, British, French, Germans, and the United States military made use of all air power available at the time: balloons, airships, and airplanes. The World War I advanced developments in aviation, and opened the way for significant commercial passenger air travel in the late 1920's. Already in 1919 Pan American World Airways had projected that soon commercial aviation in South and Central America would “amount to great volume of business.”⁸ Pan American inaugurated “official mail service between Key West and Havana,”⁹ through a contract with the U.S. government in 1927.

Dirigibles had been carrying passengers in Europe since 1910. In the U.S., the ZR-3 zeppelin “Los Angeles,” built by the Navy in 1924, provided transcontinental passenger service to, among other places, Panama and Puerto Rico. By 1925, airports in Berlin (Tempelhofer), Paris (Le Bourget), Amsterdam, and London (Croydon) had waiting rooms and bureaux de change.¹⁰ They were considered to be the most luxurious of their time. The wealthy saw air travel as exclusively theirs. This fascination with and popularity of air travel promoted world travel.¹¹ It could be speculated that it was one of the original moving forces behind the great Pan American airport competition. It could also be claimed that the competition brought to the attention of architects worldwide the prospects for an unexplored lucrative market.

Pan American Airways' president, Juan Trippe envisioned Miami would be the aerial gateway between the Americas. This had also been the vision guiding the 1928 competition's call for the design of the great Pan American airport in Santo Domingo. Trippe hired Delano and Aldrich to design Pan Am's first modern passenger terminal in the U.S.¹² In 1929 as the finalists for the first stage of the competition were been announced in Spain, Pan Am initiated passenger service from Miami to San Juan, Puerto Rico via Havana, Port au Prince, and Santo Domingo.¹³ In 1933 Pan Am moved its operations to Dinner Key in Miami. On this location Delano and Aldrich designed the Seaplane Base and Terminal, considered being “the largest and most modern marine air terminal in the world.”¹⁴

ON ARCHITECTS AND AIRPLANES

How do you like the entire site from the bird's-eye perspective, Mr. Webster? We must place extra importance on this since the air chauffeurs will usually approach their convalescence home by air. And – the first impression must also be the strongest.

– Paul Scheerbart¹⁵

At the turn of the 20th century, futuristic literature played with visions of cities where automobiles and airplanes competed for public space. Some satirized the ungainliness implied by the visions. For example, the illustrators Albert Robida and Henri Lanos in France concocted images of the monuments of Paris disappearing under a cloud of balloons and airships. A drawing for an article written by the Brazilian aviator Santos Dumont. Lanos showed Notre Dame's cathedral converted into a balloon station.¹⁶ *Life* magazine in a 1910 issue published an illustration titled “United Air Terminal” with the caption: “The arrival of an aerial transatlantic liner on the roof of a New York Skyscraper.”¹⁷ This illustration anticipated perhaps the design for the Empire State Building. Its accompanying description closely followed the language used by the author of the Columbus Memorial Lighthouse in the program for the air and sea hub.

At a time when a virulent historical eclecticism dominated architectural practice, the Columbus Memorial Lighthouse competition demanded a new typology. The competition forced architects to consider a futuristic imagery that had been previously reserved only to illustrate works of fiction and visionary utopias.

For the first thirty years of the 20th century, architects seemed not to be taking part in the shaping of the architecture for air travel.¹⁸ In 1914 Antonio Sant'Elia projected a station for airplanes and trains with funicular and elevators. Sant'Elia was not oblivious to the industrial effervescence that surrounded Milan, which included the Caproni airplane manufacturing plant.¹⁹ Paul Scheerbarth in 1917 published a visionary novel about a Chicago architect from that specialized in glass architecture to be seen from the air. Also in 1917, Tony Garnier was presenting his plan for an industrial city. In **Vers une Architecture**, first published in 1923, Le Corbusier included images of the Farman, the Bleriot, and the Caproni hydroplane among others. But it was not until the unveiling of the Plan Voisin in 1925, when he addressed airfields by planting them in the heart of the new city. In 1926, Hugh Ferriss was painting aerial traffic patterns, and Fritz Lang's **Metropolis** film was released.

In the U.S. the first architect to be hired to design an airport was Albert Kahn. The impending war called for the design of a generic airfield that could be easily replicated, fast and cheap. In 1916 Kahn delivered a prototype with a square-shaped airfield, and hangars arranged along one of its sides. He was instrumental in the definition of guidelines for the construction of airports made public in 1919. His design for Ford Motor Company's experimental station in Dearborn, MI was the model for the ideal airport.

Proposals for the design of the ideal municipal airport were promoted by the Leigh Portland Cement Company 1928 competition. Raymond Hood served as the chairman of the jury of awards.²⁰ The results were announced in 1929, the same year he participated in the review of the first stage of the Lighthouse Memorial competition. Coincidentally, the 4th place prize winner in the Leigh Portland Cement competition, Will Rice Amon of New York, was one of the ten finalists in the Lighthouse Memorial competition.

According to Geza Szurovy, the Leigh Portland competition was a landmark event, because it opened the way for U.S. architects to be part of the airport design team. Among the innovations presented in the proposals were parallel runways, linear row and star-shaped boarding gates, the separation of departing and arriving passengers on different levels, and telescopic boarding tunnels.²¹ The 1929 Architectural and Allied Arts Exposition at the Grand Central Palace included a section on airports. The exhibition's press release indicated: "advanced designs by many leading architects will be shown

including models of what the coming generation will see (...) plans and drawings of the best European aviation architecture."²² According to Szurovy, when the financial market crashed in 1929, the grand ideas were temporarily abandoned.

