

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building

Other Name/Site Number: Headquarters Building; Beaver Meadows Visitor Center

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: State Highway 36

Not for publication: \_\_

City/Town: Estes Park

Vicinity: \_\_

State: Colorado

County: Larimer

Code: 069

Zip Code: 80517

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: \_\_

Public-Local: \_\_

Public-State: \_\_

Public-Federal: X

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_

Site: \_\_

Structure: \_\_

Object: \_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

\_\_

\_\_

\_\_

1

Noncontributing

\_\_ buildings

\_\_ sites

\_\_ structures

\_\_ objects

\_\_ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Multiple Resource Nomination for Rocky Mountain National Park

Designated a NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK on

JAN 03 2001

by the Secretary of the Interior

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic:	Government Recreation & Culture	Sub:	Government Office Museum Auditorium
Current:	Government Recreation & Culture	Sub:	Government Office Museum Auditorium

**7. DESCRIPTION**

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement

Other: Park Service Modern  
WrightianMaterials:  
Foundation: Concrete, stone  
Walls: Concrete, steel, glass, stone  
Roof: Concrete, steel  
Other:

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

Rocky Mountain National Park was established in 1915 in a particularly scenic area of the Front Range of the Rockies, adjacent to the resort town of Estes Park, Colorado. The Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building (Taliesen Associated Architects, Ltd., 1967) reflects design principles typical both of the Park Service Modern style developed by the Mission 66 program, and Wrightian principles of design as espoused by the apprentices who began Taliesen Associated Architects after Frank Lloyd Wright's death in 1959. The building is a unique example of Wrightian design in a national park setting.

Because it is sited on a slope, the two-story building appears as one story from the public (north) entrance, and as two stories from the administrative (south) side. The building is constructed of precast concrete panels (cast on the construction site) with large, embedded pieces of sandstone. The second story is framed by an elaborate, exposed Cor-ten steel structure, with welded exterior elements of steel, creating a large and startling zigzag pattern inspired by motifs from Native American art.

The building is a long narrow rectangle in plan, about 280 feet long and 36 feet wide. The long west end of the building is taken up by two levels of offices and administrative spaces, divided by a four-foot modular system of movable partitions. The east end of the plan is dominated by a large amphitheater, a 64-foot square in plan, which is rotated at 45 degrees and offset in relation to the main rectangular footprint of the building. The entry lobby of the building consists of the seam between these two components, at the upper level of the building. It is an irregular space, with a low ceiling at the entry, giving way to a higher ceiling in the main space, lit by clerestory windows and indirect lighting fixtures. The center of the lobby space features a pressed steel "cornice" similar to the exterior steel fascia, which marks the transition from the lower section of the building to the central space. Originally, the space to the right of the entrance was an alcove lined with benches facing a stone fireplace (this area is now taken up by retail space). The alcove faced the information desk, which remains in its original orientation.

On the left side of the lobby, stairs lead down to the public portion of the lower level of the building. The stairway leading down is wood paneled and illuminated with lighting in the steps. On the lower level, to the left is the entrance to the lower level of the auditorium, and to the right are the restrooms. A door in the vestibule between the men's and women's restrooms opens into the first-floor of the office wing to the west.

The auditorium, which extends from the upper to the lower levels of the building, is a principal public feature of the building, and is the largest and most elaborate Mission 66 facility of this type. Inspired by Native American kiva construction, it was originally intended to serve the community of Estes Park as well as park visitors. Its subtle but ornate décor, indirect lighting, and fireplace make it a classic Wrightian assembly space. From an interior balcony in the auditorium (originally accessible from the upper level of the building) visitors could look down on the main auditorium, view the movie, and walk out onto the exterior viewing balcony encircling the auditorium at the upper level. A door in the far southeast corner of the lobby also led to the exterior balcony, where visitors could enjoy the view of Long's Peak, the highest mountain in the park.

From the rear (employees') entrance, the facade is two stories with double walls of windows that expose the building's administrative function. The main entrance to the office wing is a central door opening into the main hall below the lobby, facing the main stairway. The first level contains museum offices

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and work spaces, while the upper floor accommodates administrators, the superintendent, and a conference room. On both levels the hallways have low ceilings that actually become lower in the center, like pitched ceilings turned inside out. In contrast, the offices are spacious and so full of light that special curtains are required. Customized light panels cover the entire ceiling of each office, adding a sculptured quality to the rooms. From inside the office wing, the administrative function appears entirely separate from the visitor services, although the public has easy access to the park offices when necessary, and park employees can quickly step out of the office wing into the visitor space.

The visitor center appears today much as it did upon its dedication in 1967, but elements of the visitor's experience have been significantly altered. The fireplace in the alcove space was boarded up and the area converted into a store for the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. This has significantly reduced available lobby space. Also, alterations to the auditorium and balcony have partially redefined the visitor circulation pattern. The installation of a new movie projector sealed access to the exterior balcony from the auditorium. The circuit around the balcony and through the auditorium was also permanently closed, and access to the exterior balcony was limited to the single door at the southwest corner of the lobby. Today visitors who actually find this entrance and walk around the balcony are then forced to retrace their steps all the way back. Although a seemingly minor element in the overall plan, this circuit of park views was a crucial part of the building's program as originally designed.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  
 Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

Applicable National  
 Register Criteria:           A X B    C X D   

Criteria Considerations  
 (Exceptions):               A    B    C    D    E    F    G X

NHL Criteria:               Criteria 1 and 4  
                                   Exception 8

NHL Theme(s):               III. Expressing Cultural Values  
                                   5. Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design

Areas of Significance:       Architecture  
                                   Politics/Government

Period(s) of Significance:   1965-1966

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder:           Taliesen Associated Architects, Ltd, (E. Thomas Casey) architects  
                                   Kunz Construction Company, Arvada, Colorado, builder

Historic Context:             Sarah Allaback, Ph.D., *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000)

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****SUMMARY**

The Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building is of extraordinary national importance under NHL Criteria 1 and 4.<sup>1</sup> The property falls under the NHL Theme III (Expressing Cultural Values), Subtheme 5 (Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design). The property is less than 50 years old, but qualifies under Criteria Exception 8 because of its extraordinary national importance.

Under NHL Criterion 1, the property is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad national patterns of American history. Specifically the property is associated with the Park Service's "Mission 66" program, which transformed the American national park system to meet postwar conditions. The park "visitor center" was the central planning and design element of the Mission 66 program. The visitor center was the most significant architectural expression of national park development in the postwar period and subsequently became the centerpiece of park planning of all types both nationally and abroad.

The Rocky Mountain NP Administration Building was one of the four most significant and successful examples of the new building type. The Rocky Mountain NP building was a high profile project for Mission 66, in part because the designers, Taliesen Associated Architects, were Frank Lloyd Wright's successor firm. Much of the work of the firm at the time involved finishing designs Wright had initiated. At Rocky Mountain the firm had one of their most important early commissions, which gave them an opportunity to demonstrate the continuity of the firm's Wrightian design principles in an entirely new project. The project received national attention in contemporary design magazines, among other designers, and within the Park Service. The building became a national showcase for the Mission 66 program, and helped validate the entire design and planning direction of Park Service during the postwar period. The continuation of the Wrightian tradition in a national park setting further legitimized the use of modern architecture in the parks.

The Rocky Mountain NP Administration Building is one of the four most significant visitor centers produced by the Mission 66 program. Because of its significance within the Mission 66 program, and therefore within the history of American parks, the property possesses extraordinary national importance under NHL Criterion 1.

Under NHL Criteria 4, the property embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for the study of a period and style. Specifically the property one of the four most

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<sup>1</sup>This nomination is one of four that have been presented in the historical theme of "Mission 66 Visitor Centers." These four buildings have been nominated as National Historic Landmarks because of they are the four most significant architectural designs of the Park Service's "Mission 66" program, an initiative that transformed the American national park system to meet the new conditions and demands of the postwar era. Each of the four visitor centers is one of the original and most influential examples of a new building type—the visitor center—which was at the heart the new planning and design direction at the National Park Service in the postwar period. The visitor center subsequently became a central feature of park planning in park systems all over the United States and the world. Besides this distinction, each of these four buildings also possesses another dimension of significance that relates to their place in the history of American modern architecture. Each building was a pivotal commission in the history of an architectural firm of national importance in the history of American modernism. In this case, the Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building was one of the most important commissions (other than those initiated by Wright himself) for Taliesen Associated Architects in the early years of the firm, during the critical time following Frank Lloyd Wright's death in 1959. Taliesen Associated Architects are one of the most important architectural firms of the postwar era, responsible for maintaining and developing the Wrightian tradition in American modernism.

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significant examples of Park Service Modern architectural style. This style relates to contemporary American modernism, and Taliesin Associated Architects were among the most important American modern architects of the era. The Rocky Mountain NP Administration Building was a powerful and influential example of how modern construction techniques and architectural style could be appropriate and successful for national park development.

The Rocky Mountain NP Administration Building also is a unique example of a Wrightian building in a national park. Although Wright designed at least one other building for a national park (a visitor center for Yosemite), that design was rejected by Park Service director Conrad Wirth. The Rocky Mountain building is a unique example of the adaptation of Wright's "organic architecture" to the needs and contexts of national parks. As such, the building has had a major influence on the course of national park architecture.

The Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building is one of the four most significant examples of the particular strain of American modern architecture that can be described as Park Service Modern. The building is also an important and original example of Wrightian style, as continued by Taliesin Associated Architects in the years immediately after Wright's death. Because of its significance as an example of American modern architecture of the period, the property possesses extraordinary national importance under NHL Criterion 4.

## CONTEXT<sup>2</sup>

### *The Origins of Mission 66*

In 1949, Newton B. Drury, Director of the National Park Service, described the national parks as "victims of the war."<sup>3</sup> Neglected since the New Deal era improvements of the 1930s, the national parks were in desperate need of funds for basic maintenance, not to mention protection from an increasing number of visitors. Between 1931 and 1948, total visits to the national park system jumped from about 3,500,000 to almost 30,000,000, but park facilities remained essentially as they were before the war. Meeting the increased need for visitor services required significantly larger appropriations from Congress. Throughout his tenure, however, Drury remained unable to obtain adequate appropriations to change the situation.<sup>4</sup> In 1951, Conrad L. Wirth took over as director of the Park Service, but at least at first, funding levels continued to lag behind the perceived need for new, enlarged, or renovated park facilities.

The conditions Drury had described in 1949 soon became a subject of public concern, not to mention ridicule. Social critic Bernard DeVoto led the crusade for park improvement with an article in his *Harper's* column, "The Easy Chair," entitled "Let's Close the National Parks," which suggested keeping the parks closed to the public until funds could be found to maintain them properly.<sup>5</sup> The story caught the attention of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,

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<sup>2</sup> The following text is extracted from Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Newton Drury, "The Dilemma of Our Parks," *American Forests* 55 (June 1949): 6-11, 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> President Truman also tried to obtain additional funds for the national parks in 1949, but his efforts were thwarted by a democratic Congress. See Elmo Richardson, *Dams, Parks and Politics* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard DeVoto, "Let's Close the National Parks," *Harper's* 207 (October 1953): 49-52. Many popular magazines featured stories warning the public of the dangers of visiting the parks and the slum-like conditions encountered within park boundaries. See Jerome Wood, "National Parks Tomorrow's Slums?" *Travel* 101 (April 1954): 14-16; Charles Stevenson, "The Shocking Truth About Our National Parks," *Reader's Digest* 66 (January 1955): 45-50. "Twenty-Four Million Acres of Trouble," in the *Saturday Evening Post*, took a slightly more sympathetic approach by featuring Conrad Wirth and his

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a longtime national park supporter, who wrote to President Eisenhower of his concern over this potential “national tragedy.” Eisenhower’s staff responded with a standard apology, but Rockefeller’s letter did cause the President to request a briefing from Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay on conditions in the parks.<sup>6</sup> As the need for massive “renovation” of the Park Service entered the public forum and reached the President’s desk, the Park Service’s pressing maintenance problems continued to mount.<sup>7</sup>

During the summer of 1954, Department of the Interior Undersecretary Ralph Tudor began a reorganization of his department. According to historian Elmo Richardson, the reorganization allowed Conrad Wirth to focus attention on the crisis within the Park Service. Once the door was open, Wirth had an opportunity to begin to press ambitious proposals for increased funding to redress long-standing inadequacies within his agency.<sup>8</sup> Director Wirth’s own recollection of his initial idea for what became known as “Mission 66” is fittingly more dramatic. In his memoir, *Parks, Politics and the People*, Wirth remembers one “weekend in February, 1955” when he conceived of a comprehensive program to launch the Park Service into the modern age.<sup>9</sup> Rather than submit a yearly budget, as in the past, Wirth would ask for an entire decade of funding that would total hundreds of millions of dollars. Inspired perhaps by other multi-year federal initiatives (particularly in public housing and highway construction), Mission 66 would allow the Park Service to repair and build roads, bridges and trails, hire additional employees, construct new facilities ranging from campsites to administration buildings, improve employee housing, and obtain land for future parks. The new program would result in a fully modernized national park system in time to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Park Service in 1966.

Early in 1955, Wirth organized two Park Service committees to plan the Mission 66 program: a steering committee to develop and oversee the planning process, and a Mission 66 committee to make the specific proposals for the program. Representatives from several branches of the Park Service devoted themselves full-time to the project. Lemuel Garrison put aside his new appointment as chief of conservation and protection to act as chairman of the steering committee. In his memoirs, Garrison captures the energy behind the mission and its fearless confrontation of park problems. Each superintendent was asked to write a list of “everything needed to put ‘his’ park facilities into immediate condition for managing the current visitor load, while protecting the park itself.”<sup>10</sup> They were also to estimate the number of visitors ten years in the future. The Mission 66 staff derived a list of priorities for determining park needs to assist superintendents in their assessments. One result of the project was the development of standards throughout the system. Each park was to have a uniform entrance marker listing park resources, a minimum number of employees, paved trails to popular points of interest, and other basic amenities. Visitors could expect the same basic facilities in every park.<sup>11</sup>

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ceaseless efforts to improve the Park Service despite inadequate funding. See *Saturday Evening Post* 3 (July 3, 1954): 32, 78-80.

<sup>6</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1963), 549-550.

<sup>7</sup> William Nelson Noll, “Mission 66, the National Park Service Program for the Revitalization of America’s National Parks, 1955-1966,” (Master of Arts Thesis, Kansas State University, 1997), 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson, *Dams, Parks and Politics*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 238.

<sup>10</sup> Lemuel A. Garrison, *The Making of a Ranger* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Howe Brothers, 1983), 255-56.

<sup>11</sup> Roy E. Appleman, *A History of the National Park Service Mission 66 Program* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1958), 2-32. Pilot studies were also conducted for Yellowstone, Chaco Canyon National Monument, Shiloh National Military Park, Adams Mansion National Historic Site, Fort Laramie, Everglades, and Mesa Verde.

Wirth's preliminary planning of the Mission 66 program was geared towards promotion and, by necessity, selling his idea to Congress and the Eisenhower Administration. The Mission 66 staff was to produce a basic outline of the program for the Public Service Conference at Great Smoky Mountains on September 18, 1955. Since a meeting with Eisenhower had been scheduled for May, Wirth hoped to keep details of "Mission 66" confidential until then; but news of the program leaked out after the Great Smokies conference, which only increased public interest in the program. After several dry runs and administrative delays, Wirth introduced Mission 66 to the President and his cabinet on January 27, 1956. The program received immediate approval, and Mission 66 was officially introduced to the public at an American Pioneer Dinner held at the Department of the Interior on February 8th. Highlights of this event included a presentation by Wirth, a Walt Disney movie entitled "Adventure in the National Parks," and the circulation of *Our Heritage*, a promotional booklet describing the Mission 66 program. Wirth himself was involved in every detail of the carefully orchestrated publicity that followed.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Modern Architecture and the National Parks***

Even before Mission 66 planning began, the Park Service planners and architects were moving away from the traditional "rustic" construction that had characterized prewar park development. There were many reasons for this shift, which mirrored national trends in architectural style, construction technology, and planning policies.

