

# COMMON Ground

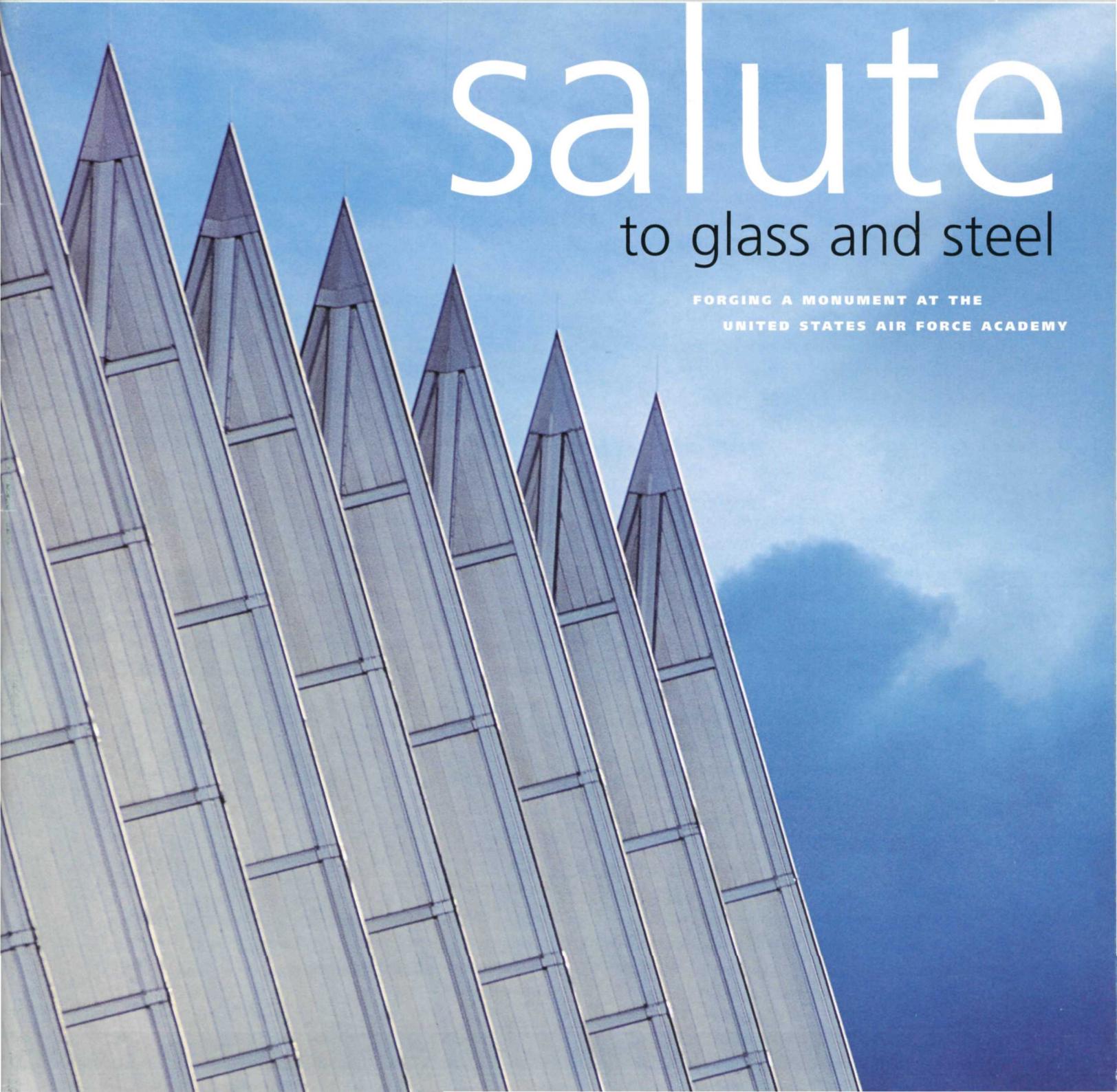


PRESERVING OUR NATION'S HERITAGE SPRING 2005

# salute

to glass and steel

FORGING A MONUMENT AT THE  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY



| BY CRAIG MANSON |

*The following is adapted from Judge Manson's April 2004 remarks honoring the United States Air Force Academy's 50th anniversary and designation as a national historic landmark.*

**NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS** are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. They are extraordinary places that have meaning to all Americans. The Air Force Academy joins fewer than 2,500 other historic places bearing this special designation. **AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR**, I oversee the National Park Service, which is responsible for the National Historic Landmarks Program. As an academy graduate, and former faculty member who served in the regular Air Force, the Air Force Reserve, and the Air National Guard, I am particularly thrilled about the honor bestowed on this institution on its 50th anniversary. **THE NOTION THAT THERE SHOULD BE** a school to train the professional warriors of air power took hold almost immediately after the military significance of the airplane was understood. Other nations moved quickly to establish such institutions. France, Greece, even Turkey, were all training air force officers in their own academies before there even was a United States Air Force. **AND IT WOULD BE MORE THAN** half a century after that day at Kitty Hawk before Congress authorized the creation of the United States Air Force Academy. Then-Secretary of the Air Force Harold Talbot appointed a commission to select a site. The commission considered 580 locations in 45 different states before finally recommending 3 to the Secretary, including a site along the Rampart Range. It is fitting that an institution that represents America's highest values and America's greatest strengths should be situated in one of America's greatest naturally beautiful places. **THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDINGS** by architects Louis Skidmore, Nathaniel Owings, and John Merrill provoked controversy and outrage at the time. Walter Netsch's 17-spire chapel design was denounced in Congress as sacrilegious and offensive. Why 17 spires it was asked? Well, every cadet learned the answer to that. Twelve for the apostles and five for the chiefs of staff! **AND YET CONSTRUCTION PROCEEDED** and was completed in about three years at a cost of less than \$150 million. Imagine that for a major military construction project! **OF COURSE WHAT MAKES THIS SITE EXCEPTIONAL** is not just the

buildings but what they represent. Heritage. Tradition. Given meaning through ever-upward progress in defense of American values. American military air and space power exercised in defense of freedom around the world. The American commitment to win the war on terrorism and defeat terrorism throughout the world. That's what these buildings represent. That's what the people who pass through these buildings represent. They are the history of America in the latter half of the 20th century, and in the 21st century and beyond. History is too important to be left to historians. History is about all of us and therefore belongs to all of us. **FOR ME, THE YEAR 1954 HOLDS PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE.** The year the Air Force Academy was born was the year I was born. It was also the year that on May 17th the United States Supreme Court declared "... we find the doctrine of separate but equal has no place in public education." The case of *Brown*

**Walter Netsch's 17-spire chapel design was denounced in Congress as sacrilegious and offensive. Why 17 spires it was asked? Well, every cadet learned the answer to that. Twelve for the apostles and five for the chiefs of staff!**

*v. Board of Education* defined the world in which I and my generation, and the Air Force Academy itself, would grow up. **WE KNOW AND HONOR CERTAIN NAMES** in the history of the Air Force Academy but we must not fail to recognize that the history of this institution is also shaped by the names of people that will never go on buildings or be mentioned in heritage programs. **VISITING THIS REGION LATE IN THE 19TH CENTURY**, Katharine Lee Bates wrote in one stanza of her famous poem—

O beautiful for heroes prov'd  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved  
And mercy more than life.  
  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And every gain divine.

**THIS WAS A PRESCIENT HOMAGE** to the men and women whose commitments to America led them as cadets, faculty, and staff here to the beginning of the long blue line, here to America's Air Force Academy.

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**Above:** Pablita Velarde painted scenes of Pueblo life for New Mexico's Bandelier National Monument.

**Cover:** The late afternoon sun washes over the spires of the cadet chapel at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

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Icon of modernism, artifact of the Cold War, the U.S. Air Force Academy in now a national historic landmark.

BY DAVID ANDREWS

# OUTPOST RECLAIMED

## Civil War "Gibraltar" Begins Restoration

Among the most remote national parks, Dry Tortugas is a speck in the sea 68 miles west of the Florida Keys. Visitors have to go out of their way to get here, making the trek by ferry or seaplane. One would think the place a virtual unknown in the 19th century, but the tiny archipelago loomed large in the minds of American strategic thinkers.

It is the site of one of the largest Civil War-era coastal forts in the United States, built in 1846 to protect the southern approaches to the coast. Known as "the Gibraltar of the Gulf," Fort Jefferson was a military marvel. It boasted 16 million bricks, covering 23 acres, with a parade ground the size of Yankee Stadium. But 150 years of exposure have taken their toll, and the National Park Service has embarked on the first phase of a six-year, \$18-million restoration.

