

THE MAKING OF A MONUMENT
THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL
1955-1972

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PROLOGUE

On the afternoon of September 26, 1941, following the East Room funeral of G. Hall Roosevelt and at the request of the deceased's brother-in-law, Justice Felix Frankfurter called at the White House. The following is from Frankfurter's account of the occasion, published twenty years later in The Atlantic.¹

The President seemed under considerable strain, and plainly enough he just wanted to talk. After the barber left, talk continued, going hither and yon, and the President told me of a letter to Fred Delano [FDR's uncle, chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission], which the latter had sent to him, from a correspondent who had apparently just discovered that Jackson [Lafayette] Park contains the statues of four Revolutionary heroes and that the equestrian statue of Jackson was incongruous in this Revolutionary setting. He read me his memorandum in reply to the suggestion for the removal of the Jackson statue. . . .

When he finished reading the memorandum, this followed:

F.D.R. This leads me to say something that I want you to remember because you are much more likely to be here longer than I shall be.

F.F. (jocosely). You mean that I shall remain on the Supreme Court longer than you will remain in the White House.

F.D.R. (smilingly but sharply). No, that isn't what I mean at all. I mean in plain English that I am likely to shuffle off long before you kick the bucket. And if that should happen and if any memorial is to be erected to me, I know exactly what I should like it to be. Now please remember what I am telling you as my wish in case they are to put up any memorial to me. About halfway between here and the Capitol is the Archives Building. Now I have some relation to Archives. And right in front of the Archives Building is a little green tri-

¹"The Memorial to F.D.R.: What the President Wanted," March 1961, pp. 39-40.

anglo. If, as I say, they are to put up any memorial to me, I should like it to be placed in the center of that green plot in front of the Archives Building. I should like it to consist of a block about the size of this (putting his hand on his desk). I don't care what it is made of, whether limestone or granite or whatnot, but I want it to be plain, without any ornamentation, with the simple carving "In memory of ----." That is all, and please remember that, if the time should come.

F.F. I shall indeed remember, and you deeply honor me in putting this wish in the keeping of my memory.

F.D.R. Don't you think I am right in wanting that kind of a memorial and none other?

F.F. The founder of your party, Jefferson, left specific instruction for that beautifully simple memorial of his at Charlottesville, and I think your idea entirely comports with wisdom about such things.

Our talk then drifted to other matters.

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood.
--Attributed to Daniel H. Burnham

I. NO LITTLE PLANS (1955-1960)

On July 1, 1946, little more than a year after the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Representative Eugene J. Keogh of New York introduced in Congress a resolution to authorize a Federal Memorial Commission for the purpose of planning a permanent memorial in the District of Columbia in honor of the late President.² Although Keogh's resolution was buried in committee and came to naught, a similar proposal by Senator Herbert H. Lehman of New York nine years later would enjoy a different reception. Introducing his resolution on May 31, 1955, Lehman told the Senate:

I think it is more than fitting that we have a memorial to the late President Roosevelt to take its place on the banks of the Potomac alongside the memorials to our other great Presidents-- Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. President Roosevelt has certainly won his place in history alongside these immortal men for what he did for the welfare of the people of the United States and of the world.³

With dispatch, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration favorably reported Lehman's resolution on July 20, and the Senate passed

²H.J. Res. 373, 79th Cong., 2d Sess. Rep. Estes Kefauver of Tennessee first introduced such legislation on Apr. 18, 1945, but his bill (H.R. 2943, 79th Cong., 1st Sess.) did not specify a Washington location.

³S.J. Res. 73, 84th Cong., 1st Sess.; 101 Cong. Rec. 7229.

it (together with similar legislation authorizing planning for the Robert A. Taft Memorial) two days later. Some questioned the wisdom of the measure. The New York Times, editorializing against both the Roosevelt and Taft memorials, declared:

The objection is not that the tributes are not earned but that they would come a little too soon. These great reputations should outlast the turmoils of our time. If so, another generation, or this generation grown older, can pay a monumental tribute to them. . . . Why not a sort of moratorium on such memorials--perhaps until a quarter of a century or so after the subject has passed on?⁴

Despite such sentiments, the resolution sailed through the House and was approved by President Eisenhower on August 11.⁵

The law established a Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, to consist of four senators, four members of the House of Representatives, and four citizens appointed by the President. In its assigned mission of formulating plans for the location, design, and construction of a permanent memorial, the Memorial Commission was authorized to organize contests, receive gifts, and accept the assistance and advice of certain professional bodies in the Capital. The National Park Service became the "housekeeping" agency for the Commission, managing the funds appropriated for its use. At the first meeting of the Commission on May 17, 1956, Judge Francis Biddle, Attorney General under Roosevelt, was selected as chairman.

⁴"A Moratorium on Memorials," July 25, 1955, p. 18.

⁵P.L. 84-372, 69 Stat. 694; see Appendix A.

Among the first acts of the Memorial Commission was the appointment of an Advisory Committee of seven distinguished architects and planners to assist in site selection and the formulation of design guidelines.⁶ On February 8, 1958, Judge Biddle and members of the Advisory Committee, accompanied by Associate Superintendent Harry T. Thompson of National Capital Parks (a branch of the National Park Service), visited five sites in Washington considered as possibilities for the memorial. During the tour Biddle told Thompson that the Memorial Commission was thinking in terms of a substantial and functional structure, perhaps an opera house; Thompson in turn suggested a planetarium.⁷ The Advisory Committee preferred to leave the nature of the memorial open, however, and its professional judgment would prevail.

The Committee reassembled in New York on May 2. Of the five locations proposed by the Memorial Commission it found three deserving of serious consideration: a site on the south side of the Mall opposite the Archives building (now occupied by the

⁶Pietro Belluschi (chairman), dean of the School of Architecture and Planning, M.I.T.; Samuel Glazer, architect; R. Sturgiss Ingersoll, president of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Lewis Mumford, teacher and writer; Hideo Sasaki, chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture, Harvard; G. Holmes Perkins, chairman of the Department of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania; Jay S. Unger, architect.

⁷Memorandum, Thompson to Director, National Park Service (Conrad L. Wirth), Feb. 10, 1958, File "Roosevelt, F. D.," National Capital Parks, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, Accession No. 66A1097, General Archives Division, Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Md. (File hereinafter cited as NCP-WNRC.) See map, Illustration 1, for site locations.

Hirshhorn Museum of the Smithsonian); the Old Naval Hospital site across 23d Street, N.W., from the State Department; and the portion of West Potomac Park south of Independence Avenue and west of the Tidal Basin, still covered by temporary wartime structures. The first it thought "suitable for the erection of a public building, but not for a memorial," and the second would require demolition of the Old Naval Hospital building, judged "worth preserving." In the Advisory Committee's report to the Memorial Commission on June 2, the West Potomac Park site was the unanimous recommendation.⁸

At its third meeting on June 17, the Commission adopted the Committee's recommendations, which included the holding of an architectural competition for the selection of a memorial design. The desired site would have to be reserved, and more funds would be needed for prizes and other expenses involved in administering the competition. For these purposes the group authorized the introduction of a second joint resolution in Congress.⁹

Representative John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, a member of the Memorial Commission, sponsored the legislation. His resolution died upon adjournment of the 85th Congress in 1958, but it progressed with little difficulty after reintroduction the following year. The favorable report of the Committee on House

⁸"Report of the Advisory Committee to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission," in S. Rept. No. 735, 86th Cong., 1st Sess. (1959), pp. 3-4.

⁹"Report of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, January 2, 1959," ibid., p. 3.

Administration noted that "the erection of the memorial in that particular section of the Nation's Capital would be fulfilling the postwar goal and dream of the late President that the temporary buildings erected on the Mall and adjacent parklands, many of them dating back to the First World War, would be removed as soon as possible after the conclusion of World War II."¹⁰ When Representative H. R. Gross of Iowa asked whether federal expenditures beyond the \$150,000 authorized in the resolution would be needed, Representative Paul F. Schenck of Ohio, another Commission member, told the House: "It is the consensus of all members of the Commission that it will be highly desirable to finance the total cost of the memorial through public subscription." In the Senate, Hubert H. Humphrey and Lyndon B. Johnson both spoke in favor of the measure.¹¹ The resolution, directing that "the competition for the proposed memorial shall be carried out so as to insure that it will be harmonious as to location, design, and land use with the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, and the Lincoln Memorial" and charging the Memorial Commission to "avail itself of the assistance and advice of the Commission of Fine Arts, of the National Capital Planning Commission, and of the National Park Service," was signed by the President on September 1, 1959.¹²

¹⁰H. Rept. No. 203 To Accompany H.J. Res. 115, 86th Cong., 1st Sess. (1959), p. 1.

¹¹105 Cong. Rec. 14147, 16705.

¹²P.L. 86-214, 73 Stat. 445; see Appendix B.

Planning for the competition proceeded swiftly. The Memorial Commission appointed as its professional adviser Edmund N. Bacon, executive director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission. Five persons of high distinction were selected as jurors: Pietro Belluschi (chairman), dean of the School of Architecture and Planning, M.I.T.; Thomas D. Church, landscape architect; Bartlett Hayes, Jr., director of the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover; Joseph Hudnut, emeritus professor of architecture, Harvard; and Paul Marvin Rudolph, chairman of the Department of Architecture, Yale. The Commission published a thirty-two-page program for competitors, describing and illustrating the memorial site and setting forth the requirements for entry and design submission. Although Chairman David E. Finley of the Commission of Fine Arts had stressed the importance of proscribing monumental structures that might compete with the neighboring memorials,¹³ the program gave entrants wide leeway, quoting from the report of the Advisory Committee to the Memorial Commission:

It would stultify the mind of the designer, perhaps paralyze him, if the Committee were to indicate beforehand whether the appropriate form would be a building, a garden, a fountain, a pool, a whole landscape, or all of these wrought together in some fresh, surprising, and appropriate form. Our one thought would be that Roosevelt, the essential Roosevelt, must be the focus of an appropriate memorial; it is surely not enough to inscribe his name over the entrance of a building conceived for some quite different use and purpose.¹⁴

¹³Memorandum, Harry T. Thompson to Conrad L. Wirth, Jan. 13, 1960, NCP-WNRC.

¹⁴Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Competition (Washington: Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, 1960), p. 24.

On September 19, 1960, six finalists, each receiving \$10,000, were selected from 547 design submissions. They presented, in the words of the jury, "widely differing solutions, some leaving the parklike character of the site untouched, others remodeling the topography to suit their particular ideas."¹⁵ But the big moment came on December 30 with announcement of the \$50,000 first prize winner: the New York architectural firm of William F. Pedersen and Bradford S. Tilney. Norman Hoberman was the sculptor; Joseph Wasserman and David Beer were associate members of the team. Their design (see Illustration 2) comprised eight monolithic steles, or tablets, the largest 165 feet high and 65 feet across, clustered asymmetrically and bearing some 2,000 of FDR's words (selected with the aid of Professor Frank Freidel of Harvard). To avoid visible joints the steles would be constructed of a white quartz aggregate concrete of high density, bush hammered for maximum brilliance. The landscape treatment employed low contoured mounds and paths connecting with the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. The total cost was estimated at \$4.5 million.