Mission 66 reached the drawing boards in the mid-1950s, at a time when modern architecture had reached the mainstream of American architectural design. Conrad Wirth was trained as a landscape architect in the 1920s, and in the 1930s he had been responsible for the Park Service's state park development program. His chief of planning and design, Thomas C. Vint, had been chief landscape architect since 1927 and was one of the originators of the Park Service rustic style. Other Park Service designers active in the 1950s, such as architect Cecil Doty, had been principal Park Service designers during the rustic era. But in many ways this group continued the tradition of park planning and design that they had created over the previous decades, in other ways, postwar conditions, changing ideas about nature, and new practices in the construction industry necessitated new approaches. Mission 66 designers needed to find new ways for park development to "harmonize" with park settings.

As the negative effects of larger numbers of visitors and their vehicles began to be better understood, for example, Mission 66 planners responded by centralizing services and controlling visitor "flow" in what were called "visitor centers." In some cases, planners proposed removing some park facilities and relying on motels and other businesses springing up in gateway communities to serve visitors. Enlarging parking lots and widening roads encouraged this trend, since faster roads made access in and out of parks quicker; but under Mission 66, parking lots, comfort stations, gas stations, and other visitor services were bound to proliferate, in any case. Conrad Wirth remained firmly committed to the idea that the parks were "for the people." Mission 66 planning proceeded under the long-standing assumption at the Park Service that increased numbers of visitors (and their cars) should be accommodated. Modernized and expanded park development, usually restricted to existing road corridors within the parks, was therefore proposed as the essential means of preserving nature to the greatest degree possible, while making sure visitors were not turned away.

But if Mission 66 continued traditional assumptions, it also exploited the functional advantages offered by postwar architectural theory and construction techniques. Mission 66 architects (whether in-house or consultants) employed free plans, flat roofs, and other established elements of modern design in order to create spaces in which large numbers of visitors could circulate easily and locate essential services efficiently. The architects also

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<sup>12</sup> Appleman, "A History of the National Park Service," 33-95.

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used concrete construction and prefabricated components for buildings, highways, and other structures. Development was often sited according to new criteria, as well. Visitor centers were located according to functional concerns relating to park circulation, and so were not calculated as components of larger landscape compositions. Although Mission 66 park development was no longer truly part of the landscape, in this sense, in many cases this meant that buildings could be sited less obtrusively, near park entrances or along main roads within the park. Stone veneers, earth-toned colors, and low, horizontal massing also helped continue the tradition of reducing visual contrasts between building and site. Mission 66 architecture was not or picturesque or rustic, but it did “harmonize” with its setting (at least in more successful examples), although in a new way. Stripped of the ornamentation and associations of rustic design, Mission 66 development could be both more understated and more efficient than rustic buildings.

Park Service designers were following a nearly universal, international trend in postwar architecture. Changing styles, changes in architectural training, and perhaps above all, changes in the technology and economics of construction fueled the new trend. But the prospect of abandoning traditional “rustic” architectural design in national parks still provoked an outcry from critics. One of the most outspoken critics of modern architecture in national parks was Devereux Butcher of the National Parks Association. As early as 1952, Butcher wrote of his horror at finding contemporary buildings in Great Smokey Mountains and Everglades national parks and criticized the Park Service for abandoning its “long-established policy of designing buildings that harmonize with their environment and with existing styles.” Among the eyesores he discovered were a curio store with “blazing red roof and hideous design,” a residence “ugly beyond words to describe,” and a utility building that he felt might as well have been a factory. Later in the decade, David Brower and Ansel Adams joined Butcher in condemning such park development, although these critics focused more on issues of resource conservation than architectural style.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the criticism of Butcher and others, the Park Service felt it had remained consistent with its tradition of architectural design in harmony with the surrounding landscape. In fact, the design methodology behind the use of rustic architecture was adapted to explain contemporary design decisions. According to Director Wirth, Mission 66 buildings were intended to blend into the landscape, but through their plainness rather than by identification with natural features. Even the qualities that defined rustic architecture might draw attention to a building intended to serve a practical function.<sup>14</sup> The Park Service communicated this architectural philosophy in its early promotional literature, as well as in its relations with the national media. In August 1956, *Architectural Record* reported that Mission 66 would produce “simple contemporary buildings that perform their assigned function and respect their environment.”<sup>15</sup> The magazine also emphasized that while this policy had traditionally

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<sup>13</sup> Devereux Butcher, “For a Return to Harmony in Park Architecture,” *National Parks Magazine* 26, no. 111 (October-December 1952). See also David Brower, “‘Mission 66’ is Proposed by Reviewer of Park Service’s New Brochure on Wilderness,” *National Parks Magazine* 32, no. 132 (January-March 1958); Weldon F. Heald, “Urbanization of the National Parks,” *National Parks Magazine* 35, no. 160 (January 1961); Ansel Adams, “Yosemite--1958, Compromise in Action,” *National Parks Magazine* 32, no. 135 (October-December 1958). That Butcher’s opinions remained unaltered over the decade is indicated by his article, “Resorts or Wilderness?” in *Atlantic Monthly* 207, no. 2 (February 1961).

<sup>14</sup> Wirth issued a memorandum to the Washington Office and all field offices announcing that field officials attending the Public Services Conference at Great Smoky Mountains (September 1955) “recommended that structures be designed to reflect the character of the area while at the same time following up-to-date design standards.” He added that “park structures are to conform, to some extent, with the trend toward contemporary design and the use of materials and equipment accepted as standard by the building industry. However, restraint must be exercised in the design so that the structures will not be out of character with the area and so that the structures will be subordinated to their surroundings.” See Conrad Wirth Papers (CWP), Box 6, American Heritage Center (AHC), Laramie, Wyoming.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Mickel, *Architectural Record* 120, no. 2 (August 1956), 32. *The New York Times* also picked up the story, reporting Park Service officials stating that “...the national parks were maintained as showcases for natural attractions,” and therefore “Mr. Wright’s ‘modernized type’ of building would be out of place among Yosemite’s trees and glacier-cut rock

led to the use of stone and redwood, “preliminary designs for the newer buildings show a trend toward more liberal use of steel and glass.”

Within the Park Service, architects appear to have embraced the opportunity to modernize facilities and experiment with new design concepts. For example, Cecil Doty had designed a rustic masterpiece, the Santa Fe Headquarters building, in 1937. By the early 1950s, however, he recalled “a change in philosophy. . . . That’s why you started seeing [concrete] block in a lot of things. We couldn’t help but change. . . . I can’t understand how anyone could think otherwise, how it could keep from changing.”<sup>16</sup> Doty’s statement provides a key to understanding the legacy of Mission 66 architecture, the purpose of which was not to design buildings for atmosphere, whimsy or aesthetic pleasure, but for change: to meet the demands of an estimated eighty million visitors by 1966, to anticipate the requirements of modern transportation, and to exercise the potential of new construction technology. As Director Wirth explained, the Park Service not only had to serve greater numbers of visitors, but to understand their increased need for appropriate facilities. The “stress and restless activity of this machine age, when man is sending satellites spinning into orbit around the sun and our own earth” required more frequent renewal in “the peace and solitude offered by nature.”<sup>17</sup> Even critics agreed that some kind of efficient action was necessary to bring the parks up to contemporary standards.

Mission 66 planners and administrators were also clearly caught up in the enthusiasm of the modern movement. Wirth told his steering committee to be “as objective as possible. Each was to be free to question anything if he thought a better way could be found. Nothing was to be sacred except the ultimate purpose to be served. Man, methods, and time-honored practices were to be accorded no vested deference.”<sup>18</sup> A writer for *Architectural Record* expressed this sense of limitless potential for park architecture in 1957:

Let us not decide, just because we cannot draw it on the back of an envelope, that the great and sympathetic architecture cannot exist... The whole habit of thinking in the parks is the other way. We have not dared to let man design in the parks; we have not asked to see what he might do. We have slapped his hand and told him not to try anything.”<sup>19</sup>

But the acceptance of modernism and its use in the parks was also a matter of urgency and economics. The Park Service needed to serve huge numbers of people as quickly as possible, and, despite increased funding, it had to do so on a limited budget. The often less expensive materials that composed modern buildings (steel, concrete, glass) allowed more facilities to be built for more parks. In its publication, *Grist*, the Park Service praised concrete as “low-cost, long-lived beauty treatment for parks.” Asphalt was “nature’s own product for nature’s preserves,” and asbestos-cement products “building materials for beauty, economy, permanence.”<sup>20</sup>

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cliffs...” See *The New York Times* (December 1, 1954).

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Searle Monroe, “Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66,” (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 82.

<sup>17</sup> “Address by Conrad L. Wirth, Director of National Park Service, at the Dedication of Badlands National Monument and Mission 66 Facilities on Wednesday, September 16, 1959,” “Speeches, 1959,” CWP, AHC, Laramie, Wyoming.

<sup>18</sup> Appleman, “A History of the National Park Service,” 16-17. Wirth reprinted this statement in his memoirs. See *Parks, Politics and the People*, 242.

<sup>19</sup> Emerson Goble, “Architecture (?) for the National Parks,” *Architectural Record* 121, no. 1 (January 1957), 184.

<sup>20</sup> *Grist*, a publication of the National Conference on State Parks in cooperation with the National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior (September-October 1957; July-Aug. 1958; November-December 1958). The story on concrete was written by the Portland Cement Association and that on asphalt by the Asphalt Institute.

Despite the general acceptance of modernism, Americans were still unfamiliar with modern architecture in national parks. When *The New York Times* reported on the controversy surrounding Gilbert Stanley Underwood's Jackson Lake Lodge, the reporter emphasized the contrast between the new concrete building and the area's wild west tradition, noting that "sheepman," "naturalists," and "gamblers...now heatedly discuss the pros and cons of modern architecture." Nevertheless, the *Times* clearly admired "the artful blend of comfortable modern with western" even as critics called it "a slab sided concrete abomination." The *Virginian Pilot* was more conservative in its coverage of the "modern trend in architectural ideas" exhibited in the shade structures at Coquina Beach, Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Although Park Service architect Donald F. Benson received a *Progressive Architecture* award citation for the design, the paper warned that, "until people get used to the modern trend," the new shelters would "cause as much comment as three nude men on a Republican Convention Program."<sup>21</sup> The Coquina facilities (destroyed by a storm in the early 1990s) soon became among the most widely praised designs of the Mission 66 era.<sup>22</sup>

The Park Service accepted modernism at a time when the new tradition had aged, and its post-modern backlash not yet emerged. The visitor center designed by Mitchell/Giurgola for the Wright Brothers Memorial was featured in a "news report" in *Progressive Architecture* suggesting that the Park Service had finally caught up with the standard required by the modern visitor. "The design of visitors' facilities provided for national tourist attractions seems to be decidedly on the upgrade, at least as far as the work for National Park Service is concerned. Disappearing one hopes, are the rustic-rock snugery and giant-size 'log cabin' previously favored."<sup>23</sup> That the progressive periodical chose two visitor centers to "exemplify new park architecture" was not surprising. The Park Service intended for the new visitor center buildings to represent the values and results of its system-wide development campaign.

### *Developing a New Building Type: The "Visitor Center"*

Even before the commencement of the Mission 66 building program, the Park Service had begun to develop a new type of visitor facility, eventually known as the "visitor center." *Our Heritage* described the visitor center as "one of the most pressing needs, and one of the most useful facilities for helping the visitor to see the park and enjoy his visit." Visitor centers were lauded as "the center of the entire information and public service program for a park."<sup>24</sup> One hundred and nine visitor centers were slated for construction over the ten-year period. This new type of park facility would not only embody new park visitor management policies, but also the spirit of Mission 66, which looked forward to an efficient Park Service for the modern age.

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<sup>21</sup> Jack Goodman, "Controversy Over Lodge in the West," *The New York Times* (August 7, 1955); Dan Morrill, "No Daub, No Wattles: Coquina Beach at Nags Head to Feature Modern Trend in Architectural Ideas," *Virginian-Pilot* (July 22, 1956); *Progressive Architecture* 37, no. 1 (January 1956): 92. Donald F. Benson (1921- ) grew up in Ottawa, Illinois, and graduated from the University of Illinois with an architectural degree in 1951. Benson's work for the Park Service began in 1953, when Charles Peterson hired him as an architect in the Philadelphia office. During Mission 66, Benson worked for EODC under John B. Cabot, designing and supervising the design of visitor centers at Everglades National Park, Saratoga and Hopewell Village (now Hopewell Furnace), among other locations. Benson is now retired and living in Lakewood, Colorado. Interview with Donald F. Benson by the author, March 9, 1999, Lakewood, Colorado.

<sup>22</sup> Wolf Von Eckardt, "The Park Service Dares to Build Well," *Washington Post* (March 29, 1964); Lois Craig, et al, *The Federal Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1979): 493.

<sup>23</sup> "Two Visitors' Centers Exemplify New Park Architecture," *Progressive Architecture* 40, no. 2 (February 1959): 87.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior. *Our Heritage, A Plan for Its Protection and Use: "Mission 66"* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956).

During the early 1950s, Park Service architects and planners began developing a centralized service facility that would help manage increased visitation. The updated facility, equipped with basic services and educational exhibits, was known in its early stages as an “administrative-museum building,” “public service building,” or “public use building.” As this range of labels suggests, the Park Service was struggling not only to combine museum services and administrative facilities but to develop a new building type that would supplement old-fashioned museum exhibits with modern methods of interpretation. In February 1956, Director Wirth issued a memorandum to help clarify the use of terminology applied to the new buildings, explaining that “there are differences in the descriptive title, although most of the buildings are similar in purpose, character and use.”<sup>25</sup> From then on, Wirth expected park staff to use “visitor center” for every such facility, even “in place of Park Headquarters when it is a major point of visitor concentration.” As late as 1958, however, the matter remained unclear to many park visitors. When the topic was raised at a design conference, it was noted that “the term ‘Visitor Center’ is sometimes confusing to the public as it is an unusual and specialized facility which may be associated with shopping centers with which the general public is familiar.”<sup>26</sup> If still puzzling to some, the building’s label emphasized the novelty of the visitor center and bolstered the Park Service’s image with high-profile examples of Mission 66 progress.

The Custer Battlefield museum & administration building, designed by Daniel M. Robbins & Associates of Omaha, demonstrates the transition from early Park Service museum buildings to standard Mission 66 visitor centers. The building was constructed in 1950, the first year since World War II that congressional appropriations for the parks included museum funding.<sup>27</sup> A lobby space and offices were incorporated into the new museum, but orientation areas remained small; no audio-visual or auditorium space was included and restrooms were relegated to the basement. Visitor circulation between the various areas does not appear to have been a major consideration. The Department of the Interior *Annual Report* for 1953 announced the commencement of “the first major public use development at Flamingo, on Florida Bay,” which would consist of “a boat basin and other developments...camping and picnic facilities, dock and shelter building, roads, and water and sewer systems.” At this time, “public use” was still a general term, applicable to a marina or an interpretive facility. The report also noted “administration and public-use buildings at Joshua Tree and Saguaro National Monuments, and utility buildings in Potomac Park, Washington, DC, and at Death Valley National Monument.”<sup>28</sup> Other early precedents for visitor centers included the public information centers at Yorktown and Jamestown. The public use building planned for Carlsbad Caverns in July, 1953, underwent the transition to visitor center during its design and construction. Preliminary drawings for the building were produced by the Office of Design and Construction in Washington, D.C., before the creation of the eastern and western design offices. Thomas C. Vint, chief of the Washington office, signed off on the proposal for a streamlined, two-story public use building with steel and glass facade. It featured a central lobby area and, on the left side, a coffee shop/fountain/dining room, curio store, and kitchen. The museum and auditorium were entered from the right side of the lobby, which included the women’s restroom. Park Service offices were in the basement, along with the men’s restroom, and on the second floor, where they overlooked the double-height lobby.<sup>29</sup> By December 1954, a more detailed preliminary design for the Carlsbad Caverns facility had been drafted in which the entrance lobby was attached to a lounge area on the right side surrounded by restrooms, an exhibit space, and a ticket booth. The concession area was further defined as a curio shop, coffee shop, nursery, playroom, kitchen, and offices. This design

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<sup>25</sup> Conrad Wirth to Washington Office and field offices, memorandum, “Visitor Centers; Park Roads,” February 10, 1956.