"Deterioration is exponential out here," says Ross Hunt, an exhibit specialist with the park. "There are tens of thousands of square feet of repointing that need to be done."

According to a report by the historic architecture firm Lord, Aeck & Sargent, hired to draw up a restoration strategy, Fort Jefferson was "a physical manifestation of the United States' response to the geopolitical atmos-

**UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GENERAL JOSEPH TOTTEN, CHIEF OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, THE SIX-SIDED FORTRESS SHOWCASED THE LATEST IN MASONRY TECHNOLOGY AND FORTIFICATION-BUILDING.** MARY CATHERINE MARTIN, A PRESERVATION ARCHITECT WITH LORD, AECK & SARGENT, DESCRIBES TOTTEN AS "A MORTAR FIEND" WHO FOUND THE ULTIMATE OUTLET FOR HIS PASSION—MASONRY CONSTRUCTION.

phere of the mid-19th century." Fraying relations with Mexico and a strong French, British, and Spanish presence in the Caribbean prompted the fort's construction. The location was critical, since whoever controlled the archipelago controlled shipping lanes to the mouth of the Mississippi River, through the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Straits.

Under the direction of General Joseph Totten, chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, the six-sided fortress showcased the latest in masonry technology and fortification-building. Mary Catherine Martin, a preservation architect with Lord, Aeck & Sargent, describes Totten as "a mortar fiend" who found the ultimate outlet for his passion—masonry construction. "The lengths to which the American military went to develop these technologies was really extraordinary," she says.

Much of the deterioration stems from a Totten invention: large, cast-iron shutters intended to blow open when the guns fired, then slam shut again. Rusting iron, says Hunt, "can expand anywhere from six to ten times [its] original size." As the ironwork supporting the shutters corrodes and expands, it destroys the surrounding brick.

Last summer, says Hunt, Lord, Aeck & Sargent took a section of the fort walls as a preservation test case, to "learn all the problems we might encounter in stabilization." As a result, the firm recommended mortar with a traditional cement called Rosendale to stabilize the wall.

Rosendale was practically out of use by the 1930s, replaced by stronger, faster-curing varieties. It's perfect here because it sets up in wet conditions. Most of the original mortar has held up remarkably well, aside from the damage around the shutters and the inevitable erosion.

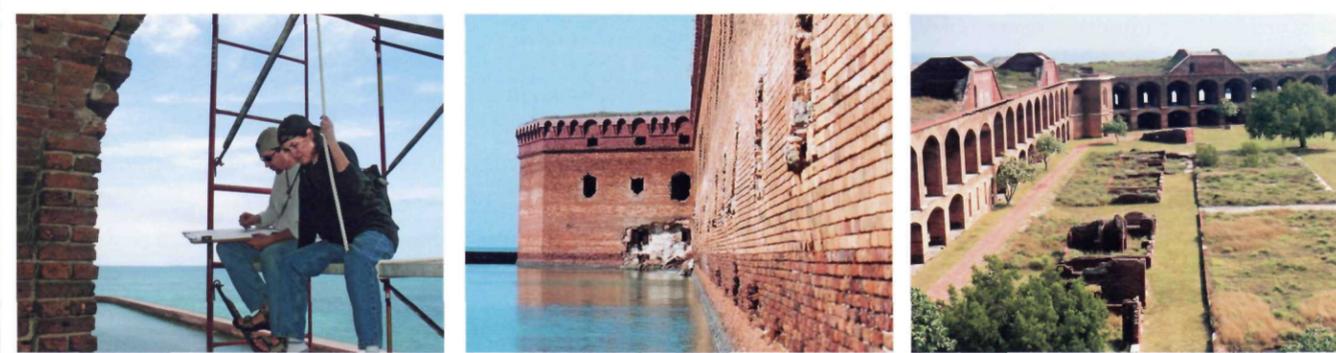
For many years, the outpost awaited an invasion that never came. The advent of the rifled cannon, which could pierce its walls, eventually put the fort out of business. A prison during the Civil War, the place was used sporadically into the early 20th century until it was abandoned about 1916.

Fort Jefferson remains open so intrepid visitors can witness the work.

