

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
The Mall, between Maryland Avenue, 3rd Street, Jefferson Drive, and 4th Street, SW

Report to the Smithsonian Institution

July 1, 1999

Abstract

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) submits revisions to preliminary site and building plans for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). The preliminary site and building plans, approved in November, 1996, have been revised to adjust internal floor-to-ceiling height, internal circulation and visitor queuing; to incorporate the northwest corner of the site into the Mall Sidewalk system; and to develop further the organic and naturalistic character of the proposed building and its setting.

Authority

D.C. Code, sec. 5-432, and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71d).

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the revised preliminary site and building plans for the NMAI, on the Mall between Maryland Avenue, 3rd Street, Jefferson Drive, and 4th Street, SW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.00)-40644.
- **Compliments** the SI and its design team for the continuing evolution of the design, and anticipates the further development of the site's water and landscape features and the building's entrances, windows, and wall surfaces.
- **Requests** that SI, in preparation of final site and building plans:
 - Provide material samples and a list of plant species, and information about other site elements such as fencing.
 - Prepare and submit its Transportation Management Plan as soon as possible, now that the staff levels are known.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its November 7, 1996 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary site and building plans for the NMAI. The Commission requested that in preparation of final site and building plans, the SI continue to refine the streetscape treatment to retain the Mall sidewalk grid; and provide further information about the proposed landscape design, including the herb garden, wetland areas, proposed paths, fencing and planting.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

The revised preliminary site and building plans represent a further development of the preliminary plans approved by the Commission on November 7, 1996.

Site

On the south side of the Mall, the site is bounded on the north by Jefferson Drive, on the south by Maryland and Independence Avenues, on the east by 3rd Street, and on the west by 4th Street, SW. The prominent site is near the U.S. Capitol and Botanic Gardens to the east; the open great panels of the Mall and the National Gallery of Art's East Wing to the north; the National Air and Space Museum to the west; and the Department of Health and Human Services Building to the south. Currently used as recreational open space, this site is the last on the Mall designated for a building.

Program

The museum program calls for a 324,186-square-foot building with a footprint of 49,331 square feet. The building is composed of a basement and five above-grade-levels including two mechanical mezzanine levels (3rd and 4th floor). The museum will accommodate 333 employees.

Design Concept

The design concept derives from Native American principles:

- The acknowledgement of the four cardinal points, the earth and sky, and the solstice solar positions.
- Strong connections between the indoors and the outdoors.
- Respect for the earth as a living organism and for the value of the straightforward way in which objects are made.

REVISIONS TO PREVIOUS PLANS

The following is a brief summary of the revisions to the 1996 approved preliminary submission:

- The northwest corner of the site will be an extension of the museum site paving (jet mist granite) to announce the museum's presence and set the tone for entering the site at this critical location. The jet mist granite is proposed for all on-site paving, the Tribal Recognition Wall, and the bench wall. Perimeter sidewalks will be the exposed aggregate called for in the Mall Streetscape Manual, except at the northwest corner. A water cascade at the building's northwest corner will dramatically link building wall to water habitat.
- The habitat zones will be planted with native species of particular importance to Native American tradition and culture. A common feature of Native American wayfinding, key marker trees will be planted at the principal entrances to the museum.
- The relocation of the elevator penthouse farther south on the roof will improve the appearance of the dome in relation to rooftop mechanical elements and improve the sight lines to the U.S. Capitol.
- The surface of the façade is a stratified stone mass; the lower courses are large, rough stone blocks of Kasota limestone that express massiveness and the transition from earth to building. The stone courses narrow, expressing compression, as the walls rise.
- Louvers and openings for fresh air intake are disguised behind undulating masonry curves. The proportions of the glazing panels (windows) are narrower and more sinuous.
- The elevator core has been relocated to the south side of the museum to be closer to visitor facilities. This will simplify movement throughout the most traveled areas of the museum. The gift shop has been relocated to the north side, where it becomes part of the open flow of walls and space surrounding the central Potomac atrium.
- An additional 2.4 meters is added to the height of the building to achieve adequate floor-to-ceiling heights on the interior of the building.
- The redesign of the solstice window on the south façade and the continuing evolution of the entrances have enhanced the organic character of the building.

CONSULTATION WITH SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The SI and its architects have met with staff during the past several months to discuss the continuing revisions to the building and its site. Some staff suggestions have been

incorporated in the revision now before the Commission. Some will be studied in the next design phase.

EVALUATION

Staff is pleased with the evolution of the site and building design and recommends that the revised preliminary site and building plans be approved.

A number of refinements enhance the spiritual, organic, and sculptural character of the building. Staff particularly notes:

- The evolution of the undulating and organic quality of the masonry skin in order to enhance the naturalistic expression of the stone, water, and habitat plantings, as well as to disguise air intakes and vents.
- The flow of the jet mist granite into the concrete aggregate sidewalk grid at the northwest corner of the site as a means of drawing visitors into a different and less formal micro-environment.
- The relocation of the rooftop elevator penthouse farther away from the dome.
- The repositioning of some interior elements to improve visitor circulation and the naturalistic flow of the open spaces.

For the next phase of review, staff recommends that SI continue studying:

- The garage parking ramp on the western side of the building, so that the connection between the building and the landscape is as strong and uninterrupted as possible.
- The entrances, so that they are fully commensurate with the organic qualities of the masonry skin.
- The window openings (glazing panels and individual windows), to ensure that they fully articulate the organic, naturalistic qualities of the masonry skin.
- The possible use of curved glass rather than faceted glass in the glazing panels.
- The integration of the water elements, particularly at the southeast corner of the building, with the naturalistic character of the masonry and the habitat plantings.
- The continuation of rusticated masonry above the base, perhaps intermittently, to further distinguish the building from the neoclassical buildings on the Mall.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 9, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies participating.

The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

The Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the revised preliminary site and building plans at its June 17, 1999 meeting.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed museum would be located on the National Mall, which is a national landmark property and is a designated Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed facility would also be located adjacent to Independence and Maryland Avenues, SW, which are designated Special Streets in the Element. The proposed revised plans are consistent with the applicable policies relating to the protection and enhancement of historic properties and Special Streets and Special Places. The proposal is also consistent with the Comprehensive Plan employee parking requirements for the Mall area.

Master Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Development Concepts for the Mall, approved by the Commission on September 15, 1966, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.40(05.12)-24636.

National Historic Preservation Act

The SI has concluded its consultation responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act, and is proceeding with the terms of those requirements, including the well-publicized archaeological investigation of the site.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Smithsonian Institution and the Executive Director determined that this proposal did not require an environmental impact statement. In lieu, thereof, the Smithsonian submitted an environmental assessment (EA) in September 1993. In May 1996, the Commission took responsibility for the scope and content of the environmental assessment.

A museum at the proposed site would slightly affect stormwater quality due to increased discharge volume. On-site stormwater would be conveyed through existing lines surrounding the Mall site. No stormwater quality control currently exists on-site, but the Smithsonian might install an underground concrete holding tank to filter and improve water quality before it is discharged to the combined sewer.

The museum would affect the limited amount of available parking by increasing parking demand in the area. Visitors would compete for parking spaces at nearby lots and in area garages. The Smithsonian would only provide 15 parking spaces, of which 10 would be assigned to employees, based on grade and seniority. Tour buses may potentially displace approximately 16 automobile parking spaces. The EA identifies several short-term parking spaces and long-term parking lots in and near the Downtown where buses could park.