STEERING THE COMPETITION

We are dealing with intangible airways, thousands of miles long. The very sky and every mountain must be considered, for some day the trunk-route across this island will have to be systematically marked and lighted.

– Albert Kelsey²³

Albert Kelsey, technical advisor for the Pan American Union, was responsible for defining the rules and program for the Memorial Lighthouse competition, and for providing a contextual narrative. With Paul P. Cret, a graduate from the Ecole des Beaux Arts established in Philadelphia, Kelsey won the competition for the Pan-American building in Washington, D.C. Kelsey was born in St. Louis, and raised in Philadelphia. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania where he won a Traveling Scholarship in 1890. In 1896 he was an apprentice in the office of T.P. Chandler. Later he moved to the office of Cope and Stewardson. He opened his own firm with Kennedy and Hays, but the association was dissolved in 1905.²⁴

The idea of a monument to be placed in Santo Domingo memorializing Columbus achievements had been discussed since the late 1800's. The proposal for building a tomb crowned by a lighthouse dates back to 1896. A committee appointed by the President of the Dominican Republic was expected to generate the funds needed through a special tax, but the plan was repealed. The lighthouse tomb project was forgotten until 1914 when William E. Pulliam, Dominican General Receiver of Customs, started an aggressive campaign through the media to get the memorial built. Pulliam's efforts proved successful when the 5th International Conference of American States held in Santiago de Chile in 1923 approved a resolution supporting the project and creating a committee to study ways to make it possible. In June of that same year, **The New York Times** announced plans for a Pan-American memorial in the West Indies illustrated with a sketch by Walter F. Beyer, an engineer from Washington D.C.²⁵ In October **The Washington Post** carried an article describing a project to be undertaken by the Dominican Republic: "a massive tomb (...) proposed to have a tower three hundred feet high in the top of which there will be a great light to aid navigators."²⁶

According to Kelsey's account, the Pan American Union decided on an implementation plan in 1927. The approved resolution called for a competition open to all architects of the world. The instructions given to Kelsey in June 1927 were to assist in the selection of the site, to survey it, locate it in relation to air and sea routes, and to write the program and rules for the

competition. Embedded in this directive from the Governing Board was an interest on air transportation, which had not surfaced until then. The celebrated pilot Charles Lindbergh praised the initiative because the building of the Memorial coupled with air travel would “aid to a large extend in the development of these islands.”²⁷

The architects registered for the competition elected the jury of awards. It was to be composed by three architects, one representing each of three continents: Europe, North America, and South America. The jury was to review both stages of the competition. Each registered participant was asked to send three lists with no more than ten names each, for the three continents. Kelsey identified the names cited most often, and collated three lists, one for each continent. He sent the lists to participants and asked them to select one name and five alternates from each.

The resulting jury was formed by Horacio Acosta y Lara of Uruguay, representing Latin America; Eliel Saarinen of Finland representing Europe; and Raymond Hood of the United States representing North America. Hood had won the Chicago Tribune competition in 1922, designed the American Radiator building in 1924, and the Daily Press in 1928. While the Columbus Memorial Lighthouse competition was in progress, his office was busy designing the McGraw-Hill building in New York, and the Rockefeller Center. Eliel Saarinen became known in the U.S. for having won second place in the Chicago Tribune competition. He was vice-president of the International Planning Conferences, and active in a number of professional organizations. Wright, who substituted Hood in the 2nd stage of the competition, expressed surprise as to why Saarinen was representing “Europe from America.” However, it is clear Wright respected Saarinen’s work since he recognized him as “the most accomplished foreign eclectic.”²⁸ Acosta y Lara was president of the Uruguayan Society of Architects, professor at the University of Montevideo, and member of the Central University Council.

The project brief for the 1928 call for proposals read as follows:

“Given 2,500 acres of water-side property for what is to become a carefully restricted Pan-American Park; the problem first of all is to find the best site for the Columbus Memorial Lighthouse: – the best for a beacon to guide navigation both by sea and by air – the best for a commemorative monument – the best for a great international center.”²⁹

Competitors were asked to bring to bear on the design its proximity to the harbor and the “ancient city” across the Ozama River. They were to place the monument on a high point to be seen over the treetops, to incorporate a chapel and a museum, to provide at least one revolving “lantern”, and to when seen from a distance have a significance that would “grip the

imagination.” On a pragmatic level, recommendations were made for the selection of structure and construction materials: “properly protected structural steel frame, of reinforced concrete, faced up to a certain height with a nobler material.”³⁰ In the second stage designers were advised not to use glass because of its cost and fragility. The government of the Republic was also conditioned by the rules of the competition. First, the land was to stay as a restricted district property of the Government of the Dominican Republic. Secondly, the government would not allow the construction of “commercial structures skyscrapers, factories, billboards, or inferior houses.”

