
GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL, FOUNTAIN FOUR
West Potomac Park, East of Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin

Report to the National Park Service

November 4, 1999

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, submits a design concept for the George Mason Memorial. In 1990, the Board of Regents was authorized by Congress to establish a Memorial to George Mason. The proposed design concept draws upon elements of the original garden design of the site and the addition of the memorial should enhance the overall ambiance of the existing garden.

Authority

Public Law 101-358, P.L. 102-277 and P.L. 99-652.

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the design concept for the George Mason Memorial, Fountain Four, West Potomac Park, East of the Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(08.21)-40714.
- **Recommends** that the Board of Regents and the National Park Service, in the preparation of preliminary site and building plans refine the relationship between the George Mason sculptural element and the trellis with the objective of giving more prominence to the sculptural element.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Park Service (Park Service), on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents (Regents) has submitted a design concept for the George Mason Memorial. George Mason was a Virginia patriot and colleague of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. His 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights was the basis for the writing of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution. The construction of the memorial will provide for the renovation of one of Washington's smaller designed historic landscapes near the Jefferson Memorial. Historic layouts and photographs have been used as the basis for the design with the objective of providing a modest and contemplative environment.

Site

- The site, near the Jefferson Memorial in West Potomac Park, is referred to as Fountain Four or the Pansy Garden. It's bounded by Ohio Drive SW on the north and west, and generally bounded by the George Mason Memorial Bridge and its approach lanes on the south and east. The existing fountain feature is a remnant of the early development of West Potomac Park. By 1905, the area had been improved with the construction of Fountains 1, 2, 3, and 4. Fountains 1, 2, and 3 were demolished in 1947 for the construction of the 14th Street Bridges across the Potomac River.
- In addition to the remaining Fountain Four, the site contains planting beds, walkways and rows of shrubs formally arranged in a circular pattern. The site is enclosed by a hedge, which is surrounded by a variety of trees and shrubs as its backdrop.
- The existing fountain is emptied during the winter months to prevent ice damage and to allow for the cleaning and maintenance of the pool bottom.

Design Concept

- The design concept for the memorial is set within the context of the existing garden and pool. The entrance to the garden will be enhanced with a low curb wall inscribed with preamble text as an introduction to and an identification of the memorial.
- The principal memorial element will consist of a 9-foot high by 72-foot long semi-circular trellis. This trellis will be set on axis to the garden entrance and located to the rear of the garden against the support slope for the roadway leading to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.
- Two, three- to four-foot tall, granite stone walls and a life-size sculpture of George Mason will be located on a paved platform underneath the trellis.

- The stone walls will be inscribed with text related to George Mason and the central space within these walls will contain a niche where the life-size figurative sculpture is to be located.
- Existing walkways within the site will be renovated and enhanced with new natural stone paving.
- Additional seating will be placed within the garden under the trellis and supplemental plantings will be added at the back of the memorial on the embankment to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.
- Supplemental plantings will also be added to restore the existing plantings surrounding the garden and pool.
- Minor alterations to the fountain will be undertaken to improve operational efficiency and enhance the aesthetics of the pool. Low bubblers will replace the existing tall waterspout.

All of the above actions are intended to memorialize George Mason as well as enhance the existing garden.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its March 2, 1995 meeting, the Commission approved the site location for the memorial at the Fountain Four area of West Potomac Park, east of the Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin. The Commission also concurred with the design guidelines for the George Mason Memorial as established by the National Park Service. The Commission further recommended that, as the design concept is developed for this site, the existing garden-like setting of Fountain Four be enhanced.

EVALUATION

The design concept for the George Mason Memorial is sensitively developed and will enhance the existing garden character of the site. At the time the Commission approved the site location for the memorial, design guidelines were attached to the approval. These design guidelines stipulated that:

- The memorial cannot dominate, but may significantly contribute to or enhance the existing design of the historically-designed landscape.
- The memorial cannot encroach visually on the Jefferson Memorial or the Tidal Basin; however, visual associations with the river embankment, George Mason Bridge, and Virginia could be appropriate.
- Access to the memorial site from the vicinity of the Jefferson Memorial will be via existing paved paths.