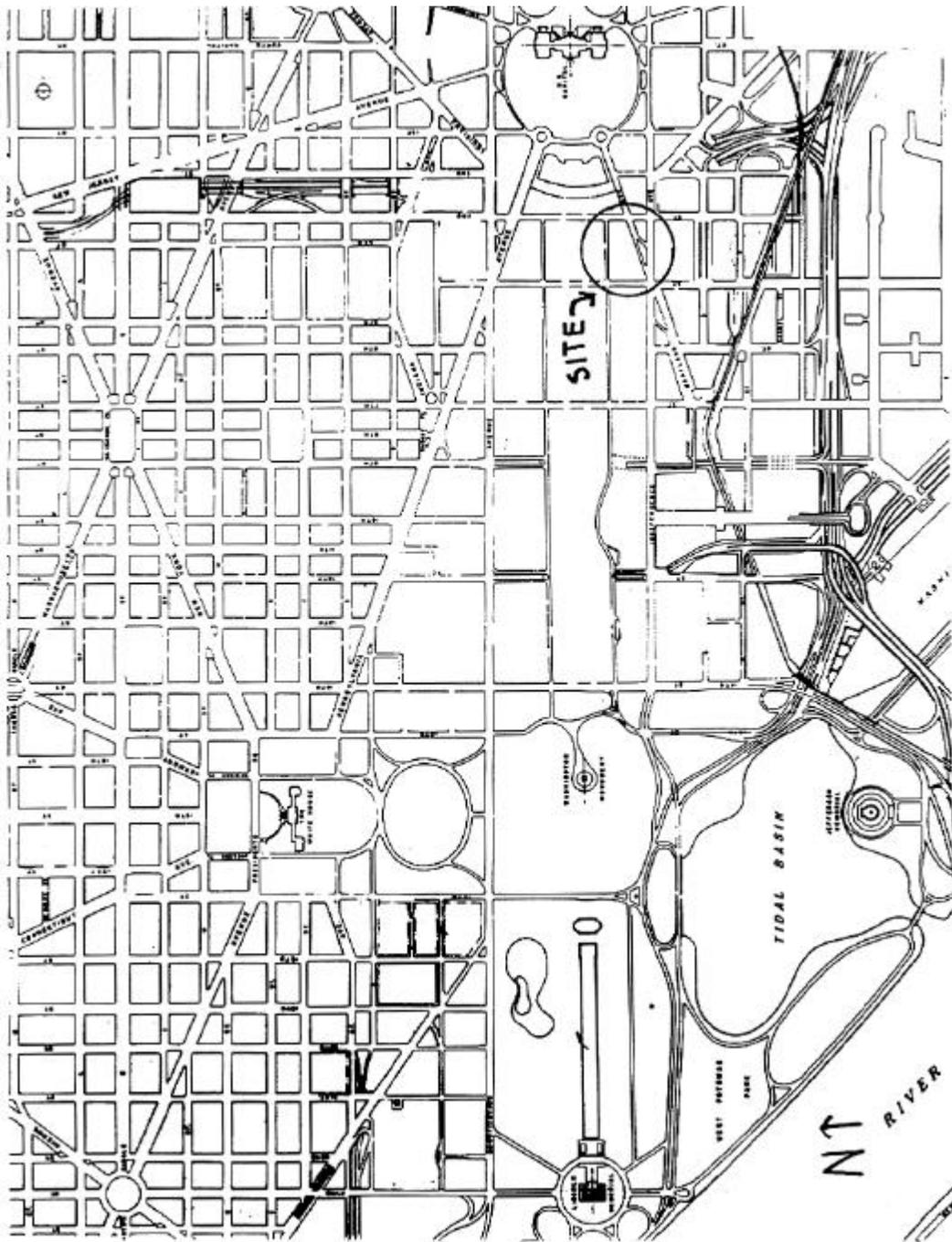
The deficit between parking supply and demand will likely encourage employees and visitors to use mass transit, as is the case with other museums on the Mall. Several bus routes and the Federal Center SW, and L'Enfant Plaza Metrorail Stations serve the site. The Smithsonian plans to increase the estimated 1.4 average passenger occupancy to 1.6 through the implementation of a Transportation Management Program (TMP). Potential TMP strategies include provision of a shuttle bus route to the Suitland facility, participation in Metro's subsidy program, and provision of lockers and racks for bicycles and showers for employees who bicycle or walk to work.

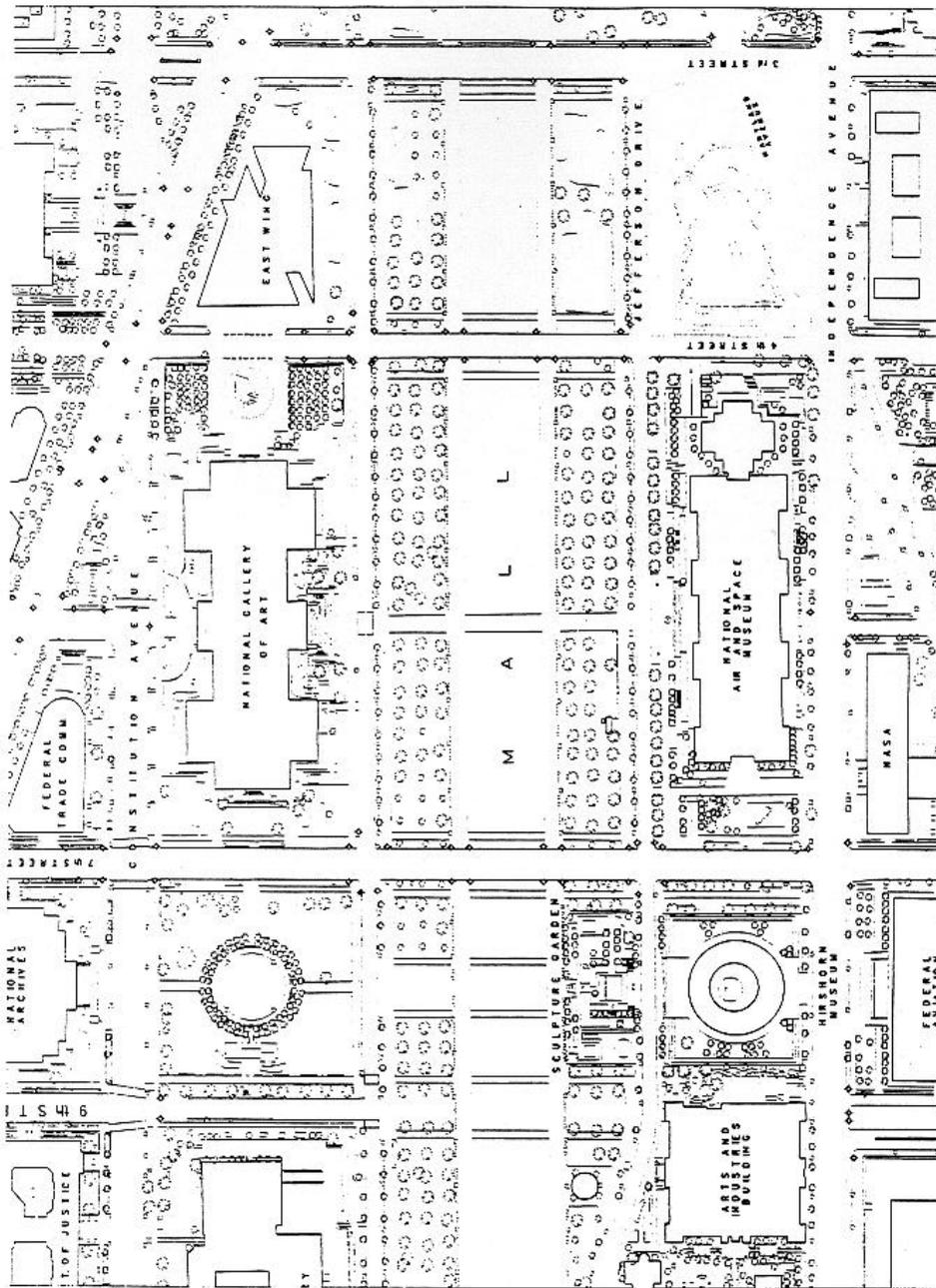
Traffic associated with the museum will not significantly affect the levels-of-service (LOS) at surrounding roadway intersections. The LOS at each intersection would operate at acceptable levels of "D" or better. Associated traffic would not noticeably affect ambient air or noise quality.