The Memorial’s design was to be supplemented with a master plan comprising an airport. It was to provide for ancillary facilities, mooring mast and one runway three hundred feet wide and one mile long; an “official center” with offices and residences for high government officials, including the president of the republic; and a small neighborhood of residences. Kelsey articulated a strong argument for locating an airport on this site. He envisioned “one great ethereal avenue uniting two vast continents (...) a heavenly highway.”³¹ Moreover, he argued “the most direct route from Montreal to Buenos Aires” passed over the Dominican Republic. This fact, he claimed, demonstrated without any doubt the selected site “could be a halfway station, and perhaps in time, the greatest airport of the Western Hemisphere.”³² Kelsey referred to the project as the “great Pan-American Airport.”³³ Ironically, in the program Kelsey recommended placing the airport and accessories as far away as possible from the Memorial. In agreement with the views of the time, for Kelsey airports were areas of noise and turmoil.³⁴

Kelsey also offered examples of new well designed airports in New York, Philadelphia, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. In New York he referred to plans for an airport on a central island in the harbor. In Philadelphia he described a plan of major proportions for the construction of a grand central terminal for ocean ships, railways, land-planes, seaplanes and airships with warehouses, hangars, and repair shops on a site next to the Delaware River.

In his program brief for the second stage of the competition, Kelsey added to his original recommendations building “hurricane-proof refuges for aircraft (...) stark and massive hangars for Zeppelins, and fortified slots in the earth for airplanes,”³⁵ in view of the “ravages of the recent hurricane.” He praised German and Scandinavian submissions for showing the best understanding of the problem. His report also included suggestions for the location and direction of the beam of light that was to guide aviators. Competitors were warned that the Aviation Department of the U.S. Department of Commerce advised against “a great vertical column of light shoot through the zenith.”³⁶ By this time the U.S. Army Air Service had standards for orientation markings and lighting, guidelines for

airport design, and was working on a rating system to evaluate airport facilities, services, and landing areas nationally.

The first stage of the competition attracted one thousand twenty six registrants. Of these, 456 projects were received from 48 nations, a total of 2,400 drawings.³⁷ A selection of the proposals submitted were shown in 1929 in the “art palaces” of El Retiro Park in Madrid, and later in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome. Ten projects were advanced to the second phase, and ten others received honorable mentions. On the selected finalists, the jury stated they were chosen for their promise, more than for their perfection.³⁸ Initially the jury of award had wanted to return the ten winning entries to each of its designers without publicly exhibiting them. However, the Central Society of Architects in Madrid demanded that the conditions established at the beginning of the competition were respected, and the projects were included in the exhibition.

Among the projects exhibited only ten projects were from Latin America. None of these projects, although a few were commended in Kelsey’s report, received awards. A few of these architects, such as Carlos Obregón Santacilia of Mexico, Flavio de Rezende Carvalho of Brazil, and Pedro A. Castro of Puerto Rico had well established reputations in their countries. Seven projects from the Soviet Union were exhibited. Two of the architects were well recognized at the time: Konstantin Melnikov and Nicolai Ladovsky. Melnikov had gained international notoriety in 1925 for the design of the Soviet Pavilion at the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels held in Paris. Ladovsky, a rationalist, represented the camp opposed to Melnikov’s seemingly intuitive design process. Kelsey noted that in Madrid, Melnikov’s was the most discussed design.³⁹ Acosta y Lara, in a lecture presented in 1946 described Melnikov’s design as rare and extravagant, product of a brain that seeks success through originality, but that fails when a superior inspiration is missing.⁴⁰

Kelsey expressed his personal views in every description in the report for the first stage. Some of the comments are insightful from our perspective. For example, he calls E.L. Harrison’s project, an architect from Memphis, “the jazz architecture of today.”⁴¹ He comments that Tony Garnier’s proposal for a tall, monumental circular railway climbing to the top of the lighthouse had made the King of Spain “dizzy.”⁴² Kelsey criticizes Soviet architects Krautikov, Warentzov, and Bounnie for ignoring the cultural context with their proposal for “an extension signaling device of great originality, but how far away it all is from mantillas.”⁴³ Kelsey seemed to have preferred proposals following the lines of the Spanish Mission style.

The jury for the second stage was composed again by Horacio Acosta y Lara and Eliel Saarinen. Frank Lloyd Wright substituted Raymond Hood. Although it is documented elsewhere that Hood’s health was delicate, and thus was unable to travel to Brazil, had Wright been chosen as an alternate? Hood and Wright were friends, although later their relation became

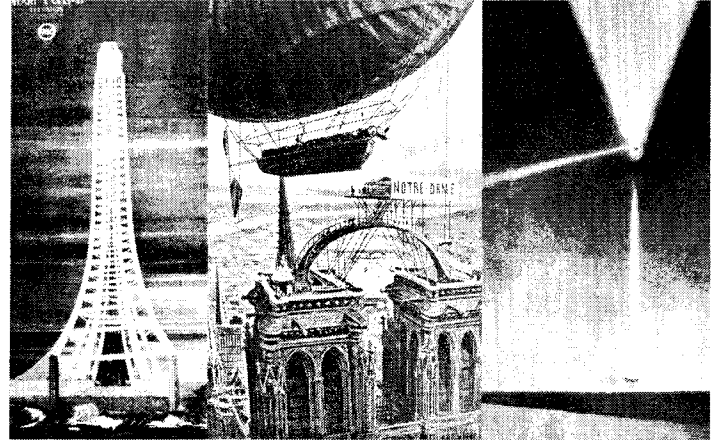


Fig. 1. left: Proposal submitted by Tony Garnier, Lyons, France; center: Notre Dame cathedral refurbished as a balloon station, Henri Lanos, 1905 (taken from *The History of the Future*); right: Proposal submitted by G. T. Krautikov, J.N. Warentzov, and A. W. Bounnie, Moscow, Russia.