<sup>26</sup> “Summary of General Discussions of Visitor Center Design Problems,” WODC, February 4, 1958, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Museum Curatorship*, 128.

<sup>28</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1953.

<sup>29</sup> These drawings are available on microfiche at the Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center.

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incorporated an existing elevator building constructed in 1932, and one wing of the new facility was built by the concessioner, the Cavern Supply Company, with guidance from the Mission 66 staff.<sup>30</sup> The 1955 *Annual Report* called it “a public use building and elevator lobby, museum and naturalists’ offices.”<sup>31</sup> By January 1956, “the Public Use Building was in the final stage of preparation,” but when bids for construction were opened in March, the building was referred to as a visitor center.<sup>32</sup> In his dedication speech nearly three years later, Conrad Wirth praised the Carlsbad Caverns Visitor Center for its use of “modern design” and “modern high-speed passenger elevators.”<sup>33</sup>

Early proposals for the public use building at Grand Canyon suggest a similar struggle with programmatic aspects of the new facility. Preliminary drawings of the building were produced in 1954, with several proposals designed by Cecil Doty. Despite variations in plan, the front facade of the various proposals remained remarkably similar. The entrance area was mostly glass framed in decorative brick. The exhibit wing to the left was cement stucco, and the wing to the right either additional brick or stucco. The building was long and low, with little to attract attention except the flagpole and sign. By 1955, a courtyard scheme had been chosen for the floorplan, perhaps because its plan allowed for more flexible circulation. Visitors entered a lobby and were confronted with an information desk on their right, directly in front of the rangers and superintendents’ offices. The library and restrooms were straight ahead, and the exhibit space, lecture room, study collection/workshop, and offices arranged in clockwise procession around the courtyard. The public use building was an immediate source of pride for the Park Service, which praised this “visitor center” as “a one-stop service unit” in 1956. An information desk complete with uniformed ranger, lobby exhibits, an illustrated talk, and a park museum “where a great variety of exhibits, arranged in orderly and effective fashion” were among the many conveniences for the visitor. The presence of the park superintendent and naturalist was also considered remarkable, as were the study collection, workshop, and library. According to the Park Service, the new building provided much-needed efficiency and economy.<sup>34</sup>

The use of the word “center” to describe these early visitor centers indicated the planners desire to centralize park interpretive and museum displays, new types of interpretive presentations, park administrative offices, restrooms, and various other facilities. The underlying theory relates to contemporary planning ideas such as shopping centers, corporate campuses, and industrial parks, all of which sought to give new civic form to emerging patterns of daily life and urban expansion in the late 1940s and 1950s. Like the shopping center, the visitor center made it possible for people to park their cars at a central point, and from there have access to a range of services or attractions. Earlier “park village” planning had typically been more decentralized, with different functions (museum, administrations building, comfort station) spread out in an arrangement of individual, rustic buildings. The Mission 66 visitor center brought these activities together in a single, larger building intended to serve as a control point for what planners called “visitor flow,” as well as a more efficient means of serving far larger numbers of visitors and cars in a more concentrated area. Centralized activities created a more efficient pattern of public use, and assured that even as their number grew to unprecedented levels, all visitors would receive basic orientation and services in the most efficient way possible.

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<sup>30</sup> Building Maintenance Records, “Elevator Bldg. Carlsbad Cavern’s N.P.,” n.d., Carlsbad Cavern archives.

<sup>31</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1955.

<sup>32</sup> Superintendent’s Monthly Reports [R. Taylor Hoskins, Superintendent], Carlsbad Caverns National Park, January 1, 1956, and March 3, 1956.

<sup>33</sup> “Address by Conrad L. Wirth, Director, National Park Service, Dedication of Visitor Center, Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico, June 12, 1959,” “Speeches, 1959,” CWP, AHC.

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1956.

Considering the commitment of Mission 66 era planners to accommodating the growing numbers of people who wanted to visit the parks, the centralized visitor center was an essential approach to park preservation. The visitor center facilitated, yet concentrated, public activities and so helped prevent more random, destructive patterns of use. The siting of visitor centers was determined by new considerations in park master planning that involved the circulation of unprecedented numbers of people and cars. While on the one hand the Park Service remained committed to making the parks accessible to all who wanted to use them, on the other agency planners also felt it was desirable to continue to concentrate automotive access in relatively narrow areas and road corridors, most of which were already developed for the purpose. As a result, Mission 66 development plans (at least in older parks) usually called for the intensification of development in existing front country areas, rather than opening back country areas to new uses. This implied road widenings, the expansion of campgrounds and parking lots, and often, the construction of a new visitor center. The visitor center was therefore sited in relation to the overall park circulation plan, in order to efficiently intercept visitor traffic. These criteria for siting Mission 66 visitor centers differed significantly from the criteria for siting and designing the rustic park villages and museums of the prewar era.

### *The Visitor Center and Mission 66*

The planning and design of visitor centers began in the Park Service offices of design and construction in San Francisco (WODC) and Philadelphia (EODC). Both offices had been established as part of the Park Service's reorganization in 1954, and both were overseen by the central planning and design office in Washington, DC. Neither the WODC nor the EODC was prepared for the quantity of work Mission 66 would bring to the drawing boards. Rather than hire additional architects and landscape architects who would have to be laid off at the conclusion of Mission 66, the Park Service planned to contract out work to private firms on a project by project basis. In most cases, the Park Service furnished contract architects with preliminary drawings, which the consultants would then use as the basis for the developed design and contract drawings. In some cases, consultants simply provided the contract drawings for designs that had been fully developed in-house. Visitor centers were typically the most expensive new buildings in the parks, as well as high-profile commissions, and therefore attractive to private consulting firms.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not consulting architects were employed, in all projects the Park Service retained control over the location of buildings and, in many cases, significant aspects of the consulting firm's design. The planning of early visitor centers reflected the Mission 66 concern with protection and use, the idea that park development provided the key to preservation. According to the 1955 *Annual Report*, the Park Service decided to locate administration offices, warehouses, shops, and residences away from areas devoted to visitors, creating separate "zones" for maintenance, employee housing, administration, and visitor services. Location within the park was also an important interpretive issue. Planners debated whether visitor centers provided better visitor orientation from a location near the entrance to the park, or were more effective near a significant feature that visitors would want to see and know more about. In some cases, this issue was resolved by creating secondary visitor centers, which were usually little more than a single exhibit space equipped with restrooms.

Throughout the Mission 66 period, the Park Service's overriding goal for its visitor centers was to improve interpretation and stimulate public interest in the park. To do this, the park's "story" was to be told as clearly and effectively as possible. Historians and interpreters played crucial roles in the Mission 66 planning process. According to Robert Utley, chief historian for the Park Service beginning in 1964, historians such as Roy Appleman and Ronald Lee favored siting visitor centers "right on top of the resource" so that visitors could "see

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<sup>35</sup> The Design and Construction Division benefited from student trainee and assistant programs that provided the WODC with 90 student architects, engineers, and landscape architects during the summer of 1956; EODC was supplied with 75 students. See *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1956.

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virtually everything from the visitor center.”<sup>36</sup> The location of visitor centers in sensitive areas often occurred at cultural sites and battlefields, where the purpose of the visitor’s trip to the site was to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of an important historic event. The preservation of cultural and natural resources sometimes became a concern, but was rarely articulated, according to Utley. The siting of a visitor center among the ruined structures at Fort Union, for example, was deemed advantageous for interpretation. During the Mission 66 period, the Park Service strove to educate the public, sometimes even at the expense of encroaching on the historical or natural environment. Mission 66 historians and planners believed that more effective public education justified such encroachments, and that resulting understanding of sites would lead to greater support for preservation. But if this priority meant sometimes siting visitor centers in sensitive areas, it did not extend to other types of development. Director Wirth emphasized that “definite steps were taken to move as many of the administrative, government housing, and utility buildings and shops as possible out of the national parks to reduce their interference with the enjoyment of park visitors.”<sup>37</sup>

Within the visitor center building, Park Service designers faced the challenge of orienting visitors and directing them to desired services. These design decisions also affected visitor impacts on park resources. The visitor center was considered “the hub of the park interpretive program,” and a method of orienting park visitors who “lacking these services, drive almost aimlessly about the parks without adequate benefit and enjoyment from their trips.”<sup>38</sup> Not only was the visitor center a signpost intended to attract the aimless visitor within, but also a method of distributing information and other services in the most efficient and significant manner. Park Service architects confronted such issues in the development of building “circulation” or “flow” diagrams. Visitor circulation patterns were particularly important in this type of building, because people were expected to use the building in different ways; while some would study the exhibits and watch the films, others were only interested in visiting the restrooms or purchasing a park map. At this early date, Park Service architects had no precedents for use patterns, and, therefore, only a vague idea of how the new buildings would function.

The Park Service design and construction staff and interpretation staffs held joint meetings on visitor center planning in November 1957 (EODC) and February 1958 (WODC), and distributed their general findings in a summary. The discussions focused on participants’ experience at early visitor centers, particularly those at Colonial National Historic Park and Grand Canyon. Conference participants discussed the desirability of open design, the need for outdoor rest rooms, the importance of determining anticipated numbers of visitors, and the consideration of administrative requirements. Planning visitor center interpretation in conjunction with roadside and trail side interpretation was also encouraged. Individual spaces were to be designed with environmental factors in mind. If the lobby served as “a transition area for the harassed visitor between the crowded highway and the park atmosphere,” it should “convey a mood and invite a relaxed frame of mind.” Assembly rooms had actually become multiple use spaces and, as the example at Jackson Lake Lodge demonstrated, were more effective with flat rather than sloping floors. These spaces also played a role in the visitor’s “transition from ‘outside’ into the park atmosphere.” Exhibits might require artificial light for curatorial purposes, but they also benefitted from a little daylight “to avoid claustrophobia.” Finally, information counters could only function effectively at the minimum height requirements suggested, and portable counters were often most useful.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Utley in Sellars and Webb, “An Interview with Robert M. Utley.”

<sup>37</sup> Wirth, *Parks, Politics and the People*, 278.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Mission 66, To Provide Adequate Protection and Development of the National Park System for Human Use* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1956).

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Visitor Center Planning, Notes on Discussions Held in EODC November 18-22, 1957 and WODC February 4-6, 1958* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, n.d.).

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In his discussion of visitor center placement, John B. Cabot, supervising architect for the EODC, described three potential locations. An entrance visitor center established the mood of the park and introduced the visitor to “the total interpretation of park values.” The “en route” center posed the problem of simultaneously introducing the visitor to the park and providing information about the site to be visited. Most common was the “terminal visitor center,” located at a popular destination, which supplied the visitor with a summary of park values while incorporating relevant information about the area; architects of these centers were encouraged to make use of surrounding views in their designs. According to Cabot, the location of the visitor center influenced the development of the building program because placement “affects how, in what sequence, the story is told, as well as how much or how little.” This narrative depended, to a great extent, on the type of park under consideration. Whereas any of dozens of locations on the edge of natural areas might serve to orient visitors in wilderness parks, most historical parks could only be adequately understood with the help of interpretation presented in close proximity to the commemorative site. In a January 1960 report on visitor centers, the chief of interpretation commended the “desirable” siting of Colonial (Yorktown), which featured an “excellent view of the battlefield from the Siege Line Lookout on the roof of the visitor center,” but criticized that of Grand Canyon, which stood midway between Mather Point and Grand Canyon Village, as “too far removed (1/3 mile) from the Canyon Rim.” Park Naturalist Shultz commented that “a visitor center should be ‘in touch’ with the feature it interprets.”<sup>40</sup>

Once planners had chosen a building site, architects considered the park’s story on a more intimate level. Cabot demonstrated how “visitor sequence diagrams” (flow diagrams) showed alternatives for visitor travel through a series of spaces; a typical example placed reception/information (lobby) in the center, with the assembly (auditorium), toilets, administration and interpretation (museum exhibits) areas grouped around it. In the diagrams, spaces were represented by circles of varying sizes. One alternative placed a circulation terrace between the various areas, allowing the visitor to choose his or her route. Cabot suggested that architects develop a sequence analysis, flow diagram and estimates of spatial dimensions before beginning preliminary drawings. Such planning required a close working relationship between museum professionals and architects, as indicated by Cabot’s lengthy outline for visitor center design.<sup>41</sup> The “architectural treatment” of assembly or audio-visual rooms depended, in part, on mechanical systems and park programs. Funding for certain “audio-visual devices” became available in 1956, too late for incorporation into early visitor center plans, such as the Fort Frederica Visitor Center on St. Simons Island, Georgia. In the future, Ronald Lee recommended supplying architects with audio-visual related information, including descriptions of the devices, whether accommodations were needed for slide or film projectors, the audience’s seating requirements, and the possibility of dividing auditorium space for several smaller presentations. Architectural consideration of such factors would lead to the development of “rooms which open from the lobby and which are separated from the exhibit rooms in order to keep the devices from distracting the visitor in his enjoyment of the exhibits.”<sup>42</sup> Both Cabot and Lee encouraged architects to work closely with the interpretive branch and to contact consultants at the Washington Office for assistance in designing suitable spaces.

The professional partnership between Park Service designers and planners and interpreters and curators dated back at least to the creation of the Museum Division in 1935. During the planning stages of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the Museum Division developed exhibits for the future museum and catalogued significant architectural fragments from the site as it was cleared for construction. In the early 1940s, architect

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<sup>40</sup> “A Report on Visitor Centers” (Washington: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, ca. January 1960), National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center.

<sup>41</sup> “Visitor Center Planning,” 13-40.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald L. Lee, Chief, Division of Interpretation to Chief, Eastern Office of Design and Construction, memorandum, “Audio-Visual Space Requirements in Visitor Center Buildings,” ca. November, 1956, Box 29; “WASO Design and Construction Correspondence,” 1954-56, Regional Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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Lyle Bennett wrote up a "Checklist for Museum Planning," addressing issues that would become relevant in his Mission 66 visitor centers designs. The close relationship between exhibit and architectural designers was strengthened by Tom Vint during the early years of Mission 66. Vint discussed exhibits at Grand Canyon with architect Cecil Doty, and it was typical for him to consult with Ralph Lewis or another museum expert on interpretive aspects of visitor center design.<sup>43</sup> Ten years after the official conclusion of Mission 66, Lewis published *Manual for Museums*, a technical handbook for curators on collections management. Although visitor centers are beyond the scope of the work, its frontispiece is a color photograph of the Mission 66 visitor center at Wright Brothers National Memorial. This "characteristic example of museums in the National Park System," was still a suitable representation of current Park Service curatorial standards nearly twenty years after its construction.<sup>44</sup>

Mission 66 caused a surge of activity in the museum branch of the Park Service that led to the re-opening of the Western Museum Laboratory in San Francisco's Old Mint building.<sup>45</sup> Within months of its organization, the laboratory began work on exhibits for Quarry Visitor Center at Dinosaur National Monument, the Mission 66 building slated for a grand opening June 1, 1958.<sup>46</sup> Correspondence between the Division of Interpretation and the director indicates that Park Service exhibit professionals influenced the design of the center. The contract architects, Anshen & Allen, drew up exhibit plans based on the Western Museum laboratory's requirements. In April, the laboratory corrected some circulation problems in the construction drawings.<sup>47</sup> Since the laboratory must have provided preliminary designs, other alterations may have taken place during the planning process.