The design concept is consistent with the above design guidelines. The concept draws from elements that were included in the original garden design. Elements such as the fountain, the trellis, and the circular arrangement were all major elements of the original garden design. Access will remain along the existing paths and the new memorial should fit nicely within the established environment of the Pansy Garden.

Although staff is supportive of the design concept, we feel that the relationship between the sculpture of George Mason and the trellis should be refined for the purpose of giving more significance to the sculpture, perhaps by aligning the sculpture on axis or opening up the trellis so that the sculpture will figure more prominently on the site.

As preliminary design plans are developed, the Regents and the Park Service should ensure that donor contributions are not visibly acknowledged anywhere at the memorial site. This is consistent with the Commission's December 1, 1988 policies relating to recognition of private contributions to memorials, museums and other cultural facilities on public lands. Staff recommends approval of the design concept.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on October 13, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Public Works; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

On October 21st, 1999, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the design concept for the George Mason Memorial.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The location of the proposed memorial is designated for Monumental and Decorative Areas and Parks in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with an applicable policy in this element, which specifies:

Monumental and Decorative Parks...should serve as settings to enhance public buildings, monuments and memorials; as such, their fundamental integrity should be protected.

Additional policies contained in the Federal Facilities Element also apply:

The adaptation and refinement processes necessary to complete the central portion of the Monumental Core as a fine work of civic art should be continued in the development of individual project proposals within the existing basic form and framework.

New memorials to be located in the L'Enfant City and environs should be carefully sited to refine and complete the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans so far as possible.

The proposed design concepts are consistent with these policies.

National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) the Park Service completed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the memorial on October 13, 1999. Overall, the site contains no major environmental constraints. No wetlands exist at the site and no threatened or endangered species exist in the project area. The memorial would not generate significant traffic, noise or air quality impacts.

Characteristics associated with the site of the memorial include:

- The 100-year floodplain of the Potomac River
- Poor subsurface drainage and a high water table

Neither is a significant constraint to project development.

The new memorial construction will slightly impact existing vegetation. This effect involves only ornamental plantings associated with the site's former use as a remnant of formal gardens that previously existed in West Potomac Park. Currently, an existing circular pool fountain, planting beds, walkways and formal plantings of shrubs are located on-site. As noted in the Environmental Assessment (EA), Park Service plans to implement several precautionary measures to protect vegetation in the vicinity of the project:

- Park Service will identify and fence the areas involved in the principal work.
- Additional mitigation will include fertilization and mulching of the root zones.

Pedestrian and vehicular access is available to the site. Heavy pedestrian use occurs on walkways along the Tidal Basin that lead to and from other monuments and memorials in the vicinity (Jefferson Memorial and FDR Memorial). The Park Service anticipates pedestrian access will be the primary mode of visitation to the site.

Visitor vehicular parking and public transportation is located in the general area. The EA states that parking spaces exist within a reasonable walking distance of the site at Ohio Drive and East Basin Drive. Bus parking is also available on Ohio Drive in West Potomac Park. The only Metrorail station near the project site is the Smithsonian Station (0.6-mile walking distance). No additional visitor vehicle parking or bus parking is proposed for the memorial.