strained. Could Hood have recommended Wright to Kelsey? Nevertheless, it proved advantageous for Wright to be part of the jury. During the Depression he spent his time lecturing⁴⁴ and this trip, his first to Brazil, helped increase his notoriety abroad. It coincided with Lúcio Costa’s resignation as Director of the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, and the students’ revolt insisting on his return.⁴⁵ Costa’s decision was caused by some of the faculty’s opposition to instituting a “functional” course parallel to the existing Beaux Arts course. The students celebrated Wright’s support of Costa. The latter was reinstated but was finally dismissed in 1933.⁴⁶

In his autobiography, Wright tells about the people he met and the places he visited with his wife while in Brazil, but provides little insight about the competition. It is also difficult to establish Wright’s position towards airports, because few explicit comments on this topic are readily available. The clearest statement is the programmatic description for the design of an automobile and airplane filling station and service station:

“And the aeroplane will be remodeled some day as a self-contained mechanical unit. Then it will pick up and continue this surface traffic as super-traffic in air, routed anywhere on earth. Then, and not until then, the airport will further develop as integral feature beside the highways, infinitely extending space-arteries and the possibilities of our modern life.”⁴⁷

The second stage of the competition was not as well documented as the first. We do know that in his autobiography Wright claims the winning proposal was the best. Only Acosta y Lara has left some observations to help reconstruct the review. He contended that most of the projects submitted to the second phase were minimally developed, if at all. And, two of them were replaced by completely new proposals.⁴⁸

The proposal by Joseph Lea Gleave, a 24-year-old recently graduated architect from Nottingham, England was given the first prize in final stage of the competition.⁴⁹ A one-line note records the attendance of the Master Builders' Association President to a dinner given by the "University Students' Architectural Society in Manchester on October 28 [1931] to honor Mr. Gleave.⁵⁰ The jury's comment as transcribed in the media was: "the finished memorial should appear in its stark simplicity as though reared by the elemental forces, which shaped the island itself."⁵¹ Years later Acosta y Lara wrote that in its first submission, the drawing quality was deficient, and the project seemed incomplete. But he commended it in its second submission for its symbolic power, simple construction, adaptation to a tropical climate, capacity to resist earthquakes, and the most affordable of all those submitted.⁵² Frank Lloyd Wright's personal views on the project were also related to its symbolism and contextual fit:

"Here is something finer in the idea, something a little more natural, a little more part of the historic plot it is to commemorate. The simple thing when you want to mark a spot is to drive in a post, and in the case of the most present-day monuments and skyscrapers the higher the post the better. This memorial is more like making a symbol on the ground and giving it architectural character that will endure centuries (...) In time, the jungle may grow over it, it may disappear from sight, it may be rediscovered."⁵³

Many years later, writing about his proposal, Gleave explained the Colossus of Rhodes, the pyramids and the Sphinx in Egypt, and Mayan temples inspired him. Gleave referred also to Columbus practice of planting a cross in all the landings. He imagined the Memorial Lighthouse: "under a clear sky, faced in white marble, (...) a streamlined symbol of modern movement."⁵⁴

THE LIGHTHOUSE IS BUILT

And the spotlight sent signals from the airship in the night air. And from the towers came spotlights back, thanking the architect with both politeness and a splendid play of lights.

— Paul Scheerbart.⁵⁵

A succession of events affected the realization of the project in its entire romantic magnificence and paradoxical eloquence. In 1930 the San Zenón hurricane struck Santo Domingo causing tremendous devastation. The same year General Leónidas Trujillo took power through a coup, disrupting diplomatic relations with some members of the Pan-American Union. No sanctions were issued. Trujillo changed the name of Santo Domingo to 'Trujillo City.' When the results of the competition were announced in 1931, the United States was deep into an economic depression.

Planes played an important role in the history of the Dominican Republic in the 20th century. In 1919, the U.S. Marines used airplanes to occupy the Island.⁵⁶ The U.S. forces left the Island in 1924 taking all the airplanes. In 1928, Trujillo established the Air Mail Military Institute without planes. Trujillo deployed a sophisticated strategy to ensure he could acquire airplanes for the Republic's air force. When he usurped power by force in 1930, the U.S. government placed limitations on his ability to buy airplanes. Nevertheless, strong ties with the U.S. military allowed the dictator to obtain two airplanes. Trujillo insisted on the connection between the airplanes and "Dominican sovereignty and progress."⁵⁷ By 1933 he had substituted U.S. veteran pilots with Cuban-trained Dominicans. Through sponsoring goodwill flights around Latin America and the exhibition of the winning entry in world expositions, he successfully linked the Memorial Lighthouse project with the "Trujillista" vision. The dictator envisioned the capital city renamed after him, serviced by a "sprawling airport dedicated to the Great Navigator."⁵⁸