The development of the visitor center not only increased the demand for museum work, but also opportunities to supplement traditional dioramas and displays with more innovative "hands on" exhibits and audio-visual productions. The Mission 66 report of 1956 noted that museums were frequently part of the administration building or visitor center and emphasized the great importance of museum collections in preserving "priceless national legacies." Audio-visual presentations were also seen as a means of reducing costs and presenting interpretive material more quickly and effectively. Improvements in mechanical systems and the production of high-quality 16 mm films were the wave of the future. This technology would replace more traditional museum exhibits--and change the role of museum professionals--in later visitor centers, such as the headquarters at Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. Even the 1963 preliminary designs for this building featured an enlarged audio-visual room rather than exhibit space, demonstrating the transformation from museum-administration building to visitor center within the decade.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ralph H. Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service, 1904-1982* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993), 108-142.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *Manual for Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> "The Eastern Museum Laboratory increased its exhibit construction staff to about 30 and the Western Laboratory reopened with a staff of fifteen." In anticipation of over a hundred new visitor centers and the rehabilitation of exhibits in about forty existing museums, the Museum Division "planned laboratory facilities to maintain a permanent production rate of 250 exhibits per year." Another one hundred and fifty exhibits were to be obtained through contractors. See R.H. Lewis, draft, "Reexamination of the Museum Phases of Mission 66," National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, "Museum Curatorship," 153-4.

<sup>47</sup> John W. Jenkins to Director, May 6, 1958 in "Dinosaur Interpretive Plans, vol. I, Quarry Visitor Center Exhibit Plan," library, Denver Service Center.

<sup>48</sup> David D. Thompson, Jr., "Visitor Centers...", 4.

The cover of "Mission 66 in Action," a 1958 brochure promoting the program, features a streamlined, modern visitor center and viewing terrace dotted with visitors. Another drawing of a simple, rectangular visitor center building is pictured inside. Thirty-four of these new "focal points of park activity" had already been completed and twenty were under construction. By this time, the Park Service was on its way towards establishing standards for visitor centers, at least in terms of in-house examples. The design conference offered park architects important tips on early planning and guidelines for developing appropriate buildings. Park publications promoted modern materials for design, and during the early 1960s, Park Service personnel could look at their own publications for guidance.

*Park Practice Design*, a joint publication of the Park Service and the National Conference on State Parks, featured a rustic wood museum building in 1957, but qualified its praise with the observation that it had "limited application because of its architectural character and the fact that it would be relatively expensive to construct." These issues were no longer applicable in 1962, when the publication emphasized the centralization of functions, circulation of visitors, and presence of modern utilities in visitor centers at Pipestone, George Washington Carver, and Everglades. Writing for the Park Service newsletter *Guidelines*, Howard R. Stagner, chief of the Division of Natural History and a member of the original Mission 66 planning staff, compared visitor centers to modern businesses. The overwhelming purpose was luring people inside. Stagner noted the absence of any standard plan for visitor centers, since each varied according to its reason for being. Taken out of context, the visitor center had no inherent value, but placed near a point of interest, it became indispensable to the curious park visitor. By 1963, museum professionals described how the visitor center allowed the Park Service to "orient the public according to its own objectives." This was achieved through what had already become a standard set of experiences: approaching the information desk, discovering one's location on a map, watching a narrated slide production, visiting the museum, taking in a view and then proceeding down the road to a major attraction.<sup>49</sup>

During the last few years of Mission 66, both the EODC and the WODC experimented with visitor center plans that moved away from the centralized, single building model. The new designs were of two basic types--an entry lobby with distinct wings for other services and a series of independent buildings grouped around a courtyard or terrace. The visitor center and administration building at Saratoga, New York, designed by Don Benson and the EODC staff in 1960-1962, is an early example of this effort to clarify services and the circulation between them. Offices are housed in a hut-like space adjacent to a similar form containing a lobby and roofed terraces. These six-sided "huts" are connected by a corridor to the assembly/museum area, which is similar in plan and outward appearance. The exterior walls of all three areas are covered with beveled wood siding and the six-sided pointed roofs are protected by hand-split wood shingles. Although the Salt Pond Visitor Center (1964), Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts, was based on a different plan and aesthetic treatment, it also effectively dispersed services into three distinct areas. EODC Architect Ben Biderman designed the visitor center with a central entrance lobby between an audio-visual room and museum. The elevation reads as three separate buildings, but the two wings are connected to the lobby with glassed-in corridors. In contrast to the Saratoga Visitor Center, Salt Pond emphasized the character of each area with distinctive roof designs and wall treatments.

The WODC also began experimenting with alternatives to the centralized, single-building visitor center during the later years of the program. Cecil Doty produced a visitor center on the "three hut model" with pointed shake roofs for Curecanti Visitor Center (1965) in Colorado, but the building was completely re-designed by a contract architectural firm. The reverse situation occurred at Cabrillo Visitor Center, San Diego, for which Doty chose a more centralized plan that contract architect Frank L. Hope reconfigured as three completely separate buildings in 1965. In this case, the administration building, exhibits/auditorium, and viewing/sales buildings were grouped

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<sup>49</sup> Howard R. Stagner, "Making the Visitor Center Work," *Guidelines* (National Park Service, November 1963): 75-77; Charles W. Warner, "The Interpretation of an Historic Area through the Original Environment and the Visitor Center," *Guidelines* (National Park Service, November 1963): 79-81.

around an open-air courtyard. Roughly contemporary with this design were the plans for the headquarters at Fort Raleigh, Cape Hatteras National Seashore (1964-65), and the Kalapana Visitor Center at Hawaii Volcanoes (1965-66; destroyed by a lava flow in 1989). The visitor center portion of Fort Raleigh was completely separate from the headquarters, a series of “pod-like” buildings. The Hawaiian structure featured an office building, comfort station, and exhibit room with attached lanai (porch). Both of these buildings, and perhaps not coincidentally most of these later visitor centers, made extensive use of wood shingles, built-up roofs, and decorative wood siding. Although “classic” visitor centers were still designed in the late 1960s, this move towards decentralizing visitor services appears to have been both a response to visitor circulation issues and a reaction to a design trend that would appear in school buildings and other public facilities during the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Mission 66 visitor center combined old and new building programs and served as the centerpiece of a new era of planning for American national parks. The influence of the Mission 66 visitor center was profound. New visitor centers (and the planning ideas and architectural style they implied) were used in the development or redevelopment of scores of state parks in the United States, as well as nascent national park systems in Europe, Africa, and elsewhere. The visitor center is still the core facility of park development programs for parks of various sizes and in various contexts all over the world.

### *“Park Service Modern”*

The Mission 66-era visitor center also embodied a distinctive new architectural style that can be described as “Park Service Modern.” By the late 1930s, Park Service architects had become aware that American architecture was changing fundamentally, and that the situation had also changed in the national parks. Park Service Modern architecture responded to the new context of postwar social, demographic, and economic conditions. The new style was an integral part of a broader effort at the Park Service to reinvent the agency, and the national park system, for the postwar world.

The new style was evident, above all, in the design of visitor centers. These showcase facilities exploited the functional advantages offered by postwar architectural theory and construction techniques. The larger, more complex programming of the visitor center encouraged Park Service architects to take advantage of free plans, flat roofs, and other established elements of modern design in order to create spaces in which larger numbers of visitors could circulate easily and locate essential services efficiently. Such planning implied the use of concrete construction and prefabricated components, and was further complemented by unorthodox fenestration and other aspects of contemporary modern design. At the same time, Park Service Modern also built on some precedents of earlier rustic design, especially in the use of interior courtyards and plain facades, which Cecil Doty had used, for example, in Pueblo revival structures of the 1930s.

The architectural elevations of Park Service Modern visitor centers reflected a new approach to designing what was, after all, a new building type. Stripped of most overtly decorative or associative elements, the architects typically employed textured concrete with panels of stone veneer, painted steel columns, and flat roofs. These were established formal elements of the modern idiom, but they also often allowed the sometimes large and complex buildings to maintain a low, horizontal profile that remained as unobtrusive as possible. Many visitor centers were sited on a slope, so that the public was presented with a single-story elevation, while the rear (service/administrative façade) dropped down to house two levels of offices. Stone and textured concrete could also take on earth tones that reduced visual contrast with landscape settings. The Park Service Modern style developed by the Park Service during the Mission 66 era was a distinctive new approach to park architecture. The style was quickly adopted and expanded upon by Park Service consultants, notably Mitchell/Giurgola and Neutra. The Park Service Modern style soon had a widespread influence on park architecture not only in the United States, but internationally as well.

Park Service Modern architecture also reinterpreted the long-standing commitment to “harmonize” architecture with park landscapes. The Park Service Rustic style had been essentially picturesque architecture that allowed buildings and other structures to be perceived as aesthetically harmonious elements of larger landscape compositions. The pseudo-vernacular imagery and rough-hewn materials of this style conformed with the artistic conventions of landscape genres, and therefore constituted “appropriate” architectural elements in the perceived scene. Rustic buildings harmonized with the site not just by being unobtrusive, but by being consistent with an aesthetic appreciation of the place. Park Service Modern buildings were no longer truly part of the park landscape, in this sense, since they were not sited or designed to be part of picturesque landscape compositions. But in many cases this meant that buildings could be sited in less sensitive areas, near park entrances or along main roads within the park. At times, the new, larger visitor centers could be even less obtrusive than rustic buildings often had been. Park Service Modern architecture, at its best, did “harmonize” with its setting, but in a new way. Stripped of the ornamentation and associations of rustic design, Mission 66 development could be both more understated and more efficient. If the complex programs and extensive floor areas of the new visitor centers had been designed in a rustic idiom, the buildings probably would have taken on the dimensions and appearance of major resort hotels. Park Service Modern offered a new approach that, when successful, provided more programmatic and functional space for less architectural presence.

During the Mission 66 era, the Park Service Modern style (epitomized by the Mission 66 visitor center) led the way in establishing what was considered an appropriate approach to planning and designing the built environment in national and state parks. The new, modern image became widespread, and was adopted by many different park and public land management agencies all over the United States. As the national park movement spread worldwide in the postwar era, visitor center planning and the Park Service Modern style were often exported as well. Mission 66 and Park Service Modern became as influential in shaping postwar park planning as the New Deal and Park Service Rustic had been between the wars.

### **Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building, Estes Park, Colorado**

#### *Background*

On Friday July 16, 1965, George B. Hartzog, Jr., director of the National Park Service, Colorado Congressman Wayne Aspinall, local dignitaries, and Gordon Lee of Taliesin Associated Architects gathered near the Beaver Meadows entrance of Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado) to break ground for the new Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building (also known as the Headquarters Building and as the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center).<sup>50</sup> Although Mission 66 officially concluded the next year, the development campaign it inspired continued until the end of the decade. The Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building, designed by Taliesin Associated Architects, Ltd., would be completed in 1967. The building is one of the finest examples of Mission 66 architecture, and one of the best demonstrations of the Park Service’s willingness to experiment with modern architecture in the parks, and to employ the foremost modern designers of the day.

Rocky Mountain National Park drafted its Mission 66 planning prospectus in 1956 amid the excitement of a 320-acre park boundary extension and planning for a new eastern approach road to the park.<sup>51</sup> President Eisenhower authorized the addition to the eastern park boundary in June. The two-and-a-third mile approach road, a project first conceived in 1932, connected State Highway 262 with Trail Ridge Road, traversing an area known as Beaver Meadows. According to plans, the new visitor center would be located on undeveloped land in Lone Pine Meadow just below the turnoff for Moraine Park. Park Service designers envisioned a “principal visitor center”

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<sup>50</sup> Superintendent’s Annual Report (Granville B. Liles), July 1965, Library, Rocky Mountain National Park.

<sup>51</sup> Lloyd K. Musselman, “Rocky Mountain National Park Administrative History, 1915-1965,” (National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1971), 210-211.

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adjacent the new road with facilities for both visitors and staff. The building was to house interpretive exhibits, an enclosed, glassed-in observation porch, and the information-orientation services then being handled at the entrance station. Indoor and outdoor auditoriums would supplement the museum interpretation. The cost of the new visitor center was estimated at \$200,000.<sup>52</sup>

By 1958, planners were considering several alternatives for park development, all of which anticipated major changes in roads and traffic patterns around the eastern entrance. One possibility was a visitor center at Deer Ridge near the convergence of Highways 34 and 36. Since the Beaver Meadows entrance and the Fall River entrance guarded these primary access roads into the park, a visitor center between the two would serve the greatest number of visitors. But because the chosen site included several inholdings (such as the Schubert family's popular Deer Ridge Chalet) acquisition of the property before the conclusion of Mission 66 was doubtful. Although this plan was not adopted, efforts to acquire the desired property were eventually successful.<sup>53</sup>

A more expedient alternative, considering the land ownership situation, was the construction of a visitor center building at Lone Pine, the site suggested two years earlier. This proposal described a 10,200-square-foot building for visitor facilities, which included an optional auditorium and naturalist's operating headquarters and workshop. A headquarters for administrative functions was planned about a mile down the road. At this time, planners imagined the administration building in conjunction with the utility area and distinct from anything having to do with visitors or interpretation. This "master plan development outline" was reviewed by Lyle E. Bennett, WODC architect, and recommended by Chief of Design and Construction Thomas Vint in 1958. This plan, as well, however, was never implemented. In the meantime, the new eastern approach road opened in 1959.

As Mission 66 planning progressed, the Park Service increased efforts to acquire inholdings, remove old buildings, and restore the natural landscape as much as possible. Between 1958 and 1962, the park purchased Fern Lake, Bear Lake, and Spragues lodges; two private "guest ranches," the Fall River Lodge in Horseshoe Park and the Brinwood Hotel in Moraine Park; and the Stead Ranch at Moraine Park, site of the Deer Ridge Chalet.<sup>54</sup> The buildings were demolished in the name of wilderness conservation, but many Estes Park residents and seasonal visitors lamented the loss of favorite vacation resorts. To complicate matters, the park's environmental preservation efforts were carried out just a few years after a controversial new ski facility opened at Hidden Valley in the park. In light of the effort to remove private development and thereby enhance the natural surroundings, the Park Service ski concession was questioned by both locals and environmentalists.

While other parks upgraded concessioner facilities inside their boundaries, Rocky Mountain was able to take advantage of its proximity to Estes Park for visitor accommodations and most services. This close relationship between the park and the town dated back to the park's founding in 1915, when a rented downtown building became the first headquarters. In 1921, the Estes Park Women's club resolved to loan a parcel of land in town to the park, and once an act of Congress passed the bill, a superintendent's office was constructed on the city lot about three miles from the park boundary.<sup>55</sup> During the Mission 66 development and planning process,

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<sup>52</sup> Mission 66 Prospectus, Final Draft, 1957, Archaeologist's Files, Rocky Mountain National Park.

<sup>53</sup> "Developed Areas--East Side Interpretation," Master Plan Development Outline, March 1958, Technical Information Center (microfiche), Denver Service Center.

<sup>54</sup> C. W. Buchholtz, *Rocky Mountain National Park, A History* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1983), 205.