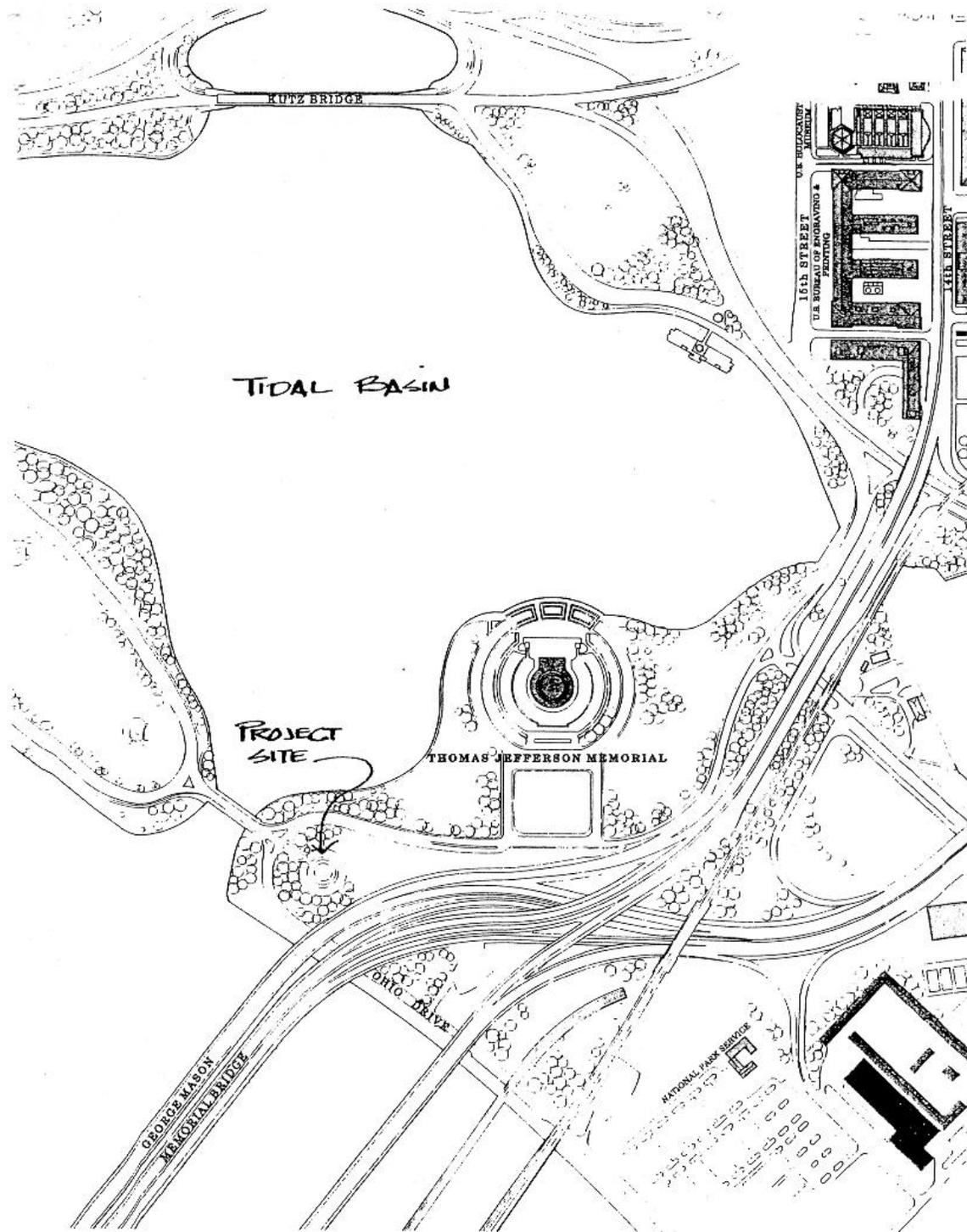
The planned memorial as designed will not, over the long term, increase visitation beyond current levels, according to the Park Service, because its visitation would be associated with visitation at other nearby major memorials. The George Mason Memorial is situated on the route between two major destination-type memorial sites.