For more information, contact Rick Cook, Everglades National Park, Public Affairs Office, 40001 State Road 9336, Homestead, FL 33034, (305) 242-7714, email [rick\\_cook@nps.gov](mailto:rick_cook@nps.gov), [www.nps.gov/drto](http://www.nps.gov/drto).



ALL PHOTOS: LORD, AECK & SARGENT



Above: Views of Fort Jefferson and technicians assessing its condition.

# RED LIGHT RETROSPECTIVE

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF SEWARD'S VICE AND VIRTUE

It was the end of the line in more ways than one. Seward, Alaska, at the close of the 19th century was a remote, rough-around-the-edges seaport freshly hewn from the wilderness. When Congress authorized a new railroad in 1914, Seward was the terminus. As a tide of merchants, sailors, railroad men, soldiers, and miners came and went, the unpaved streets and wooden sidewalks teemed with commerce of all kinds.



Above left: Seward's "Millionaire's Row," an upper and middle class neighborhood. Above: Irene Nussbaum, former lady of the evening, around 1953. Right: Houses along a Seward creek.

Now a study by the National Park Service—which sheds light on activities in a waterfront alley known as the Line—offers a fascinating portrait of morality on the frontier. The research was prompted by a plan for a visitor center where a cluster of tiny houses once served as Seward's red light district from 1914 to 1954. Today, the city is the gateway to the popular tourist destinations of Kenai Fjords National Park and Chugach National Forest.

Constructing the center—a joint National Park Service-U.S. Forest Service project—meant examining the site's history in accordance with federal preservation law. While the archeologists and historians did their part, a team of ethnographers went out into the community and, in the words of anthropologist Rachel Mason of the National Park Service, "tapped the collective memory."

**A PICTURE EMERGED OF AN AMBIVALENT COEXISTENCE** between vice and virtue. Prostitution, though frowned on in principle, was tolerated—even thought practical—in reality. At a time when many American cities were trying to close their red light districts, Seward took a different path. Prostitution, though technically illegal, was restricted to the houses along the waterfront, and informally regulated. The town collected modest "fines," essentially a business tax on the madams.

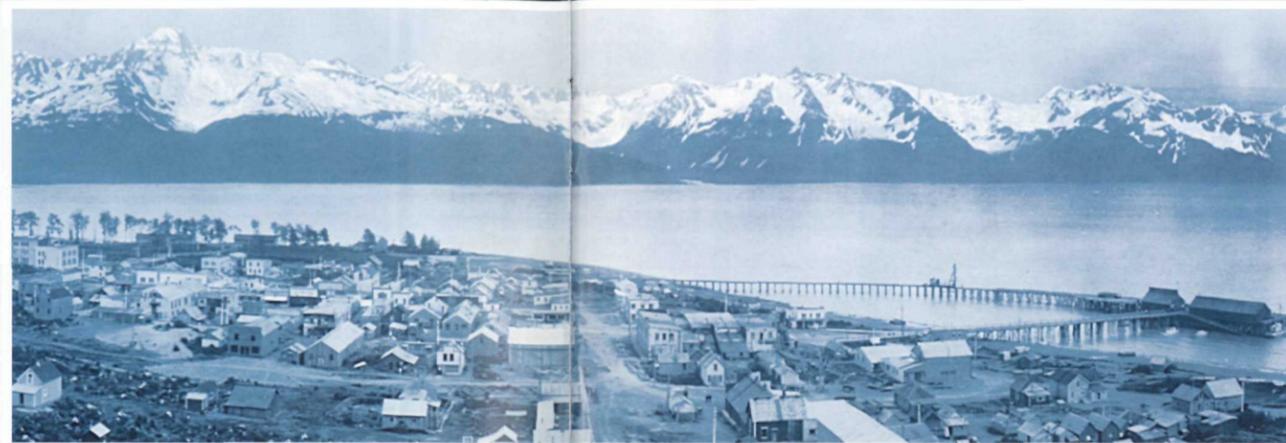
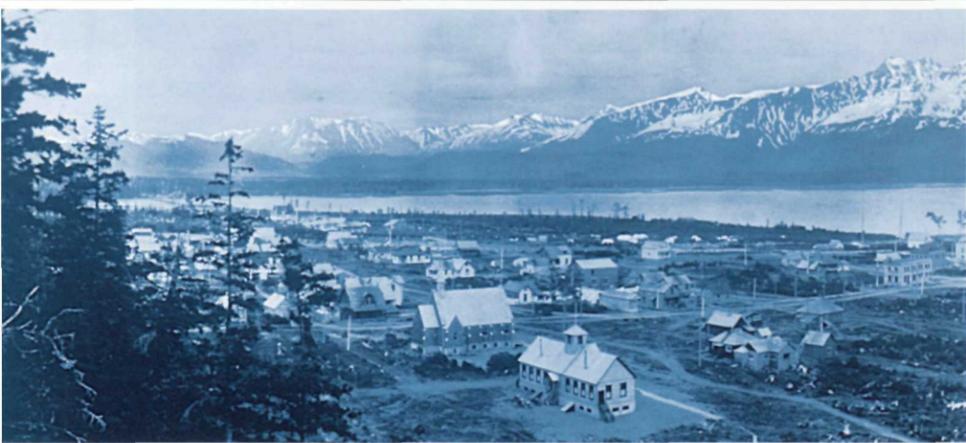
A relationship evolved between the prostitutes and "respectable" society. The women of the Line, voluntarily segregated, restricted their trips to

