

A CENTER FOR NEW PALTZ

by

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## Abstract

### A CENTER FOR NEW PALTZ

As New Paltz grows into the future, the past is blended with the present. Possibilities for understanding the past are available as future plans are developed. Connections between places and between times are an integral part of strengthening the character and identity of this town. Current urban and architectural concerns are studied, explored and presented as possibilities for the future.

## Acknowledgements

Those who have contributed to this thesis are many:

My friends and colleagues in Blacksburg.

My community of friends in New Paltz.

of the Elting Memorial Library, New Paltz,

N.Y.

To you, my thanks.

To my grandparents, whose unwavering support and love made it possible.

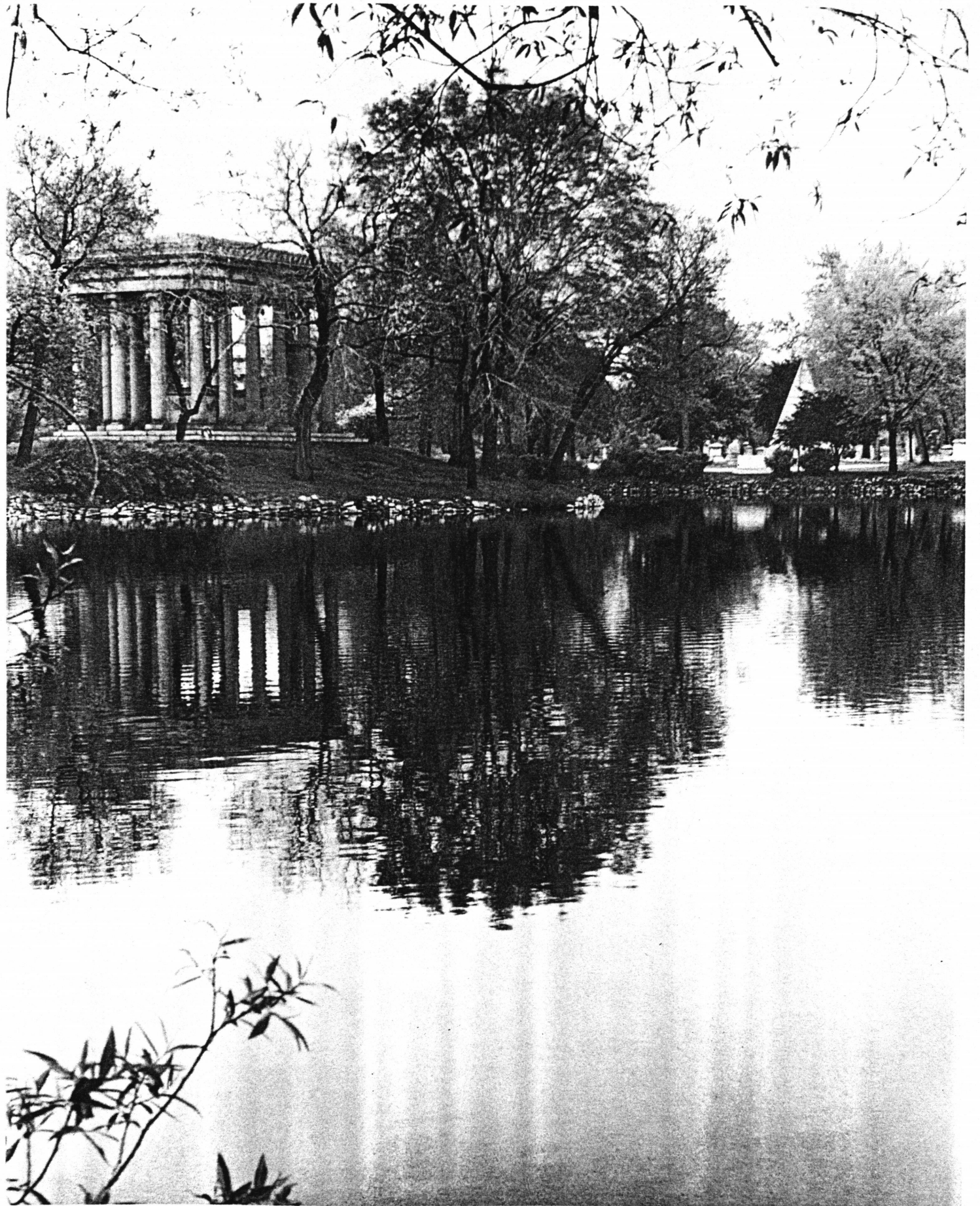
And to \_\_\_\_\_, whose love sustains me.

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The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.  
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.  
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.  
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.

Lao Tzu



## The Center

Lao Tzu wrote of the Tao, which is beyond being and not being, beyond the named and the nameless.

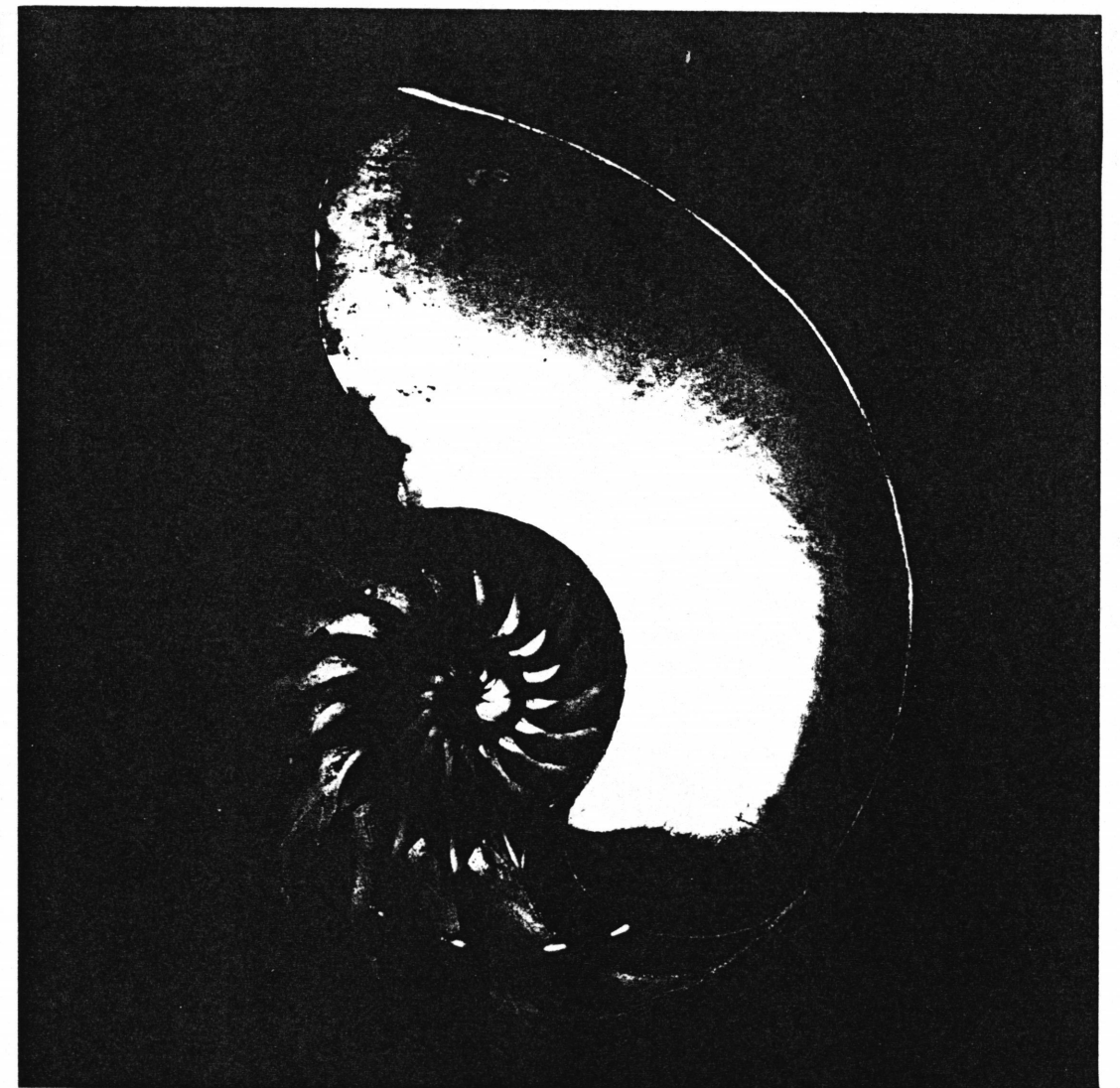
Louis Kahn wrote of Order, which lies beyond the duality of silence and light, beyond the measurable and unmeasurable.

Both men were seeking a principle or notion which would guide their understanding of the world. Both sought and described the fundamental and central nature of existence, life and human experience. It is this seeking which I call the search for the Center.

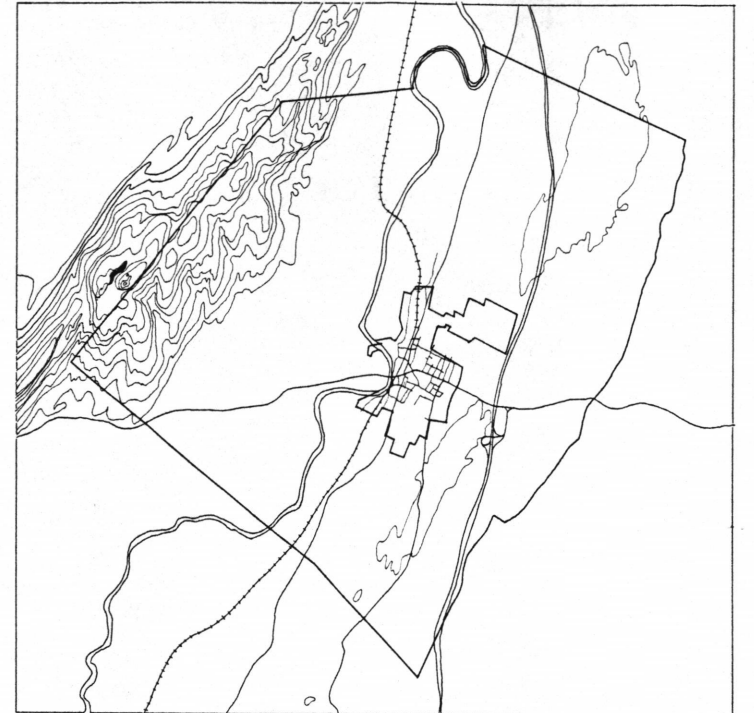
"But the people I found, the people I was attracted to, were not unlike myself. They too were trying to find order in their world, looking for the center..."

V.S. Naipaul

It is a sense of Order, of balance, of strength, a sense of the Center; which I have sought to bring to the physical center of New Paltz. It is appropriate that the center of town be the location for this exploration; from here springs the central character and identity of New Paltz.



## New Paltz



Located in the Hudson Valley, 80 miles north of New York City, the town of New Paltz is surrounded by a diverse landscape which includes the Hudson, Roundout and Walkill Rivers and the Catskill and Shawangunk Mountains. The cities of Kingston, Poughkeepsie and Newburgh (to the north, east and south respectively) are nearby. Presently, the region is undergoing a large economic expansion which is expected to continue into the 1990's. The surrounding countryside and urban centers as well as the proximity of N.Y.C., place New Paltz in a unique location, both geographically and economically.

Originally settled in 1679, the town of New Paltz retains to this day much of its rural landscape. The original patent granted to the French Huguenot settlers in 1677, was bordered to the west by the ever present Shawangunk Mountain ridge and to the east by the Hudson River. Today, the Shawangunk Mountains are largely preserved as park and trust land by New York State and private organizations who manage the fragile ecosystems of the ridge.