In the comments accompanying their design, the architects expressed their belief that it

(1) provides a site solution that complements monumental Washington;

¹⁵"6 Architects Named in Roosevelt Design," New York Times, Sept. 20, 1960, p. 78. Nearly all the entries were published by Thomas H. Creighton in The Architecture of Monuments: The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Competition (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1962).

- (2) creates a unique and memorable experience for visitors to the site, a landmark for the city's inhabitants, and a symbol for the nation;
- (3) is democratic in its accessibility from all sides, its openness, and the human scale of its spaces; and
- (4) is appropriate as a personal memorial because of the integral quality of the inscriptions containing the essential spirit of the thoughts and ideas of the great social and humane programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹⁶

The report of the jury sought to capture the impressions of a visitor to the completed memorial:

As one moves onto the various levels of the platform the views change and new spaces acquire significance. As a monument it satisfies the visitor's desire to apprehend the whole from many approaches and is visible, but without massiveness, from the distance. Its open character incorporates the natural beauty of the landscape, including altering views of the Potomac River and the Tidal Basin, in which the bright shafts are reflected. Added to this the shifting play of light and shadow as the sun traverses the sky animates the structure and imparts a sense of living reality to enhance its spiritual meaning.¹⁷

At the announcement of the selection Francis Biddle characterized the winning design as possessing "a tremendous sense of power." Pietro Belluschi, unwittingly anticipating a popular sobriquet, added that although the design was modern, "there is something primitive in it."¹⁸

¹⁶Creighton, Architecture of Monuments, pp. 51-52.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁸Bess Furman, "Design Selected for Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington," New York Times, Dec. 31, 1960, p. 1.

No memorial in our Nation's history has so divided the American people as the winning slab design chosen by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission.

--William B. Widnall

II. CONTROVERSY AND COMPROMISE (1961-1964)

Belluschi's words of praise were quickly translated to "Instant Stonehenge" by those viewing the Pedersen-Tilney design in a different light. Their response was not slow in coming. Frederick Gutheim, architecture critic for the Washington Post, wrote the next day: "The winning design is not architecture, but literature. It should not be built."¹⁹ The Post reported the first reaction of Roosevelt's daughter: "'Good Lord,' said Anna Roosevelt Boettiger Halsted as a description of the huge monument . . . was read over the phone to her in Lexington, Ky. 'We'll just have to hope for the best.'"²⁰ Indignant letters poured in to newspapers, to the President, to the Memorial Commission, the Secretary of the Interior, and the National Park Service. A New York citizen demanded of President Kennedy: "The first thing you must do . . . is to sidetrack this appalling 'memorial' proposed for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Is he to be immortalized by ironing

¹⁹"FDR Tribute Like 'Book Ends, Out of Deep Freeze,'" Dec. 31, 1960, p. B1.

²⁰Constance Feeley, "Memorial Plans Stir FDR's Kin," Jan. 2, 1961, p. C1.

boards upended? . . . Protect him, now that he is helpless, from the fat-heads."²¹ A letter to the New York Times lamented the prospect of an "agglomeration of jumbo-sized concrete slabs arranged in higgledy-piggledy fashion near the Potomac River--an eyesore for the city of Washington."²² In more moderate tones the distinguished Committee of 100 on the Federal City voiced its opposition to Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, citing the large scale of the design in relation to the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, the need to preserve open space in West Potomac Park, and the belief that more time should elapse to allow proper evaluation of Roosevelt's contributions.²³

The disinterestedness of some opponents could be questioned. A letter from the Dickinson Monumental Works of Morristown, New Jersey ("Artistic Cemetery and Public Memorials--Granite, Marble, and Bronze"), protested the use of concrete as "a grave error"; and George Mogg of the Mogg Cut Stone Company in Cleveland asked the President to do all he could "to change the specifications . . . to a suitable natural stone so that [the memorial] will have the enduring beauty it deserves for a great American president."²⁴ Those of a traditional bent in art and architectural circles formed another

²¹Letter, Roy Pascal, Jan. 22, 1961, file "Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial," National Capital Parks. (File hereinafter cited as NCP.)

²²Winthrop Parkhurst, Jan. 7, 1961, p. 18.

²³Letter, Neill Phillips (chairman), Apr. 24, 1961, NCP.

²⁴Letters, March 10 and 21, 1961, NCP.

opposition faction--of far greater influence. Gilmore D. Clarke, former dean of the Cornell College of Architecture and chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts from 1937 to 1950, asked

why, in view of Mr. Roosevelt's request [as published by Felix Frankfurter], does a commission accept the decision of a jury that selected a design which this writer believes would have been objectionable to the person it is proposed to memorialize? . . . This writer, who learned to know something of his taste in artistic matters, believes that he would cringe if he should view the loosely arranged, huge, reinforced concrete slabs that a few, possibly misguided souls, wish to erect to his memory.²⁵

Writing to the director of the National Park Service on February 14, 1961, C. Paul Jennewein, president of the conservative National Sculpture Society, called the winning design "truly the most disturbing occurrence in the Art World seen for many a day. . . . We feel that it is completely out of keeping with the traditions of the great memorials to be found in the nations [sic] Capital, and certainly most unworthy as a Memorial to an Ex-President."²⁶

The addressee of Jennewein's letter, Conrad L. Wirth, was not then in a position to publicize his views. In a memorandum to Assistant Secretary of the Interior John A. Carver, however, he confided: "I hope the design will undergo changes through the Fine Arts Commission before it comes to us. I don't like the design."²⁷ Park Service replies to the many incoming letters on the subject,

²⁵Letter, New York Times, June 25, 1962, p. 28.

²⁶NCP.

²⁷Feb. 24, 1961, NCP.

although noncommittal with respect to the Pedersen-Tilney design, soon carried word that the Service and the Department of the Interior were planning to develop "a uniform policy and criteria to cover all memorials which are proposed for placement in the National Capital Parks System." These criteria, it was declared, "might very well require a sufficient period of time to elapse after the death of an individual or the occurrence of an event before being memorialized."²⁸

Inevitably, there were critics with suggestions of their own. One wrote to the President:

I would like to express my sentiments about the proposed Franklin D. Roosevelt memorial. I think F.D.R. should be sitting in a wheelchair with Fala at his feet. His cigarette holder should be in his mouth pointing up at a steep angle and the smile should be on his face casting optimism every where. The memorial should be at least seventy five feet high with no enclosure like the Lincoln Memorial. The base should be inscribed with his best sayings. . . .²⁹

An alternative receiving more serious consideration was presented by Representative Harris B. McDowell, Jr., of Delaware. On June 17, 1961, he introduced legislation to establish on the West Potomac Park site a Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial National Park--"a formal public garden which would combine features of the Longwood Gardens on the Du Pont estate near Wilmington, Del., with some of the features of the formal gardens at Mount Vernon . . . and the gardens at Monticello." A companion bill was sponsored by Senator

²⁸E.g., letter, Wirth to Louis M. Ercsik, March 20, 1961, NCP.

²⁹Dick Greer, March 1961, NCP.

Paul H. Douglas of Illinois.³⁰ The New York Times backed this "living memorial" proposal:

All esthetic conflicts aside, the last thing Washington needs is another huge monument. . . . Small formal gardens for the display of seasonal flowers, perhaps setting off a dignified--not gigantesque--piece of sculpture dedicated to F.D.R., and incorporated into an area of beautifully planned informality like that of the London city parks, would indeed be an appropriate memorial as well as a delightful relief in a monument-ridden city.³¹

Further support for the McDowell-Douglas legislation came from the Federation of Citizens Associations, representing forty-nine Washington neighborhood groups. Responding to its letter of January 17, 1962, Regional Director T. Sutton Jett of National Capital Parks expressed--if only implicitly--the displeasure of the National Park Service with the grand design of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission:

The legislation (S. 2501 and H.R. 7664) introduced in Congress last summer offers a sound basis by which to provide, over a period of years, an appropriate living memorial, carefully conceived and properly integrated with the existing beautiful complex formed by the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, and Washington Monument. A memorial of the type proposed in H.R. 7664 and S. 2501, with appropriate park treatment, has considerable merit.³²

Advocates of the Pedersen-Tilney plan did their best to make themselves heard above the roar of professional and lay

³⁰H.R. 7664, 87th Cong., 1st Sess.; 107 Cong. Rec. 10729; S. 2501, 87th Cong., 1st Sess.

³¹"The F.D.R. Memorial" (editorial), July 16, 1961, Sec. 4, p. 8.

³²Letter, Jan. 30, 1962, NCP.

opposition. "The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Competition has produced . . . a very stirring, a very fitting memorial design," wrote Thomas H. Creighton, editor of Progressive Architecture. "I hope it gets built."³³ In a letter to the New York Times the noted architect William Lescaze called the design "a simple, strong, sculptural and architectural statement in terms of today." "This is the first breath of fresh air which we have had in the design of Washington monuments for many a decade," remarked William A. M. Burden, American ambassador to Belgium, in another Times letter. "Not only is the design extremely beautiful, but I think it extremely appropriate that a great innovator like Franklin Delano Roosevelt should be remembered by an imaginative monument, which breaks new ground esthetically in the same way that he broke new ground in the realm of government."³⁴ Francis Biddle was foremost among the defenders, leading the counterattack against Representative McDowell's proposal ("To tack Roosevelt's name to a park in no true sense creates a memorial to him")³⁵ and responding to hostile editorials and published letters. He cultivated and made the most of professional support, publicizing favorable resolutions like that of the American Institute of Architects and the comments of leaders like Jose Luis Sert, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of

³³"P.S. [editorial]," Progressive Architecture, Feb. 1961, p. 236.

³⁴Jan. 24, 1961, p. 28; Feb. 2, 1961, p. 28.

³⁵Letter, New York Times, Aug. 6, 1961, Sec. 4, p. 8.

Design, who stated: "The winning design is outstanding--the best project of this type that I have seen in many years. It fits with- in the environment and is as different as it should be from the other memorials."³⁶

On January 11, 1962, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission by an eight-to-one vote formally approved the Pedersen-Tilney design--with the addition of a statue or bas relief of Roosevelt in concession to the common criticism of the memorial's un-relatedness to its subject. The negative vote was that of Representative Schenck; Representative James Roosevelt, recently appointed to the Memorial Commission, voted with the majority. In view of the Commission's virtual commitment to abide by the result of the competition, its decision was a foregone conclusion. Less certain was the outcome of the next step prescribed by the authorizing legislation: obtaining the "assistance and advice"--in practice, the approval--of the Commission of Fine Arts, the prestigious seven-member panel appointed by the President to provide aesthetic review of proposed public works in the Washington area.