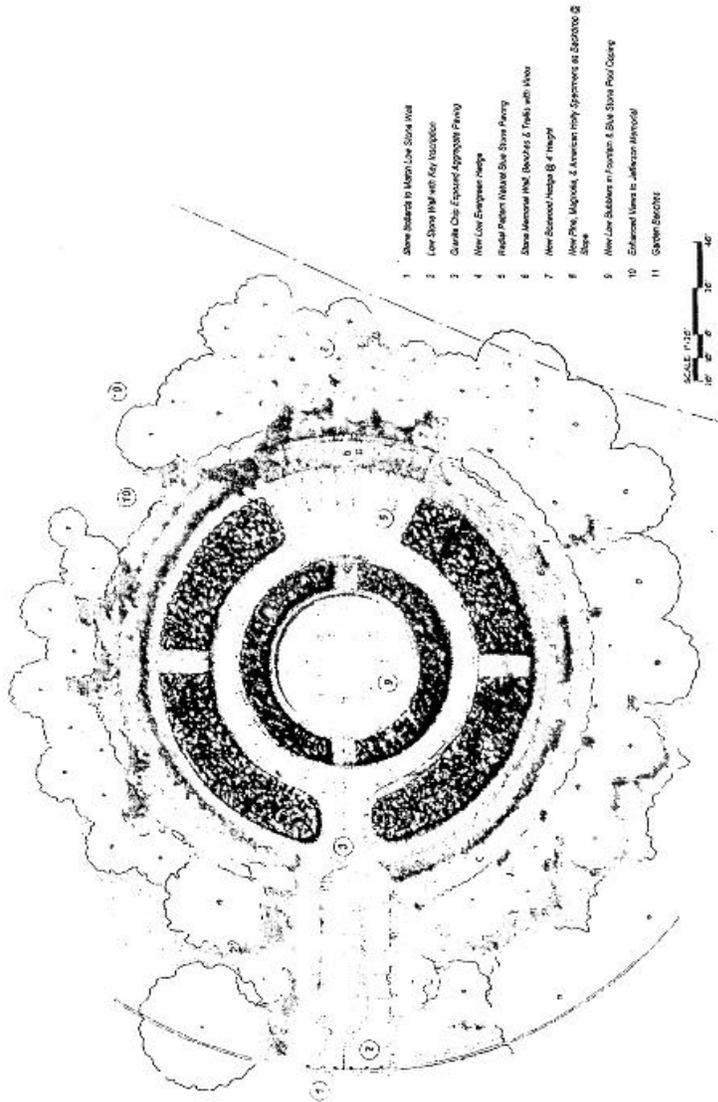
Storm water and floodplain effects from the new memorial design will not be significant. The memorial design is primarily an open landscape feature with only minor site elements that will be constructed to withstand flooding effects. No substantial earth grading or other ground surface modifications will occur in the project to impact the existing floodplain storage area. The Park Service has identified the memorial development as an excepted action under its compliance procedures for floodplain review in accordance with Executive Order 11988. The FONSI serves to inform the public of the Park Service's determination.

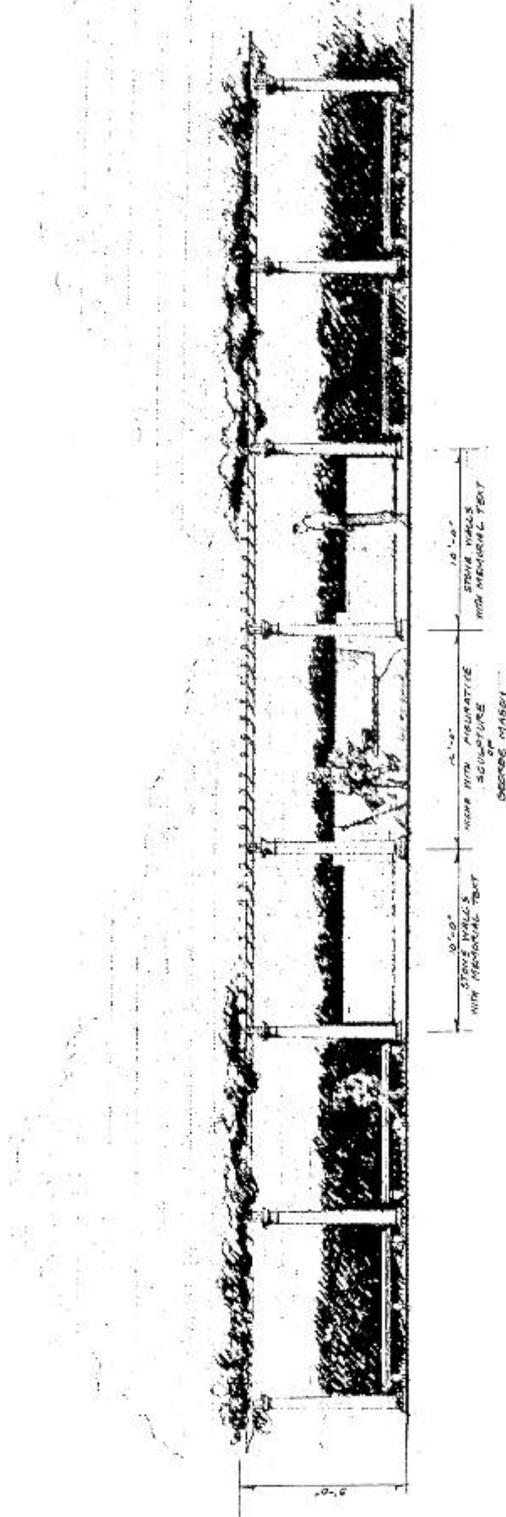
On-site storm water presently is discharged into the Potomac River through an established storm drainage system that will be maintained in the new development. Because only minor amounts of new impervious pavement are provided in the new memorial design, no significant effect is derived from those improvements. Subsurface drainage will primarily relate to the establishment of plant growth and new structures in the memorial design (minor retaining walls, sidewalks, and trellis structure) and will be provided by an under drain system connected to the storm drains. No new additional utilities are proposed, consequently ground disturbance and erosion control will be confined to the immediate boundaries of the memorial site. Erosion control measures will be implemented during memorial construction.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Park Service has initiated Section 106 consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The SHPO will refer the matter to the DC Historic Preservation Review Board, which will review the proposal on October 20, 1999.