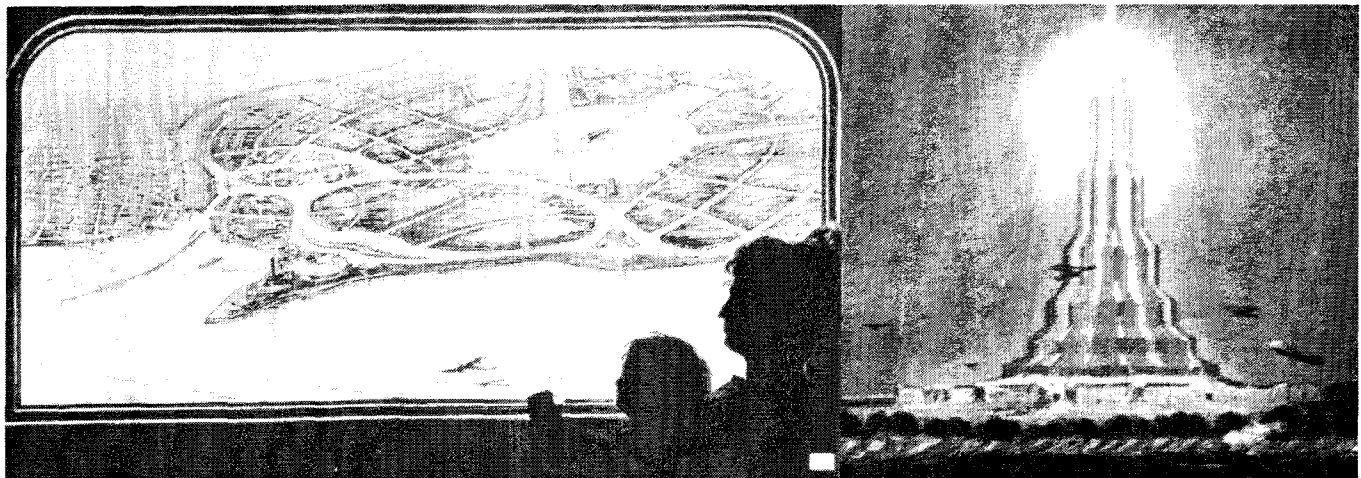


Fig. 2. left: Proposal submitted by Richard Thiede, Cologne, Germany; right: Finalist, Douglas D. Ellington, Asheville, North Carolina.

Trujillo's government provided Gleave with a sizeable amount of money⁵⁹ to build a model to be exhibited at the 1933 Chicago Exposition, and another to be shown at the New York Fair of 1939. The Goodwill Flights of 1937, intended to raise funds for the construction of the monument, were cut short when on their return home, three of the four planes crashed in a storm. A Dominican aviator piloted *Colón*, the plane that survived. This represented a victory for Trujillo's regime. *Colón* had been one of the two combat planes obtained through the U.S. Department of State in 1932.

To facilitate building the capital needed, in 1938 the Pan American Union determined the amount each nation would contribute. At the top of the list was the U.S., followed by Brazil and Mexico. The amount was calculated as a percentage of each nation's budget.⁶⁰ Starting in 1937 Pan American nations began issuing commemorative stamps to support the Memorial's construction. Even the Rotary Club International with chapters in North and South America approved a resolution to contribute a nominal sum for the construction.

The language of a resolution presented to Pan American Union members indicates that the Memorial was scheduled to begin construction in 1942, but participant nations had yet to release their contributions. A commemorative column was made from stone extracted from the ruins of the first city La Isabela, and was placed on the site in 1944 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of Santo Domingo.⁶¹ In 1945 the Directive Council of the Pan American Union in a resolution reminded nations to provide the amounts specified in 1938. Possibly focused on the idea of building the monument, in 1946 Trujillo appointed a committee to oversee the construction. His government signed a contract with Gleave who was to provide architectural services. Gleave submitted structural and architectural plans, specifications, design and budget in February of 1948.⁶² The Dominican Republic was covering all expenses.

Photographs of one of the models of the Lighthouse Memorial were apparently published in the RIBA Journal and in a newspaper in Buenos Aires in 1946. Acosta y Lara observing a "copious autochthonous Mexican decoration" was covering the façades of the Memorial, promptly contacted Saarinen and Wright to require compliance to the winning scheme. Saarinen responded that the elaborate elevation was a "decorative monstrosity."⁶³ He suggested that if the project was built with it, the members of the jury must be released from having any responsibility. Wright replied that he knew nothing about the situation. Yet, he concurred with Acosta y Lara's reasons for questioning the changes. The decoration was eliminated.

In 1948 in an apparent rush to build, Trujillo ordered the construction of a reclining cross on the Memorial's site to be demolished when the first section of the monument was erected. President Roosevelt sent a message to the inauguration of the reclining cross. In it he stressed the need for all Pan American nations to contribute funds committed to the construction of the Memorial. Roosevelt extolled the project as a constant reminder to the nations of the continent of the essential unity of ideals, interest, and purposes.⁶⁴ Gleave visited Santo Domingo in 1950 to establish the exact location of the monument, allowing for the clearing and leveling of the area. In 1955, Trujillo made funds available to further the construction of the monument, and hired the architectural engineers Virgilio Pérez Bernal and Leo Pou Richart. In 1960, Trujillo's regime was unleashing all its strength in a genocidal attack on government opponents. The Organization of American States (former Pan American Union) imposed sanctions.

Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. The construction of the Memorial was abandoned until the late 1980's, when it was incorporated into the works for the celebration of the fifth centenary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas.

A barrage of articles denouncing the injustices committed to build the monument, the cost incurred, and the problematic