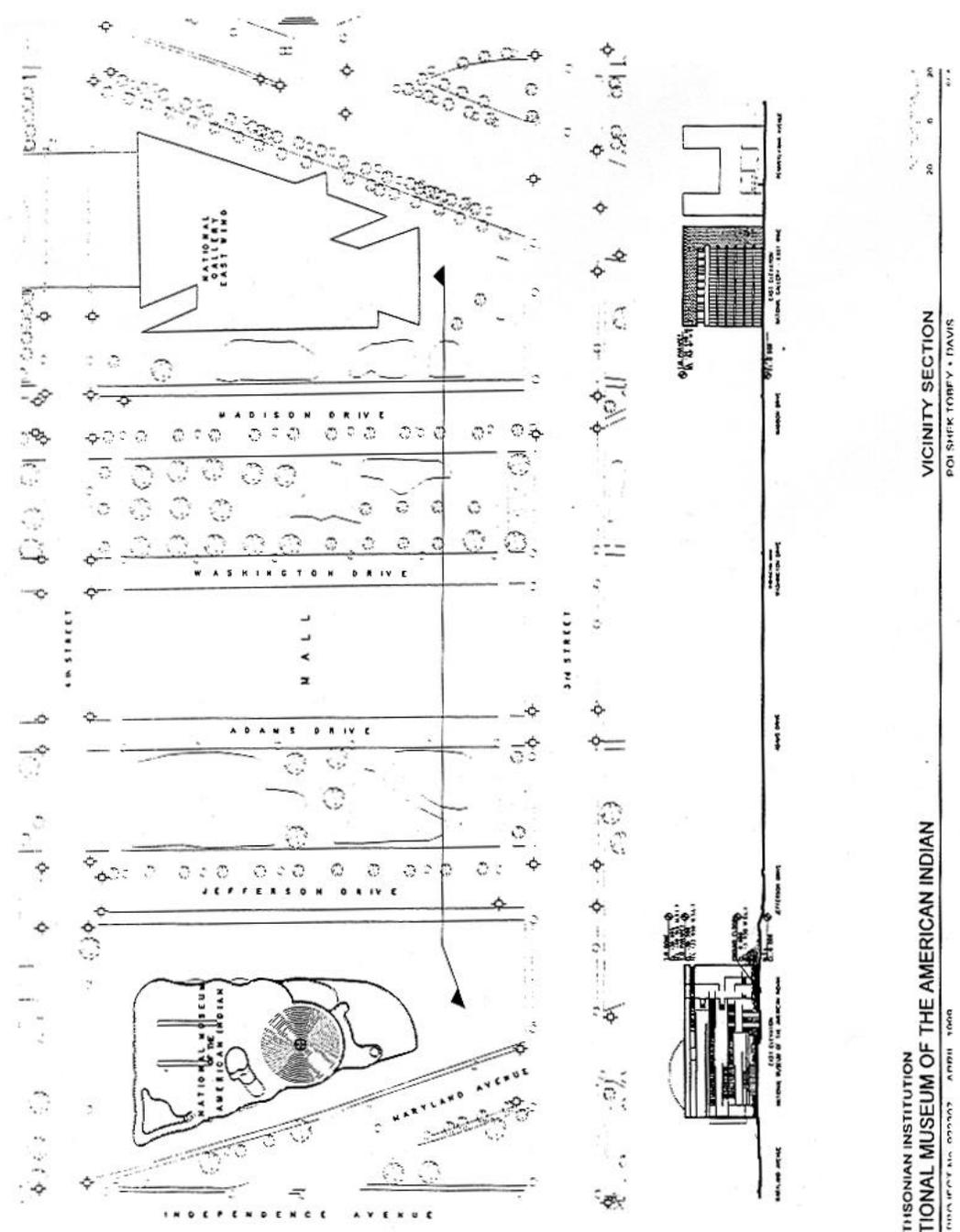
Prior to the submittal of final plans, the Smithsonian should indicate its schedule for preparing a TMP. Since the number of employees is known, staff suggests that the TMP be prepared before completion of final plans. The TMP should follow Commission guidelines regarding firm commitments to strategies, descriptions of monitoring measures, and a summary of the TMP's relationship to local and regional requirements.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

This project was recommended in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, FYs 1999-2003, adopted by the Commission on July 9, 1998.