The following week Francis Biddle and William F. Pedersen appeared before a meeting of the Fine Arts Commission to present their case on behalf of the design. Under questioning by members fearful that the proposed use of concrete would create durability problems, Pedersen cited recent advances in concrete technology

³⁶Cited in letter, Biddle to McDowell, May 31, 1961, 107 Cong. Rec. A5578 (1961).

and the sophistication of the bush hammered white quartz aggregate he would employ:

With the concrete we are at least 98-99 per cent sure [of permanence]. . . . With marble we would be 100 per cent sure, and very honestly, we in talking between ourselves have kept this subject somewhat open. If enough money can be raised to do it in marble we may do it in marble.

He estimated that marble would cost an extra million. On the subject of funds, Biddle voiced his expectation that "a large amount" of private money would be donated for the memorial. "Then if we get, say, a kitty of . . . \$3,000,000, we go back to Congress and say 'You do the rest'--I think they will do it."³⁷

The Commission of Fine Arts, fully aware of the importance of their action on this matter, delayed their vote until February 21. After a closed session, they announced their conclusions to the press:

The Commission is aware of positive qualities in the proposed design; those of great dramatic force and impact, of imaginative and stirring effects of light and shade, and the expression of much that is characteristic of our times. . . . [But] it is lacking in the repose, an essential element in memorial art, and the qualities of monumental permanence that are the essence of the three memorials with which it must by law conform.

Chairman David E. Finley added that "the winning design, by its great size and height, competes with, rather than supplements, the three memorials with which it is required to be harmonious." Unconvinced by Pedersen's argument, the Commission also questioned the durability of the proposed construction material. The decision to

³⁷Transcript of meeting, pp. 22-23, 25, Minutes, Jan. 17, 1962, Commission of Fine Arts (hereinafter cited as CFA), Washington, D.C.

oppose was unanimous. Biddle, reported "keenly disappointed" and as responding "with considerable emotion," said, "I can hardly think that this action by the Commission of Fine Arts is calculated to encourage the Government hereafter to rely on the best architect they can obtain to plan and build public buildings."³⁸

Opponents of the Pedersen-Tilney memorial voiced expressions of relief at this apparent deathblow to the design.³⁹ But obituaries were premature. On May 10, 1962, Representative Eugene J. Keogh and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (both members of the Memorial Commission) introduced joint resolutions that would declare congressional approval of the design and authorize a \$200,000 appropriation for the organization of a public fund-raising campaign. The resolutions did call for Fine Arts Commission review of the as-yet-undetermined status or bas relief of Roosevelt--a provision unlikely to mollify the opposition.⁴⁰

The Subcommittee on Enrolled Bills and Library of the Committee on House Administration offered a forum for renewed debate at its hearing on Keogh's resolution on June 8. William F. Pedersen was there to defend his firm's product:

³⁸CFA press release, in Minutes, Feb. 21, 1972; "Design for Roosevelt Memorial is Rejected by Fine Arts Panel," New York Times, Feb. 22, 1962, p. 27.

³⁹E.g., "Monuments and Men" (editorial), New York Times, Feb. 27, 1962, p. 32.

⁴⁰H.J. Res. 712, S.J. Res. 187, 87th Cong., 2d Sess.; see Appendix C.

I feel controversy is a mark of excellence, and I feel very strongly that if competition means anything the memorial must be built. I feel if professional opinion means anything the memorial must be built. And I feel if the arts in America are to advance in a significant way the memorial must be built.⁴¹

Philip Will, Jr., past president of the American Institute of Architects, stressed the importance of abiding by the result of a proper competition judged by a distinguished jury. Francis Biddle introduced statements from seventeen architects and architecture critics praising the winning design and presented resolutions from five labor unions urging its expeditious construction. Already he had received donations, he reported---\$1,000 from the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, \$2,500 from the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way employees:

One of the richest men in the country, whose name I am not at liberty to reveal, who was an associate and intimate friend of Roosevelt, wrote simply: "Thank you for telling me"--and this was before the design was chosen--"about the competition. When the time comes, let me know how much money you think I ought to give."

"Constantly I get letters from people who loved F.D.R.," he continued, "--little people, all over the country, enclosing \$5, \$1, saying they want to help, asking whether they can form local committees to raise money; and I answer them they must wait until Congress acts." Both Will and Biddle cited A. Lawrence Lowell's aphorism about the test of American democracy being its ability to use experts.⁴²

⁴¹Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Hearings on H.J. Res. 712 and H.J. Res. 713, 87th Cong., 2d Sess., p. 23.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 5-21, 26-29.

Unfortunately for the present applicability of this principle, experts on art generally agree even less than do those on other subjects. David E. Finley of the Commission of Fine Arts arrived to restate the opposition of that expert body. John Harberson, past president of the National Academy of Design, testified, "There is no order in this design; it is a disorganized agglomeration of ugly forms, of ungainly slabs of different shapes and sizes set at odd angles to each other."⁴³ The current president of the Academy, Edgar I. Williams, thought the competition winner almost subversive: "Whereas the spirit of our national character is balance and forthright outspoken clarity in the very fabric of our Constitution, Bill of Rights, and national policy statements, the design of the Roosevelt Memorial bespeaks indecision with overtones of mystery." With others, he denounced the use of concrete, "which gets old and starts deteriorating the minute it goes up." Margaret French Cresson, daughter of Daniel Chester French and a sculptor herself, protested in a letter sent for the record: "I cannot express myself strongly enough in regard to what I consider a disastrous proposal for our beautiful city of Washington."⁴⁴

Although an opponent of the design and the Keogh resolution, Representative William B. Widnall in his testimony voiced what even

⁴³Ibid., p. 62. Harberson's firm designed the Rayburn House Office Building--"a national disaster" in the words of Ada Louise Huxtable and the opinion of most other qualified judges.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 67-73.

the proponents must have felt:

I think I can say without fear of contradiction that no memorial in our Nation's history has so divided the American people as the winning slab design chosen by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission.⁴⁵

In the end, the House committee presented a favorable report on the resolution. But the foe was arrayed for battle on the House floor. Representative Thomas P. O'Neill of Massachusetts ("In all the annals of American art I have never seen such a hideous monstrosity in my life")⁴⁶ had prepared an amendment that, rather than approving the Pedersen-Tilney design, would direct the Memorial Commission

to consult with the Commission of Fine Arts to determine whether the winning design . . . may be so changed or modified to secure the approval of the Commission of Fine Arts. If it is determined that such changes or modifications are not practical, the Commission is authorized and directed to select, with the advice and approval of the Commission of Fine Arts, such other design among those already submitted in the competition for the proposed memorial, or to consider a living memorial such as the stadium, an educational institution, information center, memorial park or any other suitable or worthy project.

The authorized appropriation was reduced to \$25,000.⁴⁷ The final blow came when James Roosevelt joined with Representative Schanck

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 47. The Interior Department submitted an unfavorable report on the Keogh resolution, expressed in terms of support for the judgment of the Fine Arts Commission--"the agency expert in this field." (Letter, Assistant Secretary Kenneth Holum to Omar Burleson, Chairman, Committee on House Administration, in H. Rept. No. 2148 To Accompany H.J. Res. 712, 87th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 8-9.)

⁴⁶108 Cong. Rec. 21783 (1962).

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 21782.

to speak in support of the O'Neill amendment. The amended resolution was voted by a wide margin and subsequently passed the Senate. President Kennedy approved it on October 18, 1962.⁴⁸

The new law required the Memorial Commission to report its recommendations to Congress for approval by June 30, 1963. As a first step, Biddle and Pedersen again met with the Commission of Fine Arts on December 19, 1962, to discuss modification of the design. Pedersen said that he could reduce the height of the highest stele thirty or forty feet without doing violence to the concept. He also agreed that the steles might be sheathed in white limestone or marble. The Fine Arts Commission refused to grant tentative approval of the proposed changes; it would only restate the congressional directive that the memorial "be harmonious as to location, design, and land use" with the other memorials. It asked that Pedersen submit sketches with his alterations, and the architect agreed to do so.⁴⁹

As the new year progressed and no sketches appeared, Chairman Finley sent a letter of reminder to Chairman Biddle. Biddle replied on April 2, pleading a lack of funds for the purpose.⁵⁰ Soon thereafter the Memorial Commission received its \$25,000 appropriation, and Finley again wrote Biddle to request a "simple sketch"

⁴⁸p.L. 87-842, 76 Stat. 1079; see Appendix D.

⁴⁹Minutes, Dec. 17, 1962, CFA, p. 2.

⁵⁰Ibid., March 19 and Apr. 16, 1963.

for the June 17 meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts--its last before the June 30 reporting date set by Congress. Biddle's response revealed that he was in no hurry:

I do not believe that the use of a simple sketch would be of any service to the members of your Commission. . . . Obviously a careful study must be made by Pedersen and Tilney which would take several months to complete and would not possibly be finished at the time you suggest.⁵¹

Contributing to the absence of urgency displayed by the Memorial Commission was the prospect of several new appointments to the Fine Arts Commission after the middle of the year. There was little expectation that the existing membership would approve the relatively minor modifications that the architects were willing to make. The Memorial Commission thus preferred to ignore the congressional deadline and take its chances with the new Kennedy appointees.⁵² This strategy proved sound: the Fine Arts Commission was later characterized as "radically overhauled and liberalized" by the appointments.⁵³ At a meeting in October, the new members appeared more sympathetic to the Pedersen-Tilney concept, and the Commission again requested a revised presentation.⁵⁴

Contention flared once more at the presentation session on

⁵¹Letters, June 3 and 6, 1963; ibid., June 17, 1963.

⁵²Interview, Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary, CFA, Nov. 14 and 22, 1972.

⁵³Ada Louise Huxtable, "Monumental Troubles," New York Times, June 26, 1964, p. 31.

⁵⁴Minutes, Oct. 15, 1963, CFA, pp. 11-14.

May 19-20, 1964--sparked this time by a New York Times Magazine article by William Walton, new chairman of the Fine Arts Commission. Walton, reviewing the controversy over the Roosevelt Memorial, had written that the Pedersen-Tilney design "probably will never be built, at least not in Washington."⁵⁵ Francis Biddle declared that Walton was prejudiced and asked that he disqualify himself from voting. Walton, with the support of his commission, refused to do so, stating that his expression referred solely to the original design and assuring Biddle that he would be given "an unbiased hearing on the new design."⁵⁶

In fact, the "new design" was not so changed as to overcome the objections of most opponents. The highest stele was lowered thirty-seven feet to bring it just below the above-water height of the Lincoln Memorial, and some of the steles were rearranged to incorporate within the cluster a three-times-life-size statue of Roosevelt. Concrete was retained as the building material. At the Fine Arts Commission vote on June 24 Walton, along with Theodore Roszak, decided against it. But Gordon Bunshaft, Burnham Kelly, Aline Saarinen, and John Carl Warnecke--the necessary majority--voted to approve.⁵⁷

⁵⁵"Monumental Successes and Failures," March 15, 1964, p. 99.