<sup>55</sup> Four years later the chief ranger's office was built nearby, and in 1956 a library building was moved to the site. By 1960 the overcrowded administration facility could no longer satisfy park needs, and some offices were moved to the utility area in Beaver Meadows. "Park Headquarters to Move," press release, Rocky Mountain National Park, September 21,

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maintaining good relations with the town was of considerable importance. Superintendent Granville Liles understood that the design of the new park visitor center should reflect the close ties between the park and the community of Estes Park.

The earliest extant graphic representation of the proposed "Administration and Visitor Orientation Building" is a November 1962, site plan by the Midwest Regional Office of landscape architecture.<sup>56</sup> The drawing shows a building shaped like an angular pollywog, its head to the west and crooked tail behind. Visitor parking is located on the south side, visitors entered the "head" of the building, and employee parking is provided in the rear adjacent a central service yard. Because the road separates the new building from the utility area, the scheme did not allow efficient traffic flow. In an effort to remedy this problem, the office drafted a revised plan with a bridge over the entrance road linking the visitor center, to the south, with an administration building on the north side. The next month, a third scheme reunited the two functions in a U-shaped plan south of the entrance road, the side adjacent the utility area. The lobby and auditorium were located at the front and formed the widest section, with narrower central and eastern administration wings. Parking was divided, with visitors in front of the building and employees on the east side. During this preliminary design phase, Park Service architect Cecil Doty drew elevations and plans for his version of the future administration building.<sup>57</sup>

Although the "pre-preliminary designs" Doty produced in February 1963 hardly resemble the final building, they anticipate several of its main qualities. The entrance facade of Doty's Administration Building features a single-story office wing, with a double-height auditorium and lobby on one end balanced by the south wall of an additional two-story office wing on the other. Employee parking is on the west side, and from this vantage point, the building appears to be two stories. Visitor services are located in the east end of the building, a segregation of visitor center and administrative functions that foreshadows Taliesin's treatment of visitor and employee use. On the exterior of his administration building, Doty imagined "cement block, stucco and precast panels with heavy exposed aggregate," the type of treatment eventually employed by Taliesin. The office windows were a seemingly continuous strip of glass with thin metal mullions spaced every four feet, and roofs were flat. The Doty scheme was dominated by its extensive office wing.

The park and the Park Service's Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC) were not willing to accept Doty's plans without exploring additional possibilities for the new building. In April 1963, a Park Service architect named Robertson produced an "advance study plan for review and adjustment." This simple line drawing shows the first and second floors, and, in general outline, resembles the "pollywog" plan of two months earlier. A partition separates the audio-visual auditorium from a lobby and exhibit space which together form roughly an oval shape. The administrative offices are arranged on either side of a corridor that emerges from the rear of the lobby. This 110-foot wing is joined to a 96-foot wing angled slightly towards the front of the building. Although the drawing is crude and the plan awkward, the general organization of spaces and hierarchy of services foreshadow those of the constructed building. During this time the facility came to be known as the administration or administration-orientation building (in the Headquarters area), perhaps to distinguish it from previous schemes involving two separate buildings.<sup>58</sup>

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1966.

<sup>56</sup> All drawings noted can be found on microfiche in the Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, Lakewood, Colorado.

<sup>57</sup> Copies of these two drawings are on file at the William Wesley Peters Library, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona. The drawing is referenced as "building-NP-RM-3609 2/63-Doty" on drawing no. 3610 (March 1963), a site development plan for the administration building and visitor center designed by J. O'Shea. Doty's building was located on the north side of the road across from the Beaver Meadows utility area.

<sup>58</sup> Master Plan Development Outline, "narrative," May 1960 with revisions in April and July 1963 and May and December 1964, microfiche copy, Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center.

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Park Service personnel were still discussing the building's exact location in February 1964. That summer, William Wesley Peters and Edmund Thomas Casey of Taliesin Associated Architects visited the park to examine potential sites.<sup>59</sup> According to Casey, the firm was contacted directly by the Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall, regarding design of a future Rocky Mountain National Park Headquarters.<sup>60</sup> The basic programmatic requirements were outlined by Superintendent Liles, and Taliesin was asked for advice specifically regarding the building's site.

As resident landscape architect Richard Strait recalls, the park staff had focused the search for an appropriate visitor center site on Horseshoe Park or Deer Ridge, the site of the controversial private lodge and cabins.<sup>61</sup> Both sites posed circulation problems, however, and the cramped spaces were considered inadequate. Strait and the park planners preferred a building on the north side of the road, which would allow better traffic flow. When Casey arrived, the choice had been narrowed down to two locations, the one ultimately selected on the south side of the road, and another about a mile further into the park and on the north side of the road. The latter site was finally rejected as less conveniently situated in relation to the park's residential area. At the lower hillside site on the south side of the road, the architects could also envision a better segregation of visitors and administrative facilities. Although Strait and the park staff were not eager to build "on the wrong side of the road," they agreed that this was the best solution considering the many issues involved. In combination with the building's unusual design, these early planning studies gave rise to rumors that the two-story south facade, as eventually built, had been originally designed to face north. In fact, the building was designed and built specifically for the hillside site it occupies.<sup>62</sup>

During these early discussions, Casey remembers the superintendent's eagerness to improve the relationship between the park and the town of Estes Park. The superintendent hoped that a new headquarters closer to town might reduce some of the tension caused by the park's policy toward inholdings. As primary representative of the client, Liles not only influenced the location of the building, but also the development of its program. His hope that the auditorium might be used for city council meetings and other civic events materialized in the form of a

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<sup>59</sup> Peters and Casey visited the park on June 3. See Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1964, Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) library.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with E. Thomas Casey by Tom Keohan, National Park Service historical architect, February 15, 1997. In an interview with the author on September 23, 1998, Casey said that Udall wanted architects from his home state of Arizona for political reasons, but the secretary also had a personal interest in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. According to *Washington Post* critic Wolf Von Eckardt, Udall was "beginning to extend what he calls the 'conservation ethic' to the wastelands of our cities. He is just now skillfully trying to save a small house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Falls Church, Virginia, from the bulldozers. He has moved to declare Wright's famous Robie House in Chicago a national landmark." See "The Park Service Dares to Build Well," *Washington Post* (March 29, 1964).

<sup>61</sup> Telephone interview with Richard Strait by the author, April 5, 1999. Richard Strait graduated with a degree in landscape architecture from Utah State in 1958 and became the resident landscape architect at Rocky Mountain in 1962. He participated in the site selection process for the visitor center at Beaver Meadows and worked on the landscape plan for the Alpine Visitor Center. In 1965 Strait was transferred to the regional office in Omaha and replaced by James O'Shea. Strait is now retired and living in Littleton, Colorado.

<sup>62</sup> According to a recent guide to regional architecture, the "building was designed for the north side of the road, but a powerful park superintendent moved it to the south side, so visitors enter at the rear and rarely see the original facade." Thomas Noel, *Buildings of Colorado* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 238. In fact, although Liles contributed to the building program, the building was designed specifically for its present site. E. Thomas Casey speculated that the left turn off the main road may have contributed to the pervasive myth of the reversed facade. Interview with E. Thomas Casey by the author, October 23, 1998.

rather large auditorium, as well as the siting of the building closer to the town. In September 1964, the *Estes Park Trail* announced that, after five years of planning, the park had finally chosen a site for the building “such that it will serve visitors of the Estes Park area without requiring them to enter the National Park itself.”<sup>63</sup> Rocky Mountain was one of the few parks that chose to build a Mission 66 visitor center outside its official entrance, enabling visitors to use the building without passing through a gate or paying a fee.

### *Frank Lloyd Wright and Taliesin Associated Architects, Ltd.*

When Secretary of the Interior Udall called on Taliesin Associated Architects in 1964, the firm’s founder, Frank Lloyd Wright, had been dead for five years. The most influential American architect of the 20th century, Wright left behind an architectural legacy unsurpassed in its range and influence, from homes on the prairie to urban office buildings, and from Southern California residences to New York’s Guggenheim Museum. Wright inspired generations of modern architects to design buildings sensitive to site, climate, and regional associations. He taught countless young designers by example, through his built work, and also at the Taliesin Fellowship, the architecture school he founded in 1932. During his career, Wright incorporated history, art, poetry, music, and whimsy into designs for about a thousand buildings. Perhaps more effectively than any architect in the world, he achieved the delicate balance between contemporary innovations and centuries of tradition.

Wright built the house he called Taliesin in 1911 on family property in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Taliesin means “shining brow” in Welsh and refers to the siting of the building on the brow of a hill. For Wright, whose mother was Welsh, the name also invoked Taliesin, the legendary bard of Welsh folklore. Taliesin stood on the brow of a hill near the Hillside Home School, an institution Wright had designed for two aunts nearly ten years before. Early life in the house was a series of tragedies: two fires, the murder of Wright’s mistress, and an unhappy second marriage that almost cost him the homestead. Finally, in 1928, Wright brought his third wife, daughter and step-daughter to live at Taliesin. As the country entered the Depression, Frank and Olgivanna Wright found themselves with “everything but money,” and turned to the employment that had sustained the two spinster aunts. The school they established, the Taliesin Fellowship, occupied the remodeled quarters of the Hillside Home School and adopted the aunt’s radical educational philosophy of learning through hands-on experience. Among the applicants for enrollment when the school first opened in 1932 was William Wesley Peters, who would go on to marry Wright’s adopted daughter and become the principal of Taliesin Associated Architects. As Peters and his fellow apprentices soon learned, membership in the fellowship involved more than mastering lessons at the drafting table. Apprentices were expected to perform manual labor around the farm, prepare meals, and engage in other tasks necessary for the maintenance of the school. They also participated in social events, such as a daily tea and periodic celebrations requiring exotic costumes and often exhausting preparations.

The fellowship life of daily chores, architectural instruction, and social events was broadened in 1937-38, when Wright began planning a branch of his school in Arizona. Taliesin West was inspired by a temporary desert camp Wright had designed in 1929 while working on a project for a resort in Chandler, Arizona. Once the complex was under construction in 1938, the fellowship migrated between the two locations, living in lush Midwestern farmland during the hot summer months and in the temperate desert through the winter. This seasonal routine of dramatic environmental contrasts suited Wright personally. He expressed this satisfaction in the architecture of the schools, both of which were constantly altered and remodeled as inspiration and reason demanded.<sup>64</sup> The intense life of the fellowship, with its hands-on training and rigorous social obligations, imbued devoted students with the design philosophy, if not ability, of their mentor. The Taliesin apprentices who worked on the

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<sup>63</sup> “New Park Visitor Center Will Be Located Near Present NPS Utility Area,” *Estes Park Trail* (September 4, 1964), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Kathryn Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin and Taliesin West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997).

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Headquarters Building not only learned from Wright's method, but also from their experience at his desert retreat, Taliesin West.

Wright established the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in 1940 to guarantee that his "intellectual property" would remain within the fellowship. Upon his death in 1959, this governing body became responsible for the future organization of the school. The core of loyal apprentices, or senior fellows, who decided to carry on Wright's work were organized as Taliesin Associated Architects. Although maintaining the Taliesin farm proved to be more than it could handle, the architectural firm remained committed to the "learning by doing" philosophy so important to Frank Lloyd Wright. The Foundation established standards for a new school, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, and received its professional accreditation in 1996. Wright's belief in the apprenticeship system was carried on through a close relationship between the architectural firm and the school, which share a single drafting room and a dedication to Wrightian design principles.<sup>65</sup> Students work for the firm as part of their learning experience. The school continues the traditional annual migration between Scottsdale and Spring Green. In 1999, Taliesin Associates Architects maintains these two offices, as well as offices in Madison, Bradenton, Florida, and Hermitage, Tennessee. Eight of the fourteen principles remember life under Wright, and most were exposed to the philosophy of his "chief" apprentice, William Wesley Peters.<sup>66</sup>

After the loss of their mentor, the senior fellows looked to Wes Peters for leadership. As managing principal of Taliesin Associated Architects, Peters was responsible for overseeing all projects. Project architect Edmund Thomas Casey recalls counting up eighty-five ongoing projects, among them, the Guggenheim Museum, Beth Shalom Synagogue, and Marin County Center. Wright's continuing legacy is perhaps best illustrated by Monona Terrace, a lakeside convention building and community center on axis with the state capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. The commission came to Wright's drawing board in 1938, and, with the help of the apprentices, he revised the complex several times over the next thirty years; the convention building was finally completed by Taliesin Associated Architects in 1997.<sup>67</sup>

By the early 1960s, the architectural firm was not only continuing work begun during Wright's lifetime, but had begun taking on new commissions as well. Taliesin Associated Architects received the headquarters building contract July 1, 1964, just a few weeks after their preliminary site visit. Over the next few months, Peters and Casey met with park architects and planners to discuss the project. At a meeting on September 24<sup>th</sup>, WODC Chief Sanford Hill, John Cabot, chief architect of the Washington office, and architect Jerry Riddell discussed the proposed building with Taliesin and agreed on a schedule for completing the plans. The park staff was already reviewing "revisions of the floor plan requirements for the new Headquarters Administration Building," and by the next month they were examining preliminary drawings and submitting comments to the Regional Director. In-house architects were involved in floor plan revisions.

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<sup>65</sup> Tobias S. Guggenheimer, *A Taliesin Legacy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995), 102.

<sup>66</sup> "Brief History of the School," FLWSA 1997 Self-Study Report, Taliesin West; William E. Mims, *Interiors and Sources* (September 1998).

<sup>67</sup> William Wesley Peters (1912-1991) was born in Terre Haute Indiana, and joined the fellowship in 1932 at age twenty. Considered a leader in the school, Peters devoted his life to furthering Wrightian architecture as a member of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and chief architect of Taliesin Associated Architects. Edmund Thomas Casey (b. 1924), a native of Los Angeles, California, attended Pasadena Jr. College before joining the armed services. Five years later, he attended the University of California at Berkeley under the G.I. bill, and graduated with a B. A. in architecture in 1950. A month later, Casey joined Taliesin Fellowship, also under the G.I. bill. Curtis Besinger, *Working with Mr. Wright, What it Was Like* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); interview with E. Thomas Casey by the author, September 23, 1998.

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When local papers learned that Taliesin Associated Architects would be designing the new headquarters, stories began to appear about Frank Lloyd Wright's previous commission for a hotel in the park. According to the *Estes Park Trail* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, Wright designed the Horseshoe Inn for W. H. Ashton, who operated the hotel until 1915.<sup>68</sup> The Park Service purchased the building from new owners in 1932 specifically to destroy it. Reporters couldn't resist mentioning the demolished Horseshoe Inn as a precedent Frank Lloyd Wright building. In fact, Wright's design for an expensive luxury hotel with room for a hundred guests was a formal complex of buildings that bore no resemblance to the two-story wood frame hotel that was actually constructed.

The design that Wright produced for the Horseshoe Inn, however, had attracted considerable attention at the time. The front page of the 1908 *Estes Park Mountaineer* featured the design by "Frank Lloyd Wright, the famous architect of Chicago." The building's Wrightian characteristics are apparent in the accompanying description:

The scheme of the building is a large dining room and living room, separated only by a wide chimney with a large fireplace on both sides. Around the two rooms will be a balcony looking down into these rooms. From these two rooms, which form the central part of the building, wings will run both ways, ending in towers two stories high. The guest rooms will be in the wings, and all will have large windows commanding a view of the mountains. One of the wings will span a little stream, and the music of the waters splashing over the rocks beneath the window, ought to lull to rest the tired tourist after a day of mountain climbing. The ground between the main building and towers at the end of the wings will be made into an open court, and in pleasant weather will be used as an outdoor dining room.<sup>69</sup>

The emphasis on a central hearth, the split level arrangement, and segregation of community spaces and guest rooms in this proposed design are typical of Wright's work. Throughout his career, Wright used ceiling heights to distinguish between intimate spaces and expansive, double-height gathering places, such as theaters or living rooms. Open courts become outdoor rooms, and indoors appears to flow outside. If only in project form, the Horseshoe Inn suggests Wright was thinking about natural water features entering the building site as early as 1908.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the hotel known as Horseshoe Inn, as built, was a far more modest and conventional building that had nothing to do with Wright's design.