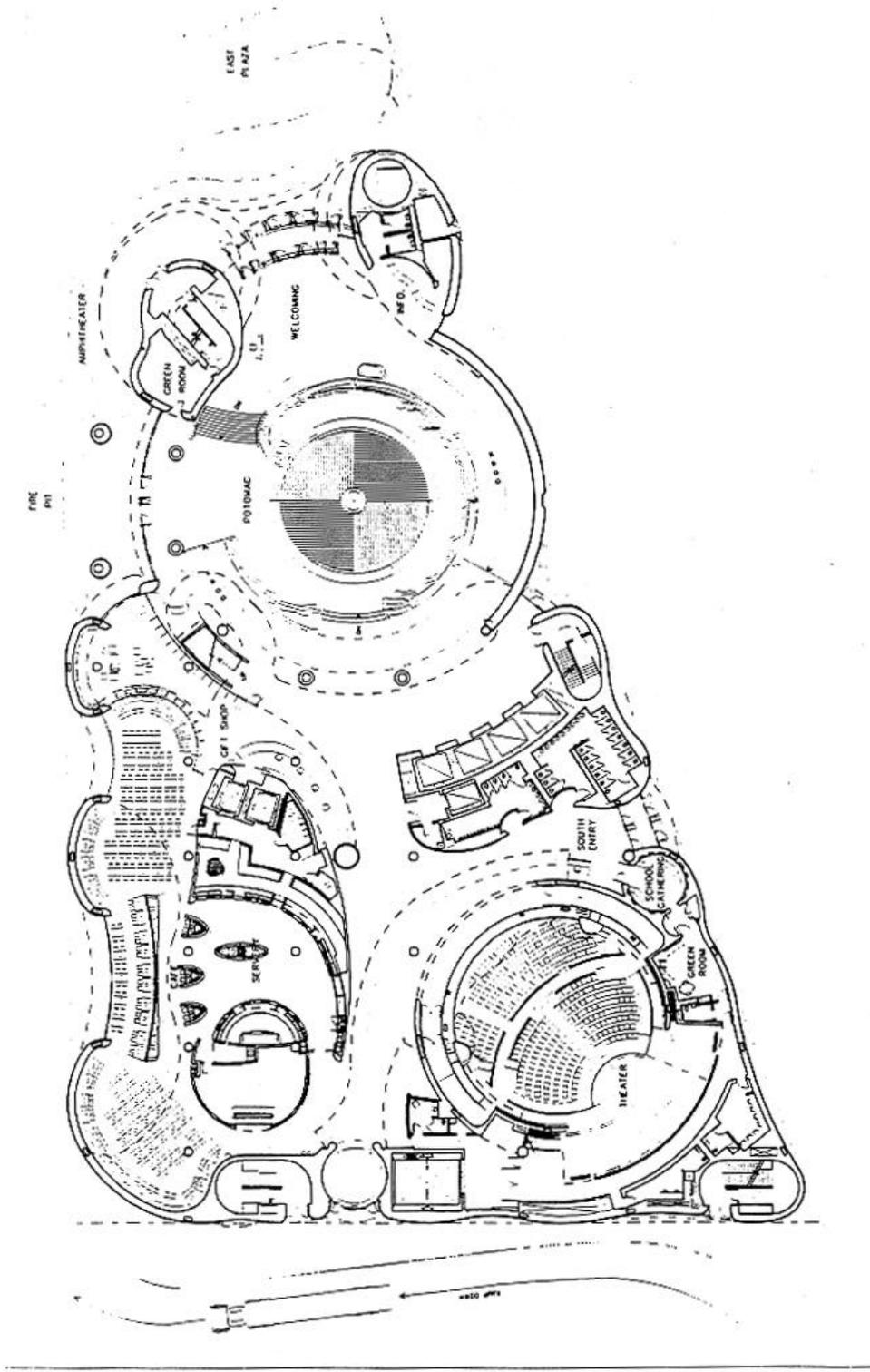






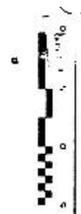
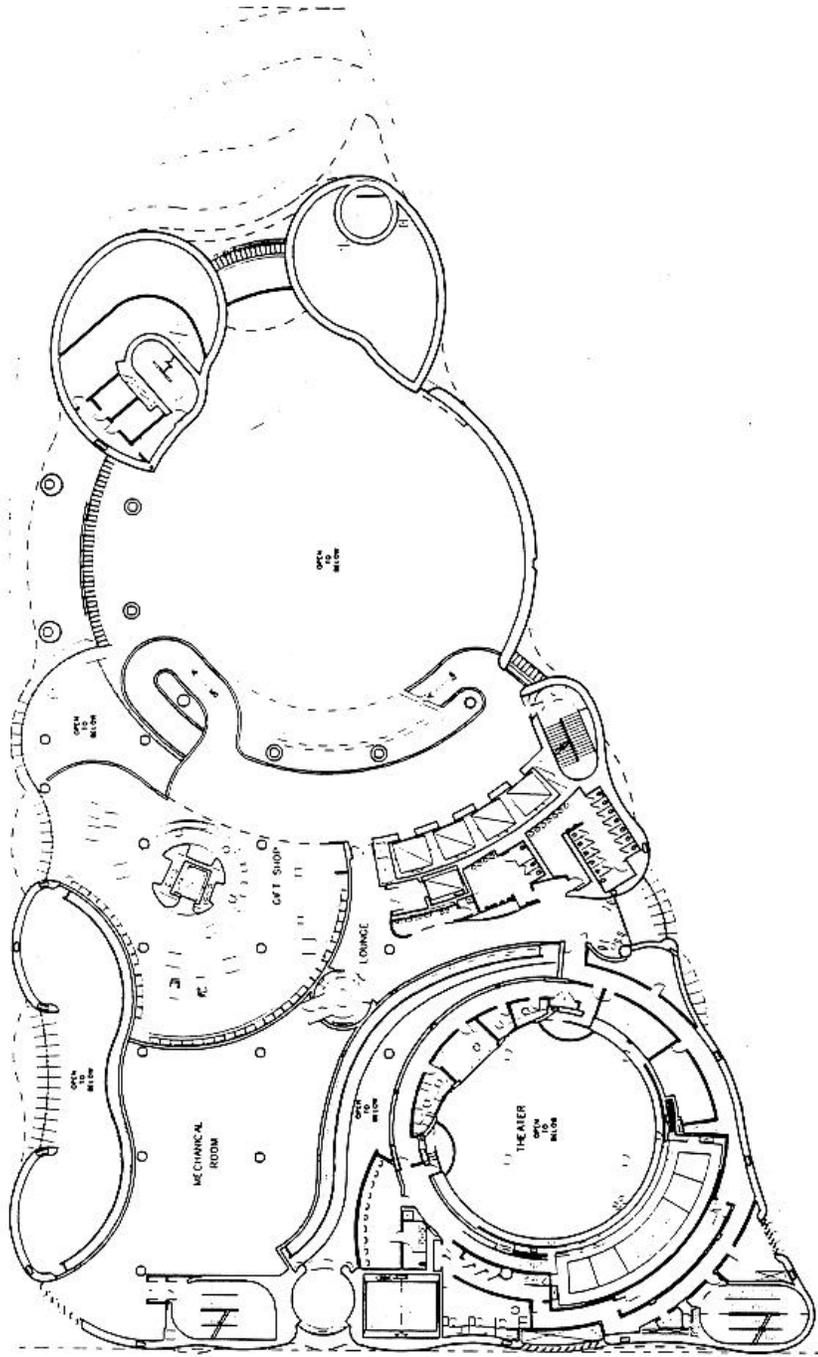
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
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VICINITY SECTION
POI: SHIPK TOMFY - TIAVIS



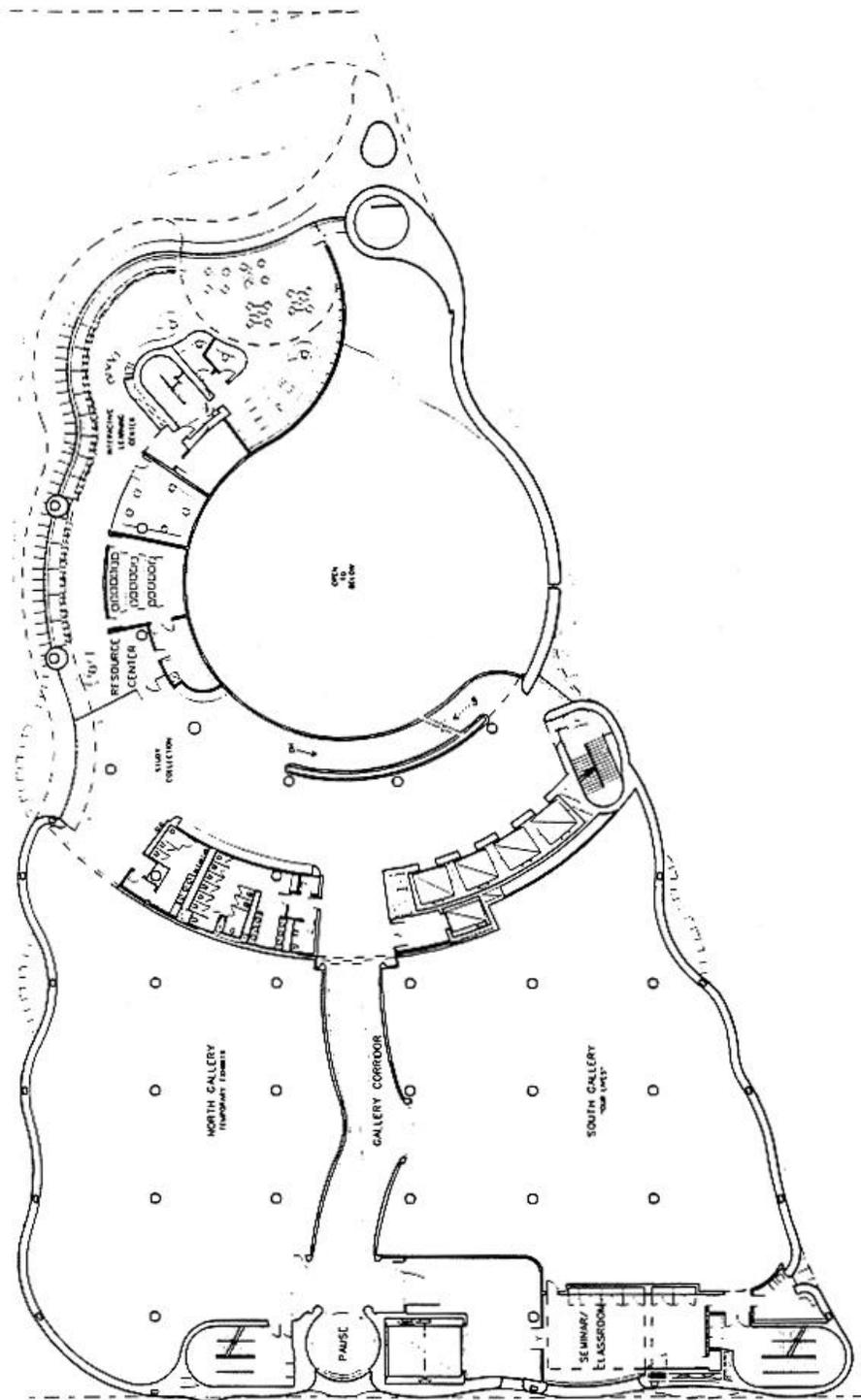
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
POI SHEK TOBEY + DAVIS