⁵⁶"Plan for Memorial to Roosevelt Stirs Dispute in Capital," New York Times, May 21, 1964, p. 37.

⁵⁷Hideo Sasaki, member of the Advisory Committee to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission and a competition entrant, abstained.

After four and a half years of controversy, construction of the Pedersen-Tilney design for the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial seemed assured.

We don't like it, and I'm sure Father wouldn't either.
--James Roosevelt⁵⁵

III. DEATH OF A DESIGN (1964-1965)

Three days before the affirmative decision of the Fine Arts Commission, the five children of Franklin D. Roosevelt--Elliott, John, James, FDR, Jr., and Anna--met at Hyde Park to discuss the memorial design that now appeared likely of approval. James stated their unanimous conclusion in identical letters to Francis Biddle and William Walton: "We are unalterably opposed to the erection of either the original or the revised design submitted by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Commission, and we do not believe any modifications of the proposal would make it acceptable to us." In addition, the family requested that "no public fund-raising operation be allowed" regardless of what design might ultimately be selected⁵⁶--reportedly because such a campaign might hinder efforts to finance the Eleanor Roosevelt Foundation.⁵⁷

The Commission of Fine Arts, informed of the family's position before their vote, did not allow it to influence their

⁵⁵Marjorie Hunter, "Five Roosevelts Oppose Memorial," New York Times, June 26, 1964, p. 31.

⁵⁶Letter, June 23, 1964, in Minutes, June 23, 1964, CFA.

⁵⁷Wolf Von Eckardt, "Keogh Becomes Chairman of FDR Memorial Board," Washington Post, June 22, 1965, p. A7.

decision. Elsewhere, however, there was renewed commotion, exemplified by the divided membership of the Memorial Commission. "I rather liked [the design] myself, but, if the family doesn't like it, then I'm afraid it's out," said Senator Maurine Neuberger. "We'll just have to start all over again." Senator Jacob Javits did not like "forcing anything on the family": "I think we should give it another try to find something they could go with. It looks all right to me, but they apparently don't like it." Representative Keogh wanted to take the family's wishes into consideration but did not see how the Commission could reject the winning design: "Why, that would make a mockery of the architectural profession." Chairman Biddle, leader of the Memorial Commission in fact as well as name, was all for pressing ahead.⁵⁸ But his determination was matched by that of James Roosevelt, who carried the family position to the House floor on June 25:

It has come to my attention that the Chairman of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Commission has stated that no further action is required by the Congress of the United States and that the Commission can now go forward and build according to the approved design; this in face of the fact that, of course, the family of the late President did unanimously express their opinion that this is an undesirable design. Therefore I hope that some of my colleagues will join me in examining the legislation which is controlling. . . . And if, as a result of that examination it appears that the Congress has lost control of the matter of the erection of this memorial under the approved design, I hope that my colleagues will join with me in considering some legislation to do something about it.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Hunter, "Five Roosevelts Oppose Memorial."

⁵⁹110 Cong. Rec. 15013 (1964)

Once again, advocates and opponents of the design made their views known through the press. Ada Louise Huxtable, architecture critic for the New York Times, was favorably impressed:

There is a subtle, processional monumentality that depends as much for effect on the movement of the visitor as on its purely visual impact. It is an impressive monumentality that surrounds the visitor and contains him. . . . It could even avoid that bugaboo of all memorials, banality.⁶⁰

Siegfried Giedion, prominent art historian, lauded the design as a successful expression of contemporary art and denounced the notion that politicians or survivors of the deceased should "presume to interfere" with a prize-winning piece of architecture. "F.D.R. belongs to history, his monument to the nation," he wrote. "Such a memorial is not a birthday present for the family, to like or dislike."⁶¹

Despite the doubts expressed by some members earlier, the Memorial Commission in December 1964 sided with Giedion and voted its formal approval of the revised Pedersen-Tilney design. Under Secretary of Commerce Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., said that the family still opposed the design but would not attempt to stop construction.⁶² He may not have spoken for all; according to one informed source, James Roosevelt threatened to fight any fund-

⁶⁰"Monumental Troubles."

⁶¹Letter, New York Times, Aug. 2, 1964, Sec. 4, p. 8.

⁶²Philip Benjamin, "Roosevelt Commission Approves Memorial Design," ibid., Dec. 11, 1964, p. 22.

raising efforts in the news media.⁶³ In any event, the Commission found itself in an untenable position. Francis Biddle announced the following April that the family's opposition had made fund raising virtually impossible and that the design had been "put on ice." Biddle simultaneously gave notice of his resignation as chairman.⁶⁴ He had battled well, but he had lost.

That fall, a new plan by Eric Gugler and Paul Manship, designers of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial on Roosevelt Island, was quietly circulated among concerned members of Congress and government officials. Their design, reportedly backed by Anna Roosevelt Halsted, was disparaged by the Washington Post:

The memorial itself is apparently to be somewhat in the manner of the Rayburn Building, constructed around a stone version of the late President as a Roman senator, in a fake toga. Mr. Roosevelt deserves better of his countrymen.⁶⁵

This scheme never surfaced as a formal proposal of the Memorial Commission. In the end, the only positive accomplishment of that body during 1965 was to obtain authorization for an additional \$100,000 to continue its existence.⁶⁶ After Representative Keogh, Biddle's successor as chairman, described the Commission as "stone

⁶³Interview, Charlotte Hoskins, Administrative Secretary, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, Dec. 4, 1972.

⁶⁴Willard Clopton, "Memorial Design for FDR 'On Ice,'" Washington Post, Apr. 30, 1965, p. 81.

⁶⁵Wolf Von Eckardt, "Family Quietly Promotes New Design for FDR Memorial Near Tidal Basin," Washington Post, Oct. 23, 1965, p. A1; "Monumental Catastrophe" (editorial), Nov. 9, 1965, p. A20.

⁶⁶p.L. 89-305, 79 Stat. 1126, Oct. 30, 1965; see Appendix E.

broke" in the House prior to passage of his bill, Representative H. R. Gross expressed what must have been the wish of all: "I hope we will get better results for the further expenditure of the money than we have had in the past."⁶⁷

⁶⁷111 Cong. Rec. 23590-91 (1965).

The Roosevelt Commission can either build this one or forget it, for it is unlikely that a more appropriate version will come along.

--Ada Louise Huxtable⁶⁸

IV. BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARDS (1966-1970)

Meeting on January 18, 1966, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission officially abandoned the Pedersen-Tilney design and, under the leadership of Senator Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota, decided upon means for selecting a new one. There would be no more competitions; Representative Keogh characterized that approach as "unnecessary, impractical, and time-consuming." Instead, the Memorial Commission sent letters to fifty-five architects inquiring as to their interest in the project. On their own, without benefit of a professional advisory body, the Commission in June selected one of the respondents. Some architects indicated disapproval of this method, but most had praise for the choice: Marcel Breuer of New York, designer of the UNESCO buildings in Paris, the United States Embassy in the Hague, the Whitney Museum in New York, and the Housing and Urban Development building in Washington. Upon his appointment, Breuer declared that he had no ideas for the

⁶⁸"If at First You Don't Succeed," New York Times, Jan. 1, 1967, Sec. 2, p. 19.

Roosevelt Memorial but would approach the job as a "fresh problem."⁶⁹

On December 20 Breuer presented his design to the Memorial Commission (see Illustrations 5 and 6). It included seven huge rough granite "darts" radiating outward from a thirty-two-foot cube of polished granite bearing an incised photographic portrait of Roosevelt. The Pedersen-Tilney design had been widely criticized for its lack of relationship to its subject; thus Breuer put particular stress on the ways in which his proposal reflected the President:

While the Memorial first of all is intended to be an inviting, leisurely, earth-and-nature-bound place, its composition has further meaning, symbolizing Franklin Delano Roosevelt's philosophy and government and identifying his personality.

The center of the Memorial is a plaza, like the center of a rotating turbine. Stone walls, like stone blades, are released from this core, evocative of ideas launched during the dynamic Roosevelt era. These stone walls emerge monumental, sixty feet high, denoting the momentum of great concepts. Their contours descend to meet the earth, much as the President's concepts reached out to the people for understanding, acceptance, and to become an integral part of the Nation's thinking.

Each of the walls would be flanked by water, "an element which had much to do with F.D.R.'s personality." Recordings of Roosevelt's voice would be played from the central portrait stone.⁷⁰

The Breuer design, for which the architect received \$40,000, was unanimously approved by the Memorial Commission. FDR, Jr.,

⁶⁹"FDR Memorial Commission Seeks New Design for His Monument Here," Washington Post, Jan. 19, 1966, p. B14; Ada Louise Huxtable, "Breuer to Shape Roosevelt Shrine," New York Times, June 9, 1966, p. 39.

⁷⁰Statement presented by Senator McCarthy, 113 Cong. Rec. 20911 (1967).

present at the meeting, also pledged his support. At a press conference the following day, Representative Keogh expressed confidence that the Fine Arts Commission would approve the memorial and hope that both Congress and the public would contribute the \$2-4 million necessary to construct it.⁷¹

Critical acclaim followed the presentation. Ada Louise Huxtable called Breuer's plan "a thoughtful, contemporary, creative solution that honors the man it commemorates at a representative level of today's aesthetic achievement, without doing violence to the classical Washington image."⁷² Wolf Von Eckardt, architecture critic for the Washington Post, lauded it as a "splendid new design." While unenthusiastic about the recorded voice, he called the photographic etching "Breuer's greatest stroke of genius" and urged that the memorial be finished by the twenty-fifth anniversary of Roosevelt's death in 1970.⁷³

The Memorial Commission had taken care this time to cultivate the cooperation of Roosevelt's children. At least one discordant note was heard from the family, however, in the form of a letter from Anna's son to the New York Times. John R. Boettiger called the Breuer design one of "striking tastelessness."

⁷¹George Dugan, "New Design for Memorial to Roosevelt Is Unveiled," New York Times, Dec. 22, 1966, p. 1

⁷²"If at First You Don't Succeed."

⁷³"FDR Memorial Should Be Built--And Soon," Washington Post, Dec. 23, 1966, p. B1.

Both the earlier tablet design and the new model . . . suggest that the F.D.R. Memorial Commission has somehow fixed in its mind the notion that President Roosevelt is best represented by monumental slabs of one sort or another.