## The Village



The village of New Paltz is the historic and commercial center of the town of New Paltz. Bounded to the west by the Wallkill River, the village is the densest, most active and urban part of town. On a gentle slope, rising to the east of the Wallkill, the village is an interwoven grouping of historic buildings, streets and neighborhoods. Among these are Huguenot Street, historic Main Street and the old railroad right-of-way. Juxtaposed with this historic grouping, are modern buildings, services and transport, thus creating a blend of the past and present.

Above the eastern banks of the Wallkill River, the original settlers built the houses of stone which, today, line Huguenot Street. Restored, preserved and open to the public, these stone houses are living reminders of New Paltz's heritage. Huguenot Street, somewhat isolated from Main Street, has become an integral aspect of New Paltz's present day identity. It is from here that the rest of New Paltz grew and it is here that we may best remember those who came before us.

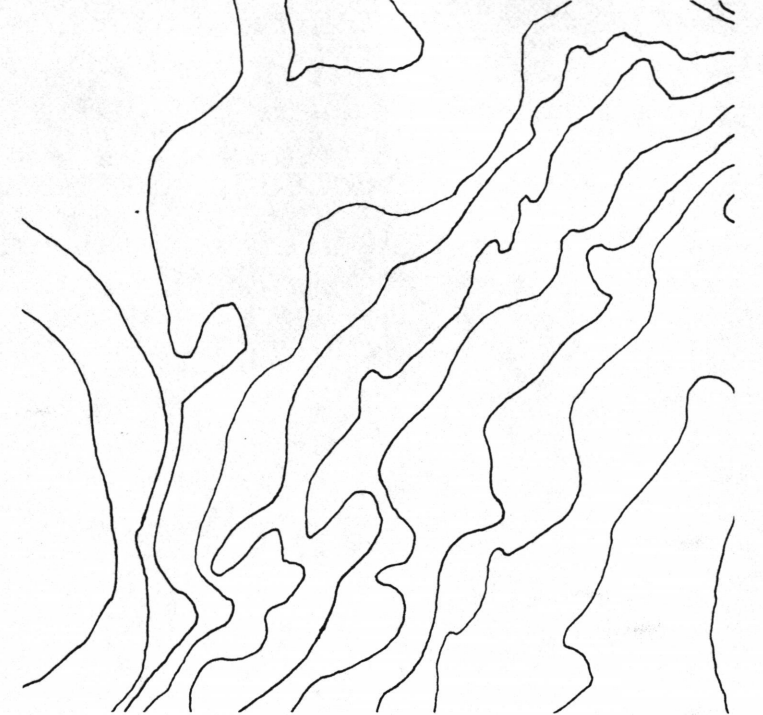
Just up the hill from the river and Huguenot Street, is the oldest, most urban and historically commercial section of Main Street. Many of the buildings along lower Main Street were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, soon after the arrival of the Wallkill Valley Railroad. This concentration of buildings and hub of activity surrounds the intersection of Main Street/Route 299 with state roads 32 and 208. The traffic and people who shop, visit and pass through downtown enrich and support this historic urban center, creating a unique meeting of 1900 with the 1980's.

Once an essential part of the commerce and activity of New Paltz, the railroad, today, is little more than a memory. The old station reminds us of times gone by, but the railroad right-of-way continues to exert a strong physical presence within the fabric of the village (and town). This narrow,

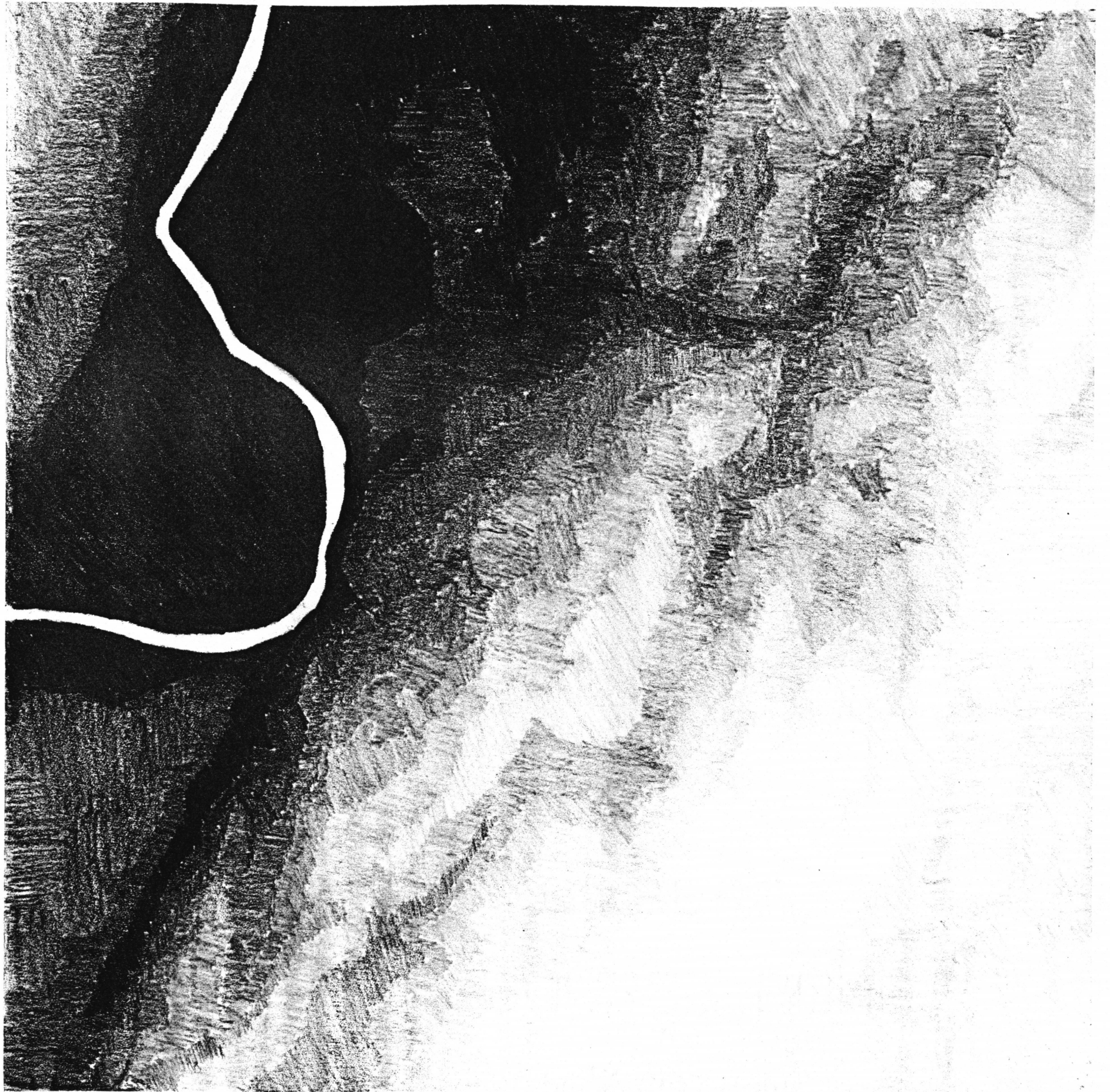


seemingly endless strip of land, once a place for movement, is silently waiting for a new day.

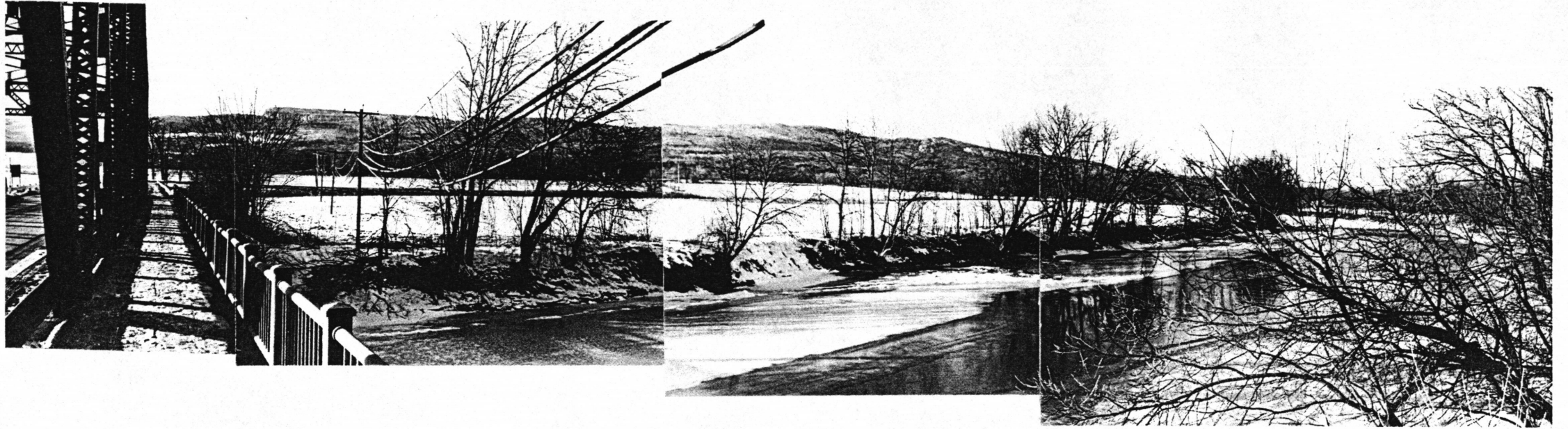
As New Paltz moves into the future, it retains the past. History interwoven with the present activates our imagination and enriches the future.



