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New Buildings Add Visual Attraction

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THOUSANDS of visiting bankers were walking the midtown streets of Washington this week. They had wives on their arms but their eyes were on the new building sites that forced them to detour into the streets or squeeze into narrow wooden walkways.

Much like Washingtonians, the visitors commented on the tempo of new construction. Some who had attended the banking convention here in 1953 could appreciate the startling above-ground changes wrought by wrecking crews, architects, developers and builders.

In the last few years, the Nation's Capital has seen elements of a new community arise and be filled in the Southwest. At the moment, the Harbour Square and Tiber Island developments are under way. In Foggy Bottom the long-delayed Watergate apartment-hotel-townhouse complex will be started soon. Downtown Progress, which is particularly interested in the midtown area east of 15th st. to North Capitol, can list nearly 20 buildings recently completed or started or ready for excavation. The sites now go to 20th st. and north above R st.

When a Washington Post photographer was aloft recently in a baby blimp, he aimed his camera at a section of downtown where construction has pushed farther to the northwest. The accompanying photo happened to center on St. Matthew's Cathedral, a downtown landmark on Rhode Island ave., just off Connecticut. A visual sweep around this area finds the new landmarks of tomorrow rising in all directions.

The nearly finished National Geographic Society building on 17th st. is already established as a dominant form of monumental architecture. It is one among about 30 new buildings at various stages of construction. They account for at least \$150 million in real property.

Participating in the building surge are Brookings Institution, the National Education Association, National Geographic, Georgetown University, the National Chemical Society, Johns Hopkins University, American Psychological Association, American Trucking, and the National Lumber Manufacturers Association.

Too often Washington's construction vitality can be kissed off breezily as the result of Government growth. That influence on downtown construction cannot be ignored. But veteran real estate people and visiting bankers do not downgrade the contribution to economic balance and solidarity made by association buildings, hotels and downtown apartments.

If the Nation's bankers return here in 1973, they'll find the mammoth Washington Hilton in business up on Temple Heights and they'll also be recalling the new International Inn as an old friend and find the dynamic Thomas Circle area remarkably unlike its 1963 image.