In such circumstances the plans to play taped recordings of the President's voice cannot but remind one of the similarly amplified words of The Founder at Forest Lawn.

Boettiger suggested an open stone amphitheater employing trees, grass, and water--"a grand monument of simple and unpretentious beauty and a suitable setting for ceremonial occasions and national public events."⁷⁴

Despite such dissent, there was hardly the hostility that followed the first design presentation six years earlier. The Fine Arts Commission met on January 25, 1967, with little expectation that Breuer's design would not be approved. Only after the closed session began did each member find that his own doubts were shared by all the others.⁷⁵ "It's what I call pop art sculpture, and it's disrespectful and frivolous," said Aline Saarinen. "The concept of a canned voice is abhorrent." Both the recording and the photographic portrait were considered to detract from the desired sense of memorial timelessness. Overall, the design was judged basically crude in conception--a series of forms that "strongly suggested stage settings rather than serious architecture."⁷⁶ Breuer's personal appearance before the members the

⁷⁴Jan. 1, 1967, Sec. 4, p. 11.

⁷⁵Interview, Charles H. Atherton, Nov. 14, 1972.

⁷⁶Transcript of meeting, p. 14, Minutes, Jan. 25, 1967, CFA; Minutes, Jan. 25, 1967, CFA, pp. 2-3.

next day yielded somewhat more sympathy for his plan, but in the end the vote was unanimous. A press release summarized the Fine Arts Commission stand:

The Commission feels that such a memorial requires the highest standard of artistic achievement and significance. The proposed design does not fulfill either criteria.

The Commission has studied all aspects of the plan and reached its conclusion with great reluctance, aware of the many difficulties that have been faced by the designer and the Roosevelt Memorial Commission.

At the public announcement, Chairman William Walton offered no hope that revision might rescue Breuer's design. "If there had been some little thing that we thought could be done, we certainly would have suggested changes," he said. "We rejected the entire concept."⁷⁷

The rejection caught nearly everyone concerned by surprise. Francis Biddle and New Jersey Representative Frank Thompson, Jr., of the Memorial Commission expressed their frustration and disappointment to the press; "I don't quite know yet where we will go from here," Thompson said.⁷⁸ That decision was made at the Commission's next meeting on March 1, when the members unanimously voted to seek congressional approval of the Breuer design. As Senator McCarthy saw it, "This is not a case of pitting the artistic judgment of the FDR Commission against the Fine Arts Commission, but rather the judgment, skill, and reputation of Marcel Breuer,

⁷⁷Minutes, Jan. 26, 1967, CFA; Ben A. Franklin, "Fine Arts Commission Rejects New Roosevelt Memorial Plan," New York Times, Jan. 28, 1967, p. 6.

⁷⁸Wolf Von Eckardt, "Unanimous Decision Dooms Breuer's 'Stone Darts' Plan," Washington Post, Jan. 28, 1967, p. C1.

recognized as one of the great architects in the world today, against the collective judgment of the Fine Arts Commission."⁷⁹

On August 2 McCarthy introduced a joint resolution similar to the original Keogh resolution that had sought approval of the Pedersen-Tilney design in 1962. On the Senate floor he stressed Breuer's qualifications and discussed the need for the legislation:

We did have an opinion that it was not necessary to come back for full authorization and that we perhaps had sufficient authority in the original resolution [P.L. 84-372 (1955)]; but it was the judgment of the Members of Congress on the Commission, that it would be better to bring the whole proposal before Congress again, in the hope that we could build a solid base upon which an appeal could be made throughout the country to raise money to help pay for the memorial. We hope to secure this approval soon in order that the memorial be completed by the time of the 25th anniversary of the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁸⁰

McCarthy's resolution was never reported from committee. Identical legislation introduced in the next Congress in 1969 met with an identical fate. Consistent with its position on the old Keogh resolution, the Interior Department submitted negative reports on these measures: "Inasmuch as the effect of [the resolution] would be to approve the Breuer plan over the objections of the Commission of Fine Arts and without the advice of the National Park Service and the National Capital Planning Commission, as required in existing laws, we recommend against its enactment."⁸¹

⁷⁹"FDR Panel Plans Plea to Congress," Washington Post, March 2, 1957, p. B1.

⁸⁰S.J. Res. 99, 90th Cong., 1st Sess.; 113 Cong. Rec. 20911 (1967). See Appendix F.

⁸¹Letter, Secretary Walter J. Hickel to Chairman Samuel N.

Without congressional action, the second great plan to be sponsored by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission was dead.

On January 20, 1969, at a time when the future of the Roosevelt Memorial appeared most unpromising, President Johnson proclaimed its site "Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Park."⁸² Of minimal consequence, Johnson's action gave at least the appearance of accomplishment to an undertaking with nothing else to show for more than a decade of effort.

Friedel, Committee on House Administration, May 22, 1970, Legislative File "Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial," National Park Service.

⁸²Federal Register, XXXIV: 14, Jan. 22, 1969, 913; see Appendix G.

This seems to be the proposal that meets with the least resistance.

--Eugene J. Keogh⁸³

V. THE ROSE GARDEN

For years prior to construction of the Rochambeau Memorial Bridge in the late 1940s, a National Rose Garden had graced West Potomac Park southeast of the Tidal Basin. To make way for the bridge, a new site for the garden and the McMillan Fountain was selected south of Independence Avenue and west of the Tidal Basin. The Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission approved this plan in 1947.

In 1958 Francis Biddle informed the National Park Service that the Advisory Committee to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission had recommended the same site for the Roosevelt Memorial. Superintendent Harry I. Thompson of National Capital Parks told him that the site was taken and that "substantial funds" had been committed to the garden project.⁸⁴ Thompson and National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth, inspired by the literal meaning of the name "Roosevelt," suggested that with the addition of a statue or other memorial feature the National Rose Garden

⁸³"Rose Garden and a Statue Are Planned as Memorial to Franklin Roosevelt," New York Times, Sept. 15, 1970, p. 22.

⁸⁴Letter, June 20, 1958, NCP-WNRC.

could become the Roosevelt Memorial.⁸⁵ The Memorial Commission did not adopt this suggestion, and both the National Capital Planning Commission and the Congress assented to use of the site for a memorial of undefined form.

There was some thought, prior to the design competition and in later years, that a rose garden might be a subsidiary feature in the vicinity of the memorial. But amid the great controversy over the Pedersen-Tilney design, Wirth's proposal of a garden as the principal feature gained support. The bills introduced by Representative McDowell and Senator Douglas in 1961, while not specifying a garden of roses, were compatible with this concept. Chairman William H. Waters, Jr., of the District of Columbia Recreation Board urged a "simple stone marker" surrounded by a rose garden at the House hearing on the Keogh resolution in 1962.⁸⁶ With rejection of both the Pedersen-Tilney and the Breuer plans, a garden came increasingly to appear the best alternative. The Washington Star reflected this sentiment:

Our suggestion is that [the Memorial Commission] push in some direction other than another variation of concrete slabs. . . . A lovely garden or some similar facility might be quite fitting, to the memory of the man no less than to the park itself.⁸⁷

After ten years of monumental thinking, the Memorial Commission gave in and endorsed the concept of a rose garden with

⁸⁵Memorandum, Wirth to Secretary of the Interior (Stewart L. Udall), July 30, 1963, NCP; Interview, Wirth, Oct. 13, 1972.

⁸⁶Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Hearings, p. 69

⁸⁷"Instant Confusion" (editorial), Feb. 4, 1967, p. A4.

statue on May 13, 1970. With the assistance of Averell Harriman, the Roosevelt children were contacted and brought into agreement with this plan.⁸⁸ If it did not inspire wild enthusiasm, the proposal also aroused no opposition. The Washington Post expressed the general attitude:

By all means let us plant a rose garden to honor the memory of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as the FDR Memorial Commission now suggests. Like sending flowers when one can't think of a more personal gift, it is surely a proper, pleasant, somewhat non-committal and thus noncontroversial thing to do.⁸⁹

The Memorial Commission received authorization that September for an additional \$75,000 beyond the \$285,000 appropriated and spent since 1957. Prior to House passage of this legislation Representative Thompson assured the watchful Representative H. R. Gross that this would be the Commission's last such request; he would "not be back to the floor for further housekeeping moneys without a final and absolute and acceptable design."⁹⁰ Before the House Interior Appropriations subcommittee on April 29, 1971, Chairman Eugene J. Keogh of the Memorial Commission (no longer in Congress) was asked by Representative Julia Butler Hansen of Washington when firm plans for the rose garden would be forthcoming. "Without attempting to commit myself specifically, I would hope

⁸⁸Letter, Rep. Frank Thompson, Jr., to Chairman B. Everett Jordan, Senate Rules Committee, Aug. 18, 1970, S. Rept. No. 91-1131 To Accompany H.R. 15351, 91st Cong., 2d Sess., p. 2.

⁸⁹"A Rose Garden to Honor FDR" (editorial), Sept. 19, 1970, p. A18.

⁹⁰P.L. 91-398, 84 Stat. 837, Sept. 8, 1970; 116 Cong. Rec. 24966. See Appendix H.

that within the fiscal year 1972 we should be well on our way," he replied.⁹¹ In March 1972 Keogh reappeared before Representative Hansen's subcommittee to request appropriation of the balance of the \$75,000; \$27,000 of his request, he said, was "expected to cover the preliminary design that we will then have to take to the Fine Arts Commission for approval and so forth."⁹²

Despite these statements, the \$75,000 would cover little more than the Commission's administrative expenses. Aware of this, Keogh had asked the Secretary of the Interior for planning and design assistance early in 1971. National Park Service Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., estimating the cost of a preliminary plan at \$150,000 (later revised to \$175,000), told Keogh that legislation would be required to authorize Interior involvement. A resolution to this end--with no appropriation limit--passed Congress and was approved by President Nixon on June 30, 1972.⁹³

Keogh formally requested Interior assistance on July 18, asking that the Secretary initiate steps to obtain a \$175,000 supplemental appropriation for planning and design of the Roosevelt

⁹¹Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1972, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 92d Cong., 1st Sess., Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, Part 5, p. 4.

⁹²Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1973. Hearings before a Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 92d Cong., 2d Sess., Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, Part 3, p. 780.

⁹³Letter, Hartzog to Keogh, Apr. 28, 1971, NCP; P.L. 92-332, 86 Stat. 401. See Appendix I.

Memorial. The reply by Assistant Director J. Leonard Norwood of the National Park Service promised that the Service would include this amount in its next budget submission. The last communication from the Service to the Memorial Commission as of this writing, on October 6, 1972, was not particularly encouraging:

As of this time, there is no amount in the 1974 budget identified for the Department of the Interior participation in this project. If we are unable to include the amount in 1974, we will give the project high priority for 1975.⁹⁴

There was talk of completing the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in time for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Roosevelt's death. The centennial of his birth will be upon us in another ten years. Possibly his memorial will be ready for that occasion.