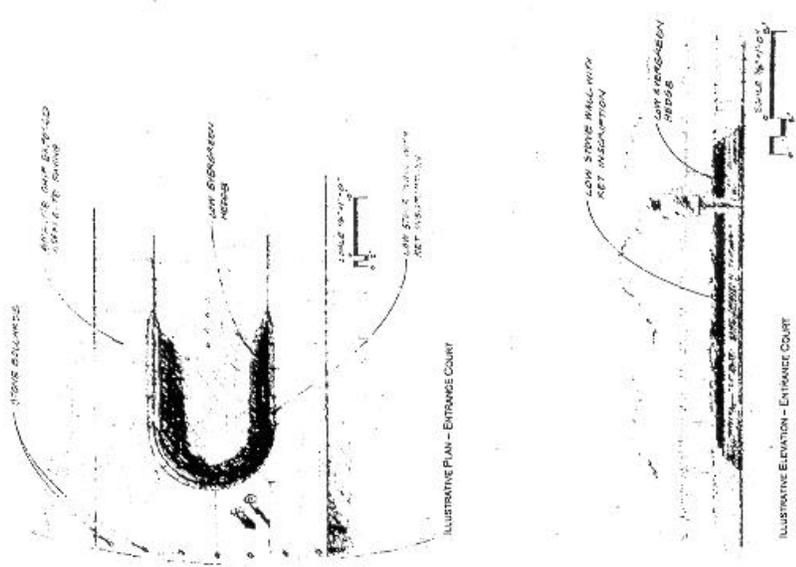


HOODSIDE
BY HARWELL
ARCHITECTS

SEPTEMBER 1922

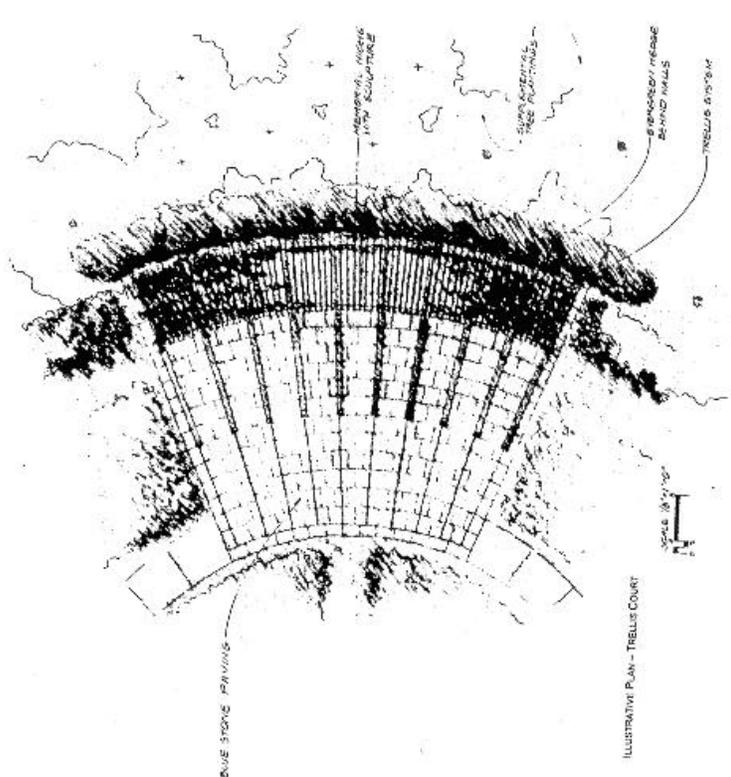
THE GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL