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<sup>68</sup> "NPS Building Architectural Sidelights," *Estes Park Trail* (November 18, 1966); Pasquale Marranzino, "Early Wright Design," *Rocky Mountain News* (June 1, 1965), 53; "Park Headquarters Building Owes Its Design to Pioneering Heritage of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Estes Park Trail* (May 26, 1972).

<sup>69</sup> "Beautiful New Hotel for Horse Shoe Park," *The Mountaineer* (Estes Park), Vol. 1, (June 4, 1908), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Wright described the Horseshoe Inn in his Wasmuth portfolio. The monograph on his work of this period includes a photograph of the sketch and further assurance that the building was never constructed. See Yukio Futagawa, ed. *Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph, 1907-1913* (Tokyo, A.D.A. Edita, 1987), 164.

### *Designing the Headquarters*

Regardless of Wright's reputation for previous work in the area, Taliesin Associated Architects was known for carrying on his tradition of "Organic Architecture": the design of buildings closely related to the landscape. The firm's reputation for environmentally sensitive modern architecture attracted the attention of Mission 66 planners and, apparently, that of the Secretary of the Interior. When the commission was accepted, Tom Casey was assigned the position of project architect. Casey designed and supervised the building from concept through completion, as was the firm's standard practice.

In an interview, Casey used "four points" to explain how Wright's philosophy influenced the design of the headquarters.<sup>71</sup> First, the building had to appear part of the site and not merely sit upon the land. Second, methods of structural manipulation were employed to destroy the traditional "box" characteristic of so much American architecture. Third, materials would be chosen for the effects of weathering over time so that they might reveal their true nature. And finally, if the building were to represent American architecture, it must somehow symbolize democracy. Like Le Corbusier's famous "five points," these four points were intended to simplify Wright's complex and continually changing design philosophy into terms the public could understand. Taliesin developed this summary of Wright's teachings in the early 1980s, when the firm was preparing a traveling exhibit of his work called *In the Realm of Ideas*. Although Wright himself never distilled his philosophy in this way, this concise formula helps to explain certain aspects of the headquarters design.

In plan, the building Casey designed resembles several of the early Park Service schemes: it consists of a long corridor of administrative offices attached to a larger room housing featured visitor services. The box is "burst" by a triangular conclusion to the administration wing and the 45-degree rotation of the auditorium, which results in an unusual lobby space. The building is sited "in the land" so that the transition from the upper to the lower floor is hardly noticeable. And yet employees entering from the rear perceive the building as two stories. This level change and the organization of spaces effectively separates visitors from park staff without requiring prohibitive signs or resulting in confusion and unnecessary traffic in the staff area.<sup>72</sup> The transition from inside to outside is also emphasized using a variety of Wrightian methods. The entrance to the main lobby is low and dark, but opens into a lobby with a higher ceiling. Lights hidden behind the steel fascia and natural lighting from a clerestory window on the west side enhance the contrast from low to high, dark to bright. These effects are also apparent in the office corridors, where oppressively low hallways lead to offices with high ceilings and clerestory windows.

The third "point" of design, the nature of materials, is both the most obvious and the most complex. The disoriented visitor is likely to stumble inside without paying much attention to the variety and color of stones, their contrast with the bare concrete, or the pink paint under the eaves that matches mortar and sidewalk. But even the most oblivious might notice the unusual Cor-ten steel framework enveloping the second story of the building. The dynamic pattern wrapping around the building is built up in several layers, with thin steel sheets welded onto the thicker tubes that form the framework. The resulting abstract design, a series of rigid triangles said to have been derived from Indian rock art, reappears throughout the building, as interior ornament, in the angles of rooms, and other unexpected places. Steel trim is also a feature along the roof of the building, where it serves as a cornice and is embossed with a decorative pattern. This design is repeated in the pressed metal panels around the auditorium. If the roughness and redness of the stones is intended to blend with the surroundings, the steel ornament seems a deliberate effort to fight this tendency. Even the steel's deep reddish color fails to

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Casey by Tom Keohan.

<sup>72</sup> By this time, the Park Service also had a tradition of separating visitor and administrative areas by housing offices in a two-story wing entered from a parking lot behind the visitor center. Cecil Doty used this design at Zion National Park (1957-60) and Colorado National Monument (1960-1963).

“naturalize” this sharp, industrial material. Whether the building is successful in its effort to satisfy the fourth point, to qualify as “democratic” architecture, is purely subjective. That the Headquarters was designed by architects, and intended to convey abstract meaning, however, is obvious.

In a general way, “the four points” can be observed in any Wrightian design. For the purposes of this study, however, comparative analysis is limited to the examples that the apprentices knew best: Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona, and Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin. A quick glance at Taliesin West establishes its striking resemblance to the headquarters building: the low profile, stone aggregate in cast concrete, and exposed structural system. The buildings draw attention to the landscape, both through siting and choice of material. Wright described Taliesin West as a ship, with its “concrete prow” facing south overlooking Paradise Valley and the Camelback Mountains.<sup>73</sup> The headquarters building also had a ship-like form, and during construction, the auditorium end was referred to as “the east prow of the Monitor.”<sup>74</sup> Taliesin is surrounded by low walls and planters for cactus; the headquarters uses similar low walls to define entrances and areas for plantings. A separate theater building, known as the kiva, stands on one corner of the Taliesin complex. Not coincidentally, the amphitheater at Rocky Mountain was said to resemble a ceremonial kiva, though probably more in its association with the Taliesin building than an authentic Southwestern Indian dwelling. The symbol for Taliesin Fellowship, an interlocking square spiral, was an adaptation of a prehistoric pictograph.<sup>75</sup> According to Wright, “inspiration for Taliesin West came from the same source as the early American primitives and there are certain resemblances, but not influences.”<sup>76</sup> The ceiling of the drafting room at Taliesin in Spring Green is decorated with a pattern of jagged triangles protruding from wood trusses, much like the triangular ornament featured throughout the headquarters. The ornament used in the headquarters may have had its closest antecedents in the Fellowship’s own design vocabulary.

### ***Building the Headquarters***

In March 1965 Superintendent Liles met with Regional Director Garrison, staff members and Casey to review the building’s working drawings and overall construction program. As on-site “architects’ representative,” Taliesin selected Charles Gordon Lee, a former apprentice who had established private practice in Denver.<sup>77</sup> The bidding process for the construction of the headquarters began with notices advertising the “partly reinforced concrete and partly structural steel frame” building, and a May 24th press release invited potential contractors to obtain copies of plans, specifications and a photograph showing “an artist’s conception” of the building.<sup>78</sup> Gordon Lee and

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<sup>73</sup> Suzette A. Lucas, ed., *Taliesin West, In the Realm of Ideas*, interpretive guide (Scottsdale, Arizona: The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1993), 12.

<sup>74</sup> “East prow of the Monitor” is written on the back of a July 1966 construction photograph in the photo collection at TIC, Denver Service Center.

<sup>75</sup> Besinger, *Working with Mr. Wright*, 46-47.

<sup>76</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, “Sixty Years of Living Architecture,” exhibition catalog, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1953.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Gordon Lee (d. 1966) received a B. S. in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania before participating in the fellowship first in 1941-42 and again in 1947-48. Lee worked briefly in partnership with Kelly Oliver, another former apprentice, and when he died in 1966, Oliver took over as Taliesin’s representative for the headquarters project. Hiring architects as construction supervisors was standard practice for Taliesin.

<sup>78</sup> “Bids for Administration Building at Rocky Mountain National Park,” press release, May 24, 1965, ROMO archives. *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* both included a photograph of the “artist’s conception” on May 26 and 28 respectively.

WODC staff attended a June 17th “pre-bid conference” for construction companies interested in the project. Five days later, Kunz Construction Company of Arvada, Colorado, submitted the lowest bid of \$652,871.95. The ground-breaking ceremony took place on July 16th, and the Park Service issued a “start work order” the next week.<sup>79</sup> Shortly after, Liles transferred to a different park and was replaced by Superintendent Fred J. Novak.

The Headquarters’ unique materials and construction required all sorts of special provisions, not to mention the use of building techniques unfamiliar to most contractors. Monthly superintendent’s reports and Park Service snapshots (by WODC architect Jerry Riddell) capture the drama of the construction process, as cranes lifted the heavy walls into place. The concrete and stone walls were a puzzle of one hundred and one pre-cast concrete panels in sixty-four different sizes, one of which weighed 65,000 pounds. The challenge was to fit each panel into its proper location. In April, “the contractor was advised to correct the alignment of a concrete column consisting of panels PC/3-4-5,” which was “out of plumb by 4 ½”.”<sup>80</sup> Even such a slight maladjustment could result in a serious structural problem and required immediate correction. Sections were cast in wooden forms assembled on-site; large stones were placed in the forms, concrete was poured around them, and then pebbles (or gravel aggregate) sprinkled on the exposed wet mortar. This method of creating a “naturalistic” wall originated during the construction of Taliesin West in 1937-39, when Wright was searching for a way of building with regional stones that could not be cut easily like granite or limestone.<sup>81</sup> “Face rocks” were selected for flat surfaces, thickness, and color. These were set into wood frames along with smaller stones, or “rubble,” to hold them in place while a mixture of concrete and sand was used to fill the crevices.<sup>82</sup> By varying the size of the stones and laying them in rough horizontal rows, Wright created the illusion of cut-stone masonry. At the Headquarters, auditorium panels included electrical wires and other utilities imbedded in concrete along with the stones. Once the concrete hardened, the panels appeared to be composed of natural stone, but the seams between panels were also a visible design element, creating both horizontal striations resembling geologic strata and a sense of the building’s structure. According to former apprentice Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, the horizontal concrete lines also originated in the Arizona desert and were perfected at Taliesin West. He recalled:

An outing the Fellowship made to northern Arizona into one of the canyons which had once been under water, the deep, horizontal grooves in the stone canyon walls caused by water erosion greatly appealed to Mr. Wright. On his return to camp he instructed the apprentices building the walls to insert triangular strips of wood stretching in thin lines on the inside surface of the wooden forms prior to placing stones and pouring concrete. When the forms were removed the indentation of the horizontal strips left an impression within the concrete surface of the wall, creating yet another element with which the sun could make deep shadow lines across the mosaic wall.<sup>83</sup>

At the headquarters, the use of lichen-covered pink fieldstone from the nearby town of Lyons heightened the ornamental effects. As Tom Casey remembers, the stone had been left in an abandoned quarry established by the government for use in Denver’s first federal courthouse. The architects’ were delighted to find leftover red

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<sup>79</sup> Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, June and July 1964.

<sup>80</sup> Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, April 1966.

<sup>81</sup> Lucas, ed. *Taliesin West, in the Realm of Ideas*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Besinger, *Working with Mr. Wright*, 59.

<sup>83</sup> Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Frank Lloyd Wright Selected Houses*

sandstone the thickness of stairs, now suitably weathered and broken into smaller chunks. They had only to gather the stone and haul it to the site.<sup>84</sup>

The November 18, 1966, *Estes Park Trail* announced that the Headquarters employed a “structural steel truss system” on the second floor. The architects called this dynamic and complex pattern of triangles, formed of hollow steel tubes and thin metal sheets, “architecturally exposed bare structural steel.” Sections of tubes were welded together to form the triangular skeleton of the design and the Cor-ten steel welded to either side. Steel-stamped spandrel panels were attached directly to the exterior walls. A similar stamped sheet metal fascia encircled the edge of the roof. This complicated mixture of structure and surface ornament proved to be one of the most problematic aspects of the design. Taliesin had to special order the material as needed because the supplier, U. S. Steel, did not warehouse the required type and only manufactured it in one mill. The steel was blasted to a white hot state to achieve the desired color effect, which required allowing the material to oxidize (rust) for a period of one to two years. Cor-ten, high carbon steel, was a new, self-sealing product that never required painting.<sup>85</sup> The designers chose Cor-ten both for its low maintenance and for its rich color, which worked with the desired earth tone palette and the surrounding environment. The steel typically rusted to a warm purple in the city, but at high altitudes without excessive pollutants, it turned a deep brown. In its final aged state, the steel was said to resemble tree bark. One of U. S. Steel’s promotional ads includes a photograph of the headquarters next to a tree with the caption, “this building is painting itself!” Despite pressure from the design office in Washington, D.C., slow production of the steel resulted in construction delays.<sup>86</sup>

The Headquarters was half complete by January 11, 1966, when union officials from the Denver Building Trades visited the site to speak with James O’Shea, acting project supervisor. A Mr. Nilander and his partner asked questions about pay rates, overtime wages, subcontractors and job classifications, promising to continue their interrogation the next week. Although they did not return, a picket line of employees from Sheet Metal Workers Local #9 formed near the site on January 17. Park Service officials met with union representatives and learned that the problem lay with the contractors handling the heating and air conditioning systems. For some time, the union had been picketing all projects associated with Croy Brothers Heating and Air Conditioning, Inc. The steel workers, plumbers and electricians chose not to cross the line for a few days, but arrangements were made with their respective unions to allow the resumption of work. At the time, the incident caused little more than an unanticipated delay, but in retrospect, it foreshadowed a history of serious deficiencies in the building’s air circulation systems. The lack of a typical forced air cooling system was specified by Superintendent Liles, who believed air conditioning an extravagance, particularly at over 7,000 feet.<sup>87</sup>

Over the next few months, the contractors placed concrete floors with terrazzo finish, installed window walls, completed electrical and plumbing work and built up the roof installation. The pink terrazzo was laid with gold atomized aluminum seams, the colors carefully chosen to add warmth to the interior. Window casings were of steel obtained locally. In addition to the attention lavished on interior surfaces, the Taliesin apprentices employed a Wrightian technique of dividing interior space in their use of an elaborate partition system. The basic drawings

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<sup>84</sup> Telephone Interview with Tom Casey by the author, October 23, 1998.

<sup>85</sup> Eero Saarinen “used Cor-Ten weathering, self-protecting steel” in his John Deere and Company Administrative Center, Moline, Illinois of 1963. See John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 205.

<sup>86</sup> “Begin Move to New NPS Adm. Building,” *Estes Park Trail* (November 18, 1966); Interview with Casey by Tom Keohan.

<sup>87</sup> The lack of air conditioning was considered a problem by the subsequent superintendent, and the architects were admonished for not insisting on it despite Liles’ desires. The issue was actually taken up with higher echelons of the Park Service. Interview with Casey by the author, October 23, 1998.

of the first and second floors included only the permanent walls around utilities and bathrooms; the remainder of the building was left open space. Additional drawings specifically devoted to the interior partition system show the space divided into the chosen office arrangement. The typical office partitions were gypsum board with a corrugated paper core. Anodized aluminum studs stretched the height of the walls about every four feet. The upper few feet of most partitions was glass, sometimes filling a triangular space, with the gold aluminum continuing up to the ceiling as a mullion. Doors were red oak veneer but solid wood to the core. In some of the fancier offices, red oak wood panels covered the gypsum board. Although the walls give the impression of permanency, their potential for change adds to the flexibility of the plan, not to mention the “breaking of the box.” Whether or not park employees were intended to move the walls frequently is unknown, but one current ranger did successfully re-configure his office space at a recent date.<sup>88</sup> Wright used the partition system in all of his office buildings, and Casey recalled such flexibility in the Sunday school at Wright’s Greek Orthodox Church (1956) as well.