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
GPP PROJECT No. 922707 JUNE 1999



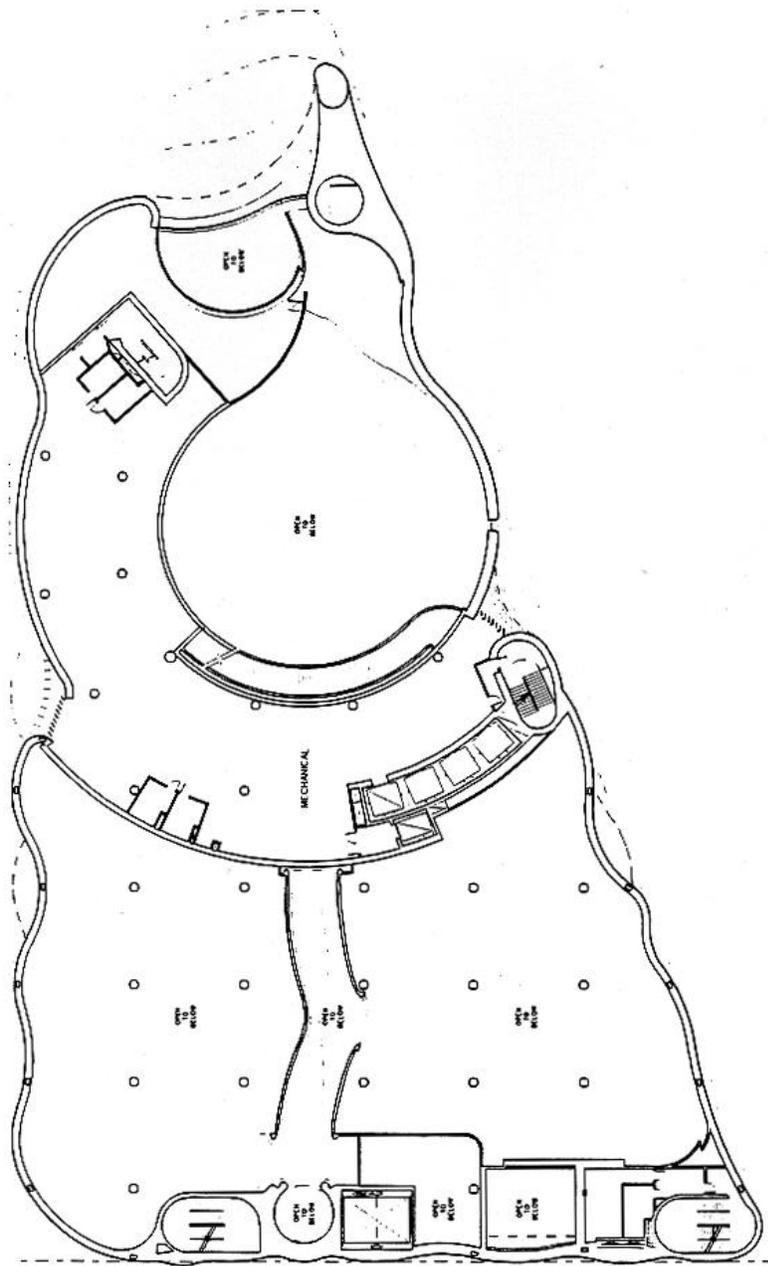
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1000 BIRNBAUM PLACE, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560



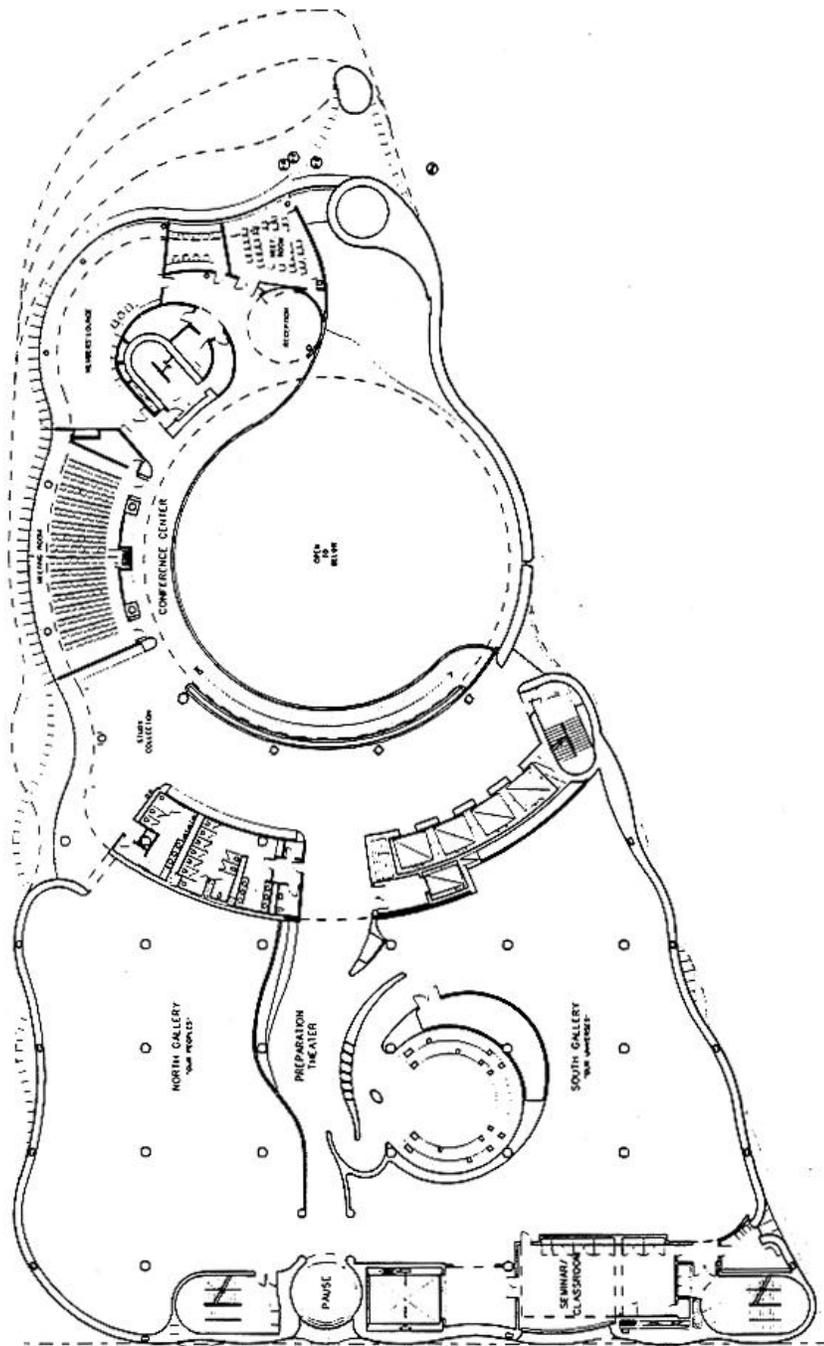
THIRD FLOOR PLAN

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OPP PROJECT No. 822307 JUNE 1999