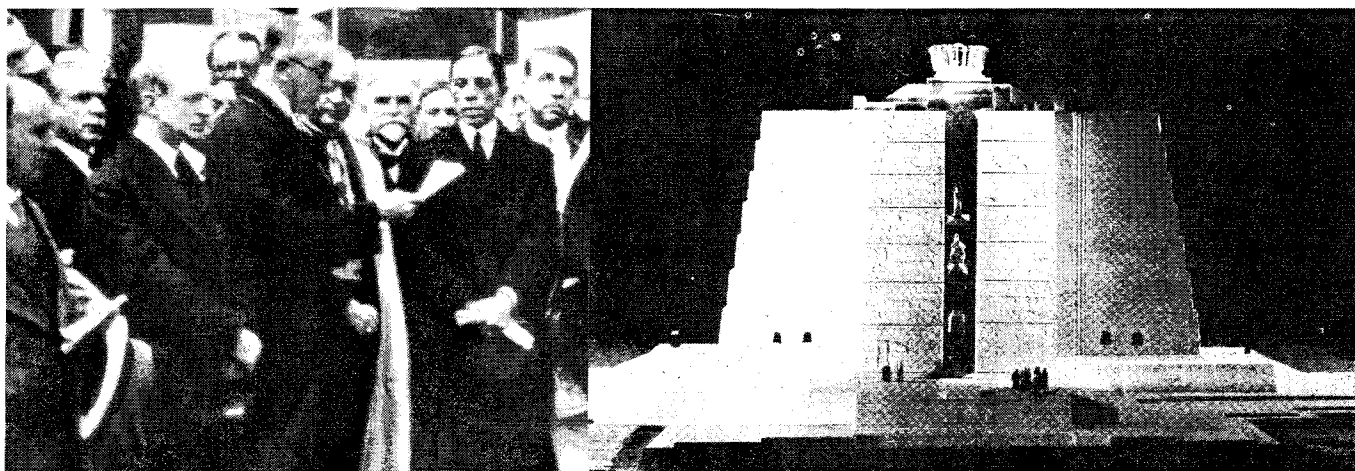


Fig. 3. left: Horacio Acosta y Lara reading jury of awards report in 1929; right: Gleave's controversial 1946 to 1948 model.



Fig. 4. Columbus Memorial Lighthouse: from left to right: North elevation, East elevation, and South elevation.

symbolism started appearing in the early nineties when construction was close to completion. The project, which had been reduced to a park and monumental reliquary box, was described in an article published in the U.S. as an “awkward, Latino-Bauhaus Leviathan, beached and peering out wistfully toward the water.”⁶⁵ It was also described as a “multi-storey car park,”⁶⁶ and a “Pharaonic project, a cream colored-pyramid laid out in the shape of a cross.”⁶⁷

The symbolical role of the project had lost validity. Gleave, the architect, had written the lighthouse beacon would be a “symbol of the Christianizing mission of the conquest of America.”⁶⁸ To further this intention the architect had planned to inscribe a quote from Columbus on the monument’s wall: “You shall put up crosses on all roads and pathways, for as, God be praised, this land belongs to Christians, the remembrance of it must be preserved for all time.”⁶⁹ Columbus’ mission in the Americas had been exposed as a massacre of the indigenous people. This redefinition of the “discovery of America” naturally diminished support for the project. Also, at the time of its inauguration, a story circulated about “the curse of Columbus,” which further complicated the meaning of the monument. The rumor claimed the curse was triggered when Columbus name was mentioned, or when an artifact celebrated his deeds.⁷⁰ The curse turned the monument into a sign of bad luck. This is verified by the fact that the lighthouse was also the materialization of Balaguer’s policies,⁷¹ who had bankrupted the country. Perhaps in an ironic way, the curse was used to explain President Balaguer’s absence from the inauguration ceremony, who was attending to his sister’s funeral.

The lighthouse construction required an investment of \$50 to \$70 million, a sum that was provided by the government of the Dominican Republic. The obscenity of spending such an enormous amount of money on a monument when there were innumerable unfulfilled pressing needs, was the subject of many news articles. Additionally, the capacity of the power grid to supply the energy necessary to bring to life the lighthouse 300,000-watt beam was seriously questioned. It was reported at the time of the inauguration that “when the lighthouse lights go on,” the lights of the neighboring residential area go off.⁷²

To finish the construction of the monument, the settlements that had sprouted in the area after their first removal in 1930

had to be eliminated. Albert Kelsey’s description of the site, in his ‘impressions’ book, indicates a colony of Chinese immigrant farmers had settled in the area. In the early nineties protest sparked because owners were minimally compensated for their houses, and a heavy-handed approach was used to remove them from their property. In fact, one of the articles pointed to the death of a man, who suffered a heart attack, after been informed that his house was to be demolished.⁷³ Other news articles denounced that houses were demolished while their owners were occupying them. To make matters worse, when it proved difficult to eliminate all the neighborhoods by the date of the inauguration, a wall was built to separate and hide them from the monument’s view. The wall described by the government as an “ornamental”⁷⁴ element was decorated with black crosses. Its detractors called it the “wall of shame.”⁷⁵ The architect that directed the monument’s construction, Teófilo Carbonell, argued the wall was “out of harmony with his building.”⁷⁶

Today Columbus Memorial Lighthouse sits on the immense esplanade oblivious to the children who ride their bikes on its ramps. It is a huge empty locked box waiting to be filled. Its walls have been inscribed with the names of the Pan American nations. The Pope’s message, delivered on the inauguration, has also been carved in stone: “recordando aquel año de 1492 en que las naves de España, guiadas por Colón, llevaron a esas tierras fecundas la semilla del evangelio.”⁷⁷ The black crosses have faded from the wall of shame, but the wall is still there.

NOTES

¹ Albert Kelsey, *Program and Rules of the Competition for the Selection of an Architect for the Monumental Lighthouse. Book II: Impressions of and Observations by an Architect.* (Pan-American Union), 164.

² “Final Design Selected for Columbus Memorial Lighthouse.” *Pencil Points*, vol.12, no.12, December 1931, 921-922.