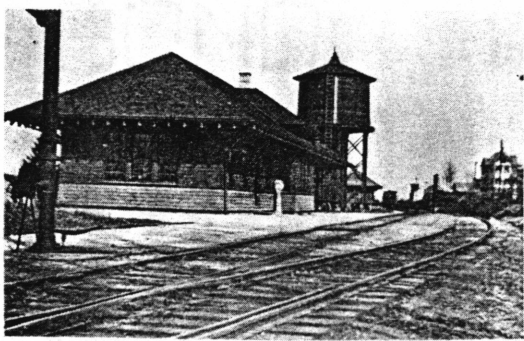
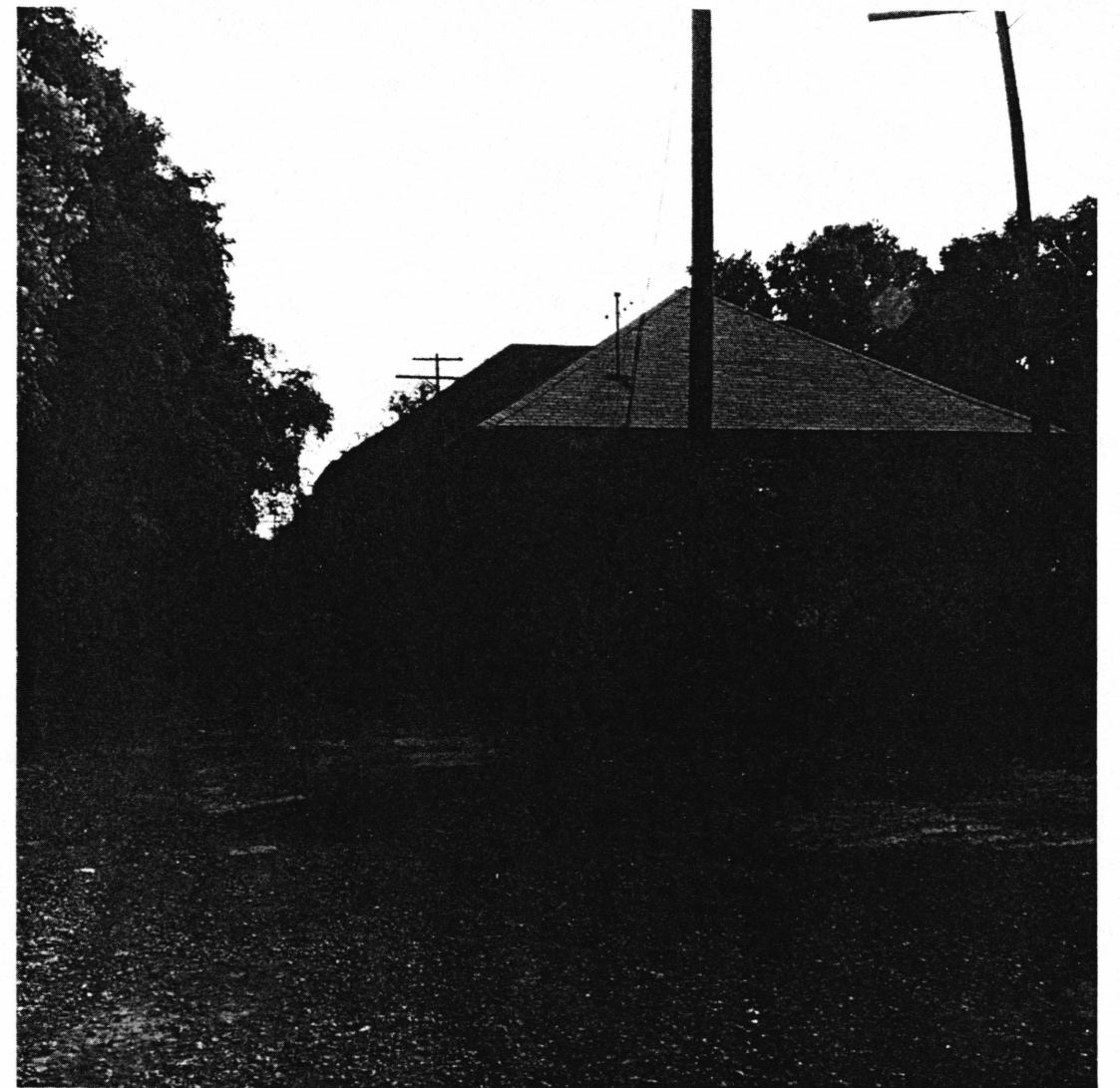


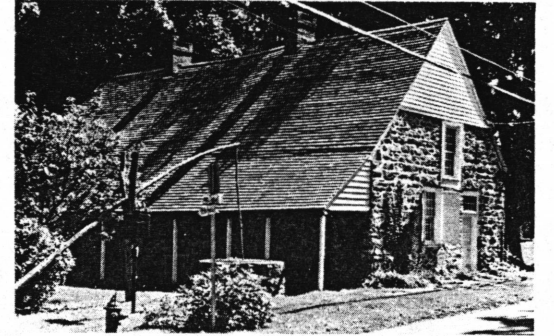
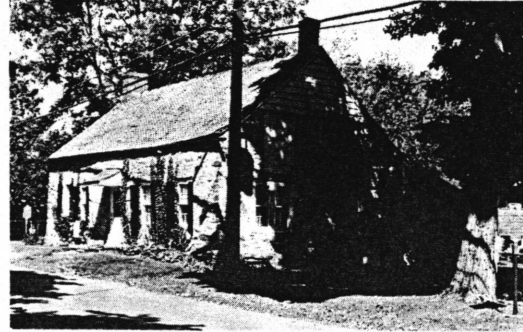
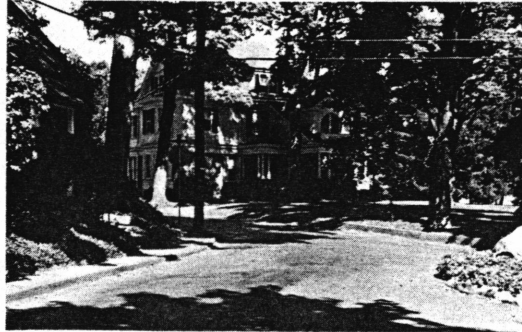


The Walkill River

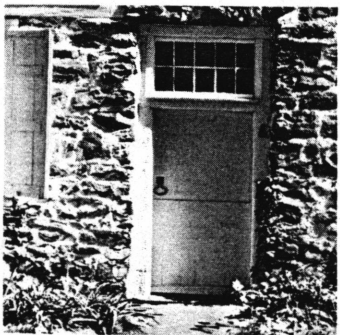


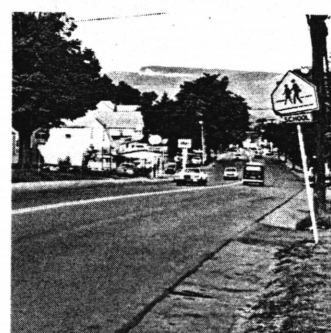
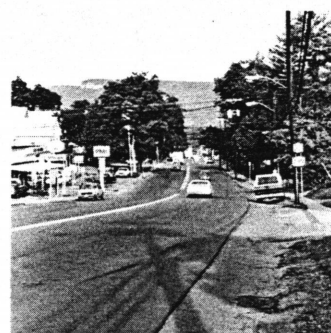
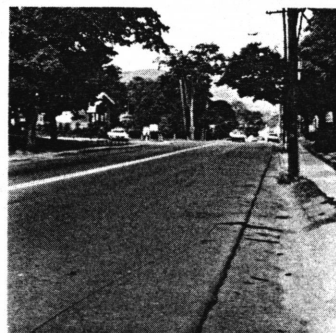
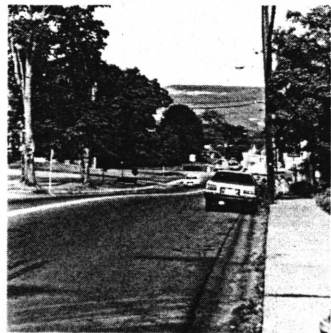
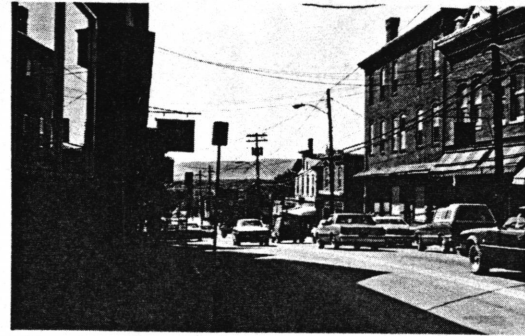
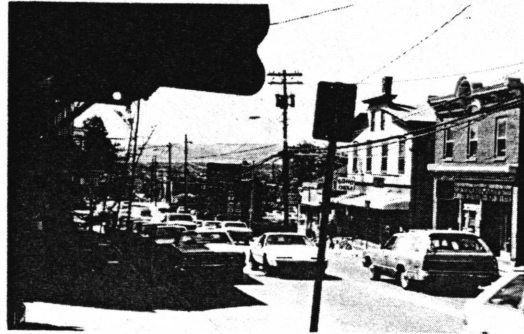
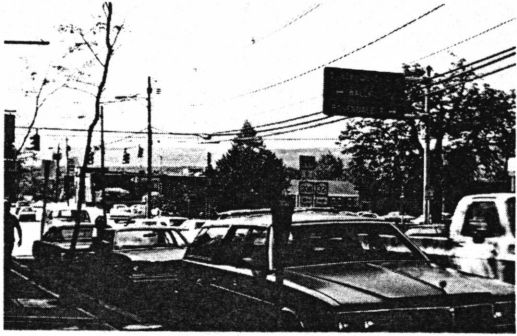
The Railroad





WATER POND  
1870





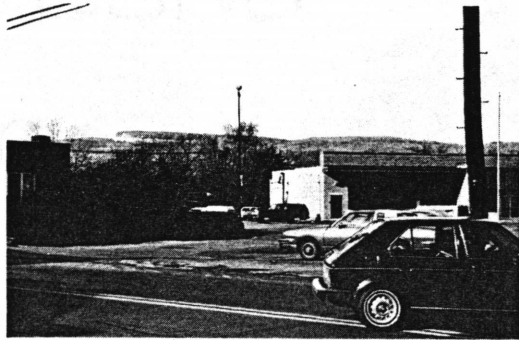


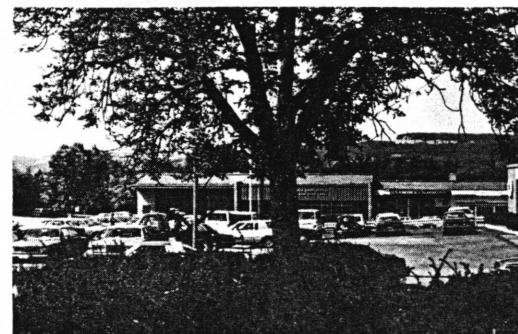
The high density mix of buildings along downtown Main Street creates a strong urban wall which emphasizes the area's position as the center of activity within the town. In downtown, the buildings are close to the street, each with its own unique character available to the pedestrian and passing automobile. East of downtown, Main Street rises towards the expanding stretches being developed for modern shopping centers and automobile-serviced businesses. To the west of downtown, across the bridge at the Walkill, the development ends and an agricultural and rural landscape prevails.

As New Paltz grows into the future, Main Street will play a large role in the plans for economic and civic development. For more than one hundred years, downtown Main Street has been the commercial center of New Paltz. The times, the buildings and the people have changed, yet the character and importance of Main Street, as the name implies, remains.



The Site





Where Main Street and Chestnut Street meet, four unique corners exist. Three of the corners are created and emphasized by the buildings at the corner. The northwest corner, however, is devoid of buildings. To the rear of the site the United States Post Office is contained in an old supermarket building along with a laundromat and restaurant. Set back and facing North Chestnut Street, a gas station carries on a brisk business. The Intercounty Savings Bank, 200 feet to the west of the corner, has been a stable part of downtown for decades.

Once vital and dense with buildings, the fabric of lower Main Street is, today, fragmented. Unlike the south side of the street, the north side is no longer an urban street, but has been transformed into a parking lot. The urban character of downtown New Paltz suffers from this fragmentation of the street and the relationship of the buildings. The character has been sacrificed for the convenience of the automobile.

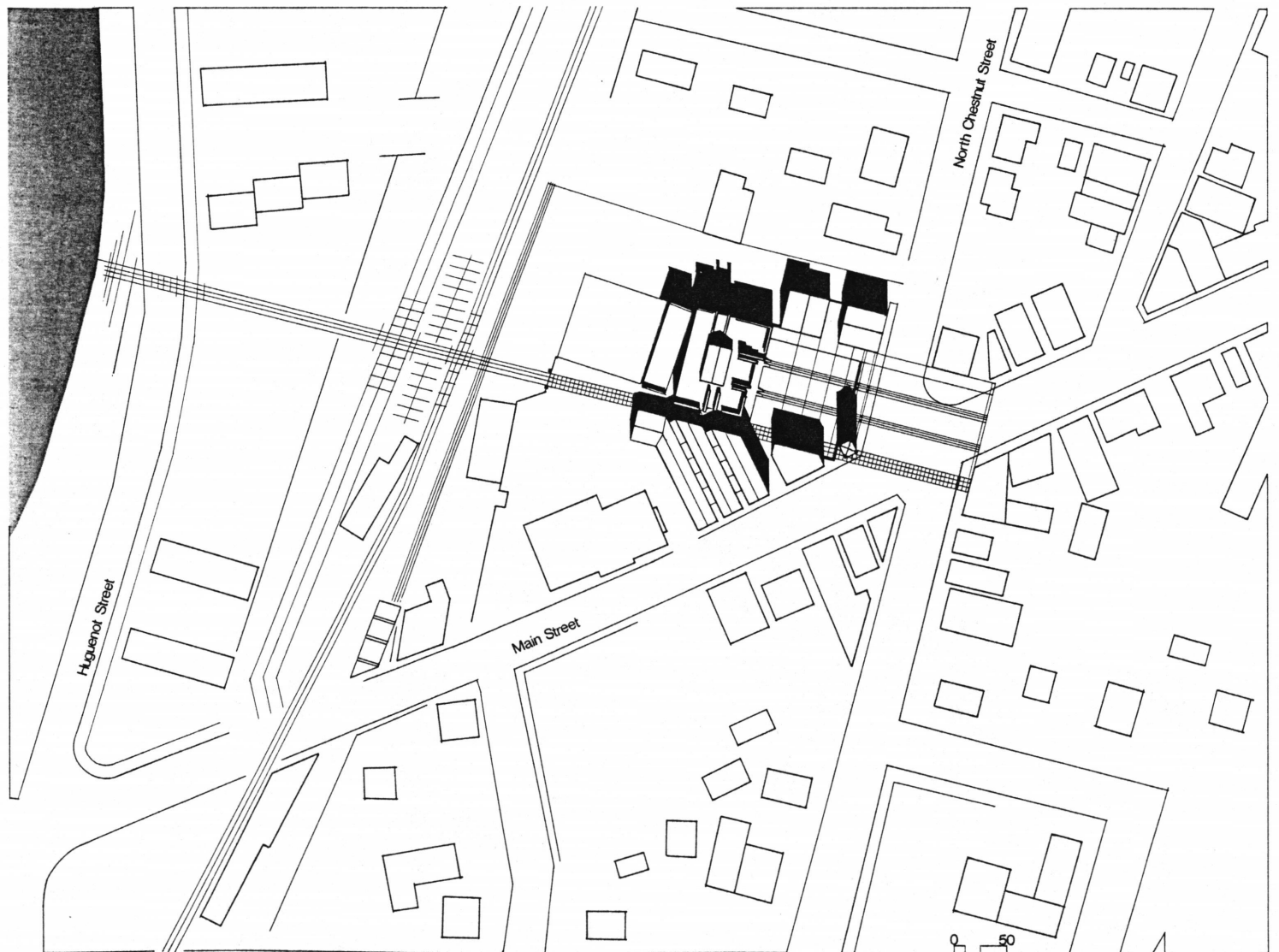




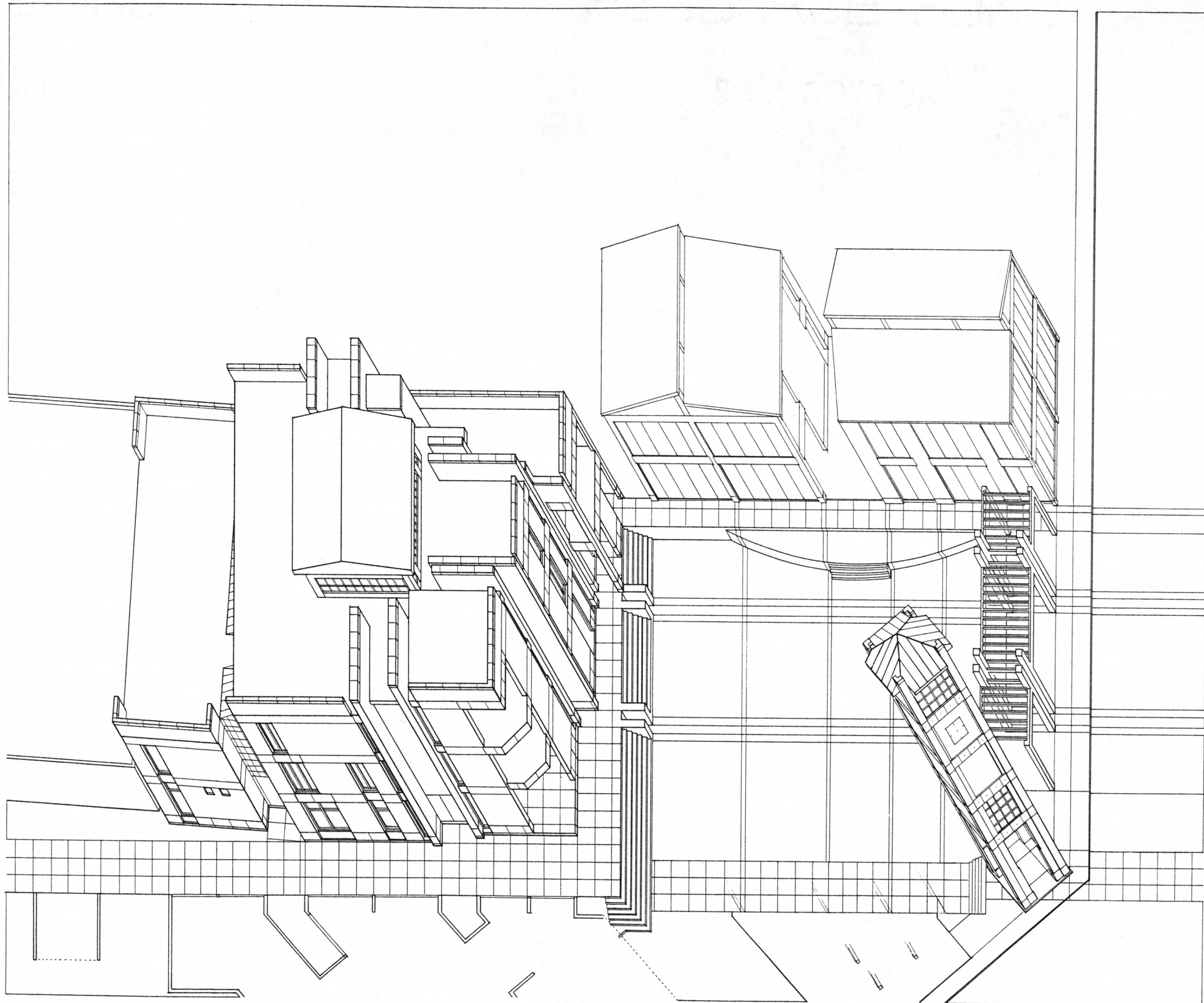
## The Proposal

As previously described, downtown New Paltz is a place rich in history and activity. All towns, however, require study, planning and development to carry them into the future. New Paltz is no exception. A careful study of the fabric of the village suggests many important directions towards enhancing, enriching, updating and clarifying the physical center and central character of New Paltz. Of these possible directions, the following are essential components of future development and growth in downtown:

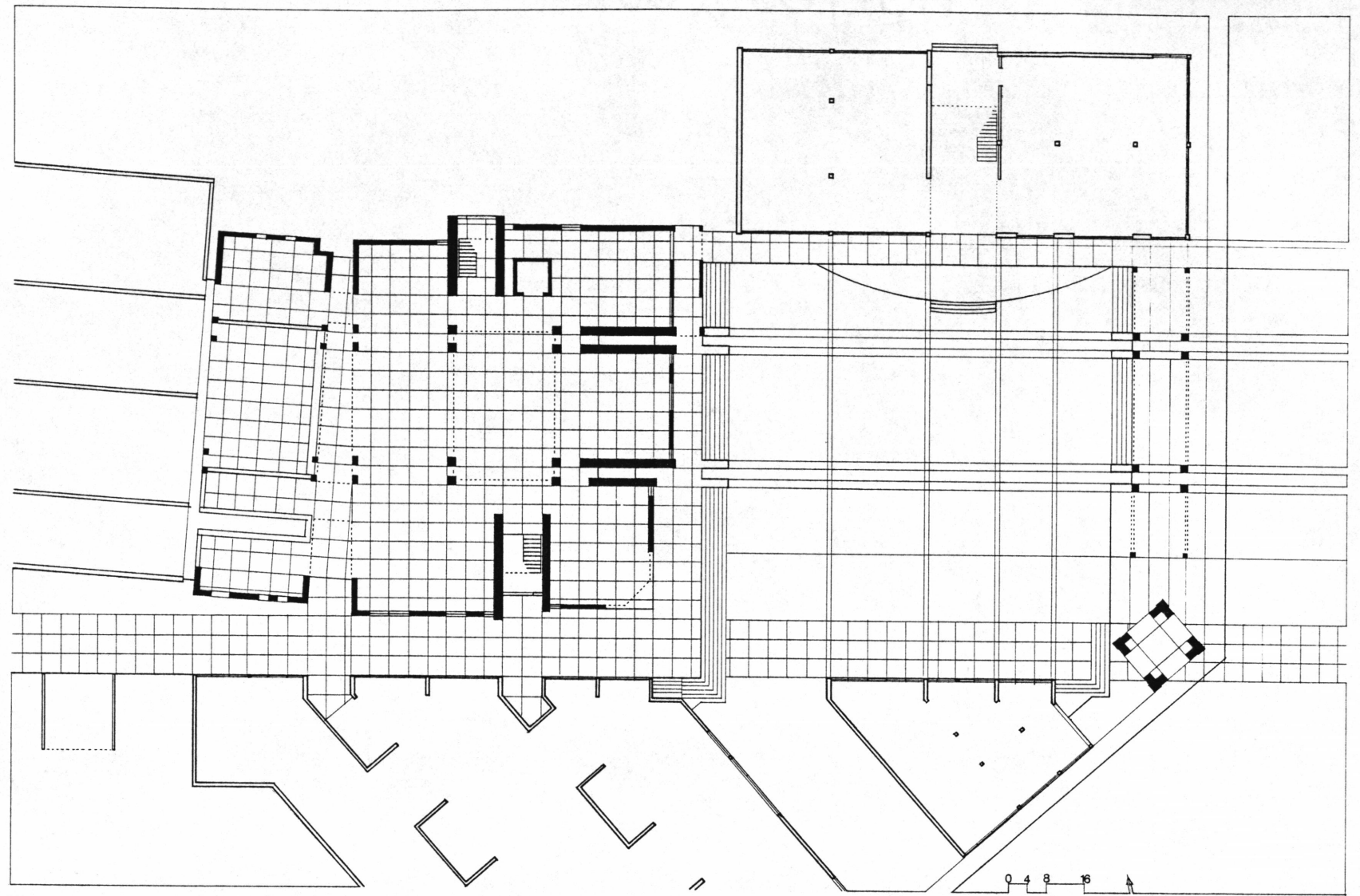
1. The creation of a visual connection from downtown to the Shawangunk Mountain ridge.
2. An increase in the density of buildings along the north side of Main Street, west of Chestnut Street.
3. The creation of a village square, an outdoor public space, as a central room for downtown.
4. The design of a new postal facility to effectively and attractively accommodate this central civic function.
5. In combination with the public aspects of the Post Office, the construction of a building for the village. Events, displays, activities and presentations ranging from modern visual and performing arts to historical scholarships may be housed within the building and on the Village Square.
6. The connection of downtown and the town center with the railroad right-of-way, Huguenot Street and the Wallkill River by pedestrian path.
7. The enhancement and updating of the railroad right-of-way, Huguenot Street and the banks of the Wallkill River.



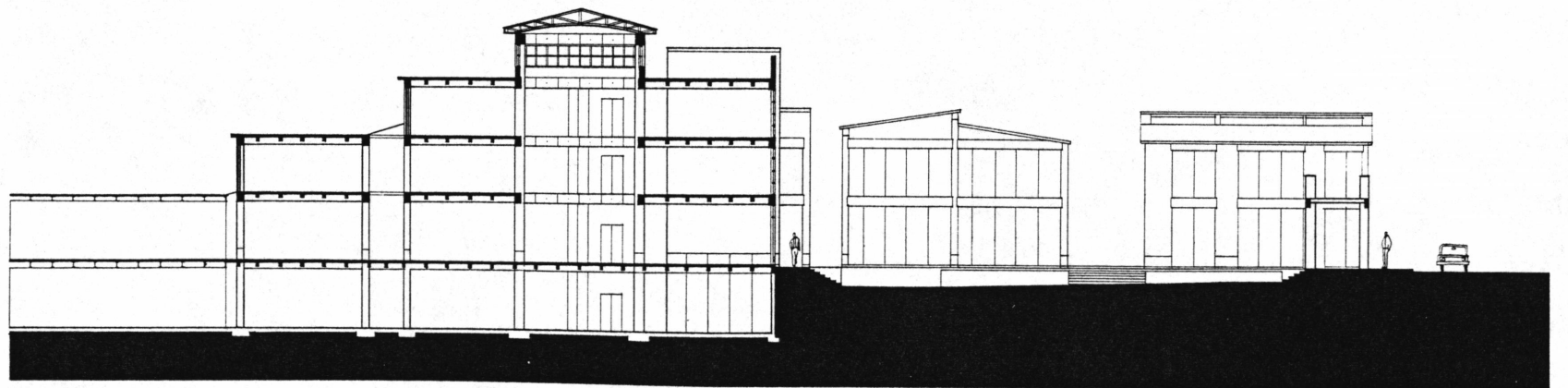




Site Plan

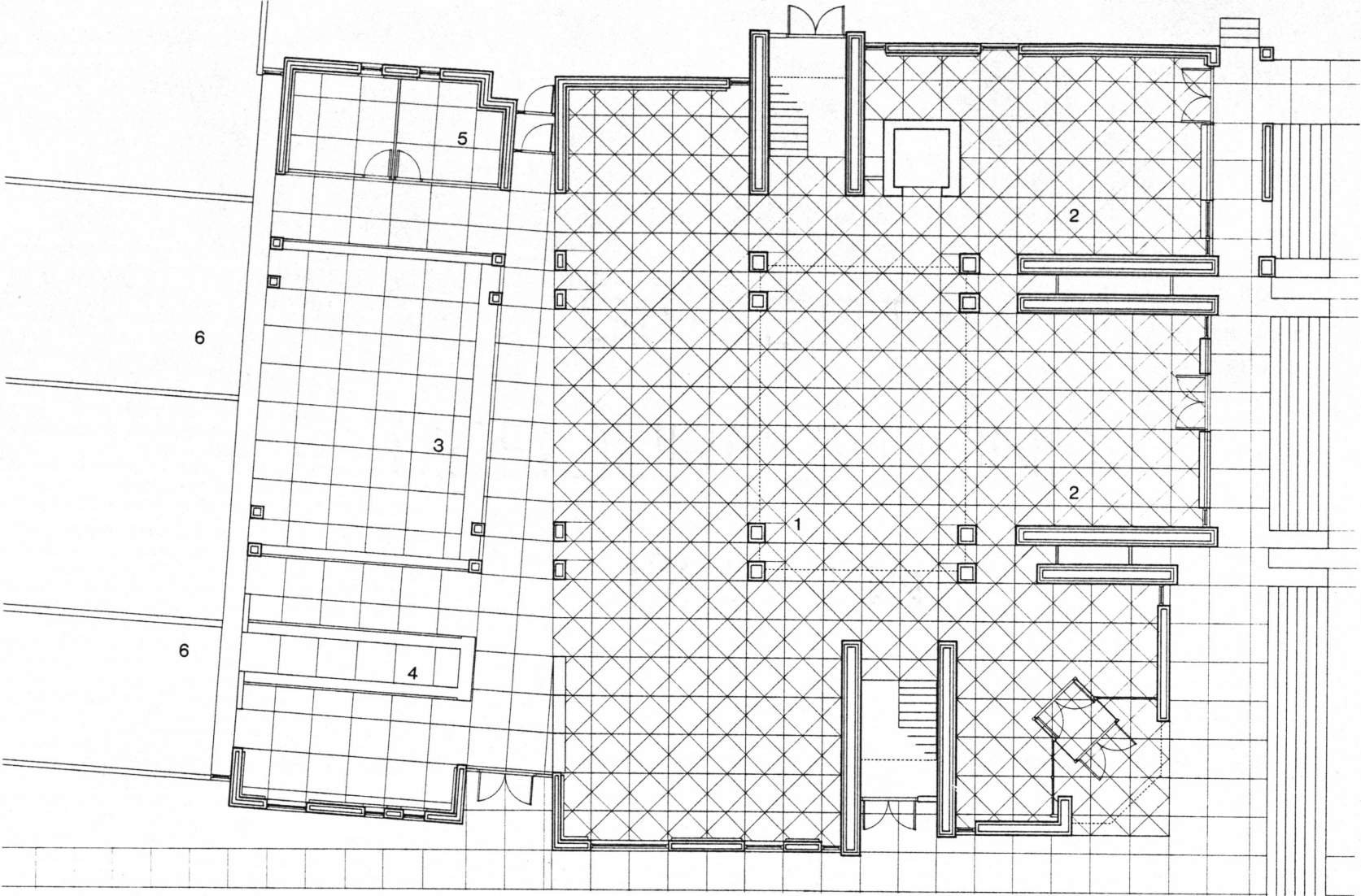
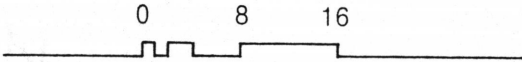


Site Section

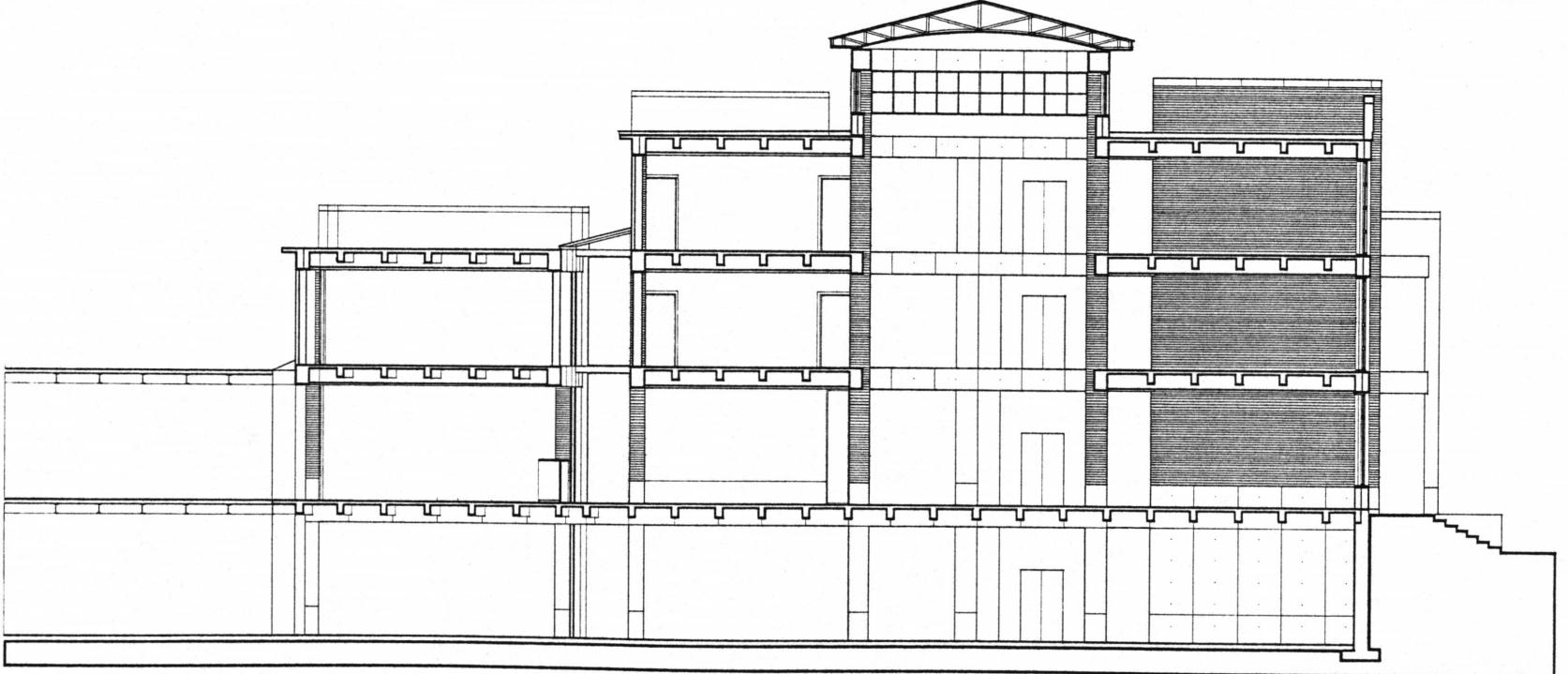


First Level Plan

- 1. Lobby
- 2. Exhibition Space
- 3. Postal Services
- 4. Postal Boxes
- 5. Postmaster
- 6. Support Spaces

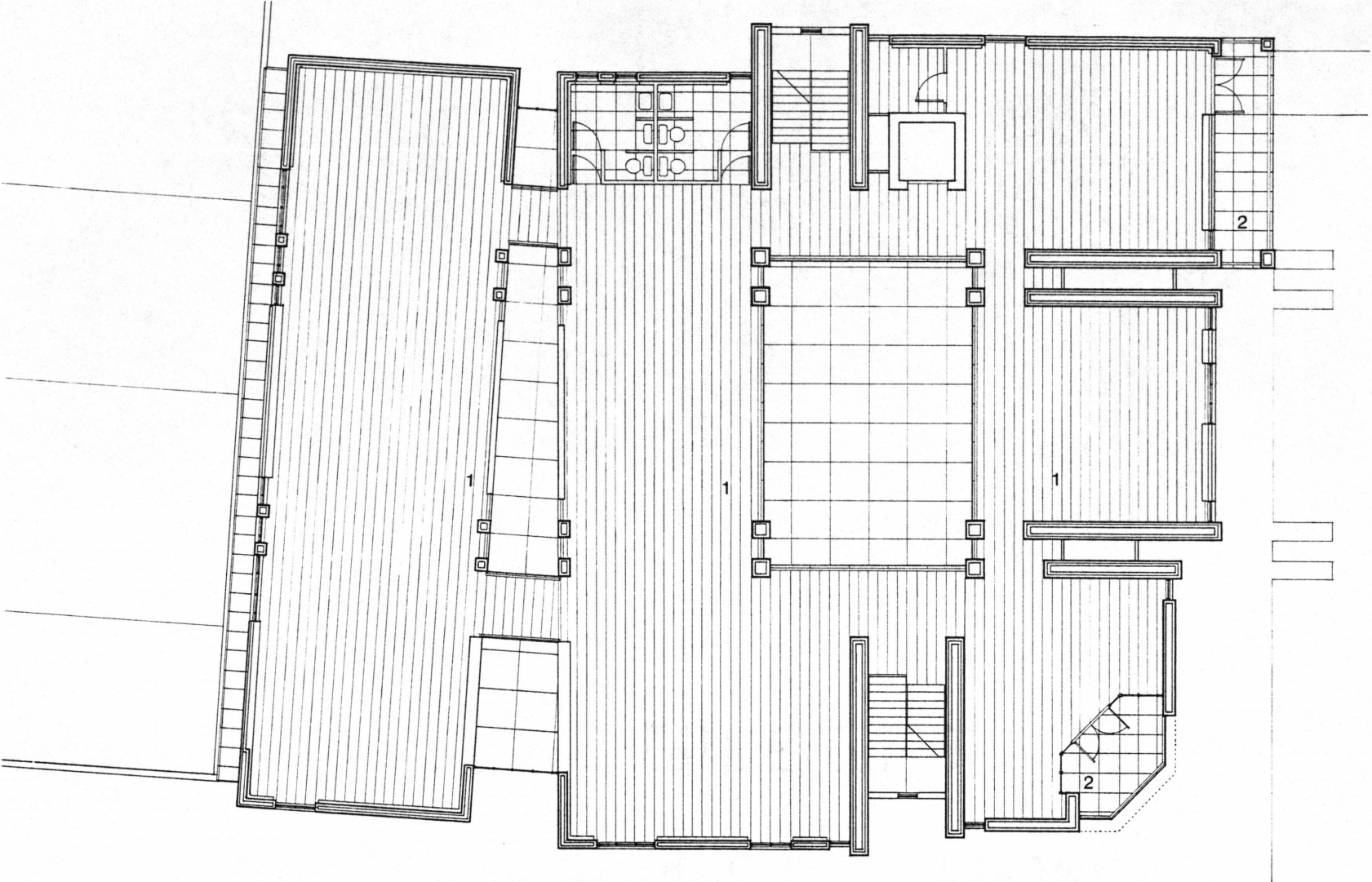


Building Section



Second Level Plan

- 1. Exhibition Space
- 2. Porch

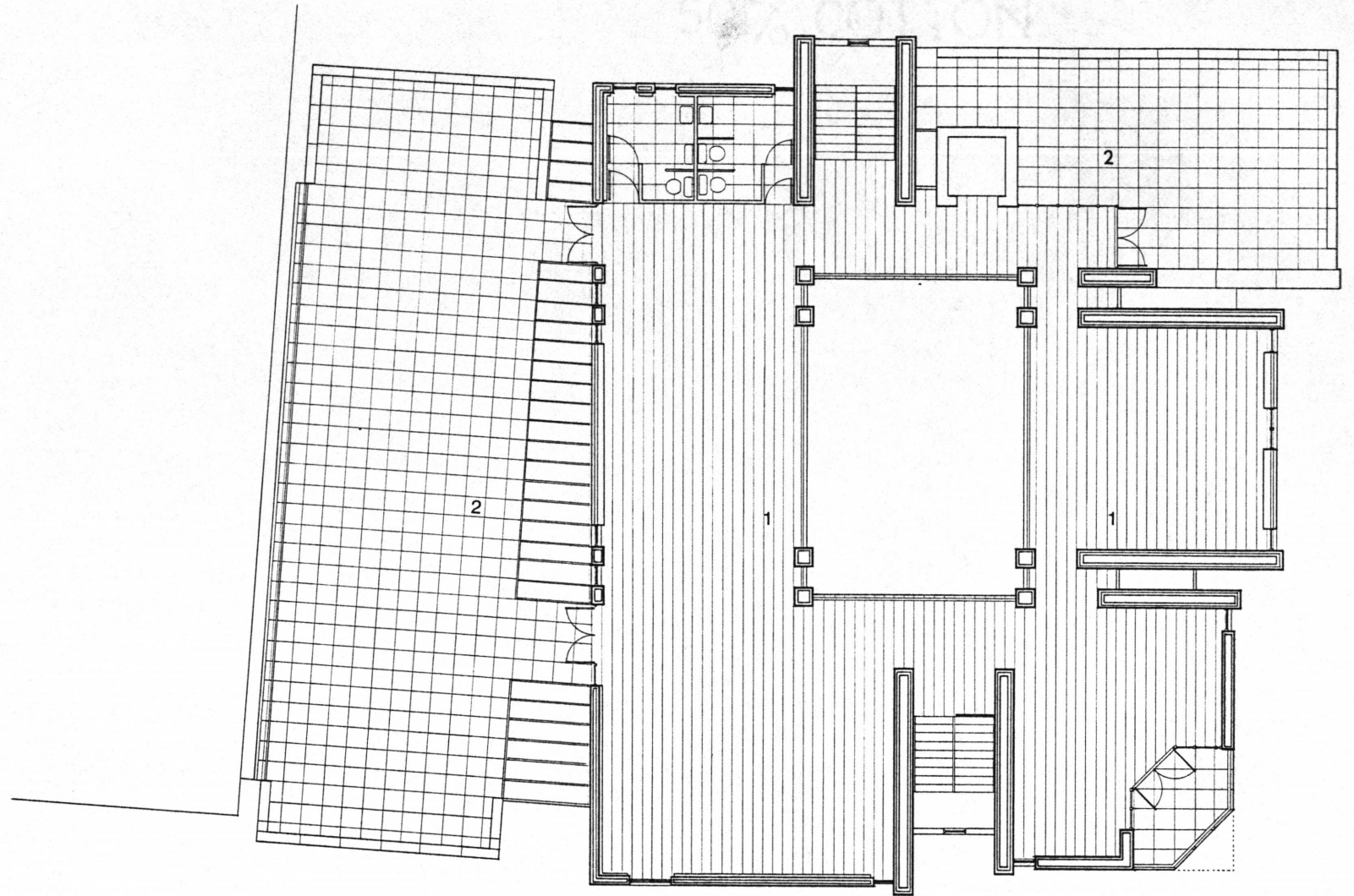


South Elevation

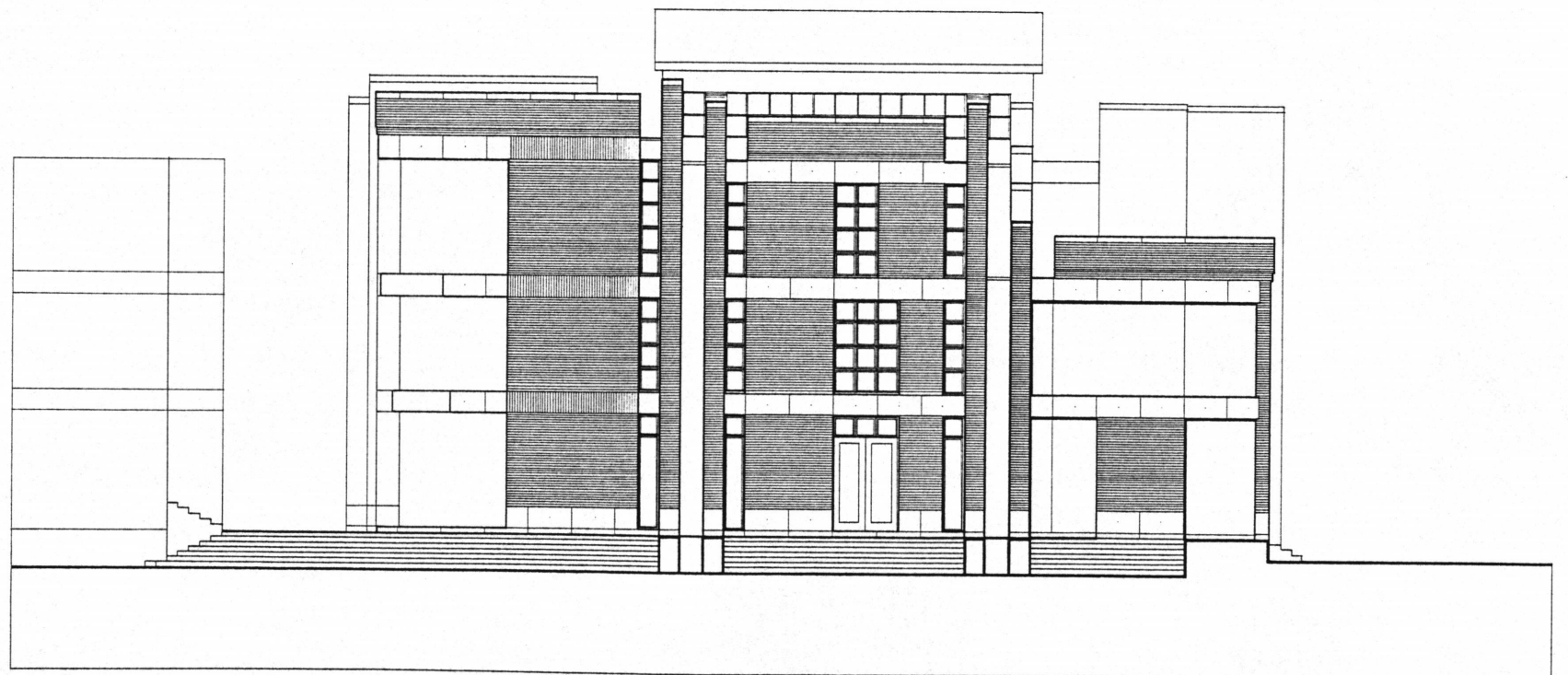