⁹⁴Letter, Acting Director Manus J. Fish, Jr., National Capital Parks, to Keogh, NCP.

The day for conventional monuments, statues, memorials, etc. has pass'd away. . . . They are superfluous and vulgar.

--Walt Whitman⁹⁵

VI. SOME MONUMENTAL THOUGHTS

Walt Whitman's view was hardly characteristic of his century, but it became widely shared in our own. According to Thomas H. Creighton, "the questions related to monumentality--its desirability, the proper architectural approach when it is deemed desirable, and its relationship to other physical expressions in the community--have been subjects of interest and debate since the beginnings of the modern movement of the twentieth century."⁹⁶ With the modernists' emphasis on function, it was inevitable that the traditional monumental memorial would lose favor to the "living memorial." In 1915 Lawrence Weaver, while not rejecting monuments serving "no purpose but remembrance," declared, "There is no more perfect monument than a building which, by its usefulness, ministers to living needs, and by its beauty recalls those who served in their day and generation."⁹⁷ A prominent recent exercise in this memorial concept is Washington's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; critics like Wolf Von Eckardt who have questioned its beauty have nevertheless admitted its success in filling its utilitarian function.

⁹⁵Quoted in Wolf Von Eckardt, "Monumental Decisions," New Republic, Apr. 2, 1962, p. 29.

⁹⁶The Architecture of Monuments, p. 9.

⁹⁷Memorials & Monuments (London: Country Life, 1915), p. 23.

The last major Washington memorial with "no purpose but remembrance" was that erected in honor of Thomas Jefferson. Designed in the 1930s by the classicist John Russell Pope with no attempt to reflect contemporary architectural thought, it was not an exemplary product of its time and has enjoyed little critical acclaim. A more recent memorial to Jefferson, on the other hand--Eero Saarinen's stainless steel Gateway Arch at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis--is a strikingly modern and successful symbol of the man and the westward movement he furthered.

Undoubtedly buoyed by the Federal patronage of the St. Louis project and guided by the expression of the Roosevelt competition program against memorial buildings essentially functional rather than commemorative in nature, entrants in the Roosevelt Memorial competition were almost unanimous in submitting contemporary and "nonfunctional" conceptions. Creighton interpreted this development and the selection of the Pedersen-Tilney design as a renewed acceptance of monumentality in architecture: "We have accepted monumentality as a matter of scale, of consistency with the aims of a democratic society, of hierarchy within the range of building types and purposes--and of ability to produce, using the vocabulary of modern architecture, a significant and emotionally convincing result."⁹⁸

Yet others were not so sure. After the Pedersen-Tilney design was chosen John Ely Burchard asked, "Is it possible in these days to memorialize anybody in a significant way through artifacts? If it is possible is a monumental artifact possible? Do we know how to make one? Do artists have their hearts in the job when they try?"⁹⁹ Lewis Mumford, who had served on the advisory committee to the Memorial Commission,

⁹⁸Architecture of Monuments, p. 9.

⁹⁹"Debating the FDR Memorial: A Plea for Relevance," Architectural Record, March 1961, p. 182.

refused to serve on the selection jury, partially because he believed that "in the present state of the arts today the odds were heavily against finding a memorial design that would effectively symbolize Franklin D. Roosevelt."¹⁰⁰ In a Saturday Review article, "Must Monuments Be Monumental?" Katherine Kuh took issue with the monumental scale perpetuated by the Pedersen-Tilney design. She did not oppose the design as architecture, she subsequently wrote in response to a letter from Francis Biddle: "It is the conception I question, the idea of another huge, costly monument. . . . The great human qualities of FDR seem curiously misrepresented by such false gigantism. As I said in my article, what I had hoped was that 'we in America might even have pioneered in design, as Roosevelt did in government, to come up with a fresh idea.'"¹⁰¹ The New York Times was another source of doubt: "Should any more monuments qua monuments (as opposed to ornamental buildings dedicated to useful purposes) be erected in an already monument-ridden city? The fact that a good monument today seems impossible to design could be proof that we do not really believe in monuments any more."¹⁰²

If in fact we do not believe in monuments, it is at least partially because of the time in which we live. Monuments best suit ages of confidence. They are most readily built by people sure of their place in history and certain that what they leave will be meaningful to those who follow. But ours is an age of uncertainty--about ourselves, our ideals, our future. Monuments are forever, bespeaking eternal

¹⁰⁰Letter, New York Times, Aug. 16, 1964, Sec. 4, p. 8.

¹⁰¹Sept. 2, 1961, pp. 26-27; Sept. 30, 1961, p. 27.

¹⁰²"Monuments and Men" (editorial), Feb. 27, 1962, p. 32.

truths. But what we express today we usually qualify tomorrow. Concepts and ideals frozen in stone (or reinforced concrete) may prove embarrassing.

Another and more particular consideration derives from the subject to be commemorated by a monument. National monuments are most appropriate to persons who have taken on the aura of national institutions. This transformation normally requires the passage of sufficient time to place the living human being, with his inevitable frailties, beyond the memory of other living persons. Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln had all attained superhuman stature by the time their memorials were built in Washington. Franklin D. Roosevelt is still remembered as a man. As such he may rate a garden--but not a tower or temple.

EPILOGUE

On April 12, 1965, the twentieth anniversary of Roosevelt's death, a plain block of white Vermont marble, 6'10" by 3'8" by 3'3" high, was unveiled on Pennsylvania Avenue near the National Archives building. Among those present at the ceremony were John A. Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., and Anna Roosevelt Halsted. Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman made a speech, and President Johnson stopped by to lay a wreath. On the block was inscribed

IN MEMORY OF FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

1882

1945

The Roosevelt children; Architect Eric Gugler, a family friend; Charles F. Palmer, a member of the Roosevelt Administration and chairman of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Warm Springs Memorial Commission; and Conrad L. Wirth were contributors toward the monument, which received no government funding.¹⁰³ Their names and those of other donors not made public were sealed in the base of the stone. A bronze plaque nearby recounted the conversation of

¹⁰³Letter, Regional Director T. Sutton Jett, National Capital Parks, to William A. Schmidt, Commissioner of Public Buildings, General Services Administration, Jan. 22, 1965, NCP; Nan Robertson, "Memorial Is Dedicated to Roosevelt in Capital," New York Times, Apr. 13, 1965, p. 16; Interview, Wirth, Oct. 13, 1972.

Roosevelt and Frankfurter and pointedly noted how "A small group of living associates of the President . . . fulfilled his wish by providing and dedicating this modest memorial."

Justice Frankfurter had made Roosevelt's desire known to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission soon after the Commission's establishment. According to Francis Biddle, the members quickly decided that "this expression of President Roosevelt's should not interfere with the erection of any suitable memorial that the commission might recommend."¹⁰⁴ Eugene J. Keogh, speaking shortly before he succeeded Biddle as chairman of the Commission, took passing notice of the stone placed by the Archives building. "It is nice for Roosevelt's friends to do what FDR wanted," he said. "But we cannot be content with such modest instructions."¹⁰⁵

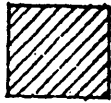
Perhaps they should have been.

¹⁰⁴Letter, The Atlantic, March 1961, p. 35. Biddle's letter, published in the same issue as Frankfurter's account, displayed some annoyance with the Justice for publicizing Roosevelt's wish.

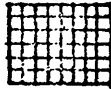
¹⁰⁵Eckardt, "Keogh Becomes Chairman of FDR Memorial Board."

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Location Map



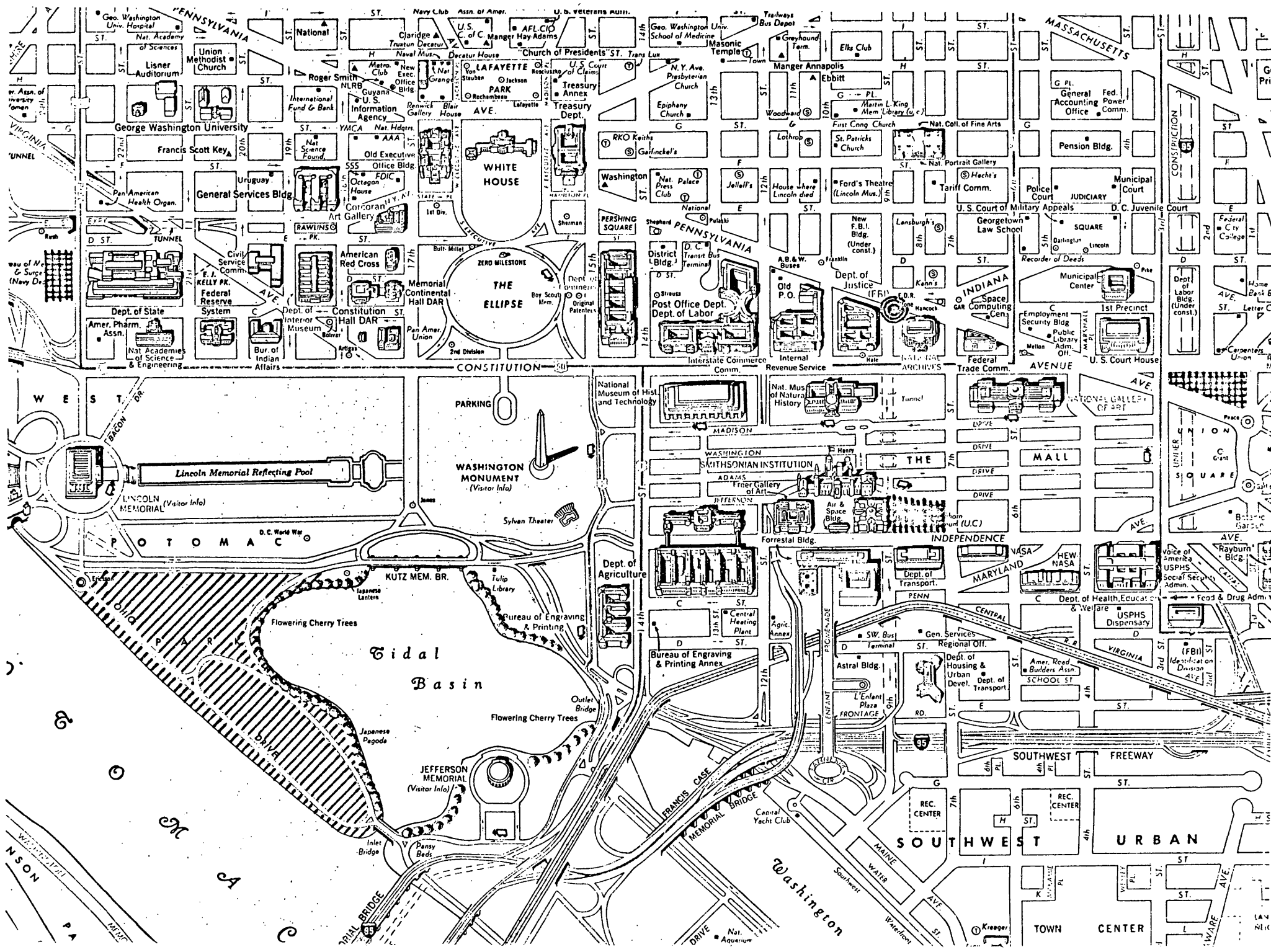
Memorial site. Memorial may occupy 27 of total 66 acres.