**AT A TIME WHEN MANY AMERICAN CITIES WERE TRYING TO CLOSE THEIR RED LIGHT DISTRICTS, SEWARD TOOK A DIFFERENT PATH.** PROSTITUTION, THOUGH TECHNICALLY ILLEGAL, WAS RESTRICTED TO THE HOUSES ALONG THE WATERFRONT, AND INFORMALLY REGULATED.

town to certain hours. But they were as much a part of the community as the other institutions. One Seward resident doubts that there were any businesses without financial ties to the women. "They were where you went to get money when the banks [wouldn't loan it]. A big share of the old madams all dabbled in real estate . . . [Prostitution] didn't have the dirty name it's got now."

**RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT THE SOCIAL BARRIER** between the women and the town was not a rigid one. Prostitutes were not allowed in bars, but for many years, the Line was the only place to get a drink after one in the morning. They did business with the locals, were punctual about their bills, and—often sporting the latest New York styles—gave local





Above: A panoramic view of Seward in 1915, about the time of the arrival of the railroad. Right: Hauling lumber by dog sled. Seward's red light district thrived thanks to the flood of workers brought in by rail.

women makeup tips. Accountants did their taxes; shopkeepers delivered their groceries. Some opened roadhouses and cafes; others invested in fishing boats.

It remained, however, a relationship of convenience. There was money to be had here, which allowed the Line to stay in business and reap the added benefit of sparing local women the advances of sailors and railroad workers.

Researchers discovered a simple hierarchy among the denizens of the Line—madams and the women who worked for them. Pimps were not tolerated. The red light district was a group of businesses run by women. Status among prostitutes reflected Alaska's class structure at the time in that divisions were not binding. A woman could move up by marrying and moving on, or leave prostitution altogether by way of a successful business venture.

**IN ADDITION TO INTERVIEWS, RESEARCHERS SOUGHT OUT** court records, city ordinances, newspapers, and other documents. *The Orderly Disorderly House*, an autobiography by Carol Erwin—who had a long career running brothels, including one in Seward—offered telling details, as did *Seward, Alaska: The Sinful Town on Resurrection Bay*, an account of bootlegging and prostitution by local John Paulsteiner. Residents weren't pleased with his exposure of Seward's indiscretions. Nevertheless, *The Sinful Town* captures the "practical, relaxed quality" of life on the street, researchers say. For the researchers, the most vivid pictures of the Line came from seemingly mundane details that interviewees recalled from long ago: bicycling past the alley, walking one of the madam's dogs, or the fancy pastries the women had delivered from the bakery.

Business on the Line boomed with the military's arrival in World War II, but it was the beginning of the end. With an outbreak of venereal disease in 1944, the Army demanded a shutdown, which fired public protest. There are varying accounts of what ultimately brought the Line to an end. Some residents believed that Alaska was



**RESEARCHERS DISCOVERED A SIMPLE HIERARCHY AMONG THE DENIZENS OF THE LINE—MADAMS AND THE WOMEN WHO WORKED FOR THEM. PIMPS WERE NOT TOLERATED. THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT WAS A GROUP OF BUSINESSES RUN BY WOMEN.** STATUS AMONG PROSTITUTES REFLECTED ALASKA'S CLASS STRUCTURE AT THE TIME IN THAT DIVISIONS WERE NOT BINDING. A WOMAN COULD MOVE UP BY MARRYING AND MOVING ON, OR LEAVE PROSTITUTION ALTOGETHER BY WAY OF A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS VENTURE.

required to close its red light districts as a condition of statehood. Yet as late as 1950, a Boy Scout troop picking up trash was warned not to go down the alley. Most residents remember that by the mid-'50s the Line had closed for good.