³ Emilio José Brea García, “Un capítulo que falta en la historia de la arquitectura latinoamericana,” *Archivos de la Arquitectura Antillana*, año 1, no.2, septiembre 1996, 93-96; See also Omar Rancier, “Batman forever y el Faro a Colón. De Fritz Lang a Melnikov,” *Archivos de la Arquitectura Antillana*, año 1, no.1, mayo 1996, 77-80.

⁴ *Santo Domingo: Its destruction by the hurricane of September 3, 1930.* (Santo Domingo: Diario del Comercio, 1930).

⁵ Albert Kelsey, *Impressions*, 158.

- ⁶ French inventors were at the forefront of the development of dirigibles, a powered blimp that can be steered. Henri Giffard applied Meusnier's ideas. Charles Renard and Arthur Krebs, made improvements on Giffard's design. South America was represented by the Brazilian aeronaut Alberto Santos-Dumont, who developed his own design for a cylindrical balloon. Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin in Germany released the first prototype of a rigid frame airship in 1900. In the U.S., Thomas S. Baldwin built his first successful airship in 1904. Zeppelin's rigid frame airships were been used commercially to transport passengers by 1910.
- ⁷ "Meusnier, Jean Baptiste Marie." *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 99. ... 1993-1998 Microsoft Corporation.*
- ⁸ Eric Paul Roorda. "The Cult of the Airplane Among US Military Men and Dominicans during the U.S. Occupation and the Trujillo Regime," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. – Latin American Relations*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 269. It must be noted that international civil flying was initiated in 1919 with service from Hounslow, London to Le Bourget, Paris. "Air Service to Paris Attracts Londoners," *New York Times*, 27 Aug., 1919, p.4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857 – Current file).
- ⁹ William E. Brown Jr. "Pan Am: Miami's Wings to the World," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, n.23. (Florida Theme issue), 145.
- ¹⁰ C. J. Blow. *Airport Terminals*, Reprint. (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998), 8.
- ¹¹ The airship Graf Zepellin provided long-range luxury passenger service from Germany to the U.S. Geza Szurovy. *The American Airport*. (St. Paul, Minnesota: MBI Publishing Company, 2003), 80.
- ¹² William E. Brown Jr., Pan Am: Miami's Wings to the World.
- ¹³ In 1927 a group of sugar planters lead by H.L Harper had invested on an air line flying passengers from New York to Santo Domingo. "Air Service to Begin Soon in West Indies," *New York Times*, 5.Oct. 5 1927, 4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1987-Current file). Another airline (NYRBA), connected New York, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires. It merged with Pan Am in 1931.
- ¹⁴ William E. Brown Jr., Pan Am: Miami's Wings to the World, 151.
- ¹⁵ John A. Stuart, *The Gray Cloth: Paul Scheerbart's Novel on Glass Architecture*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), p.21.
- ¹⁶ Henri Lanos "Notre-Dame gars aérienne" illustration for the article "Ce que je ferai ce que l'on fera" by Santos-Dumont in *Je sais tout*, 1905. Paris; reproduced in C. Canto and O. Faliu. *The History of the Future*. (Paris Flammarion, 1993). Chapter 0. Figure 12. 33.
- ¹⁷ United Air Terminal, *Life*, 1910; reproduced in *The History of the Future*. Chapter 1, Figure 7. 44.
- ¹⁸ Referring specifically to the U.S: "With a handful of exceptions, architects were [about late 1920's] largely absent from the field of airport development." Geza Szurovy, *The American Airport*, 57.
- ¹⁹ This argument is consistent with Esther Da Costa Meyer's analysis of Sant'Elia's work. Da Costa Meyer maintains Sant'Elia's dynamic volumetric compositions are poorly matched by the stiffness of his representations of airplanes. On an study of his 'Station for airplanes and trains' drawings, Da Costa concludes: "Sant'Elia was not capable of suggesting the idea of flight, let alone speed, and the airplane appears as if stuck to the sky." Esther Da Costa Meyer. *The Work of Antonio Sant'Elia*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 125.
- ²⁰ "Prizes are awarded for airport design," *The New York Times*, 9.Dec. 1929, p.22; ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1857 – current file).
- ²¹ Geza Szurovy. *The American Airport*. 58-59.
- ²² "Airport Architecture," *The New York Times*, 10.Feb.1929, p.90; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857-current file).
- ²³ Albert Kelsey, *Impressions*, 38.
- ²⁴ "Albert Kelsey" <<http://www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/kelsey.htm>>
- ²⁵ "Columbus Light in West Indies to be a Pan-American Memorial," *The New York Times*, 10.June. 1923. P.XX4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857-current file).
- ²⁶ "Light 300 feet high proposed to mark tomb of Columbus," *The Washington Post*, 13.October. 1923. P.4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1954).
- ²⁷ "Dominican Beacon Honors Columbus", *The New York Times*, 9.Apr. 1948, p.16; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857-current file). Lindbergh was hired as a consultant for Pan Am. In 1928 he initiated path-finding goodwill flights to stimulate direct flights from the U.S. to South America across the Caribbean. "Project air lines to link hemisphere", *The New York Times*, 2.Jan. 1928, p.2; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857-current file).
- ²⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography*. (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), 515.
- ²⁹ Albert Kelsey, *Program and Rules of the Competition for the Selection of an architect for the Monumental Lighthouse which the nations of the world will erect in the Dominican Republic to the memory of Christopher Columbus*. (The Pan-American Union, 1928), 17.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 37.
- ³³ Albert Kelsey, *Impressions*, 41.
- ³⁴ In a 1928 article a journalist writing for The New York Times attests: "the American airport at the moment is a blot on the landscape – a bigger eyesore than the old railway station used to be in the urban scene." He proposes instead "a sort of park centre viewed from the ground, and from the air appear as a chief ornament in a Persian carpet." H. I. Brock . "Giving Thought to our New Airports", *The New York Times*, 30 December 1928. P.64; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857 – Current File)
- ³⁵ Albert Kelsey, *Program and Rules of the Second Competition for the Selection of an Architect for the Monumental Lighthouse (...) Christopher Columbus* [with report of the international jury], (The Pan-American Union, 1930), 150.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ³⁷ Albert Kelsey, *Program and Rules*, 155.
- ³⁸ *Idem.*, Report of the international jury, 7.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ⁴⁰ "[Uno de esos] casos raros y extravagantes, producto de cerebros que buscan el éxito haciendo algo que jamás se haya visto, procedimiento que puede dar resultado cuando lo inspira el genio, pero que cae en lo ridículo cuando falta esa inspiración superior." *El Faro a Colón*, año II, v.II, Enero-Abril 1951, p.39.
- ⁴¹ Albert Kelsey, Report of the international jury, 91.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 118.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ⁴⁴ Brendan Gill, *Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 325. Frank Lloyd Wright sailed for Rio de Janeiro on September 19 aboard the steamship American Legion of the Munson line. "Frank Lloyd Wright Sails," *The New York Times*, 20 Sept. 1931, p.31; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The New York Times (1857 – Current file). He returned to the U.S. on November 6, 1931 on the Western Prince of the Furness line. Shortly after, he lectured at the New School for Social Research in New York on his impressions of modern architecture in South America. ["Briton's Design Wins for Columbus Crypt," *The New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1931, p.22; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857 – Current file).
- ⁴⁵ Zilah Quezado Deckker, *Brazil Built*, London & New York: Spion Press, 2001), 15.
- ⁴⁶ Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, *Afonso Eduardo Reidy*, (Portugal: Editorial Blau, 2000), 13.
- ⁴⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography*, 329.
- ⁴⁸ Conferencia arquitecto Horacio Acosta y Lara en la Sociedad de Arquitectos del Uruguay. In *Boletín: El Faro a Colón*, año 2, n.2, Enero-Abril 1951.
- ⁴⁹ The Los Angeles Times prefaced the announcement of the Memorial Lighthouse competition winner indicating the general public had received "very little information" about its results. "Young Britisher Wins Lighthouse Contest," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Nov. 1931, p.B16; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1886 – current file).
- ⁵⁰ *The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, Third Series, 21 November 1931, vol.39, no.2, 68.