Other sites considered. (A fourth site in Georgetown is not shown.)

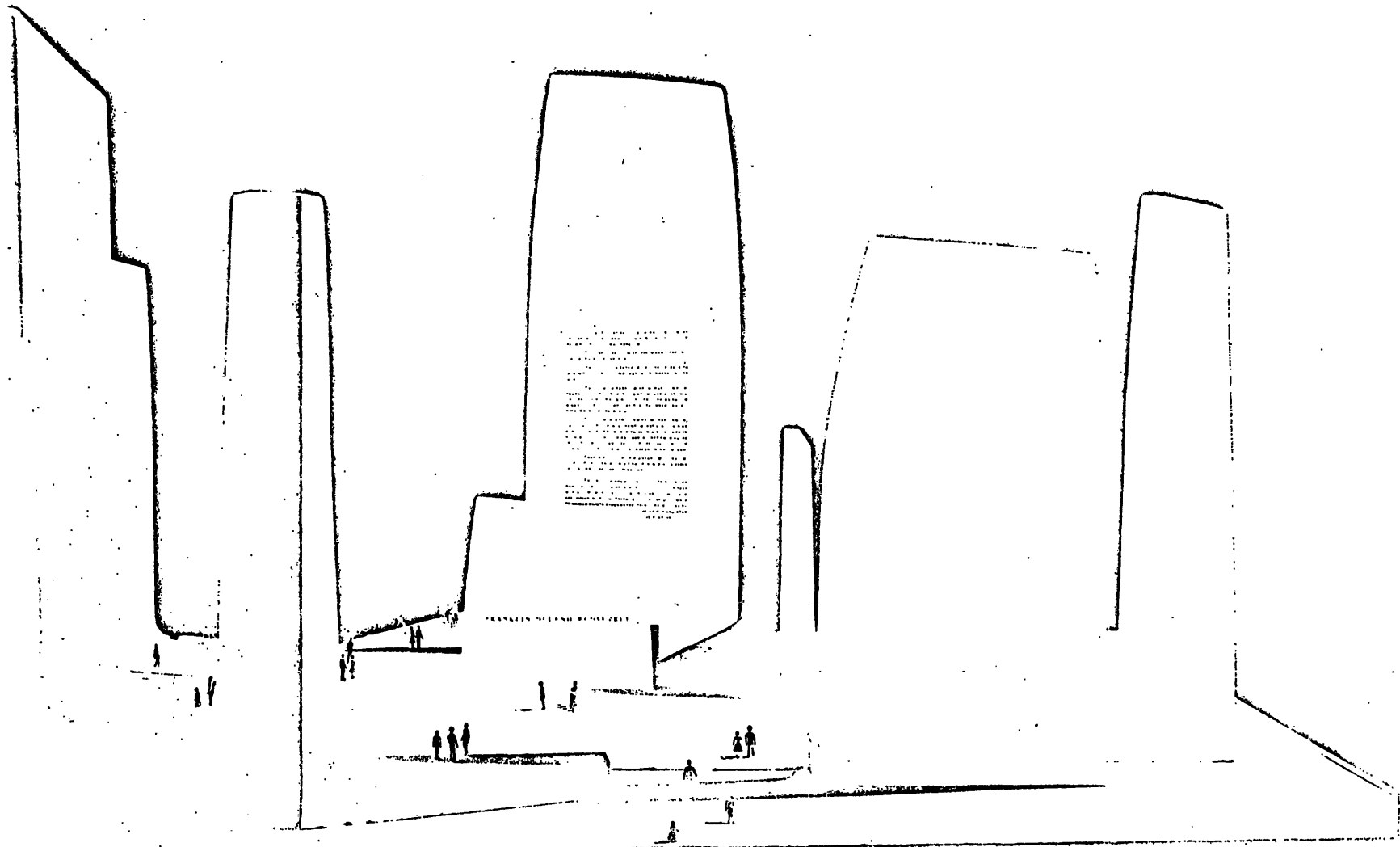


The Roosevelt Stone.



2. The Pedersen-Tilney Design

(Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission)



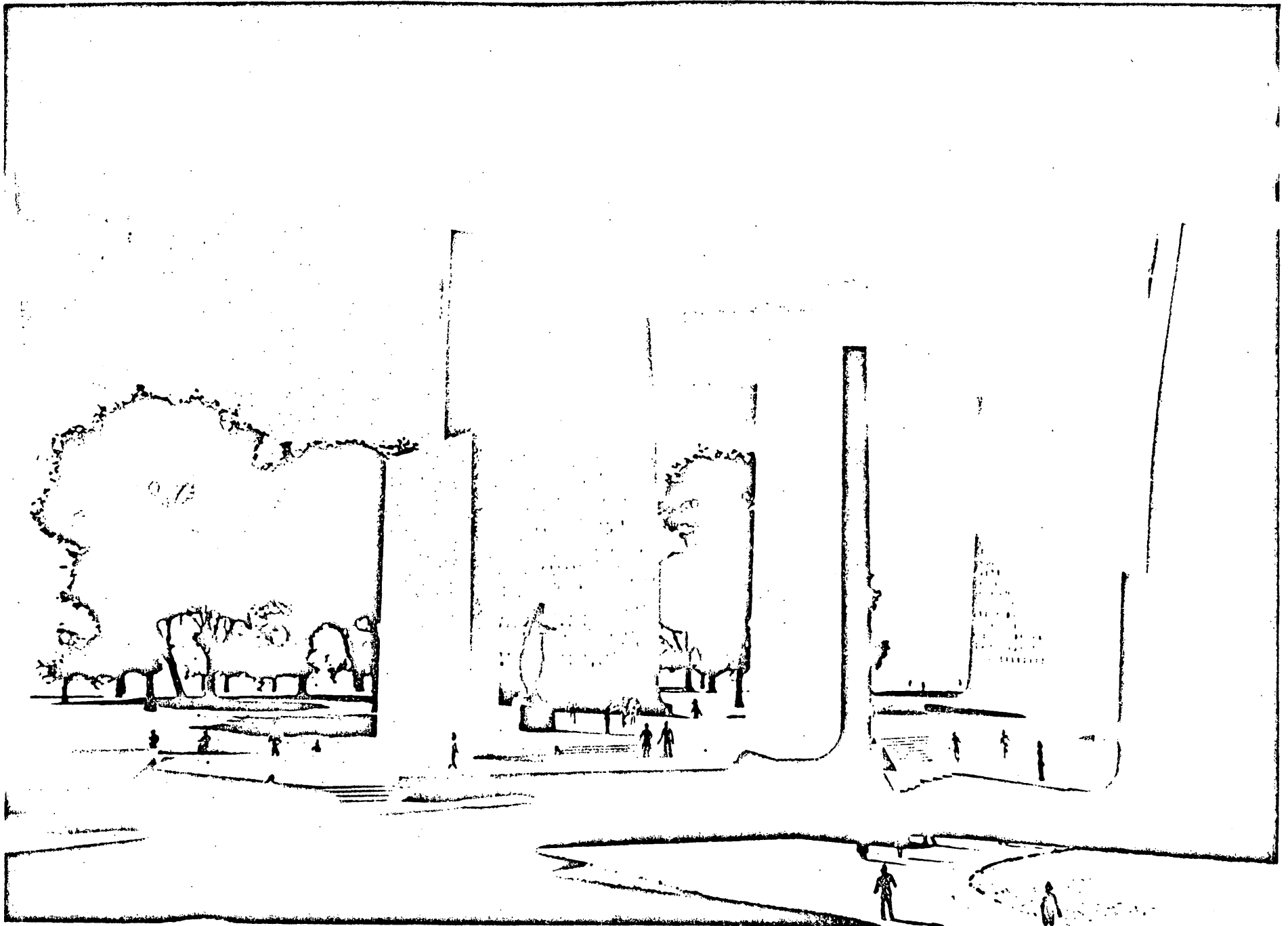
3. The Pedersen-Tilney Design (Site Development)

(Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission)