ILLUSTRATIVE ELEVATION

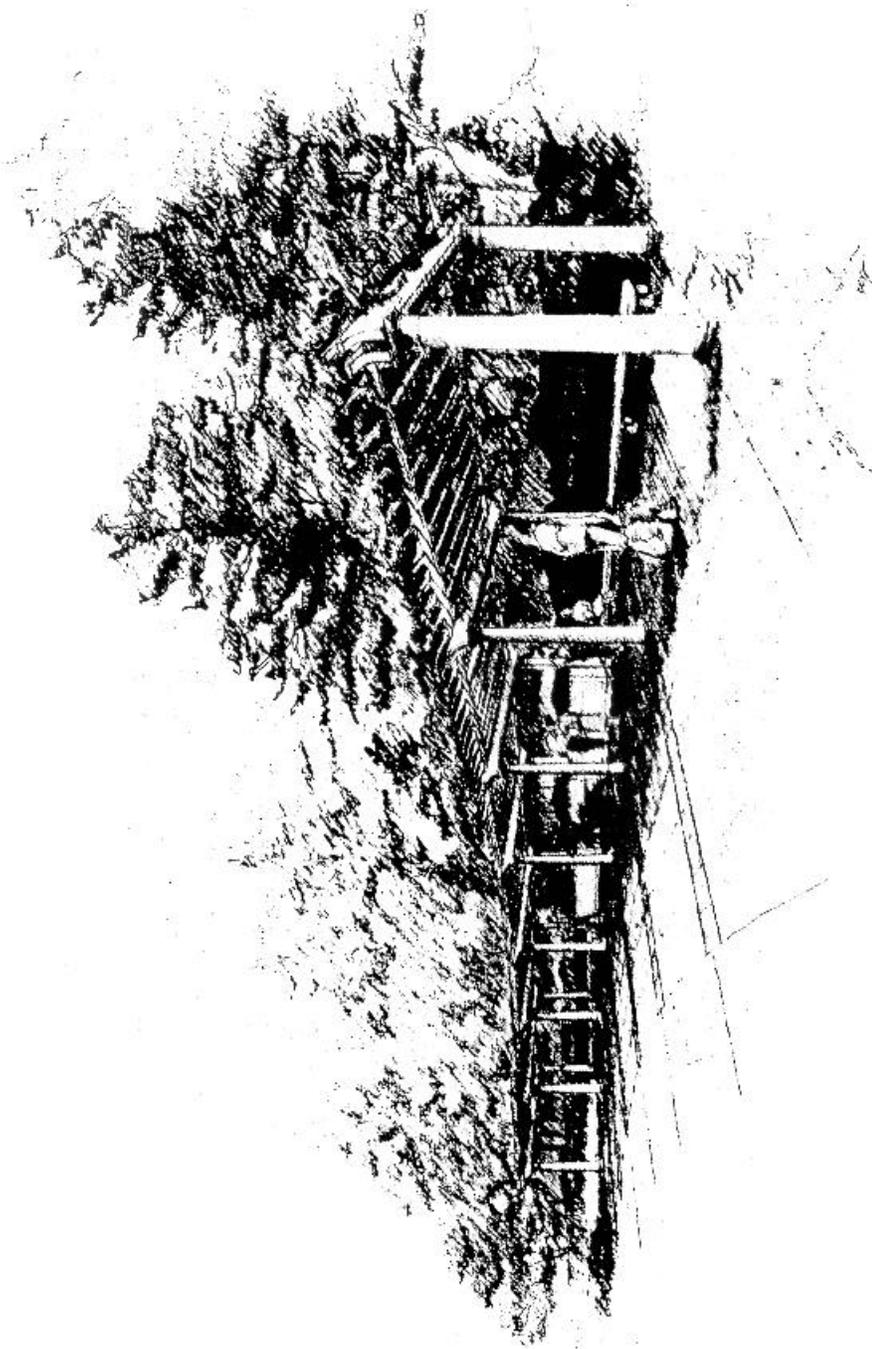


ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN - ENTRANCE COURT

ILLUSTRATIVE ELEVATION - ENTRANCE COURT



ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN - TRELIS COURT



RHODESIDE
HARWELL
ARCHITECTS

December 1998

THE GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE