

A DICHOTOMY OF PRESCENCE

by  
James R. King

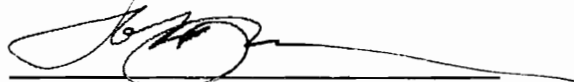
Thesis submitted to the Graduate  
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Master of Architecture

Approved:



Michael O'Brien, Chairman



Joseph L. Mashburn



William Galloway

December, 1991  
Blacksburg, Virginia

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## DEDICATION

This book, let alone my education, could not have been accomplished without the loving support of my wife, Kathy. For her extreme patience, encouragement and perseverance I give my thanks. To you , Kaitlyn and Jane,our daughters,I dedicate this book.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who have given me reason to remember them in some way, large or small, throughout my educational experience. I cannot begin to name all who have been so supportive during my academic endeavor. However, there are a few whom I feel should be thanked, for without them, I would not have discovered those things about myself and my position in architecture.

First, to my committee :

Joe, for always wondering how the many pieces would make architecture...

Bill, for pushing me to constantly examine my position...

And especially Mike, for his time, guidance, patience and genuine interest.

To my family:

For your love, encouragement and help (especially with the babies).

To my friends:

For the questions, answers and criticisms that kept me always wondering...

To Paul Marshall, AIA:

For a place to start and an opportunity to learn...

## ABSTRACT

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it, (Did you think it was in the white or grey stone? or the lines of the arches and cornices?)

Walt Whitman

In reading that particular line from Whitman one immediately realizes that to study an architectural object takes on an air of subjectivity. To assume architecture is intrinsic to site materials, or any other variable is incorrect. Rather, it emanates from so many undescrivable pieces making the whole.

Taking this thought a step further and introducing history, one can suggest that just as history is sometimes transparent, the same may apply to architecture. Since one event is not necessarily dependant on another, this thesis can be viewed in much the same manner.

An architectural study of the old and new, the in-between and how one element can affect the other but stand apart as its own was the focus of this thesis.



**POSITION**

The magnetism that makes one begin to appreciate the architecture of a structure is relatively easy when it is a building steeped in tradition and history. But what explains those buildings not intended to become such significant works, but nonetheless make their mark as architecture? Many structures fit this category, from the vernacular to the post-modern. Therefore, the exploration of this thesis is finding elements in remnants from the past that somehow suggest to even the casual observer that something of architectural significance once existed

In speaking of monuments, J.B. Jackson writes that it is “an object which is supposed to remind us of something important.” He further states “A monument can be nothing



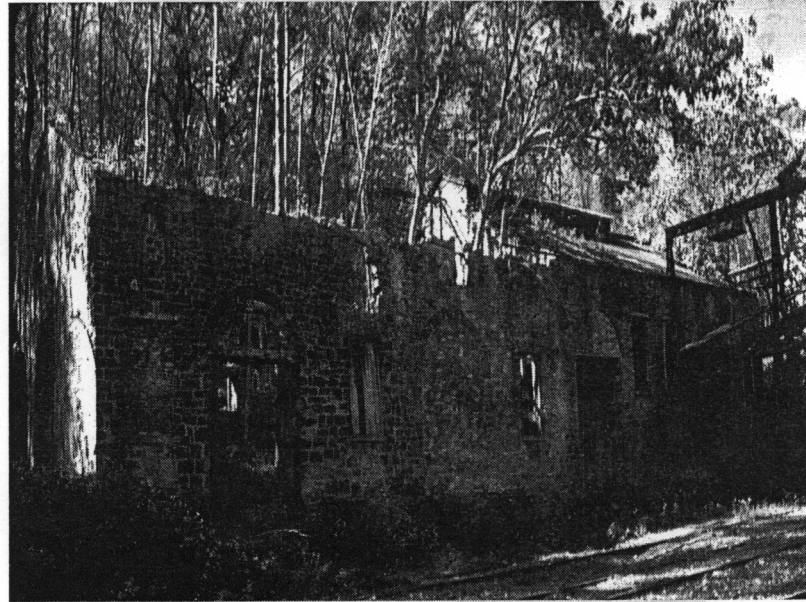
more than a rough stone. . . an echo from the remote past suddenly become present and actual.” Carrying this thought a step further, one could apply this to any fragment of the past, especially buildings. It was this thinking that led me to question the true meaning of architecture. Based on older buildings that are

either still standing or left to ruin, it is my belief that architecture, in the purest sense, is a result of intent. That is to say, one cannot deliberately set out to produce a great work of art, but the thoughtful consideration of the quality of materials used to construct a building more often than not will result in some aspect of architecture. As David Pye wrote “. . . there was no thought of distinguishing between works of art and other works, for works and works of art were synonymous. The notion that every material has, as a matter of objective fact, a specific nature, a fixed set of inherent properties which can be expressed or suppressed when it is used. . .” From this, one can see that where careful thought is given, quality [architecture] will result.

So this idea of studying the past and the nature of materials is not unique. Many have studied architecture from this perspective and will continue to do so. It is my opinion that by thoughtfully studying the past, much can be used in the present. Not necessarily particular methods or materials, but what was the intent. Many would argue that function alone served as a guideline for many buildings, and would not be entirely wrong. Others may suggest that the meaning of architecture can most easily be found in the aesthetic presence of a structure. Though the initial aesthetic impact of any object is what makes the strongest impression, there is a deeper meaning that can only be found upon closer observation. It is in this study that I feel is found the true

meaning of architecture. By studying older structures and attempting to emulate this meaning, one can at least gain a better understanding of what architecture is. In this regard, Aldo van Eyck states that "architecture is the marriage of place and occasion."



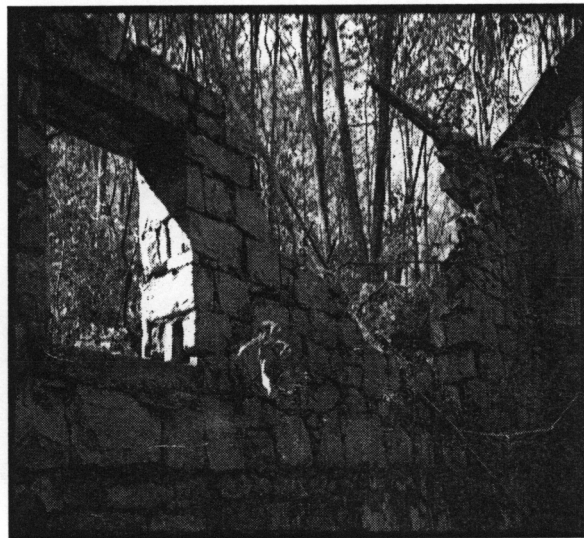


**TOPIC**

The question of how one could take an existing fragment of a building, a ruin, and add to it, yet not take away from the old or the new was a venue of exploration that ultimately became this thesis. Examining materials was of great importance. No matter how resilient a material is, when left alone over time, nature will once again claim what was built by humankind.

The possibilities of this thought suggested to me that architecture has no limits of time. What is now a sight to behold will stand the test of the ages. Whether or not it again becomes one with nature and succumbs to the elements, it is forever architecture.

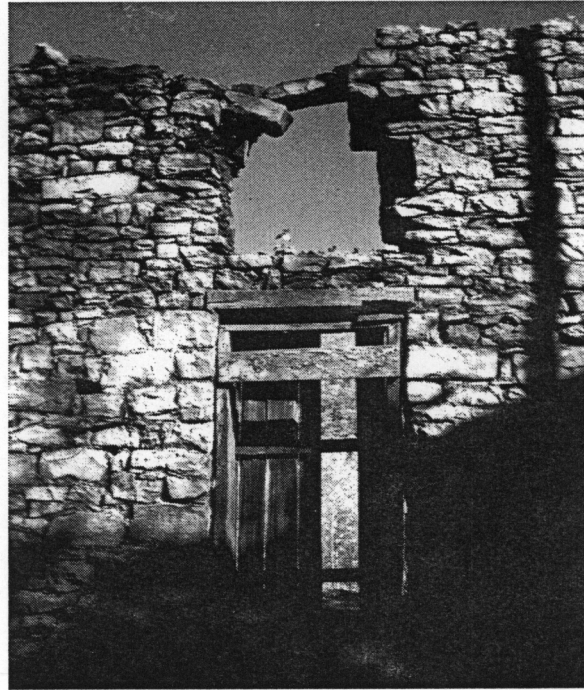
The opportunity to begin with a ruin and explore the architectural ques-



tions that arise are unique, but not unrelated to more conventional methods. The design of a new extension stemming from the old and borrowing much of its language was done keeping in mind that generations from now, one ruin would exist consisting of two separate but equal entities.

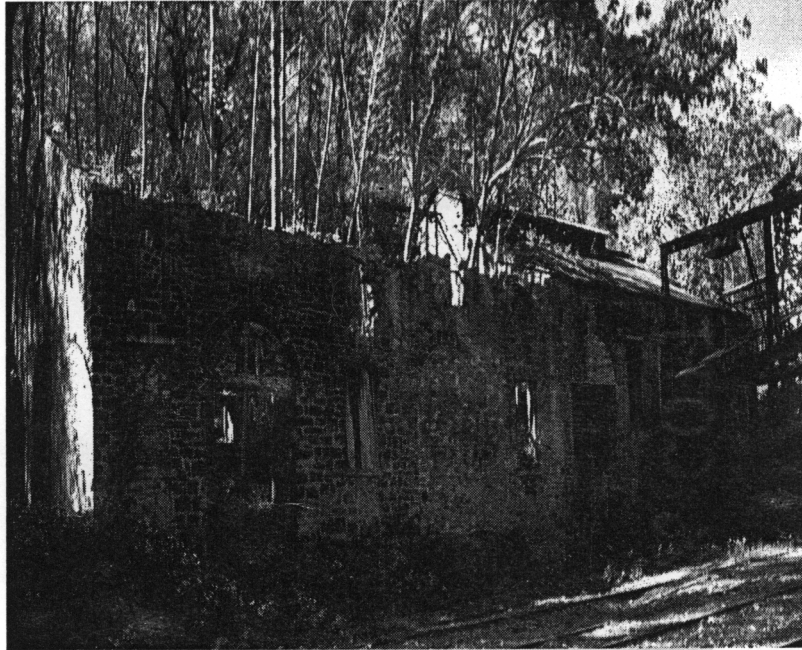
By using the old ruin for the entrance, exit and special exhibit area, and by designing the new structure to house the permanent displays, archives and the lobby, the visitor would be exposed to the old first, then the new, then back through the old. In doing this, one would be aware of the entire building, especially the two halves making the whole.

The large cavernous space of the old ruin cannot be duplicated, but can be enhanced. Therefore, a special exhibit space occupies what once was a power generating facility. The lobby area in the center acts as a mediator between what was and what is now. This same lobby also unifies each at a given area. The long, linear design of the new structure represents three things: First, the thickness of the walls to hold back the earth; second, the length to represent the flow of the river which offers historical significance to the area; and third, smaller rooms and niches along the way to offer not only literal breaks, but also to mark historically significant periods. Weaving throughout the old and new, one can experience both as separate but equal. This could best



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be described by Aldo van Eyck: "... When I speak of a house or a city as a bunch of places, I imply that you cannot leave a real place without entering another - if it's a real 'bunch'. Departure must mean entry." The old and the new - a dichotomy of presence.



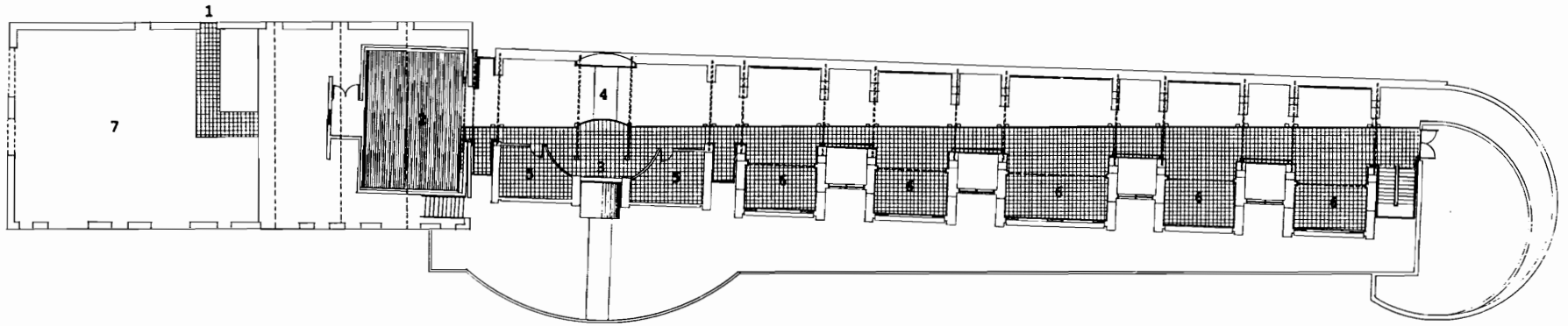
**LOCATION**

The New River, stretching over 250 miles through three states is one of the oldest in the world, dating back to about 15,000 years. The natural and cultural history of this region would be staggering, at least. In recent times (since the early part of the 20th century), numerous towns dotted the river, mostly due to the coal and timber industries. Some are still operating, most are abandoned, but all had one or two interesting buildings that would pique the interest of even the most casual observer. For this reason, the abandoned town of Kaymoor was chosen as the site for this thesis, a cultural heritage center. A once thriving coal town in the New River Gorge area of West Virginia allowed me to explore architecture from a slightly different point of view. That is, what made some of these buildings unique, especially the ones now gone to ruin and overtaken by nature. From this perspective stems the contrast of the old and the new — what was and what will be.

**THE  
CULTURAL**

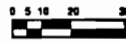


**HERITAGE  
CENTER**



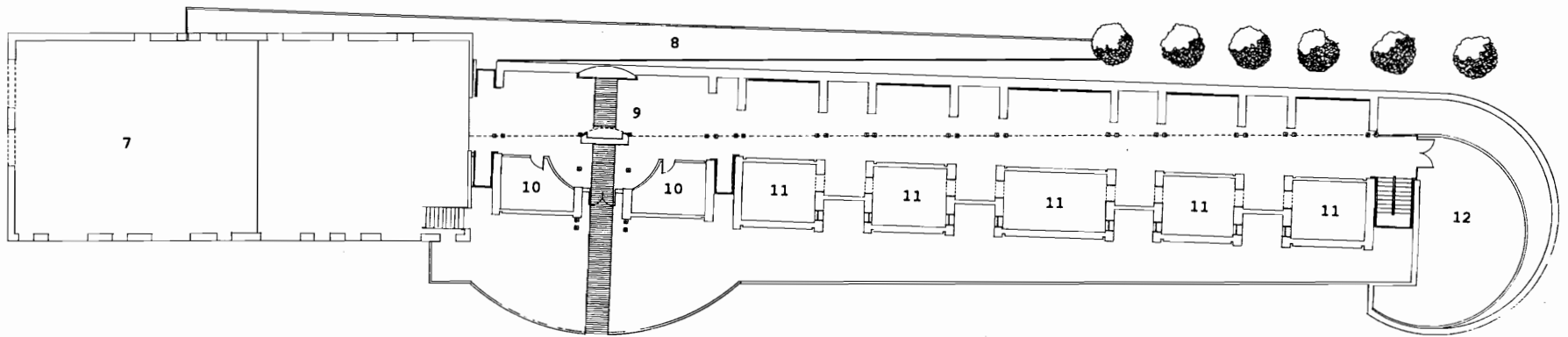
Upper Level Plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Special Exhibit
- 3 Main Entrance
- 4 Lower Lobby
- 5 Offices
- 6 Exhibit Area

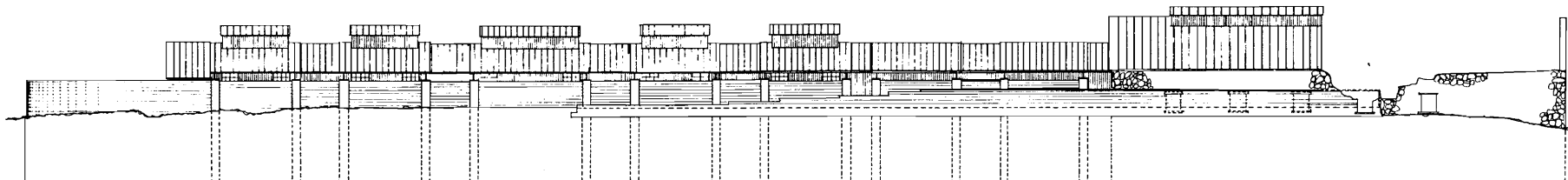


- 7 Courtyard
- 8 Walkway
- 9 Upper Lobby (Open)
- 10 Restrooms/Mechanical
- 11 Archives/Storage
- 12 Library

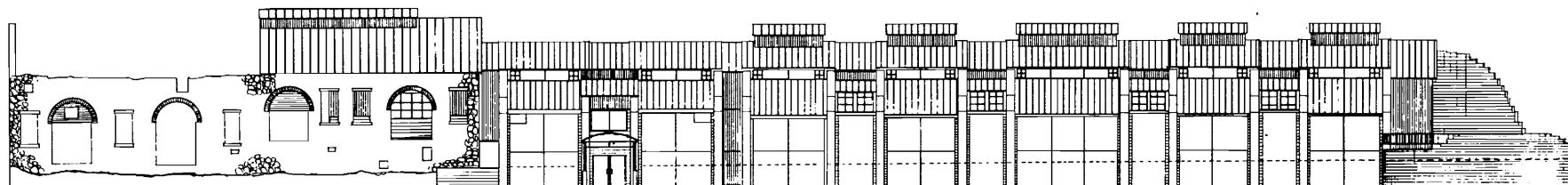
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Lower Level Plan

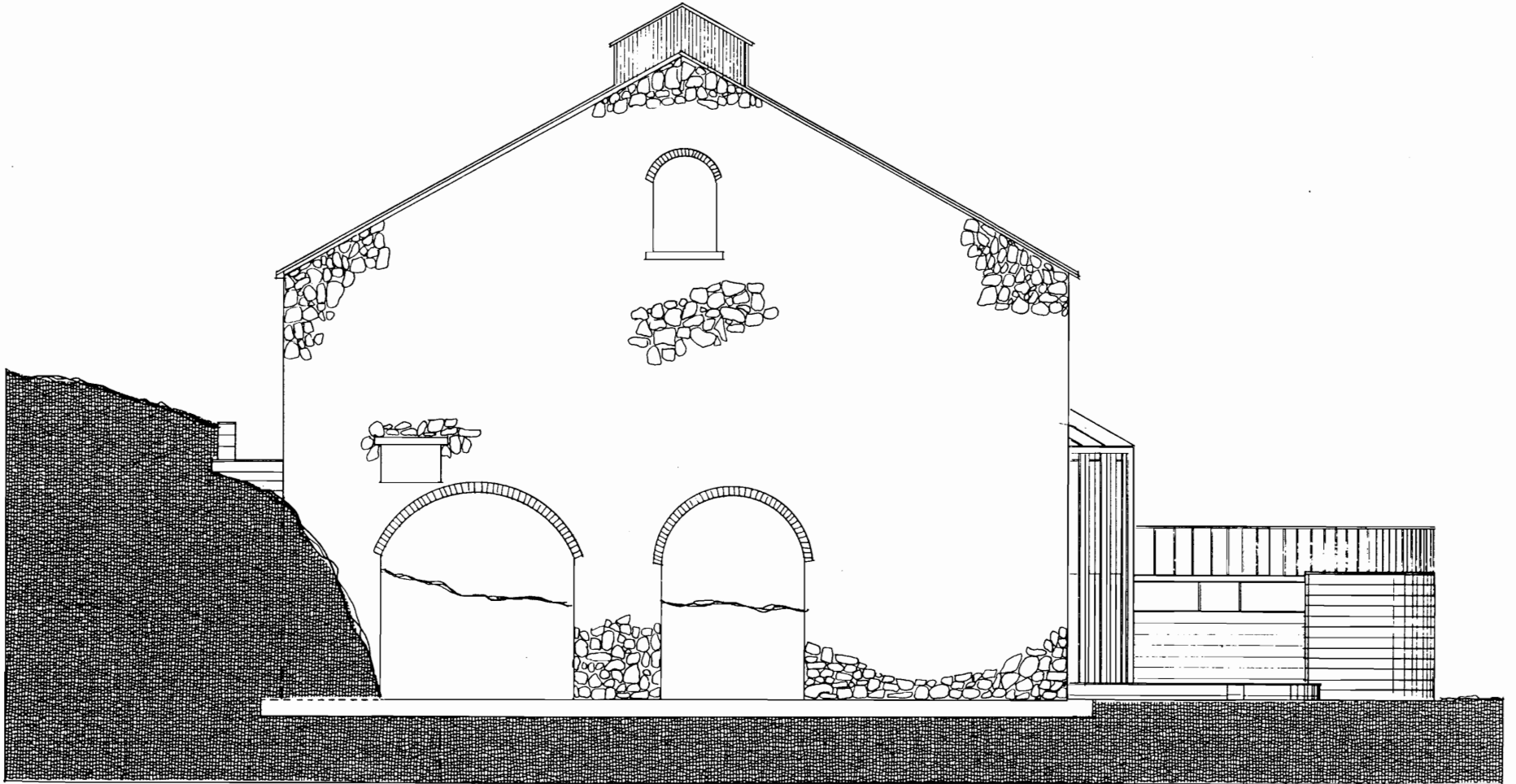


Rear Elevation

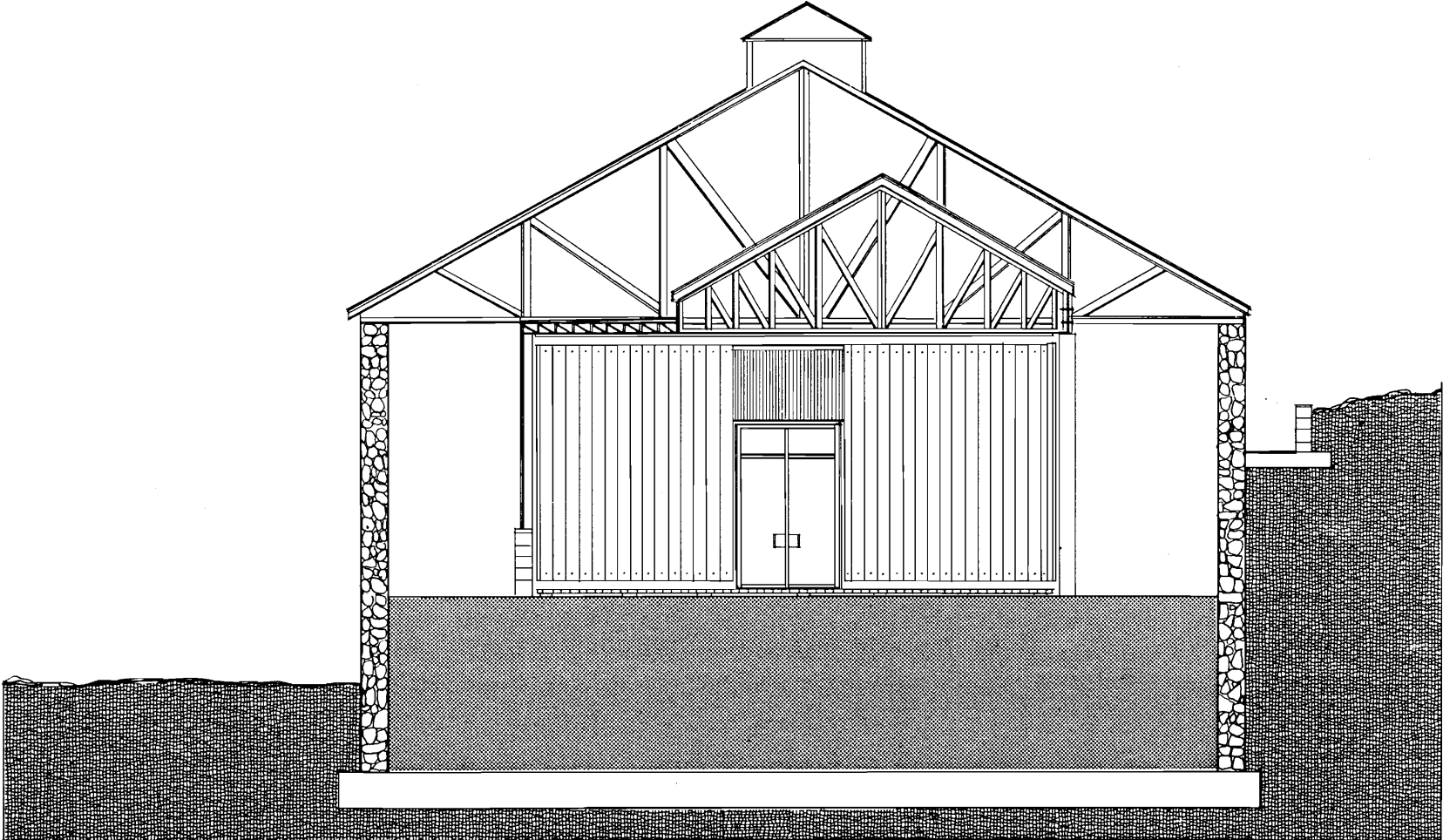


Front Elevation

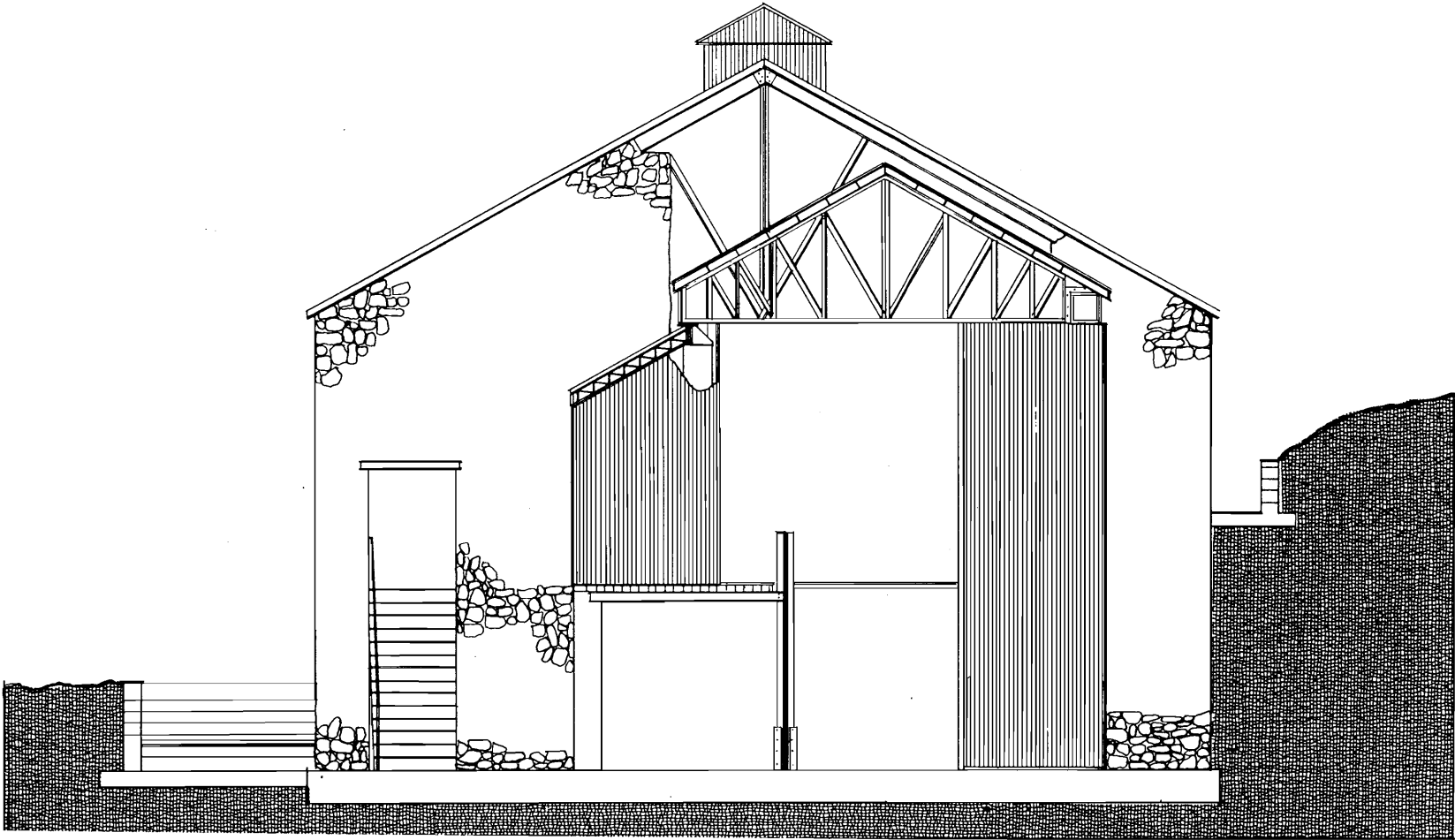
Left End Elevation



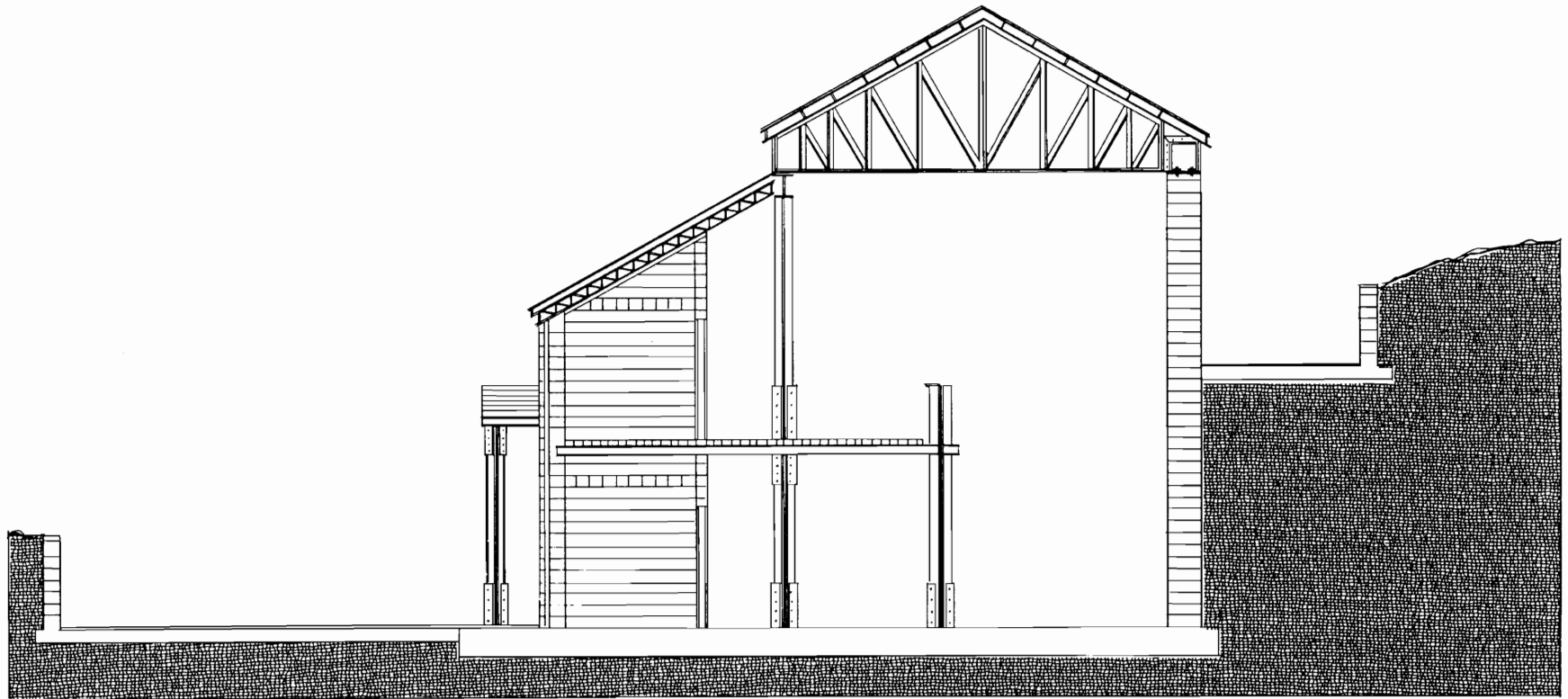
Section through Special Exhibit Area



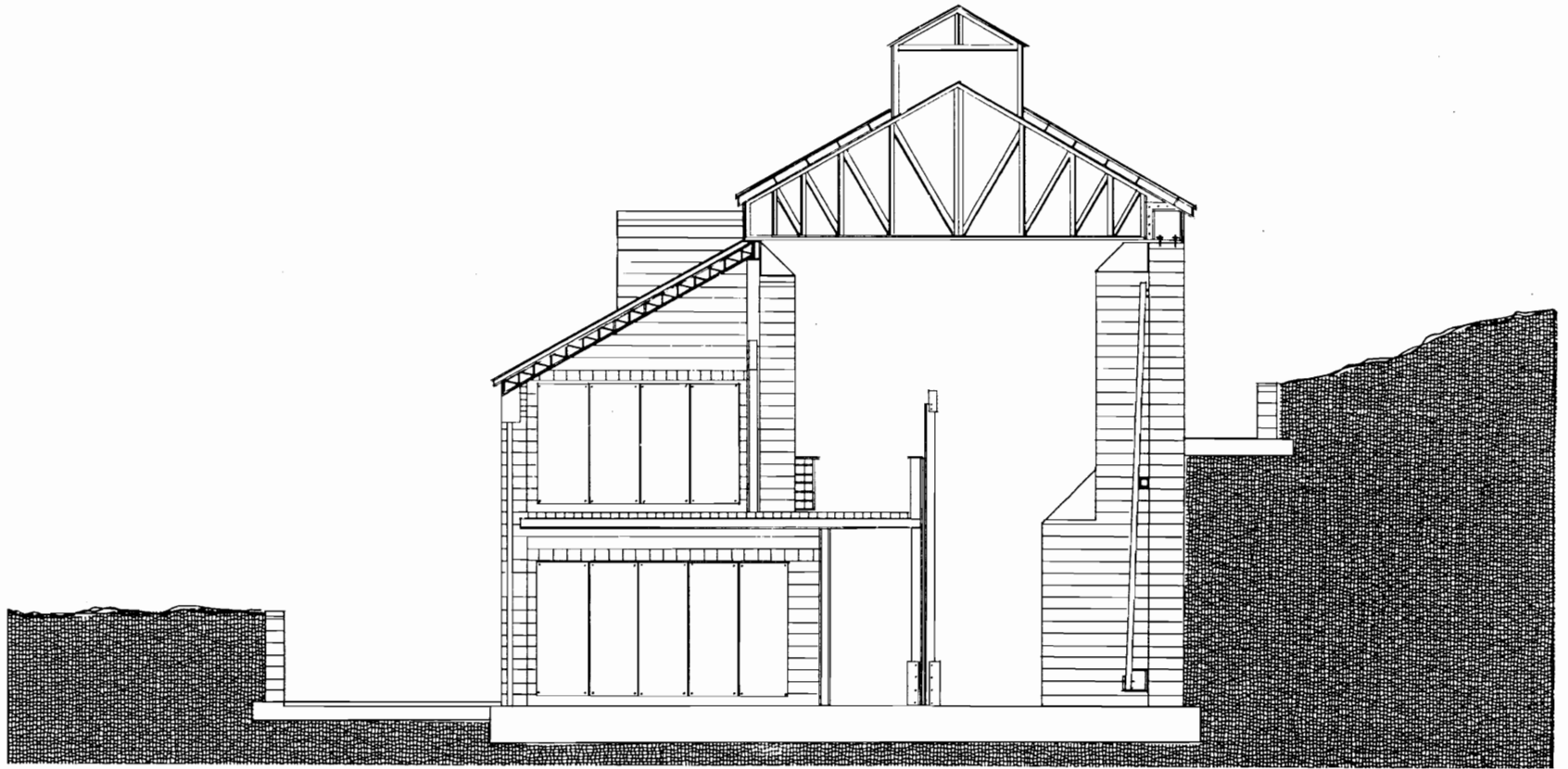
Section at Union of Old and New



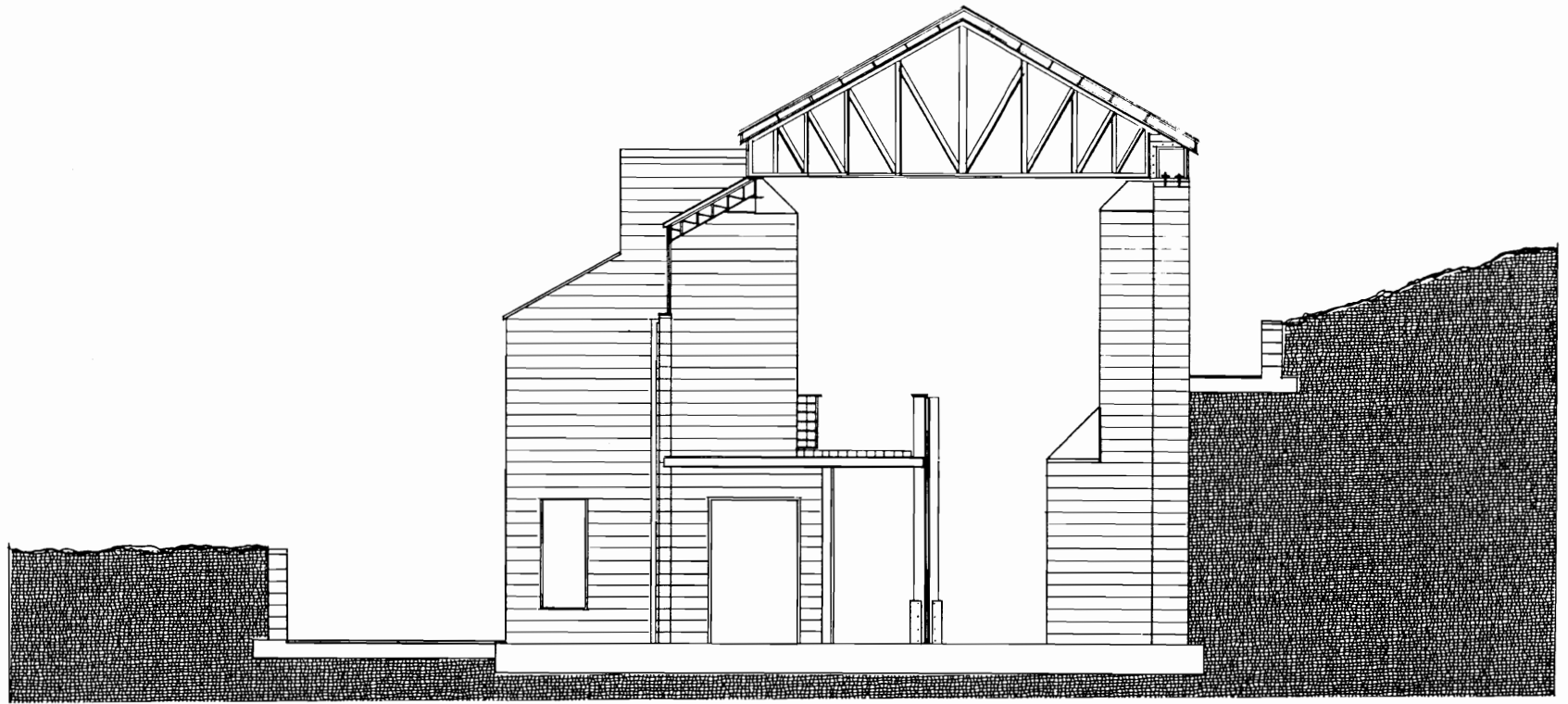
Section Through Entrance/Lobby



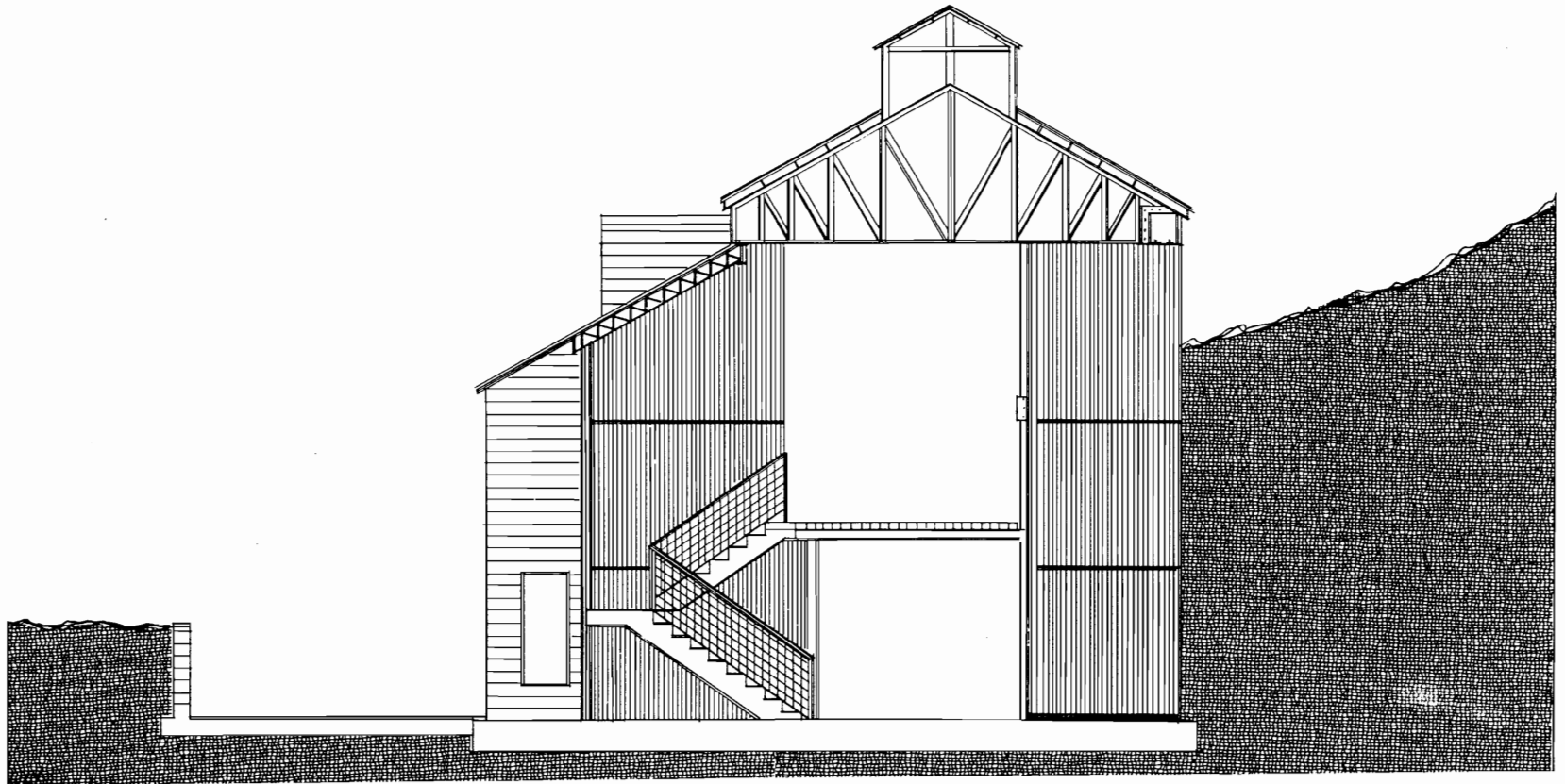
Section at Left Wall End of Typical Exhibit Area



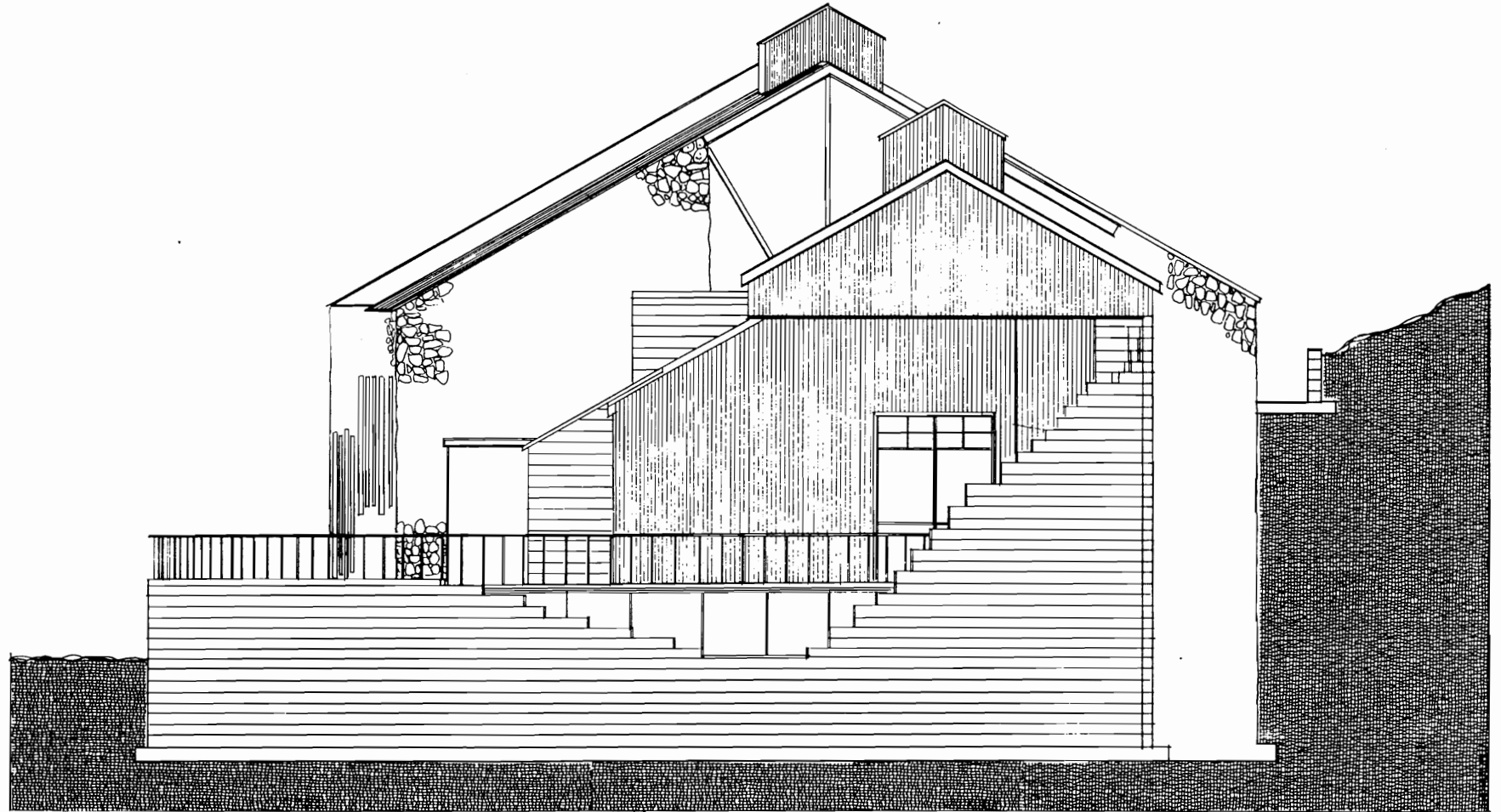
Section at Right Wall End of Typical Exhibit Area

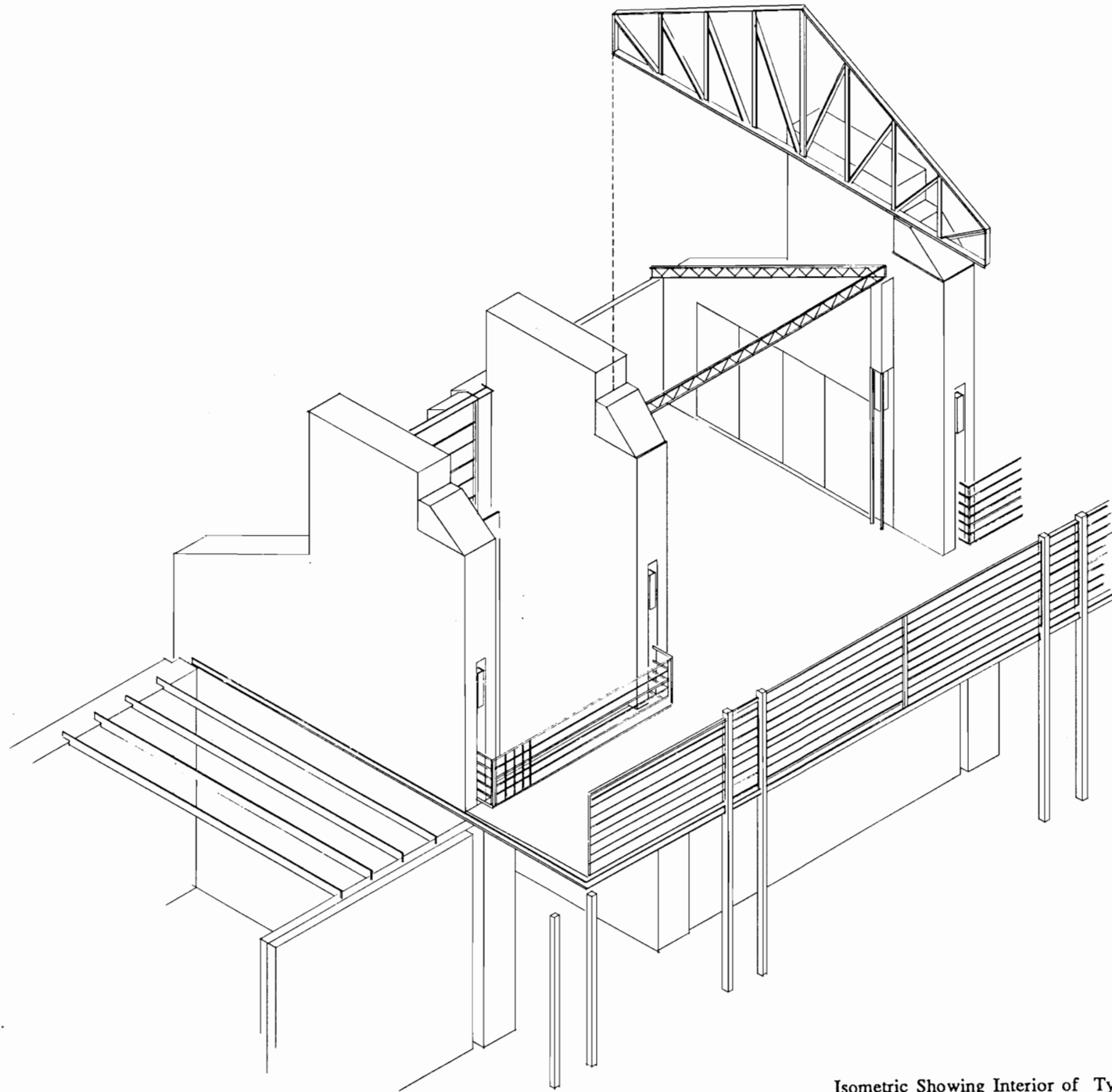


Section at End of Exhibit Area

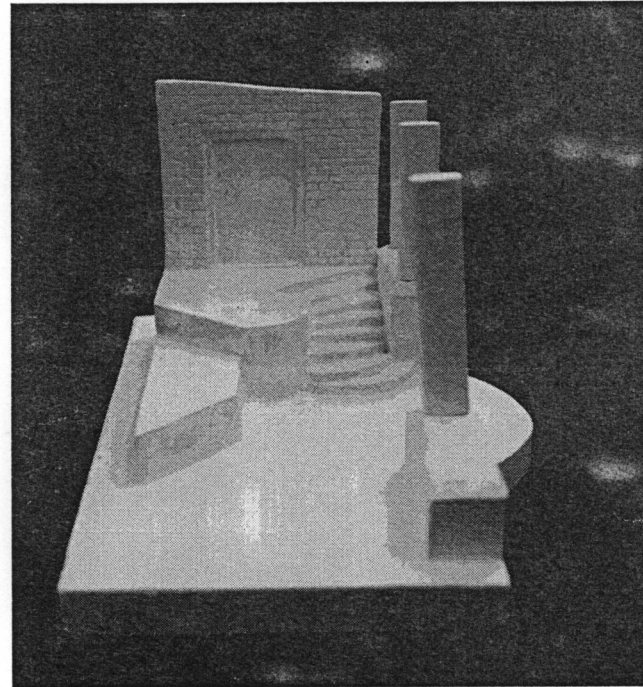
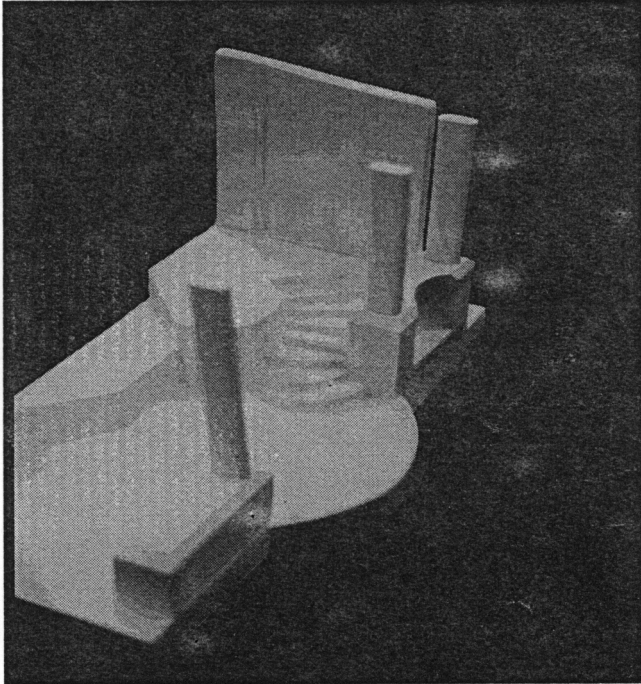


Right End Elevation

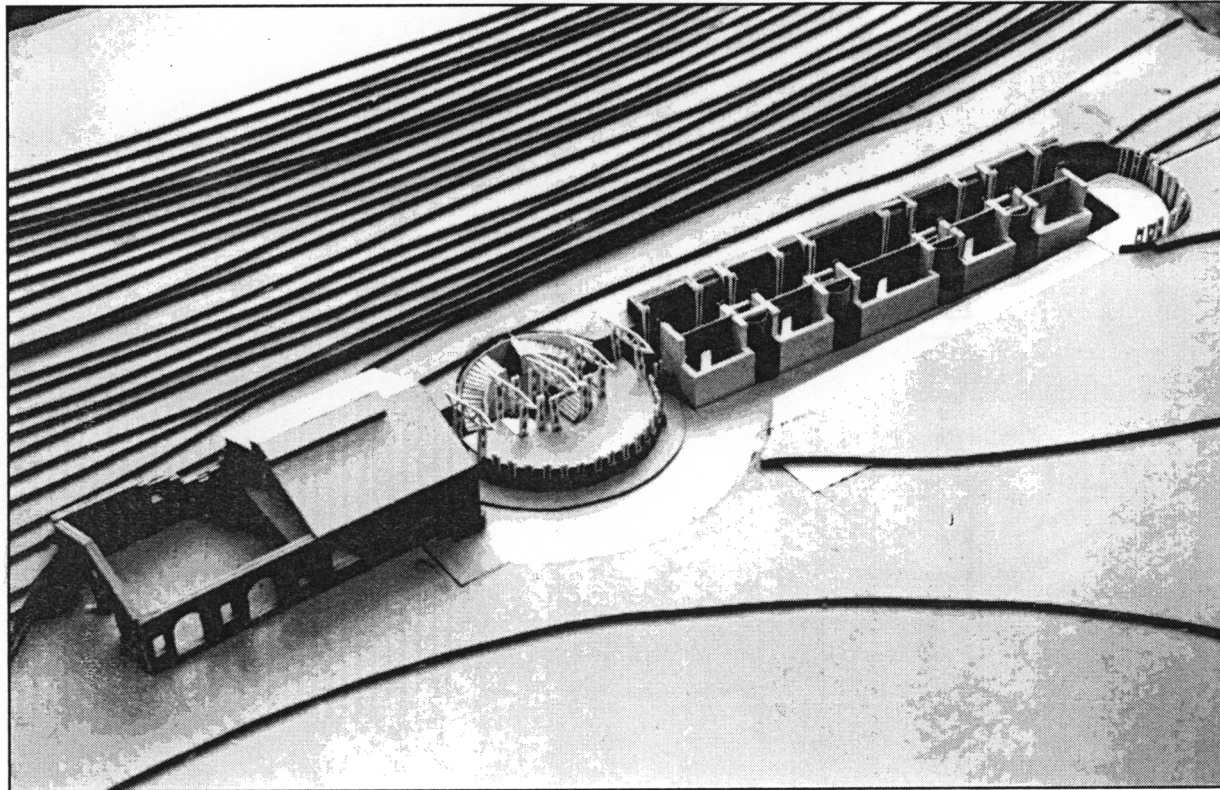




Isometric Showing Interior of Typical Exhibit Area

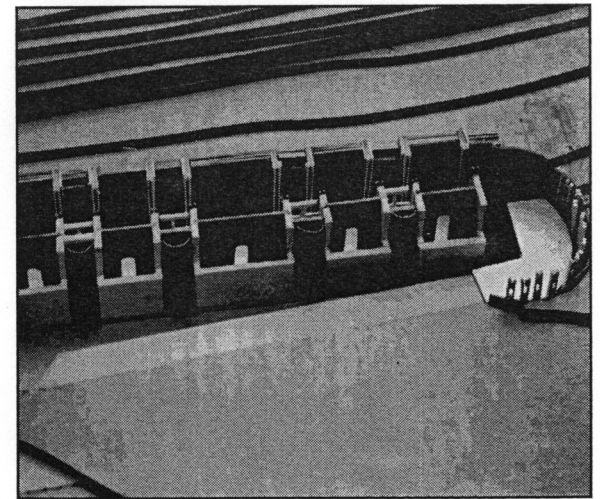


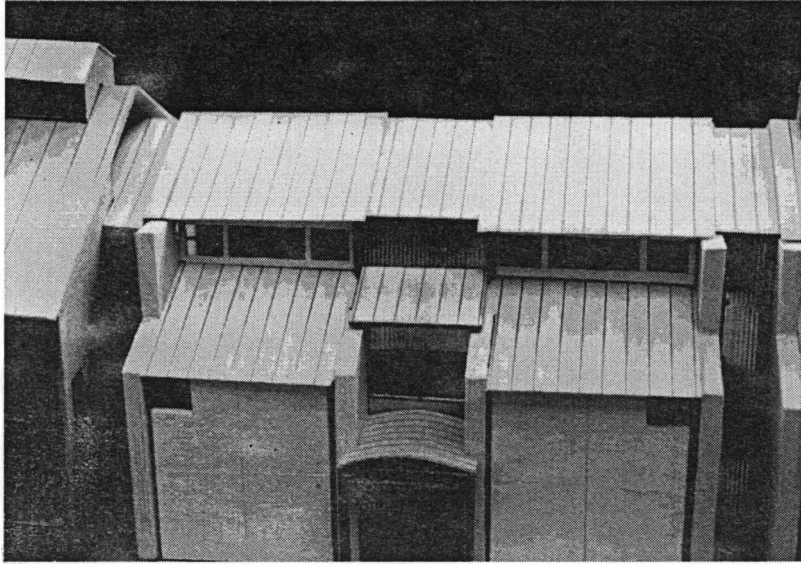
Model of entrance to Hubertus House  
Aldo Van Eyck



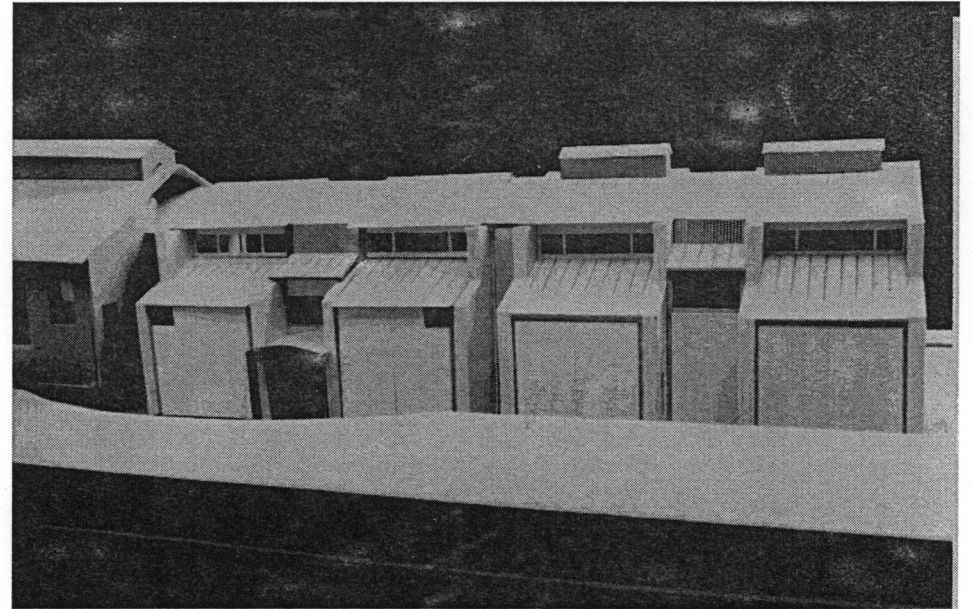
Preliminary study model showing early entrance condition and placement of new buildings.