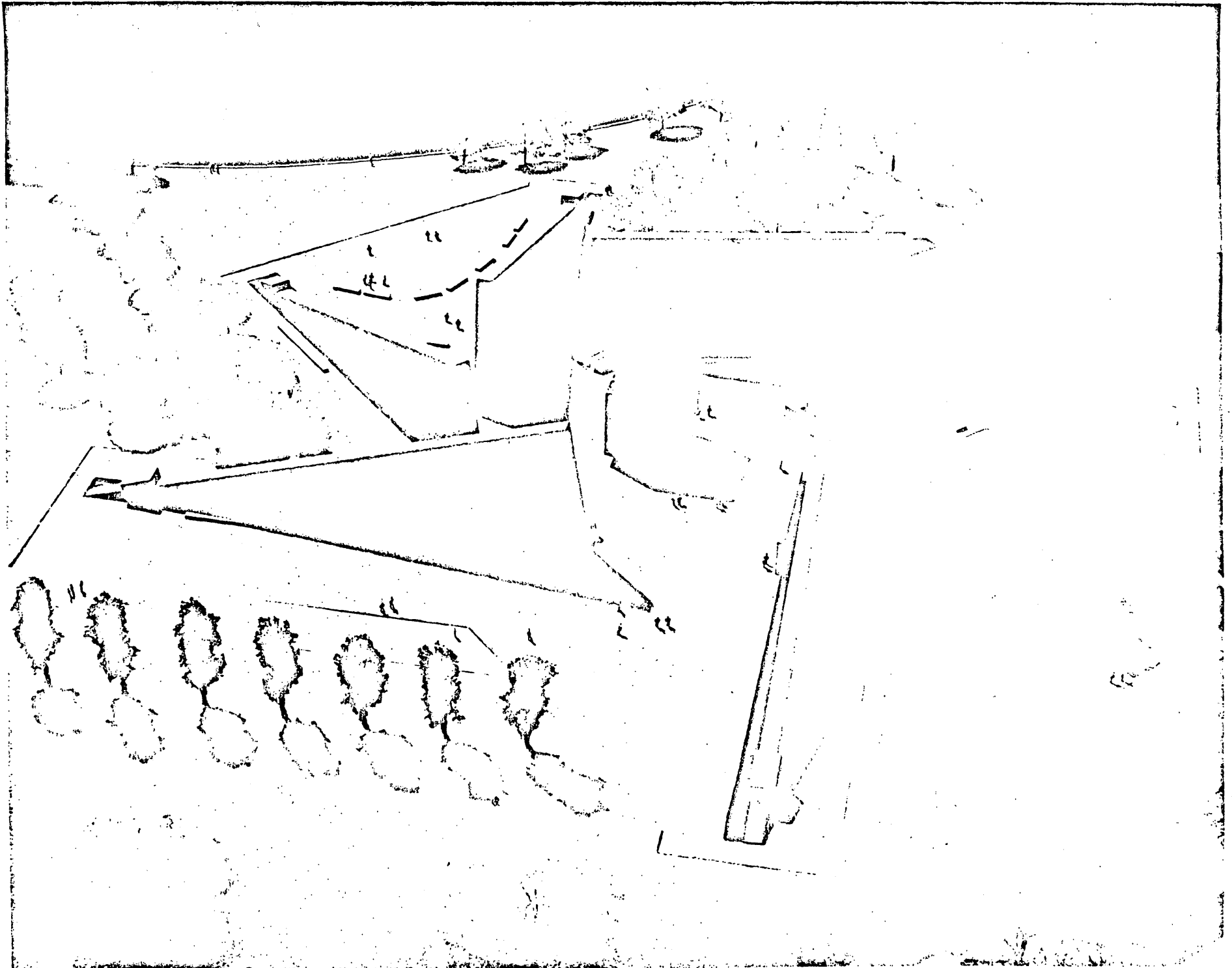
4. The Revised Pedersen-Tilney Design

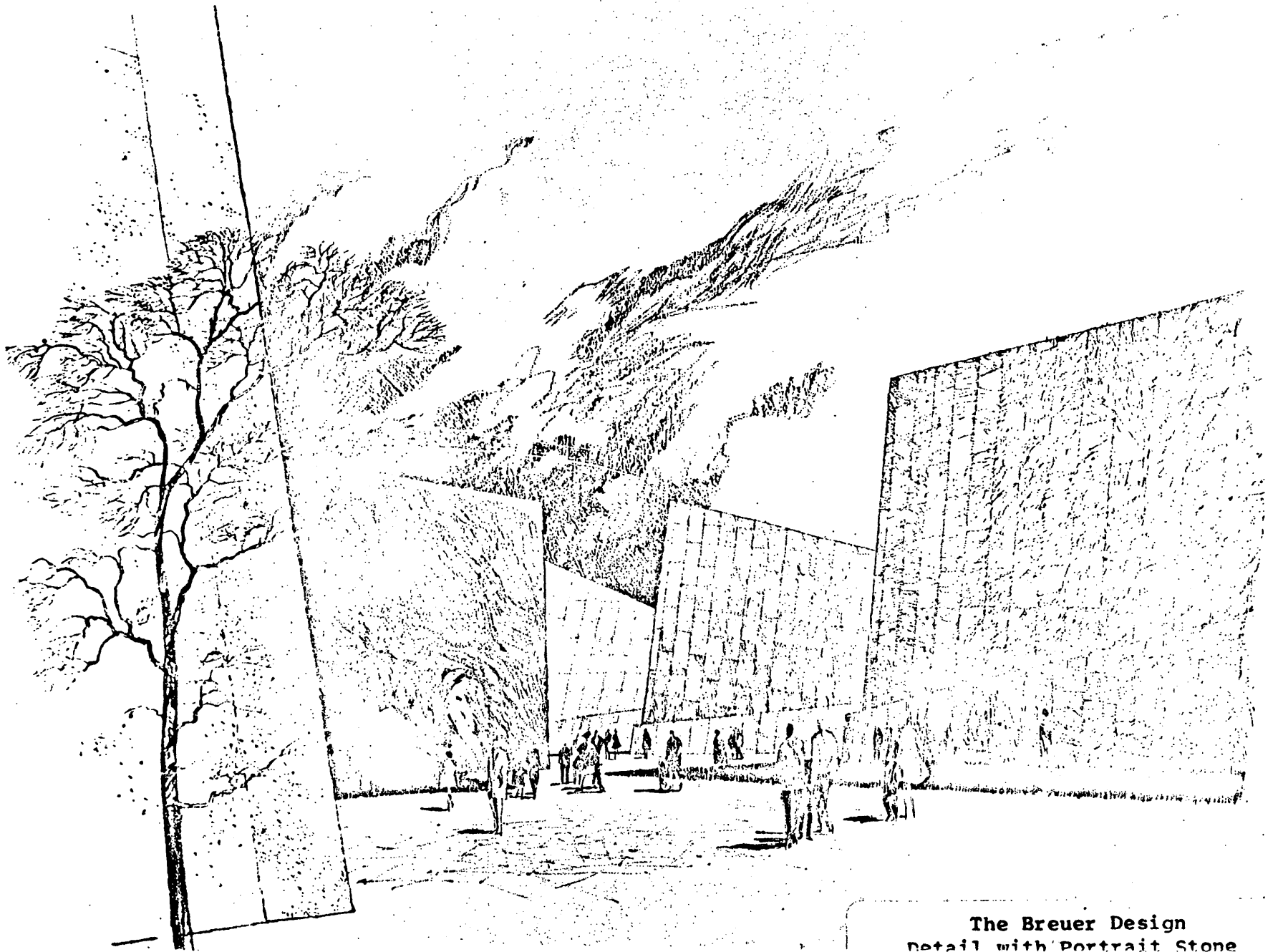
(Courtesy Commission of Fine Arts)



5. The Breuer Design

(Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission)





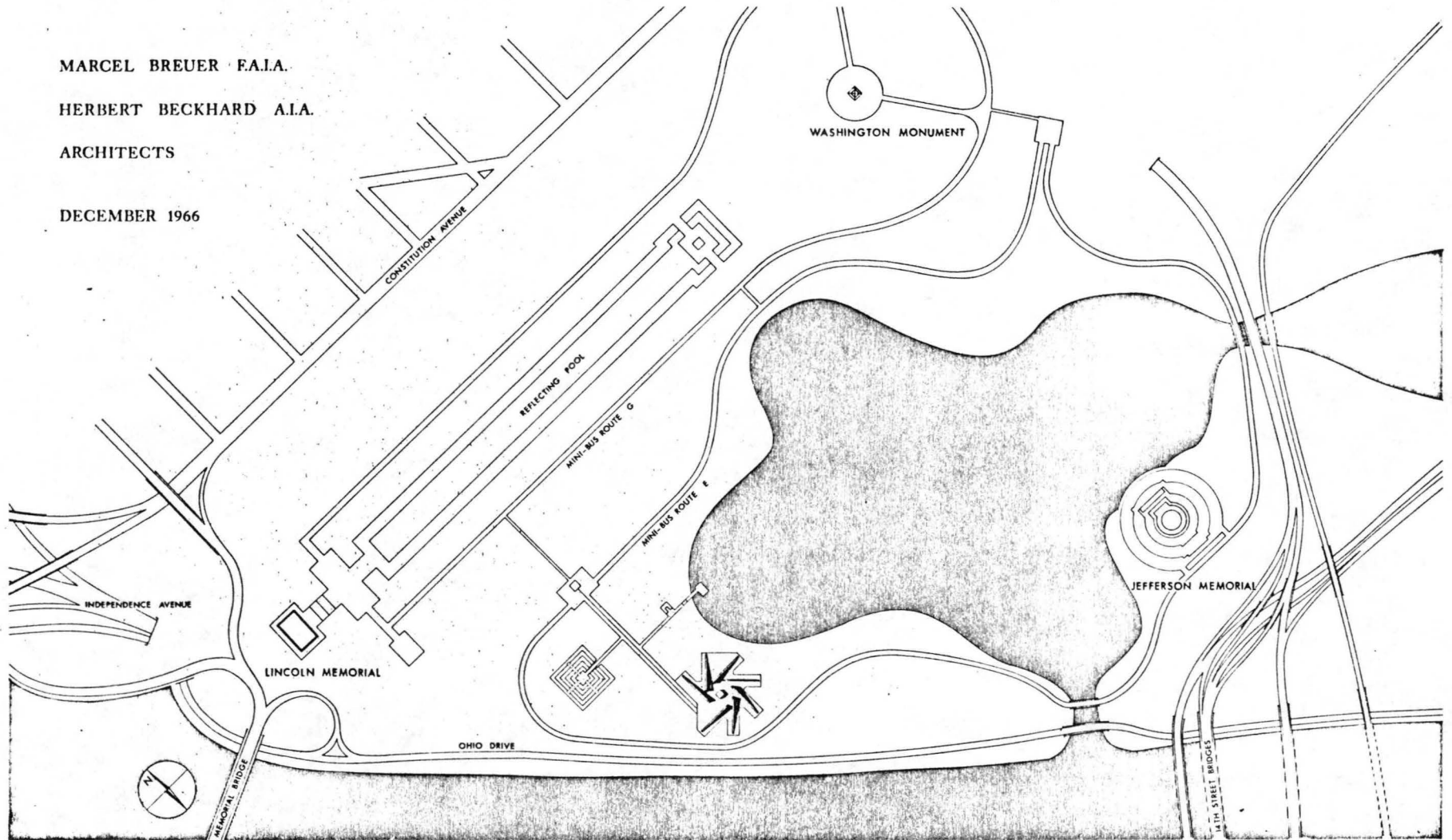
The Breuer Design
Detail with Portrait Stone

6. The Breuer Design (Site Development)

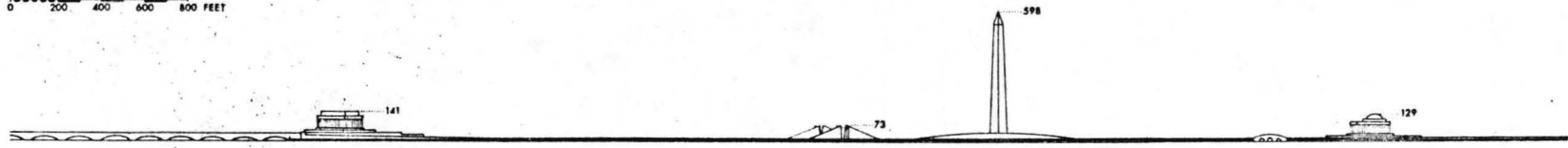
(Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission)

MARCEL BREUER F.A.I.A.
HERBERT BECKHARD A.I.A.
ARCHITECTS

DECEMBER 1966



0 200 400 600 800 FEET



FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL

7. The Roosevelt Stone

(Courtesy National Park Service)