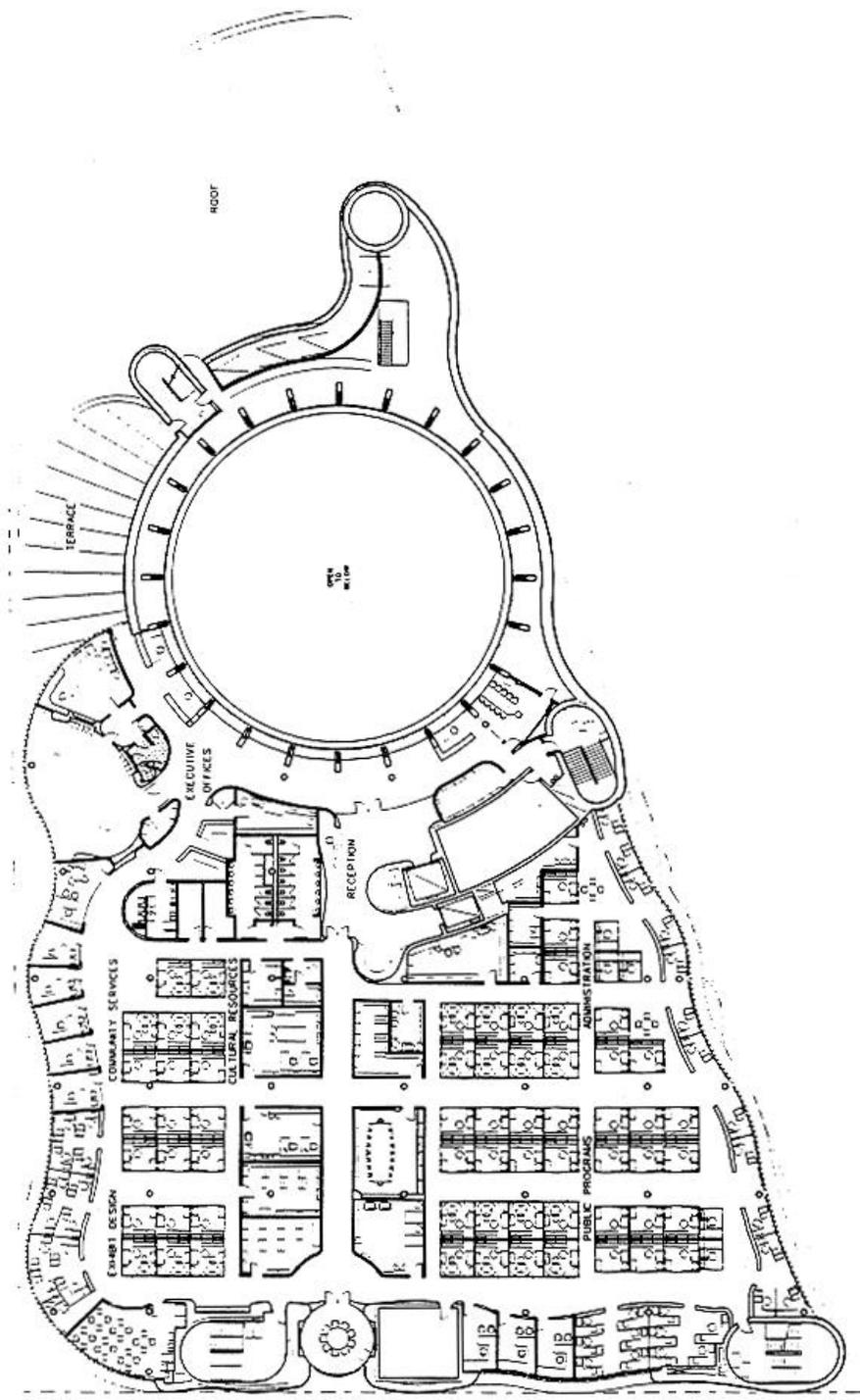
THIRD FLR MECH MEZZ PLAN
POI SHERK TORREY + DAVIS
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"
NO. 10



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OPF PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1999



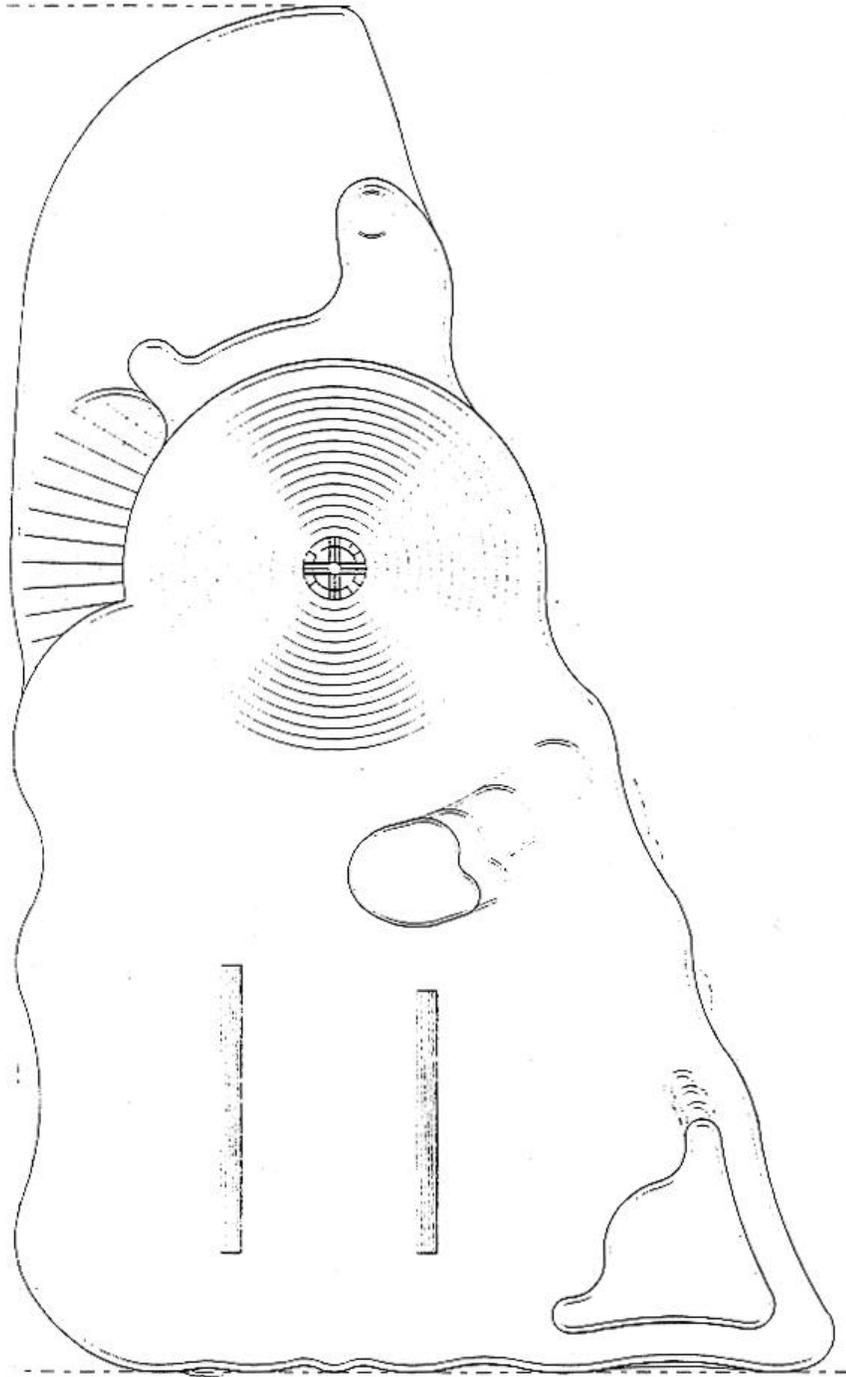
FOURTH FLOOR PLAN
POI SHEK TOBEY • DAVIS



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SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