Mason describes the era of Seward's red light district as one of "hardboiled innocence." Though the community did not approve of the women, it nonetheless developed customs to accommodate their presence.

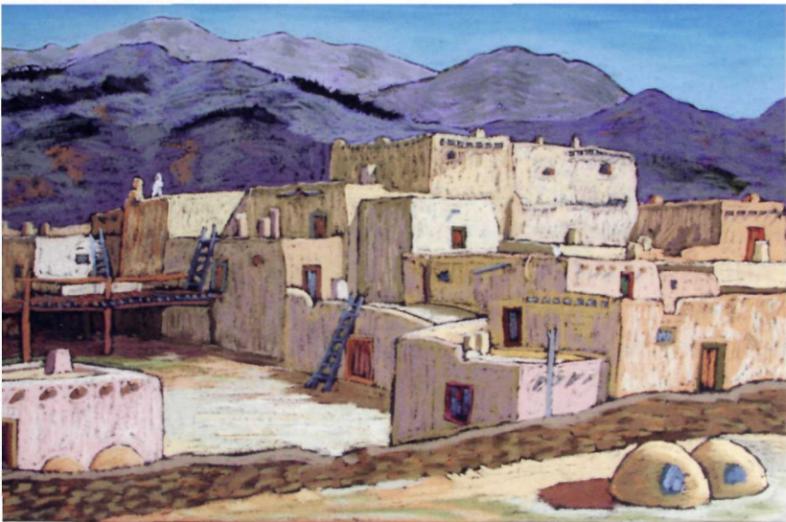
The days of the waterfront alley may be long gone, but the study provides a picture of a place and time that might otherwise have been lost to history.

For more information, contact Rachel Mason, National Park Service, Alaska Region, 240 West 5th Avenue, Room 114, Anchorage, AK 99501, (907) 644-3472, email [rachel\\_mason@nps.gov](mailto:rachel_mason@nps.gov)

# IMAGINING BANDELIER

WEB EXHIBIT ILLUSTRATES TRANSFORMATION FROM PLACE TO SYMBOL AND LEGEND

The ancestral Pueblo people left this canyon retreat over 400 years ago. Today, with its crumbled walls and remains of empty villages, Bandelier is one of the Southwest's most powerful reminders of native America. The New Mexico monument, established in 1916 to preserve the ancient dwellings, may strike some as a profound expression of antiquity and absence. In spite of the centuries, however, Bandelier's legacy remains very much alive, embraced by the modern Pueblo people.



BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

Proclaimed an archeological wonder when first seen by outsiders, the monument found expression in the arts as well, and its meaning continues to evolve. Bandelier's collections illustrate the transformation from place to symbol and legend.

To celebrate this heritage, the Museum Management Program of the National Park Service has produced an online exhibit featuring archeological artifacts, work by modern-day Pueblo artists, paintings, tinwork, and woodwork. With these objects as the feature's highlight, the exhibit looks at the past, present, and future of a national treasure—and a people.

"The grandest thing I ever saw," anthropologist Adolph Bandelier said when he arrived in 1880. The place has fascinated scholars ever since. With perhaps the highest density of archeological sites in the National Park System, Bandelier's 33,727 acres are rich with research potential.

The items left by the ancestral Pueblo people—who lived here from about A.D. 1150 to 1550—are at the core of the collection. Pottery was both an indispensable tool and highly developed craft. Over time, the fired clay took on elaborate forms, "read" today according to design, shape, and