Park staff and members of Kunz Construction gathered in the superintendent’s office on May 3 to discuss defective road paving and problems with “ceiling lighting, air return, upper floor and fireplaces.”<sup>89</sup> Taliesin did not take part in this meeting, perhaps because it resulted in some minor change orders relating to lighting, the buzzer system, relocation of the audiovisual control panel, and information desk alterations. By August 1966, the estimated completion date for the Headquarters was mid-September, but a “pre-final” inspection near the end of the month revealed two hundred and twelve items requiring attention. Nevertheless, the final inspection of the building took place on October 21st. Approval was contingent on smoothing the uneven terrazzo floors in two rooms. Although “many deficiencies” remained, the Headquarters was accepted in November contingent on their correction. Park Service officials and staff began moving into the building at the end of the month. Kunz construction was still fulfilling its part of the contract in early January, with minor repairs and alterations, which included modifying the heating system. Final payment on the building still had not been made in April, as preparations were made for its dedication on June 24, 1967.

The final work on the landscaping of the Headquarters began in the spring and continued through the building’s dedication. The park’s new resident landscape architect, James O’Shea, worked on the exterior lighting in May and June to produce field layouts and inspections. The west entrance road was staked and graded. O’Shea’s other responsibilities included examining the building and concrete curbs. In August, the park issued a change order to insure exposed aggregate finish on the curb and gutters. Work on the planting plan for the headquarters, which involved mapping the area and researching plant material, occupied O’Shea during the spring of 1967. He may have filled the three roof planters installed in the center of each side of the auditorium.<sup>90</sup> Despite progress with the landscaping, a few technical problems remained to be solved. The heating and air conditioning system installed by Croy Brothers was operating so poorly that a mechanical design company was recommended as a consultant for the firm.

### ***Furnishing the Headquarters***

Throughout the construction process, the park interpretive staff consulted with the architects regarding “floor plans and space and furnishing requirements.” Because of the limited space provided for exhibits, interpreters planned to install a large orientation map in the lobby. This relief model of the park was originally commissioned

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<sup>88</sup> “Interior Partitions, Upper Floor;” “Interior Partitions Lower Floor;” as constructed drawings, #3609-C, TIC.

<sup>89</sup> Superintendent’s Monthly Report, May 1966. Project Inspector [Eugene] Mott attended this meeting and assisted throughout the final stages of construction. From April 1961 to 1963, Mott was the primary inspector of the Painted Desert Community, Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander’s design in Petrified Forest, Arizona.

<sup>90</sup> The planters appear lush with greenery in artists’ sketches, but are no longer in use.

by Rainbow Pictures of Denver for the park's orientation movie. When the film was completed in October, the park purchased the map and installed it as a permanent fixture in the lobby. Visitors saw the model when they entered the lobby and again in the thirty-five minute movie, "Rocky Mountain National Park" which was shown several times a day. Together, the movie and model were to substitute for traditional exhibits in telling the "Park story."<sup>91</sup> Before it was installed in the lobby, the model was repaired and adapted for interpretive use by Robert Miller, a Denver artist. Curatorial staff explored methods of lighting the model and projecting features on the relief, which was accurate to .025 of an inch. Labeling the model proved to be an equally serious matter for the division of Conservation, Interpretation and Use. It wasn't until April 1967, that staff finally chose two "back lighted 16" x 20" color transparencies with the place names on an overlay" from the K. R. Bunn Studio in Denver. Bunn was also commissioned to cast five "deck-size" relief models from the original for use at information counters throughout the park. The terrain model was considered important enough to list in the dedication program, along with participants in the construction of the building and the production of the orientation movie.

In February 1966, with the building a little more than half complete, Casey and Hill discussed their progress with the superintendent, assistant superintendent, members of their staff, Mott and O'Shea.<sup>92</sup> Interior design and furnishings were the topic of the day and would continue to be an issue. After the meeting, Phil Romigh of the WODC was sent to Scottsdale to work with the Taliesin staff on interior decoration and related matters. Following in the tradition of their mentor, the firm not only planned chairs and tables, but coordinated upholstery and wood grain for just the right blend of colors and textures. The general plan of the upper floor included drawings of the simple plywood alcove seats and table. Elaborate faceted trash cans were also created especially for the headquarters. Wright's widow, Olgivanna, was involved in the interior decoration and chose the red-orange color featured throughout the building.<sup>93</sup>

The Park Service may have been surprised by the importance Taliesin attached to every aspect of interior design. This attention to detail certainly did nothing to speed up the furnishing process; delays were caused by such mundane matters as waiting for the arrival of wood samples for use in matching the wood furniture with the walls. Progress on the furnishing plan was again slowed in July, when the park learned that its request for furniture had been sent to the General Services Administration (GSA) and that the work order remained unapproved. In September the park was finally told to purchase the auditorium chairs, conference table, guest chairs, executive chairs, secretary chairs, office table, sofa, and carpeting from Federal Supply. Literature describing the available furniture was sent to Taliesin. Bids for furnishing and installing drapes and sheer curtains and for the construction and installation of custom made benches and tables were issued in mid-October. Highland Interiors was responsible for benches and tables, curtains, and drapes; Elmer's Case Company of Loveland, Colorado, produced forty upholstered benches with backs from Taliesin's designs at a price of \$105.50 each.<sup>94</sup> The only exhibit in the building, the park relief map, was moved into the lobby in November. Staff began moving into the building that month, despite the lack of carpeting and customized furniture. The Roxbury Carpet Company, selected by Taliesin, was expected to provide carpet under the proper federal supply requirements, but

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<sup>91</sup> The "western premier" of this movie and a related film, "Our Living Heritage," took place at the Denver Museum of Natural History on August 25, 1966, as part of the Park Service's 50th birthday celebration. The program noted that the relief model used in the park's interpretive movie would become part of the visitor center. "Our Living Heritage" was shown simultaneously in Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia. See Rocky Mountain National Park, clippings file, brochures, Western History Room, Denver Public Library.

<sup>92</sup> "Hill" was probably John DeKoven Hill, a member of the Fellowship from 1937 to 1953 and from 1963 to an unknown date. In 1995, Hill was chairman of the board of directors of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

<sup>93</sup> "New National Park Headquarters," Coloradan (Fort Collins) June 14, 1967, 11.

<sup>94</sup> "Face Sheet for Completion Report," Invoice, May 17, 1967, ROMO archives.

not until March 31st. Taliesin's selections of furniture from Federal Supply were scheduled to arrive in the interim, but the carpet, chairs, and benches were not delivered until April, just in time for four special performances of the Rocky Mountain film. The drapes were installed a few weeks before the park opened to the public. Five hundred people entered the lobby on May 30, and one hundred and eighty-six saw the movie. Interpretive services also included evening illustrated talks in the auditorium.

In May, the Estes Park Women's Club sent out invitations from the Estes Park Chamber of Commerce, Town of Estes Park, and National Park Service announcing the upcoming dedication of "the new Headquarters and Visitor Orientation Building."<sup>95</sup> About five hundred people attended the dedication of the Headquarters at 2:00 p.m., on Saturday, June 24, 1967. According to the superintendent, cloudy skies in Denver and Boulder "kept the attendance below what had been expected." As the Estes Park High School played a festive prelude, guests assembled in the headquarters' parking lot. The Director of the Park Service, George Hartzog, Jr., served as master of ceremonies. Congressman Wayne Aspinall delivered the featured address, entitled "Past, Present and Future." The Estes Park Women's Club received an official 'certificate of disclaimer,' returning the property it had donated to the park in 1921. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, visitors toured the building, viewed the film, listened to a string quartet from the Rocky Ridge Music Center, and enjoyed refreshments provided by the Estes Park Red Cross Canteen.<sup>96</sup>

### *The Visitor Center Today*

By the end of Mission 66, the programmatic design of visitor center buildings had become almost systematic: a series of required spaces gathered around the central lobby and viewing decks or large windows installed as dictated by the location. The rooms tended to be spacious, well-lit and functional. At the headquarters building, Taliesin Associated Architects inserted an element of intrigue into the required formula. Visitors entered what appeared to be a single-story building through a low entrance. The center of the lobby space featured a higher ceiling emphasized by a pressed steel "cornice" similar to the exterior steel fascia, which marked the transition from the lower section of the building to the central space. Depending on the time of day, the building could be quite dim. On the northwest side, a clerestory window cut into the raised area emitted natural light. Artificial lighting was hidden behind the steel cornice, creating a glowing effect as light bounced off the ceiling. Visitors were immediately confronted by the large relief map in the center of the room, and to its right, the information desk. Beyond was a wall of windows facing the Rocky Mountains.

When the building was first opened, the space to the right of the entrance was an alcove lined with benches facing a stone fireplace.<sup>97</sup> This resting place was sparsely furnished with a coffee table, a few pictures, some reading material, and a guest register. The walls around the fireplace were left rough stone and concrete, but the facing wall was wood paneled. The alcove faced the information desk. A small space behind the desk was provided for the store, and sales were conducted from the information counter. On the left side of the lobby was a stairway down to the restrooms, apparently located in the basement. The auditorium to the left of the lobby was the main interpretive attraction. From the interior balcony, visitors could look down on the main auditorium, view the movie and walk out onto the viewing balcony encircling the auditorium. A door in the far southeast corner of the room led to the balcony, where visitors enjoyed a spectacular view of Long's Peak, the highest mountain in the park at 14,255 feet. The structural supports on the three sides of the open balcony, in plan the corners of the auditorium space itself, formed triangular spaces for dioramas. Although they appear in drawings and the spaces were built, the dioramas were never installed.

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<sup>95</sup> Invitation to dedication, n.d. ROMO, archives.

<sup>96</sup> Dedication Program, Headquarters and Visitor Orientation Building, June 24, 1967, ROMO archives.

<sup>97</sup> The Park Service designed a glass enclosure for the fireplace in October 1968.

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Before venturing downstairs to the restrooms and auditorium, visitors might not realize that the building is actually two stories. The stairway leading to the first floor is wood paneled and illuminated with lighting in the steps, which allows the rest of the space to remain dark in safety. As they come down the stairs, visitors are surprised to see natural light emanating from a wall of windows in front of them and a glass door leading to an exterior porch. To the left is the entrance to the auditorium and to the right, the restrooms. The low ceiling of the first floor landing becomes even lower upon entering the restroom area. A door in the vestibule between the men's and women's restrooms opens into the first-floor office wing.

The Headquarters building is a very different place for park employees, most of whom enter the building from the rear. From this entrance, the facade is two stories with double walls of windows that expose the building's administrative function. Low stone walls, a stone planter, and boulders contribute to the landscaping, but this side of the building has an aura of efficiency. The main entrance to the office wing is not the auditorium porch, but a central door opening into the main hall and facing the stairway. The first level contains museum offices and work spaces, while the upper floor accommodates administrators, the superintendent, and a conference room. On both levels the hallways have low ceilings that actually become lower in the center, like pitched ceilings turned inside out. In contrast, the offices are spacious and so full of light that special curtains are required. Customized light panels cover the entire ceiling of each office, adding a sculptured quality to the rooms. Although the offices were formed by movable partitions, the fine materials employed give the spaces an aura of permanency. From inside the office wing, the administrative function appears entirely separate from the visitor services; in practice, the public has easy access to the park offices and park employees can step out of the office wing into the visitor space in a moment.

In 2000, the visitor center appears much as it did upon its dedication in 1967, but elements of the visitor's experience have been significantly altered. In an effort to free the information desk from increasing customer interruptions, the fireplace in the alcove space was boarded up and the area converted into a store for the Rocky Mountain Nature Association.<sup>98</sup> While this change might have solved that problem, it also significantly reduced available lobby space. Not only is the lobby typically overcrowded, but alterations to the auditorium and balcony have redefined the visitor circulation pattern. The installation of a new movie projector sealed access to the exterior balcony. The circuit around the balcony and through the auditorium was permanently closed, and access to viewing platform limited to the single door at the extreme southwest corner of the lobby. In 2000, visitors who actually find this entrance and walk around the balcony are forced to retrace their steps. Although a seemingly minor element in the overall plan, this circuit of park views was a crucial part of the building's program as originally designed. Without such free and easy circulation through the spaces, the sense of interior and exterior space is disturbed; the box is no longer broken. Perhaps most important, the dramatic view of Long's Peak ceases to become part of the visitor's experience.

Planning for the first "repairs" to the building began in August 1968, when modifications were designed to improve the faulty heating system. An alteration in the auditorium's central light fixture was also planned at this time. The working drawings for these improvements include details for constructing a new cupola on the auditorium roof as part of the heating and cooling system. Recent aesthetic and functional issues have been resolved through consultation with preservation experts. When light panels were in need of replacement in 1997, historical architects from the Denver Service Center suggested replacing the original lighting units with reproductions. Rather than install powerful T-10 hanging fluorescent lights, which would have significantly changed the office space, the park replaced original fixtures with panels that appear identical on the outside, but

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<sup>98</sup> "As Constructed" designs for the information and sales counter are dated January 1975 and 1977, however, park photographs dated winter 1982, are labeled "headquarters seating area in visitor lobby (upstairs) before removal."

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are textured on the inside to more effectively distribute light.<sup>99</sup> Unlike many Mission 66 buildings, the headquarters has been maintained by a park staff that understands its historic and architectural value.

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<sup>99</sup> Tom Keohan to Sarah Allaback, electronic mail, September 28, 1998.

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## Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

## Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency, NPS Archives
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References: Zone 13 Easting 452500 Northing 4468320

Verbal Boundary Description:

Boundary includes building and area within 10 feet of foundations.

Boundary Justification:

Boundary is based on building footprint of the historic building.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**Name/Title: Sarah Allaback  
Ethan CarrAddress: National Park Service  
Denver Service Center  
PO Box 25287

Telephone: 303-969-2354

Date: 9/1/00

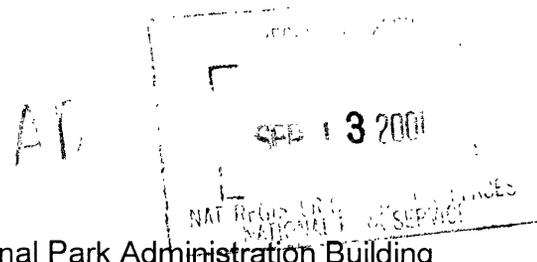
Edited by:

National Park Service  
National Historic Landmarks Survey  
1849 C St., N.W.  
Room NC-400  
Washington, DC 20240

Telephone: (202)343-8166

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**



Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building  
Larimer County, Colorado

Section number 10 Page 1

The purpose of this amendment is to correct the erroneous UTM reference point in the National Historic Landmark Nomination designation of January 3, 2001.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

UTM Reference:

13 452500 4468320  
Zone Easting Northing

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [X] nationally [ ] statewide [ ] locally. ([X] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Georgina Centeglia*  
Signature of certifying official/Title

