

A life at work in architecture

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Just weeks ago, Arthur Q. Davis enlisted the help of the Southeastern Architectural Archive at Tulane to search for materials for his latest book. When he died on Wednesday (Nov. 30) at age 91, the architect whose visionary firm designed the Louisiana Superdome was working on a retrospective about a Cold War-era project.



Arthur Q. Davis, center, stands with fellow architects Nathaniel C. Curtis Jr., left, and Walter J. Rooney Jr., right, with their model of the Worcester, Mass., public library in 1964. (Photo by Ed Lettau, from the Southeastern Architectural Archive at Tulane)

The new book was on Davis' still-sharp mind during an interview in September for a feature article published in the fall issue of [Tulane magazine](#).

The modernist era of architecture in New Orleans was the interview topic, but Davis, a 1941 and 1942 Tulane architecture graduate, also wanted to talk about the upcoming book. In it he would recall what it was like to work on the huge Free University of Berlin Medical Center in the divided Germany of the 1960s.

The lifelong New Orleanian, along with his partner, Nathaniel Curtis, designed award-winning projects that changed the city's landscape, though some eventually were demolished, such as the Rivergate Exhibition Center, St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church and several public schools.

“There are a few that should have been saved,” said Davis. “Unfortunately people have no sense of preserving buildings of real significance.”

His prolific firm's work ranged from hotels in Aruba and Scotland, to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, to the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, to Stern Hall and the University Center at Tulane. He remembered with pride the renovation of the Superdome after Hurricane Katrina (“We thought it had a fighting chance at being saved”) and his time at Tulane, where he met his wife, Mary, who was attending Newcomb College.

“I was lucky because I got a chance to work with really important people in the history of modern architecture,” he said. A [memorial service](#) will be held today (Dec. 5) at 4 p.m. at the New Orleans Museum of Art.