- ⁵¹ "Columbus Memorial a Unique Design", *The New York Times*, 15 Nov. 1931, p.X16; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1857-current file).
- ⁵² Conferencia arquitecto Horacio Acosta y Lara, 44-45
- ⁵³ "Columbus Memorial a Unique Design."
- ⁵⁴ *Boletín: El Faro a Colón*, año 1, n.1, Septiembre 1950.
- ⁵⁵ John A. Stuart. *The Gray Cloth*, 104.
- ⁵⁶ Eric Paul Roorda. "The Cult of the Airplane Among U.S. Military Men and Dominicans during the U.S. Occupation and the Trujillo Regime." 269-310.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.
- ⁵⁹ Gleave received \$15,000 to build each model. During this time Gleave may have commissioned the English sculptor Eric Kennington to developed plans and models for the Memorial.
- ⁶⁰ "El Faro de Colón será realidad en breve." *Boletín: El Faro a Colón*, año 6, n.12, Mayo-Agosto 1955.
- ⁶¹ *Boletín: El Faro a Colón*, año 1, n.1, Septiembre 1950.
- ⁶² *Ibid.* In 1951 Gleave became Director at Edinburgh's School of Architecture.
- ⁶³ Conferencia arquitecto Horacio Acosta y Lara, 50-52.
- ⁶⁴ *Boletín: El Faro a Colón*, año 1, n.1, Septiembre 1950, 68.
- ⁶⁵ Amy Wilentz. "Balaguer builds a lighthouse." *The Nation*, 21 May 1990, p.702-704.
- ⁶⁶ "Columbus Will Have Slept Here." *Economist*, 6 Jul. 1991, p.42.
- ⁶⁷ Thomas H. Stahel. *America*, 31 Oct. 1992, p.315-317.
- ⁶⁸ *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, vol.66, May 1932.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ Jose de Cordova. "If We Told You Who This Story Is About, We Might Be Jinxed". *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1992, Section A, Page 1, column 4. It is puzzling why a newspaper dealing with financial transactions dedicated space to a seemingly unrelated occurrence, a folk tale.
- ⁷¹ "Balaguer Builds a Lighthouse: Dominican Elections." *Nation*, 21 May 1990.
- ⁷² Michael J. Rosenfeld. "Dominicans and the Wall of Shame," *The Nation*, 24 Feb. 1992, pp.217+
- ⁷³ James Ferguson. "A lighthouse that Won't Pierce the Gloom." *Progressive*, October 1991, p.24-26.
- ⁷⁴ Raymond K. DeHainaut. *The Christian Century*, July 29-Aug. 5, 1992, p.704-705.
- ⁷⁵ Michael J. Rosenfeld. "Dominicans and the Wall of Shame."
- ⁷⁶ Raymond K. DeHainaut. *The Christian Century*.
- ⁷⁷ Translation: "Remembering the year of 1492 when Spanish vessels, guided by Columbus, brought to fertile lands the seed of the Gospel."