FIFTH FLOOR PLAN
POL SHEK TORFV & DAVIS

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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
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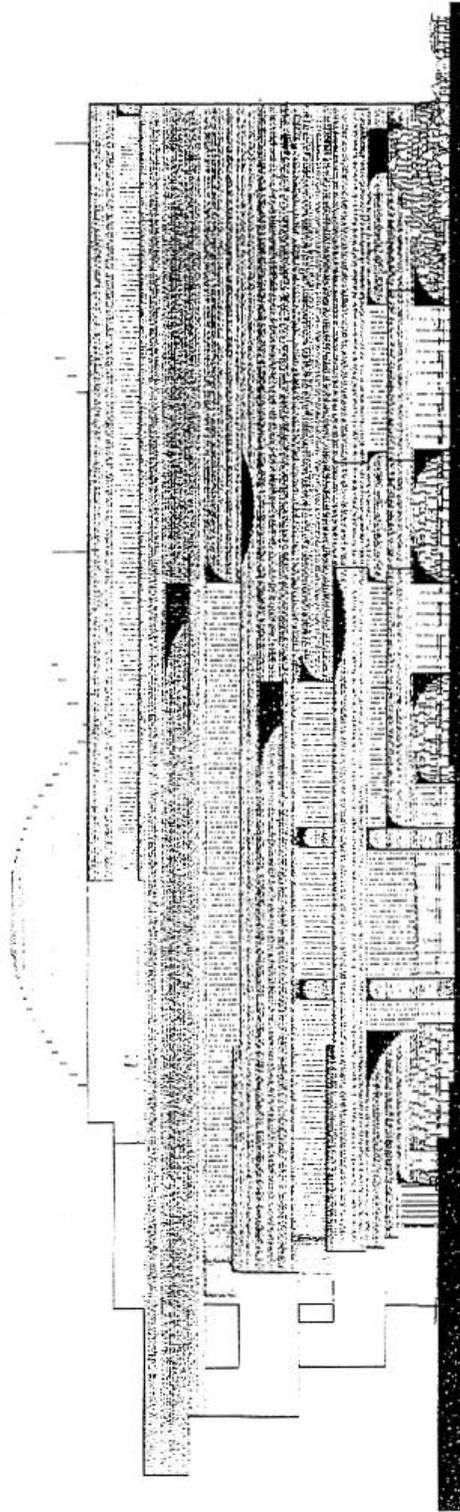


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OPP PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1999

ROOF PLAN

POI SHEK TOREY + DAVIS

SCALE
1" = 10'-0"
1/4" = 3'-0"
1/8" = 1'-0"



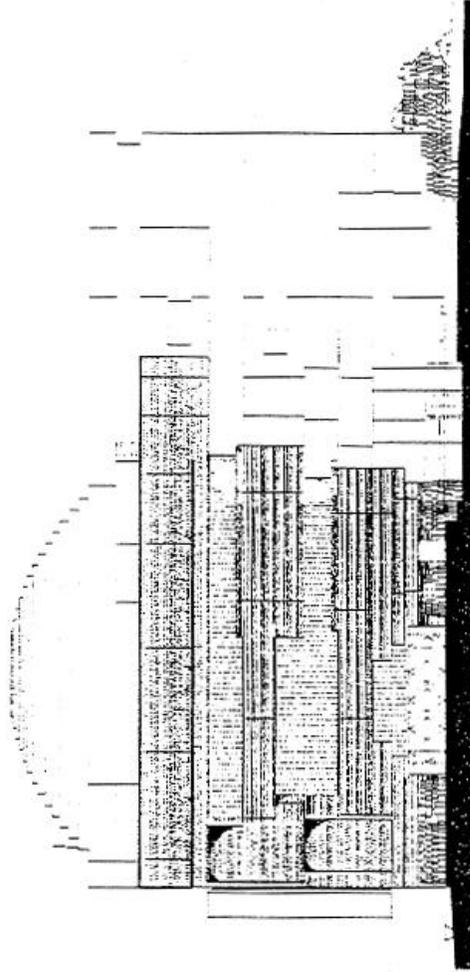
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OPP PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1999

NORTH ELEVATION
FOR SHEK TOBEY • DAVIS
JONES & JONES



SCALE 1/8" = 1'



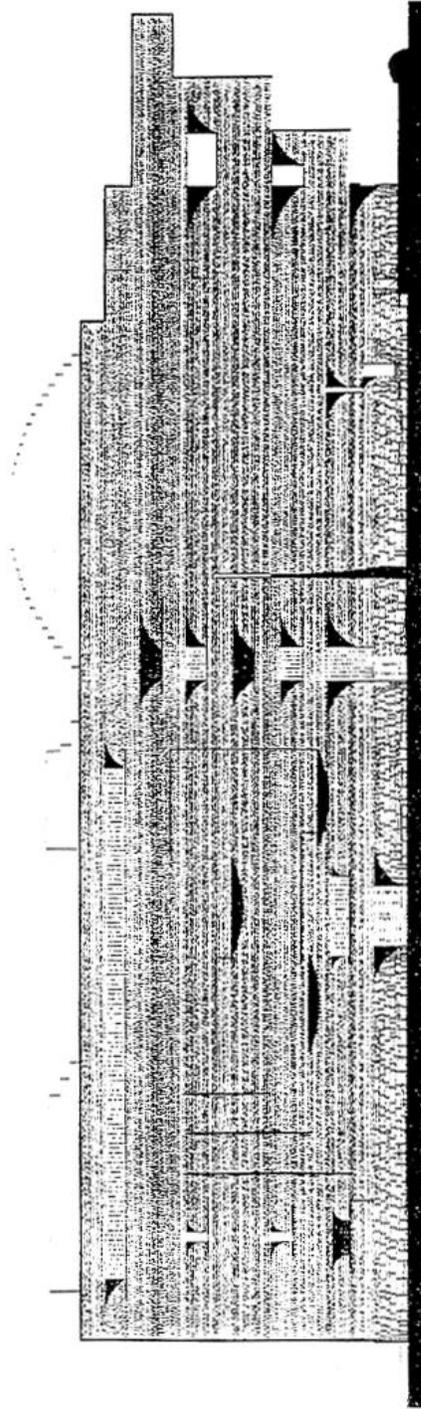
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

OPP PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1979

EAST ELEVATION

POLRIEK, TORLEY + DAVIS
JONES & JONES

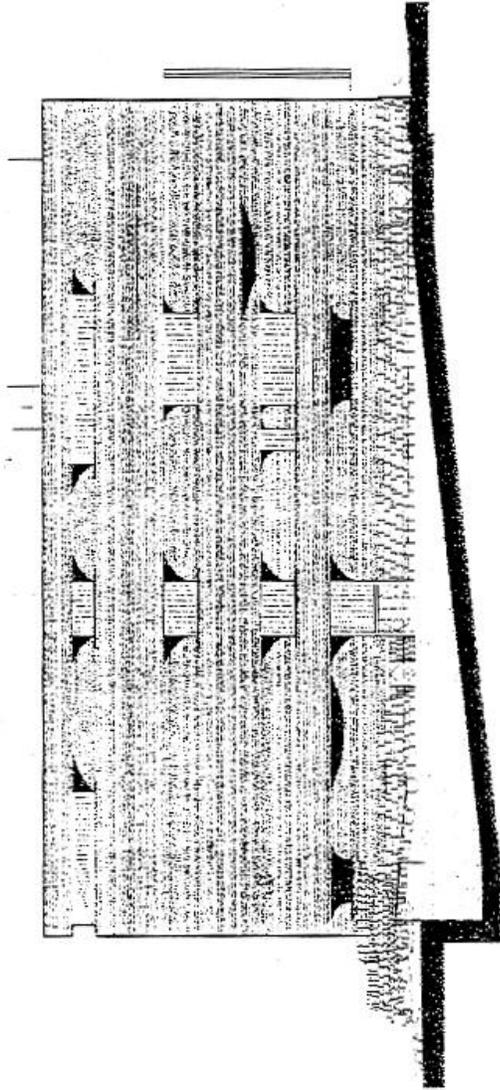




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OPP PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1986