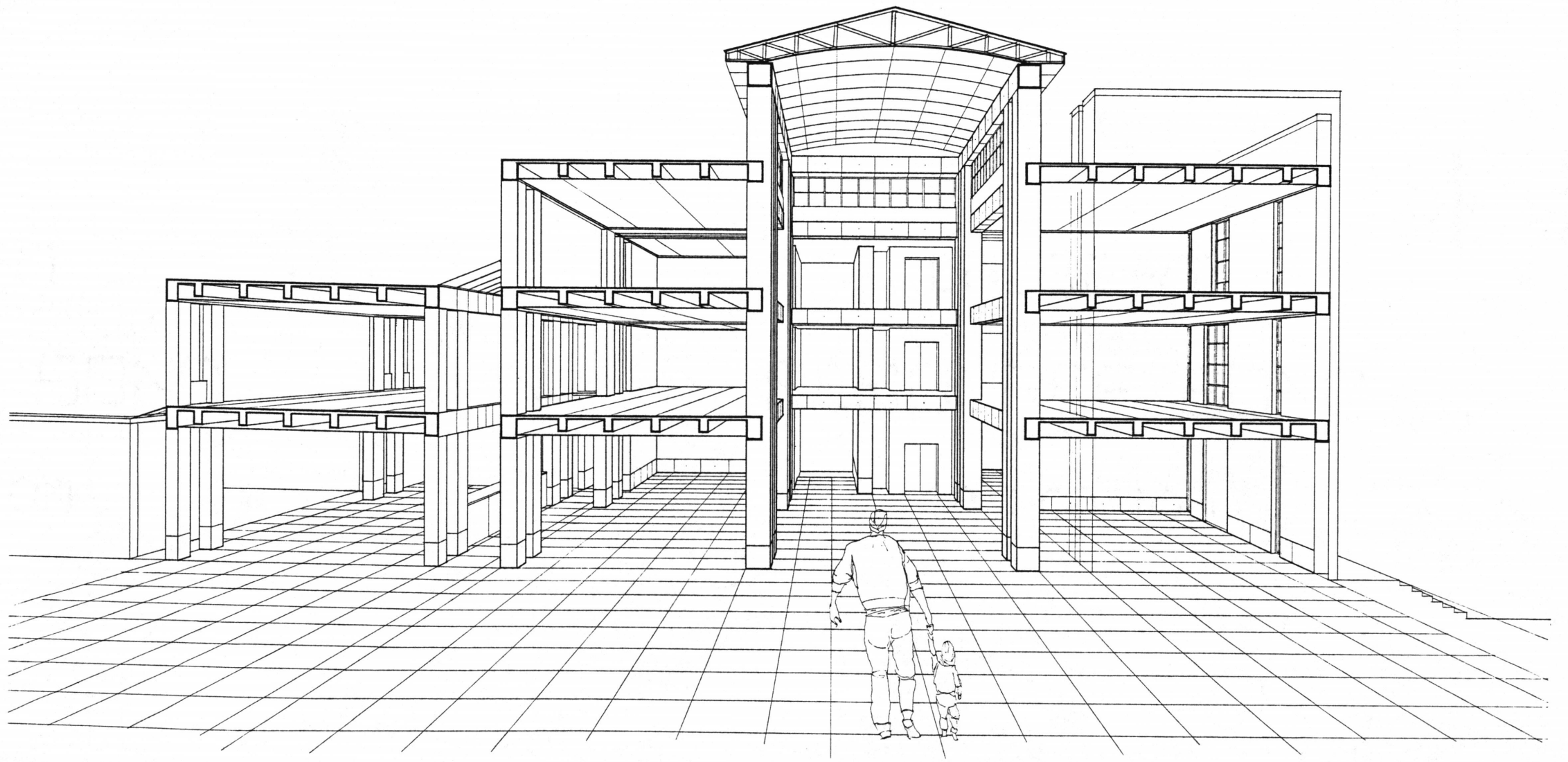
Third Level Plan

- 1. Exhibition Space
- 2. Terrace

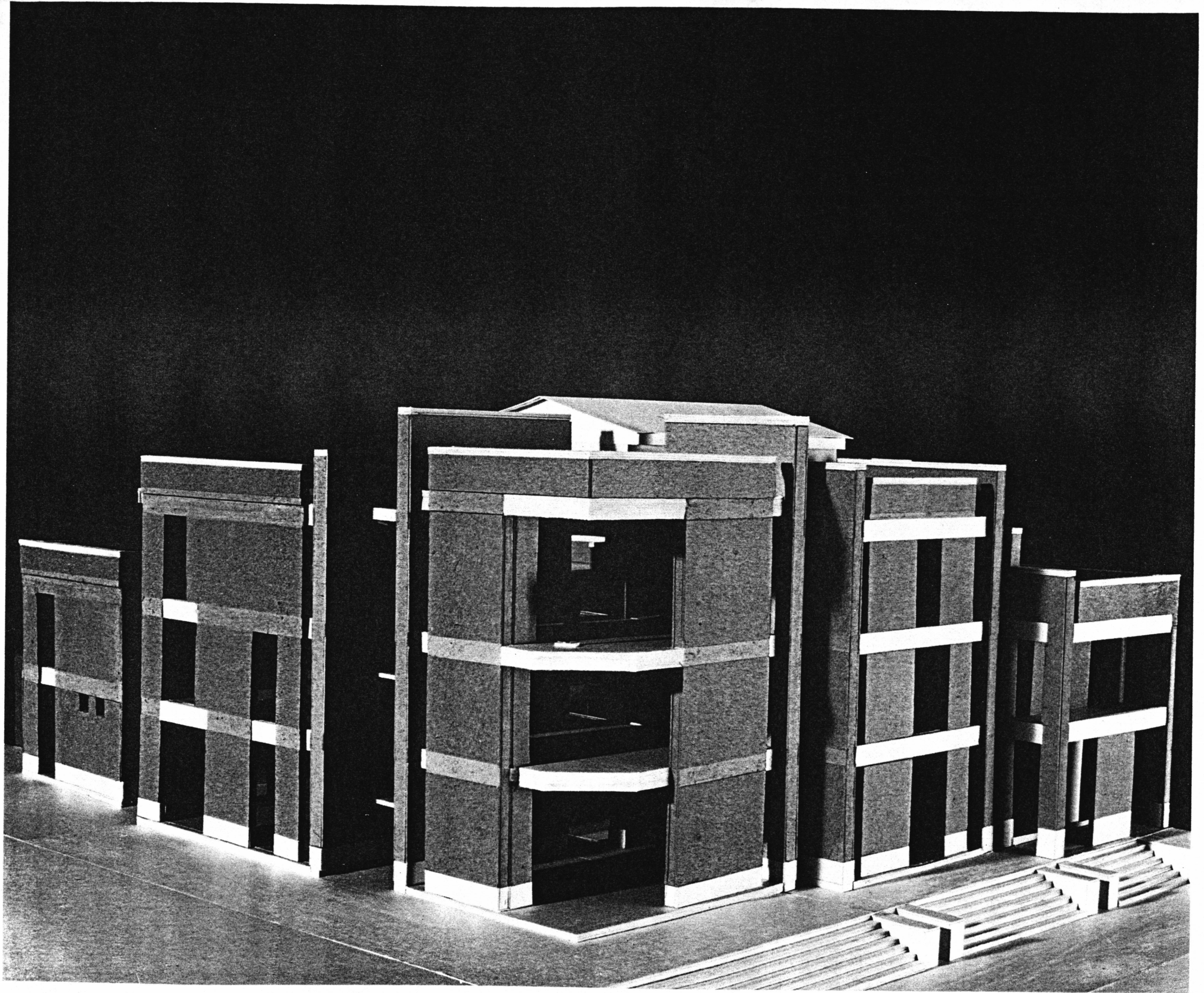


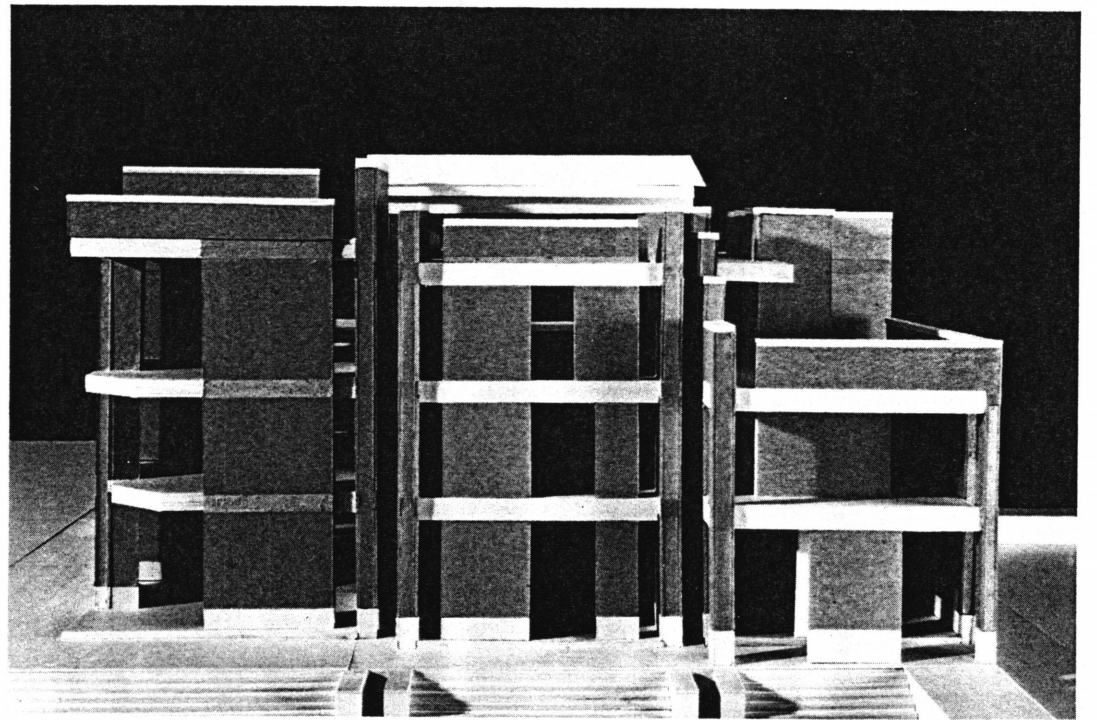
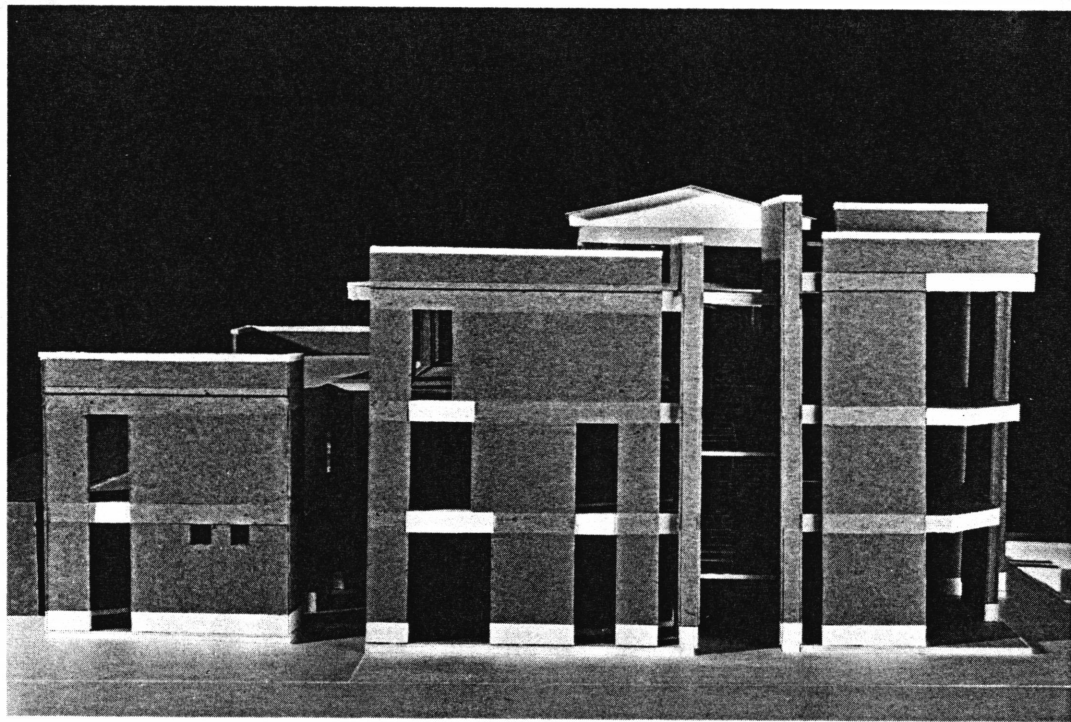
East Elevation