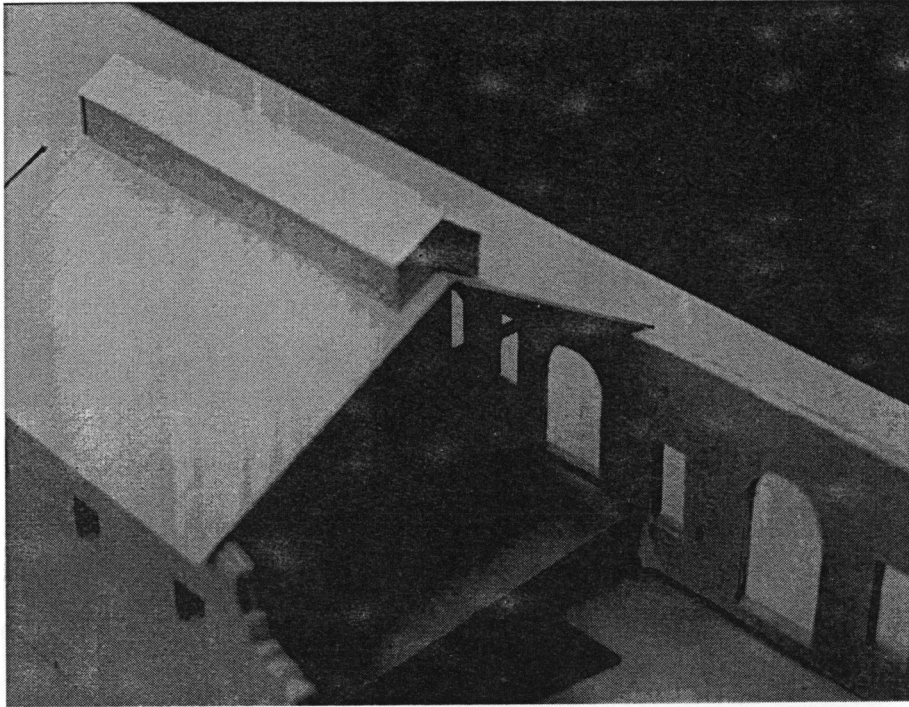
Study model showing library end.





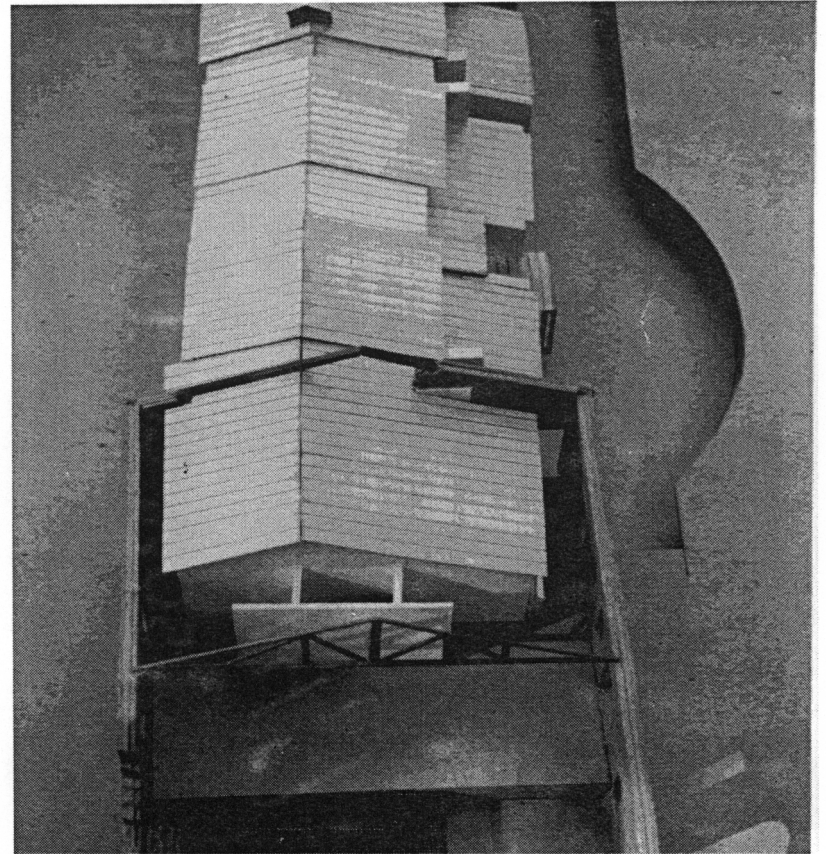
Entrance showing transition between old  
and new.

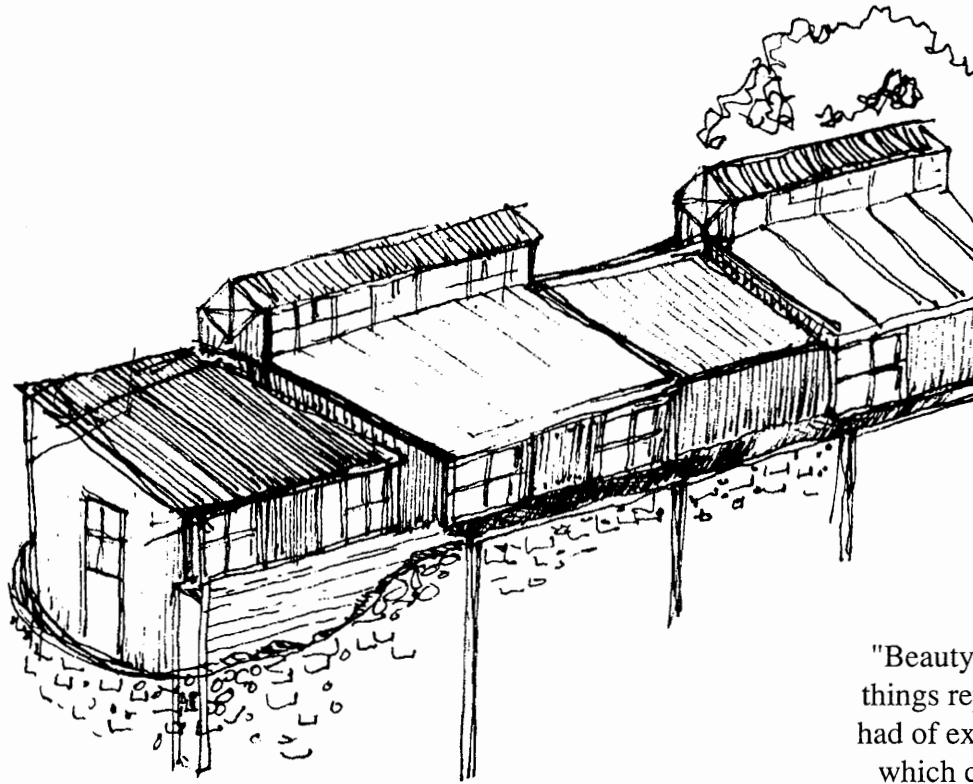




Existing powerhouse looking north.

View of powerhouse with new buildings added.





"Beauty does not consist so much in the things represented, as in the need one has had of expressing them; and this need it is which creates the degree of force with which one acquits oneself of the work. One may say that everything is beautiful provided the thing turns up in its own proper time and in its own place; and contrariwise that nothing can be beautiful arriving inappropriately."

Jean Francois Millet

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## EXPERIENCE

May 1990 - Present  
Paul D. Marshall and Associates, Architects  
Intern Architect  
Charleston, West Virginia

September 1989 - May 1990  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Blacksburg, Virginia

February 1984 - August 1988  
McDonnell Douglas Health Information  
Systems  
Senior Field Engineer  
Charleston, West Virginia

September 1982 - January 1984  
Data General Service, Incorporated  
Field Engineer  
Charleston, West Virginia

September 1980 - September 1982  
NCR Corporation  
Field Engineer  
Charleston, West Virginia

## VITA

James R. King  
847 Edgewood Drive  
Charleston, West Virginia 25302  
October 13, 1957

## EDUCATION

December 1991  
Master of Architecture  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University  
Blacksburg, Virginia

May 1987  
Bachelor of Arts  
Concentration in Business Administration  
and Computer Science  
Marshall University  
Huntington, West Virginia

## AFFILIATIONS

American Institute of Architects  
Associate Member  
West Virginia Society of Architects  
Associate Member  
West Virginia Historical Society  
Member  
VPI&SU AIAS  
Member  
National Eagle Scout Association