SOUTH ELEVATION
POLSHEK TOBEY + DAVIN





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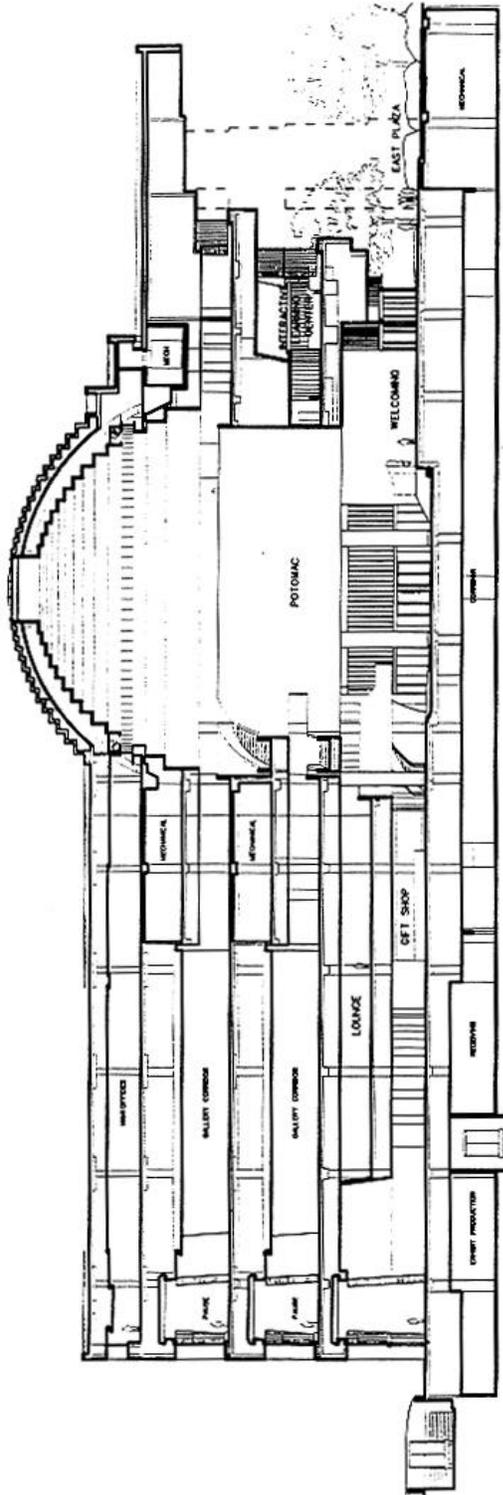
OPP PROJECT No. 922307 JUNE 1989

WEST ELEVATION

POLSHKE TOBEY • DAVIS



SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



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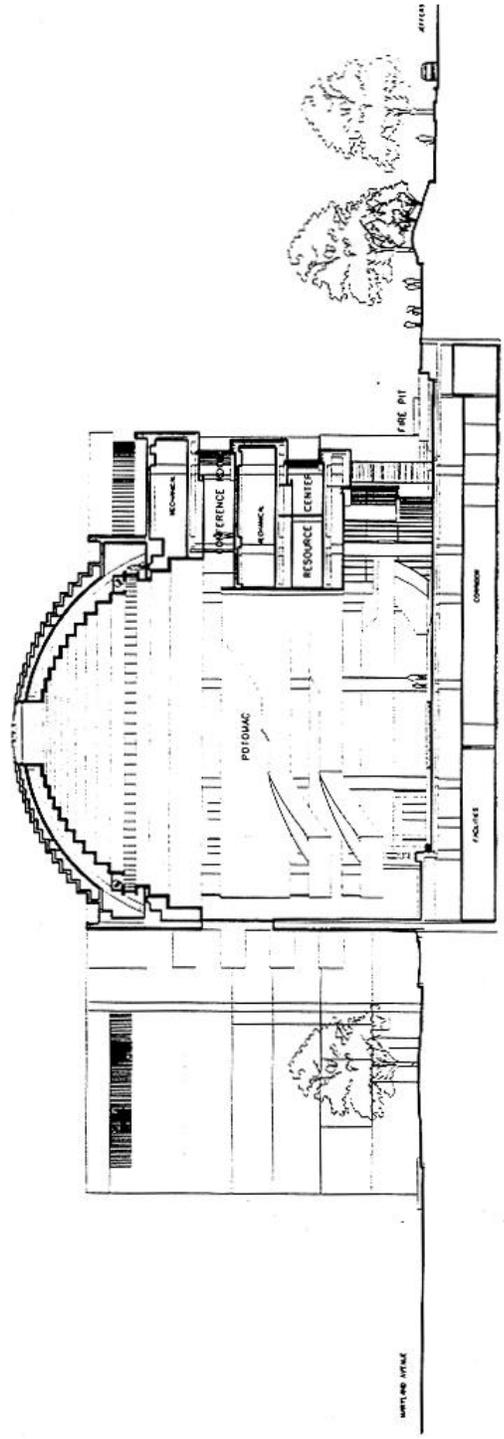
OPP PROJECT No. 022307 APRIL, 1999

BUILDING & SITE SECTION
EAST-WEST LOOKING NORTH

POLSHEK TOBEY + DAVIS
JONES & JONES



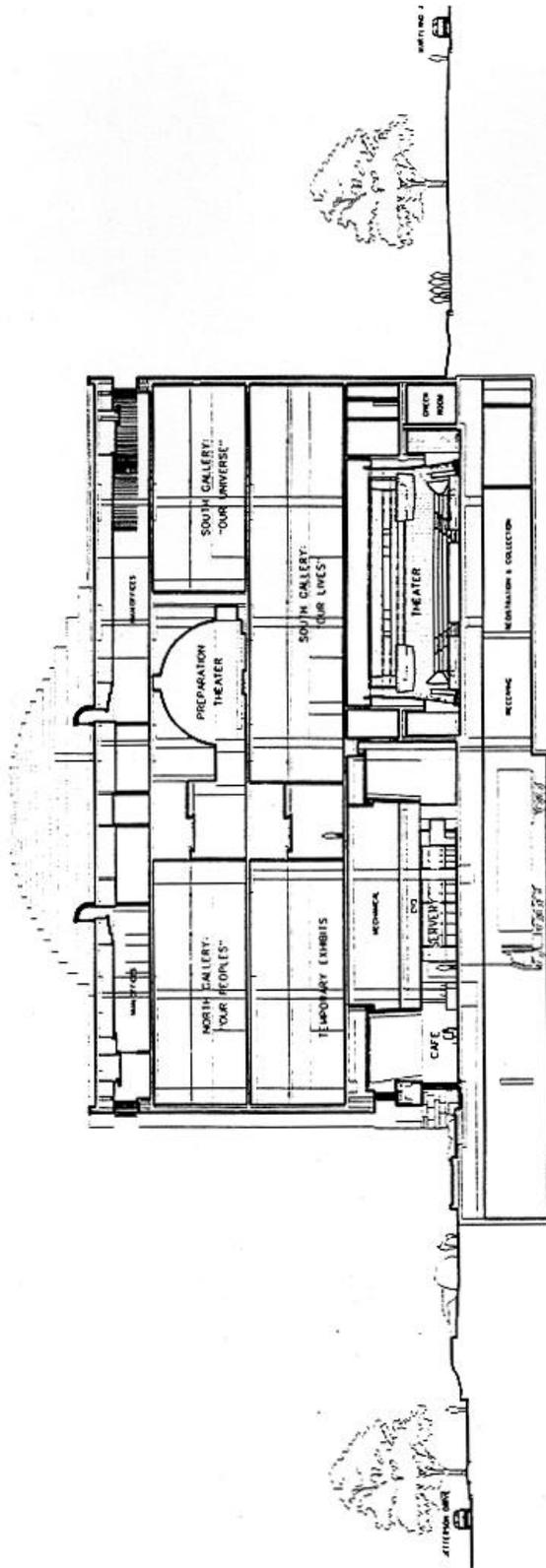
SCALE



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
OPP PROJECT No. 822307 APRIL, 1999

BUILDING & SITE SECTION
NORTH-SOUTH LOOKING WEST
POI SHEK TOBEY • DAVIS
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"





SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

OPP PROJECT No. 822307 APRIL, 1968

BUILDING & SITE SECTION
NORTH-SOUTH LOOKING EAST



POI SHEK TORREY + DAVIS
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"