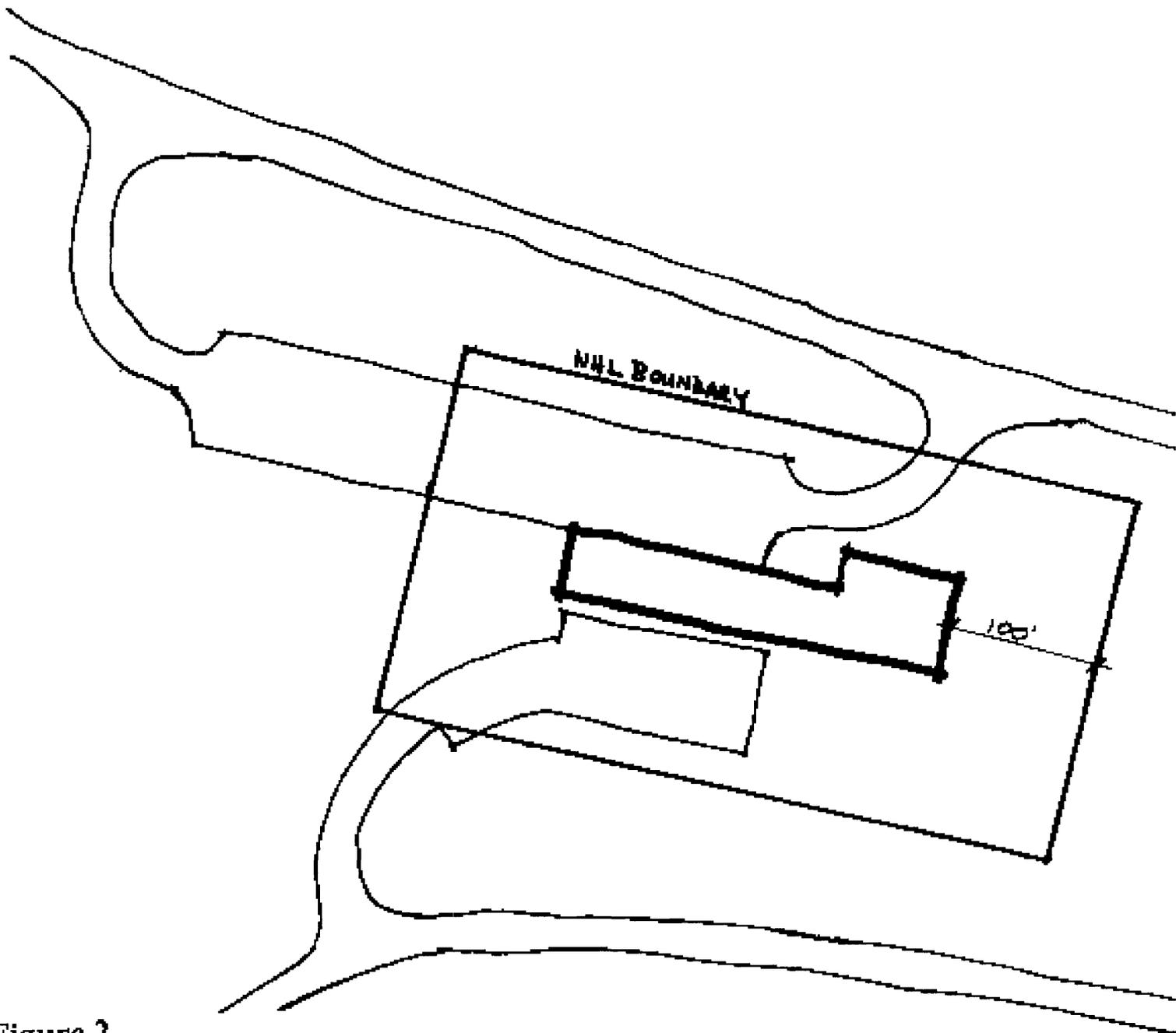
State Historic Preservation Officer

*August 27, 2001*  
Date

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society

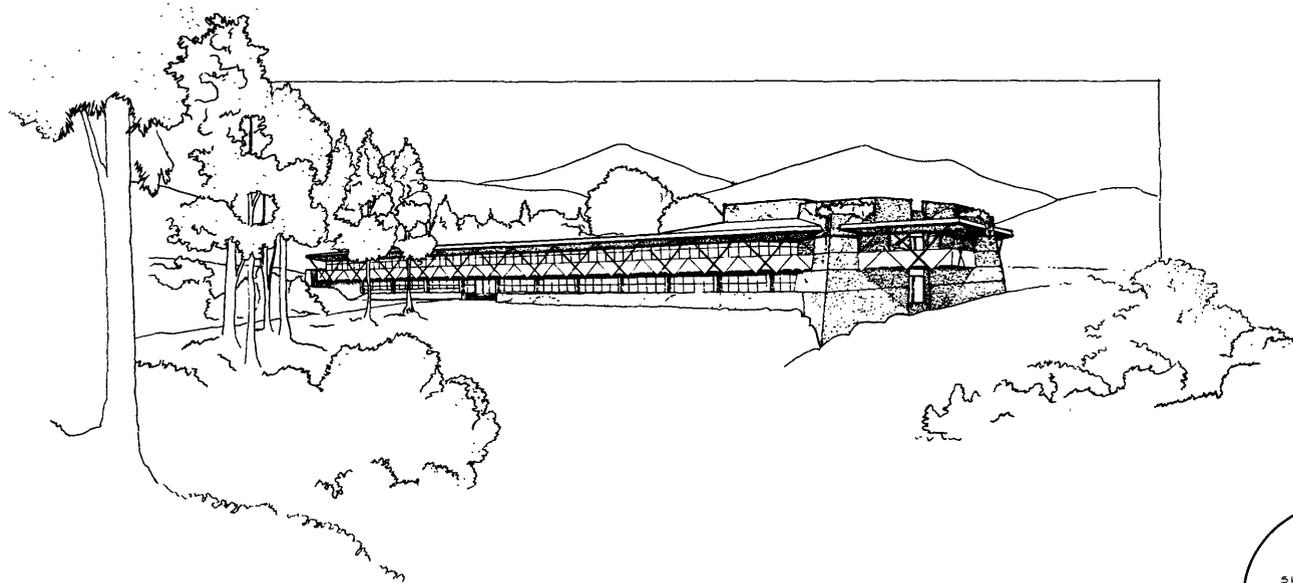
State or Federal agency and bureau

**Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building  
(Headquarters Building; Beaver Meadows Visitor Center)  
NHL District Boundary  
(NTS)**



**Figure 2  
Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building  
Larimer County, Colorado  
Proposed NHL boundary**

**Figure 4**  
**Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building**  
**Larimer County, Colorado**  
**Perspective**



PROJECT NO. RM-W577  
 CONTRACT NO. 14-10-0232-1026

~~REVISIONS~~  
 BY: [Signature] DATE: 11-28-64  
 BY: SANFORD HILL DATE: 5-8-68  
 BY: CHRISTIE E. RICHY DATE: 8-2-68

SEE SHEET NUMBER LIST OF SHEETS AND E. 12.1. NUMBERS

COVER SHEET  
 SET NO. 1  
 SHEET NO. 1  
 DATE 1-28-68  
 DRAWN BY [Signature]  
 CHECKED BY [Signature]  
 2608-C  
 8/27/68

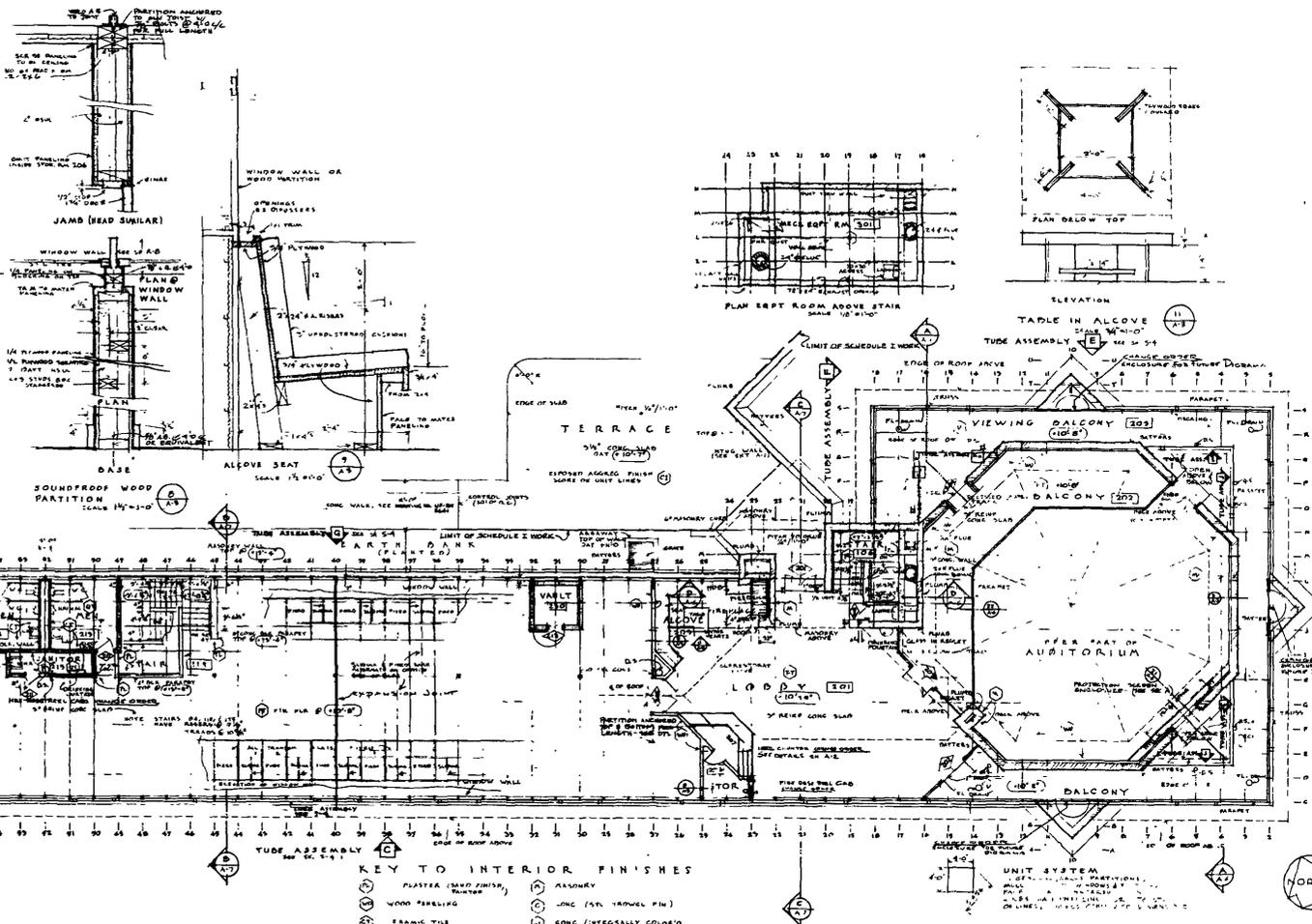
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO  
 WILLIAM WATLEY PETERS, CHIEF ARCHITECT

AS CONSTRUCTED DRAWING  
 SET NO. [ ]

ESC 3-67

# Figure 5 Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building Larimer County, Colorado Upper floor plan

ROOM NO.	FROM	TO	TYPE	DOOR	FINISH	IN	COMET	FINISH	REMARKS
100	ENTRANCE	ENTRANCE	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
101	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
102	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
103	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
104	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
105	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
106	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
107	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
108	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
109	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
110	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
111	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
112	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
113	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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138	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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142	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
143	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
144	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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147	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
148	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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163	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
164	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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169	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
170	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
171	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
172	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
173	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
174	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
175	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
176	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
177	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
178	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
179	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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182	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
183	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
184	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
185	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
186	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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189	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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191	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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193	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
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198	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
199	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				
200	LOBBY	LOBBY	D	6'0" x 8'0"	1				



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO

SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"  
DRAWN BY: E. HENNING  
CHECKED BY: [Signature]  
DATE: 4/26/56

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DIVISION OF ARCHITECTURE W.O.D.C.  
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS AREA  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, NEW 108 ROOMS  
AS CONSTRUCTED DRAWING 15643-61

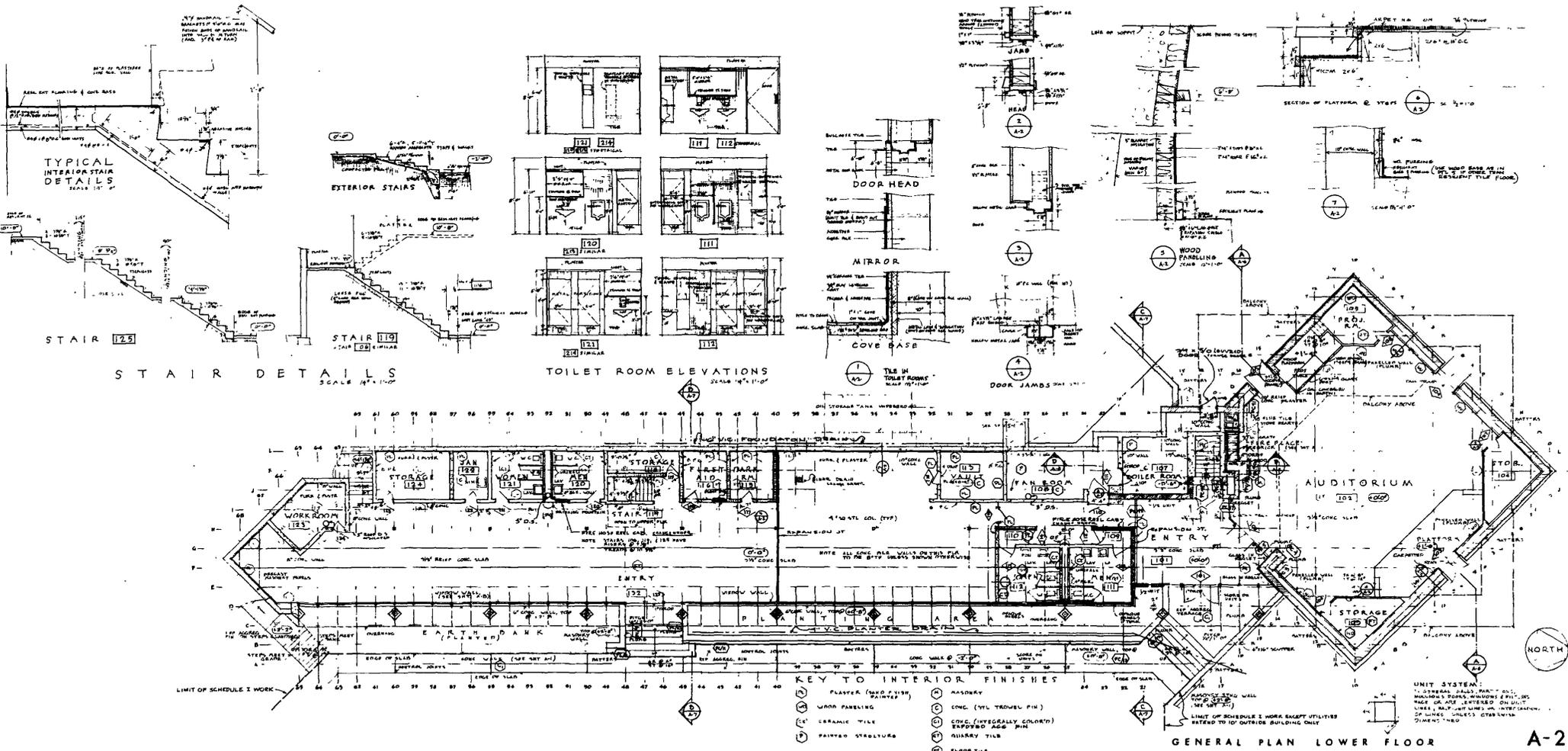
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1-1-56  
SHEET 4 OF 81  
DRAWING MFL  
107 - 8A  
3609-G

# Figure 6

## Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building

### Larimer County, Colorado

#### Lower floor plan



**ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**  
 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK COLORADO  
 LEONARD THOMAS CARL, ARCHITECT  
 TALLERIN ASSOCIATED ARCHITECTS LTD  
 WILLIAM WESLEY PETERS, CHIEF ARCHITECT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DIVISION OF ARCHITECTURE, W.D.C.  
 ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS AREA  
 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK  
 AS CONSTRUCTED DRAWING

SCALE: 3/8" = 1'-0"  
 DRAWN BY: B. KOPING  
 CHKD BY: JAC  
 DATE: 4/26/65

NO. 108-Roma  
 63-7057

REVISIONS

NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION
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3	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
4	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
5	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
6	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
7	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
8	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
9	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION
10	5-11-65	ISSUED FOR CONSTRUCTION