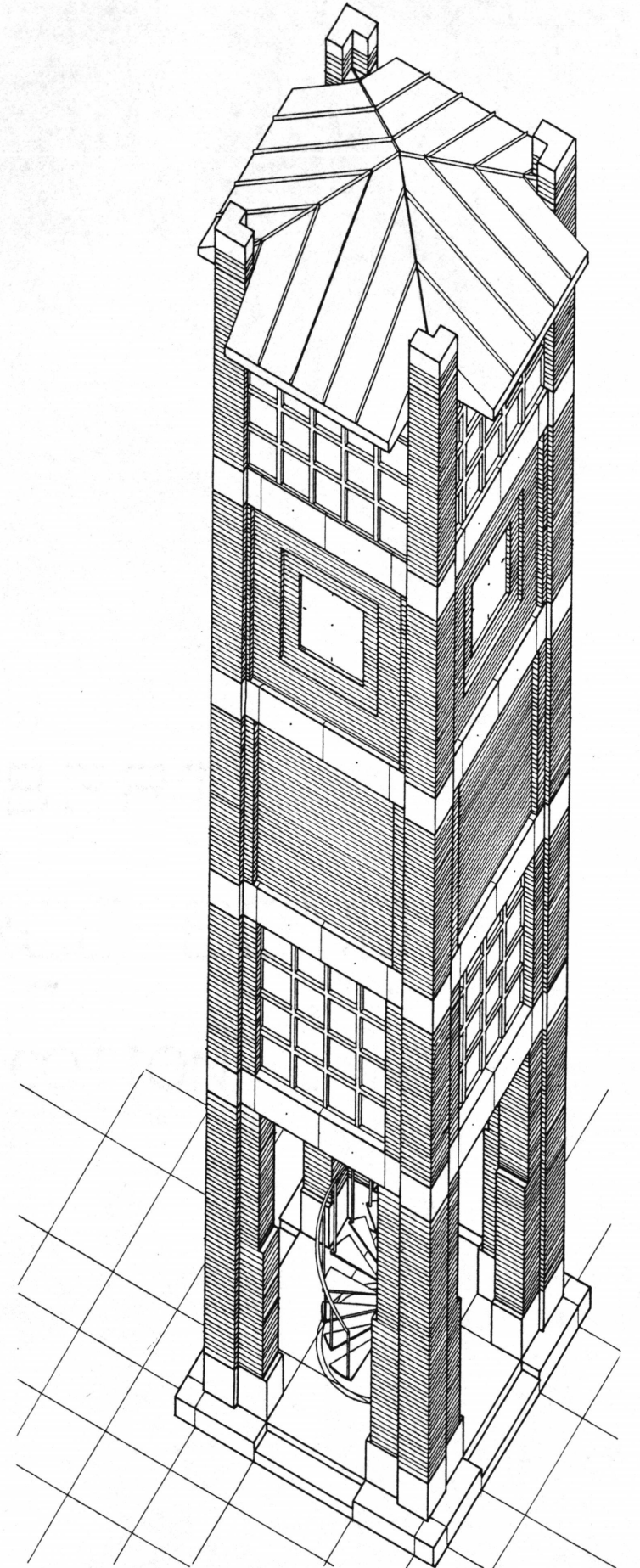
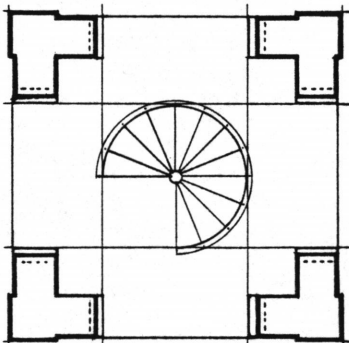
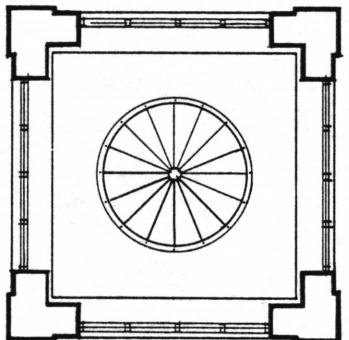
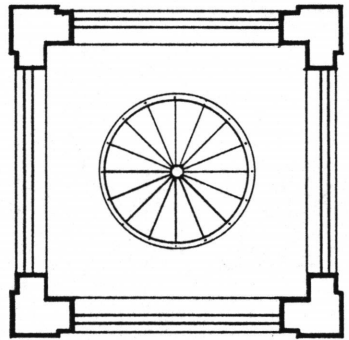
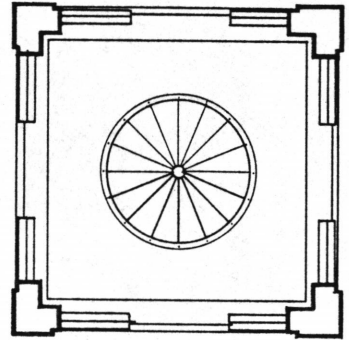
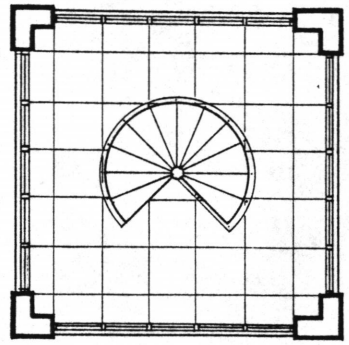


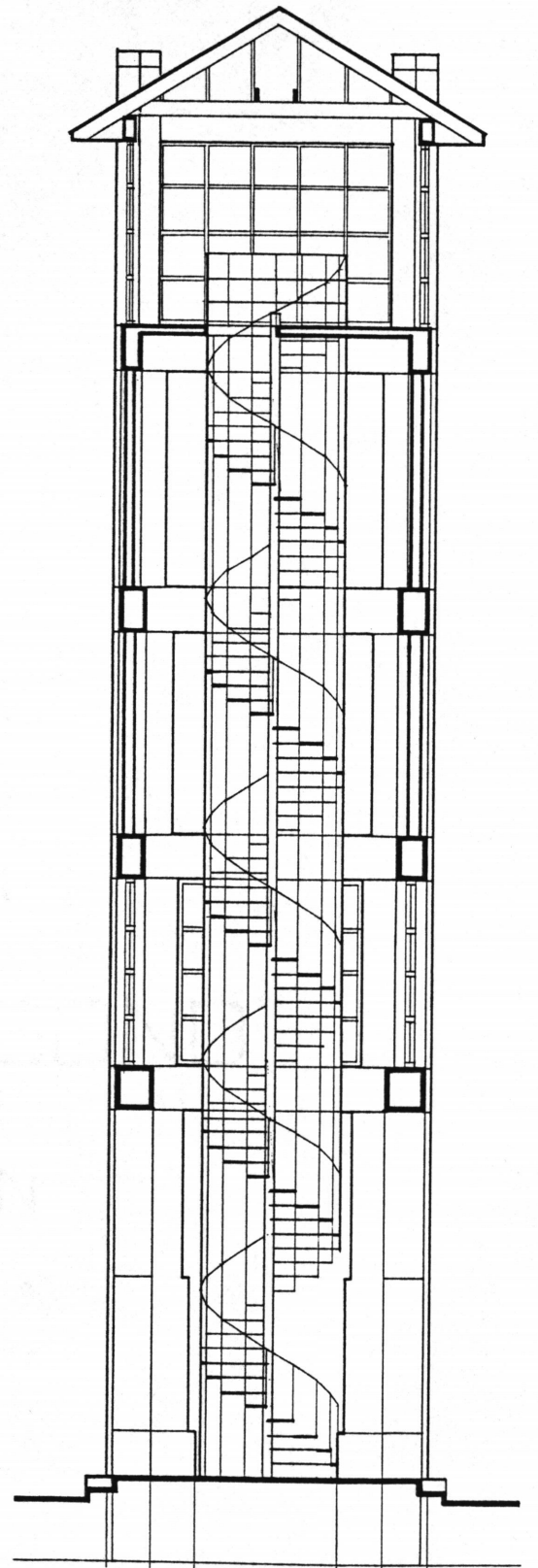
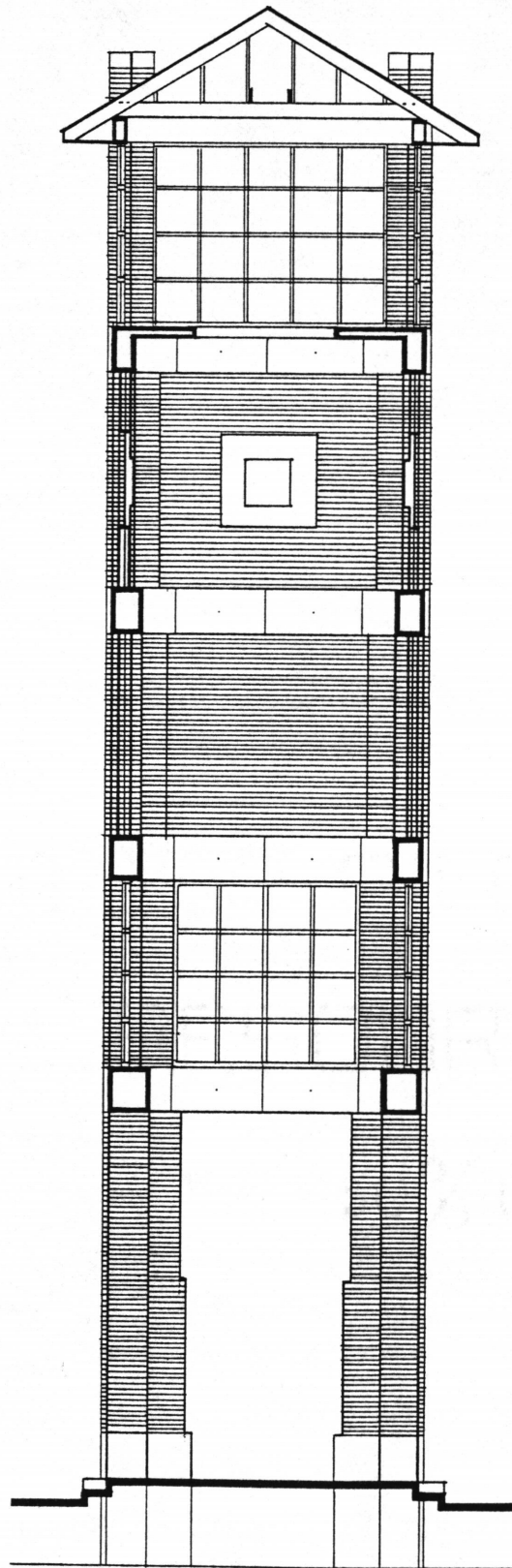
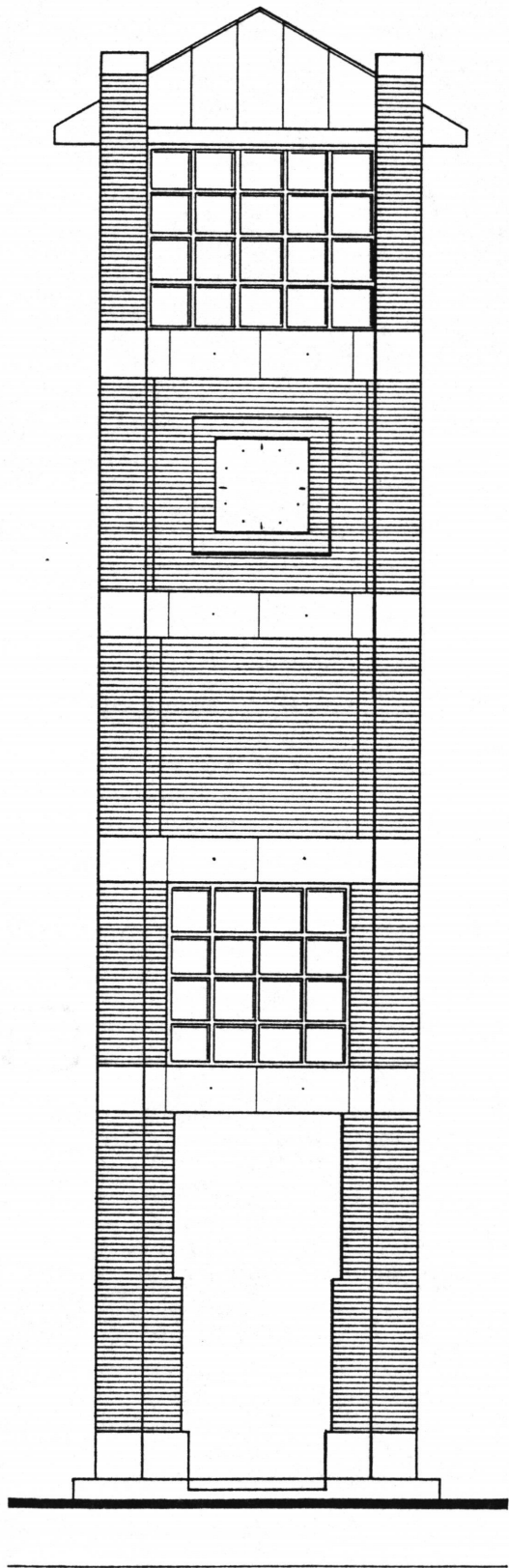












## Photographic Credits

### Page

- 2 Shell, 1927. Edward Weston.
- 7 Photograph of the railroad station in the 1880's; Courtesy of Elting Memorial Library: Haviland-Heidgard Historical Collection.
- 12 Photograph of Lower Main Street; circa 1900; Courtesy of Elting Memorial Library: Haviland-Heidgard Historical Collection.

All other photographs by the author.

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