ISLAM COMES TO WASHINGTON
By JANE OTTEN
New York Times (1857-Current file); Aug 8, 1954; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 200
pg. X21

ISLAM COMES TO WASHINGTON

By JANE OTTEN

WASHINGTON — The Moslem call to prayer may soon be a familiar sound in Washington, for the finishing touches are being put on the first mosque to be built in the nation's capital. Conceived and financed jointly by eleven Moslem countries with diplomatic representation in Washington, the mosque is one of the newest additions to Massachusetts Avenue "Embassy Row." With its slender, graceful 160-foot-high minaret, the mosque dominates the skyline in northwest Washington.

The mosque will be authentic in every detail. It has been carefully lined up at a 45-degree angle to the street so that the worshipers will face Mecca; the minaret towers over a balcony for the muezzin or prayer-caller; verses from the Koran are inscribed around the outside of the building; tiles, chandeliers and other key accessories will come from all over the Moslem world.

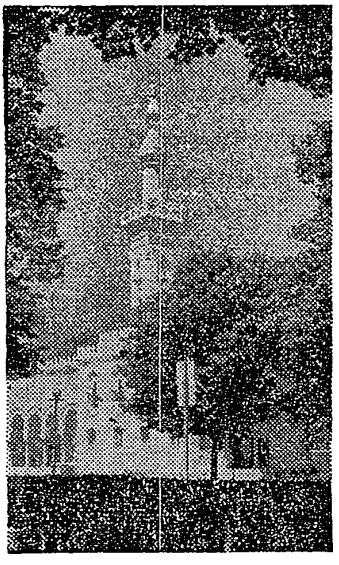
The mosque itself is the main part—but just one part—of an ambitious Islamic Center that will finally cost more than $1,500,000. The entrance to the mosque is through a splendid marble portico; on either side of the portico large, rectangular two-story wings will house a library, museum of fine arts, lecture halls and other facilities to teach both Moslems in Washington and Americans about Islamic culture. The mosque rises high above these wings.

'Mecca' for Tourists

Even now, before work is completed, the Islamic Center and the mosque have become a regular stop on the Washington sight-seeing itinerary. Names written in Arabic with Egyptian or Iranian addresses alternate in a guest book with names written in boarding school handwriting of visitors from Honesdale, Pa., and Kansas City, Mo.

Dr. Mahmoud Hoballah, an erudite Egyptian professor of psychology who heads the Islamic Center, estimates that visitors are now going through the center at the rate of 2,000 or more a week. Groups of Boy Scouts, high school seniors, women's clubs and other visitors to Washington all stop off for inspection trips. "Whenever a group comes to Washington now from any part of the United States it comes to the mosque," Dr. Hoballah says, half-proud of the interest in his building and half-regretful that playing host takes up so much of his limited time.

Handsome New Mosque Unique Site for Tourists Visiting the Capital



New York Times (Tames)
Minaret in Washington.

Work started on the building in mid-1951, under the direction of A. Joseph Howar, a Moslem who is a Washington builder and who is donating his services. The structure itself is built entirely of American materials, mainly from a white rock known as Alabama stone. The design, however, was completed in Egypt, and from abroad are coming or have come such items for interior decoration as colored tiles from Turkey, Jordan and other countries; a magnificent chandelier from Egypt; fabulous carpets from Iran; draperies from Pakistan and Afghanistan; and an inlaid mother-of-pearl pulpit from Egypt.

Dr. Hoballah says work on the mosque should be finished late this year. Right now there are delays while the workmen wait for some of the accessories coming from abroad. However, visitors can see the mosque in its present form any day but Sunday, since men are working on it and it is open.

The wings are now practically completed. Soon Dr. Hoballah and his aides will get to work filling up the library and starting the museum. In the fall, they will start regular classes in languages, Moslem culture and other subjects. They also hope to start publishing a monthly magazine about the Moslem world.

Originally the structure was conceived merely as a mosque or worship place. Later the participating countries got the idea that a center of cultural activity was also needed, to bring about a better understanding in America of the Islamic culture and philosophy.

Some lecture work has been going on for many months. Every other Tuesday evening, in a large, chair-filled hall in the completed basement of the mosque, Dr. Hoballah or some associate has been giving a lecture, open to the public, about some aspect of Moslem culture or religion. Moreover, groups coming to look the place over frequently make advance arrangements for special day-time talks on such topics as the place of women, types of government or social security in Moslem countries.

For the time being, the hall is also used as the place of prayer. Every Friday noon a small group of Moslems gathers to pray there. Dr. Hoballah says non-Moslem visitors are welcome to sit quietly and watch the prayer session, though they cannot take part. When the mosque is open, visitors will be able to watch the prayer sessions there. However, in the mosque itself there will be no chairs and the visitors will either have to sit on the floor or stand. Dr. Hoballah explains that Moslem praying involves alternately standing and then kneeling and prostrating oneself, with no sitting. Hence, no chairs in the mosque, which will be large enough to hold more than 1,200 persons.

A Recorded Muezzin

One thing has not been settled yet: whether to use a muezzin or a tape-recording. The function of the prayer-caller, Dr. Hoballah says, is that of the church bell in Christian worship—"to tell the people that the time has come to turn from worldly work and to pray." The Moslem religion, he says, permits mechanical prayer-calling, such as by a recording.

The center is now using as the call to prayer for its Friday noon prayer sessions a tape-recording made of a chant in Egypt. But when the prayer sessions move upstairs to the mosque proper, the center may use a real, live muezzin on occasion, if one is available.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.