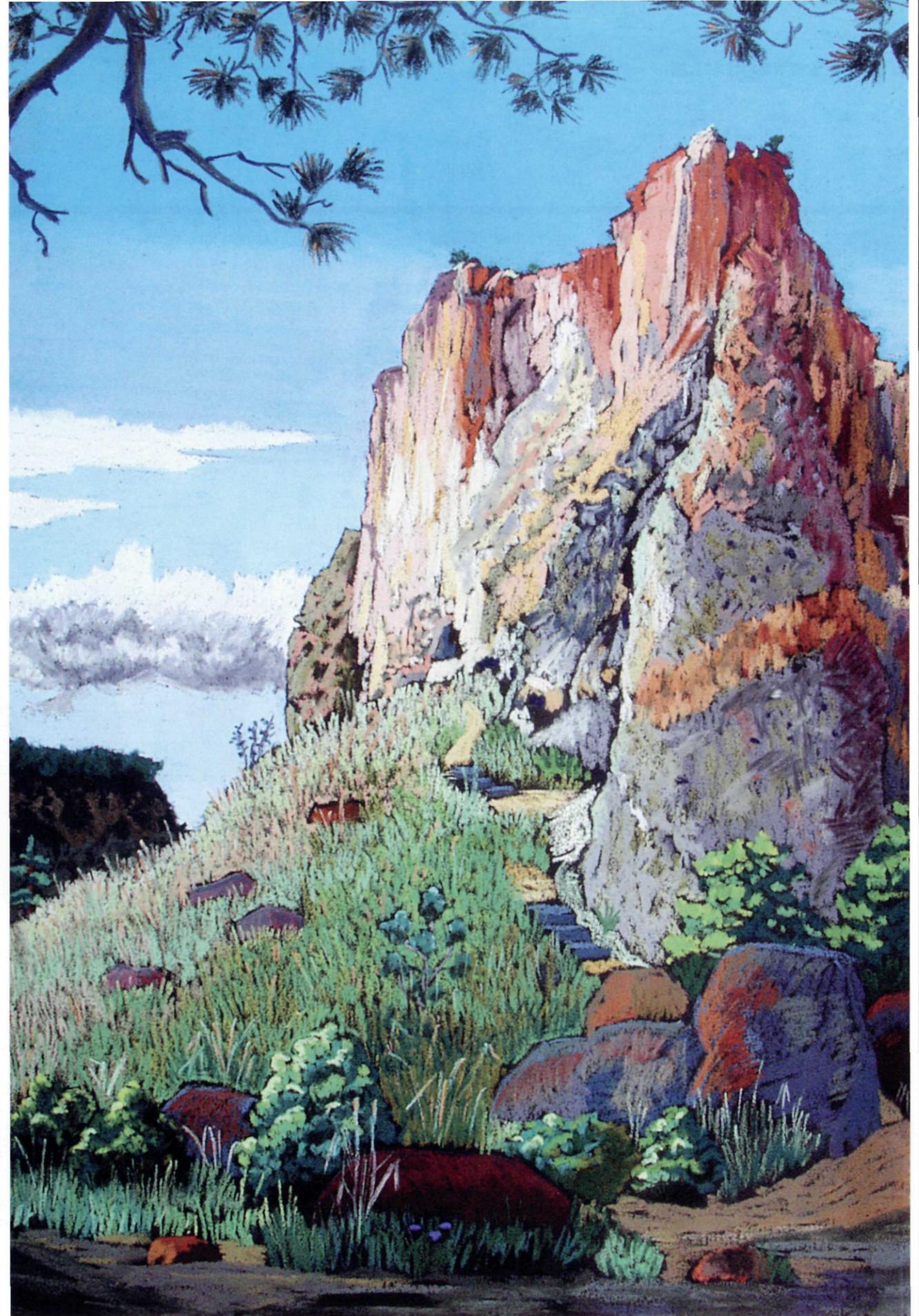
composition, traits that trace a timeline of ancestral Pueblo life. Simple, gray-hued shapes gave way to smooth, polished, sometimes finely rendered bowls, animal figurines, and the like. Still used for cooking, carrying water, and storing grain, the objects began to transcend function, as groups forged signature styles.

**Above left: Pueblo scene by Helmuth Naumer, Sr. Above: Park administration buildings, circa 1935. Right: Naumer's rendition of Bandelier's Frijoles Canyon.**

Everyday items—ancient corncobs, projectile points—flesh out the picture of a thriving desert community, evidence of how people moved through the region trading goods and interacting.

Viewers can take side tours of the archeology, delve into the history of the pottery, or follow links to information on Pueblo style architecture and rock art. The exhibit also looks at how the pottery was made, a process largely unchanged in 2,000 years. An archeological timeline explores settlement and cultural patterns.

ALL PHOTOS: KHALED BASSIM/WPS MUSEUM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM/BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT EXCEPT AS NOTED





**PABLITA VELARDE, A NATIVE OF SANTA CLARA PUEBLO, ILLUSTRATED CONTEMPORARY CUSTOMS, CEREMONIES, AND DETAILS. FROM 1937 TO 1943, SHE PRODUCED MORE THAN 70 PAINTINGS.** OF THE WORK PABLITA SAID, "I FIGURE I'VE LEARNED MORE ABOUT MY OWN PEOPLE . . . AND I APPRECIATE WHAT THE OLD ONES HAVE TRIED TO PASS ON."

**BANDELIER'S RESIDENTS LEFT THE CANYON TO SETTLE ALONG THE RIO GRANDE.** Yet today, many aspects of the culture—notably pottery—continue to thrive among their descendants, most of whom live within 80 miles of the monument. Pottery making had fallen into decline by the early 1900s, but around that time, tourists and artists began flocking here by rail. Before long, the craft was revived.

The exhibit spotlights the work of 20th-century artists such as Maria Martinez, a potter from nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo whose pieces were featured at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. Four years later, archeologist Edgar Lee Hewett, excavating at Bandelier, asked Maria to reproduce some pottery he'd found. An admirer of her sensibilities, Hewett helped to sell the work.

Maria, working with her husband Julian, developed a distinctive pottery known as blackware by smothering the fire used to make the vessels and reducing the oxygen in the process. The final product bore a matte-on-black finish, a style that is more popular than ever today.

Maria and Julian invigorated the revival, creating opportunities for other native artisans, some who also drew acclaim, and the tradition is still strong. Maria passed away in 1980, one of the great modern Pueblo potters, her work seen in museums and galleries around the world.

**DURING THE DEPRESSION, A FORMATIVE CHAPTER IN BANDELIER'S HISTORY,** the government hired two painters to depict Pueblo life and Bandelier's landscape. Pablita Velarde, a native of Santa Clara Pueblo, illustrated contemporary customs, ceremonies, and details. From 1937 to 1943, she produced more than 70 paintings. Of the work Pablita said, "I figure I've learned more about my own people . . . and I appreciate what the old ones have tried to pass on."

Pablita's Bandelier paintings are casein—a material derived from milk—applied to Masonite and glass. Later in her career, she made paints of ground soil and rocks to make earth tones. Though her people told her that art wasn't a suitable job for women, Pablita persevered, opening the possibilities for other Pueblo artists.

Helmuth Naumer, Sr., a German native, was lured to the Southwest by the cowboy novels he'd read as a child. His luminous pastels capture "the fleeting effects of [New Mexico's] sky and water . . . for there are hundreds of different colors and shades." Naumer's renderings depict the mountains, mesas, and windswept spaces of the monument and surrounding areas.

Left: Pueblo artist Pablita Velarde's depiction of traditional basket making.



Bowl made by ancestral Pueblo people featuring rare image of human hands.



A vessel bearing the characteristics of Cochiti Pueblo, made sometime in the first part of the 20th century.



Pueblo blackware, part of the crafts resurgence in the early 1900s.

**AROUND THIS SAME TIME, BANDELIER SWELLED WITH THE RANKS OF THE NEWLY FORMED CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS.**

Much of the Corps' work—planting trees and building roads, dams, and trails—was in the national parks.

Hundreds of workers came to toil for a dollar a day. "They did all the conservation work in the archeological sites," says Bandelier archeologist Rory Gauthier. "They also constructed a remarkable complex of buildings, later recognized as perhaps the premier monument to the CCC."

Room, board, and training were a big draw. Workers opened access to Frijoles Canyon, previously reachable only by horse or on foot. At the base of the canyon, they built the visitor center, lodge, and other buildings, renowned today as some of the best examples of a style called Pueblo Revival. Lyle Bennett—a National Park Service architect who sought to harmonize the complex with the mesas and cliff dwellings—used local stone to provide visual unity. Plastered portals and flagstone walkways contribute to the effect.

To give the feel of an old New Mexico village, Bennett included round beams projecting from exterior walls, heavy wooden doors, hewn timber lintels, and plaster with an aged patina. The 31 well-preserved specimens are among the finest of the time—astonishing in that they are federal buildings in a remote canyon. The complex is a national historic landmark.

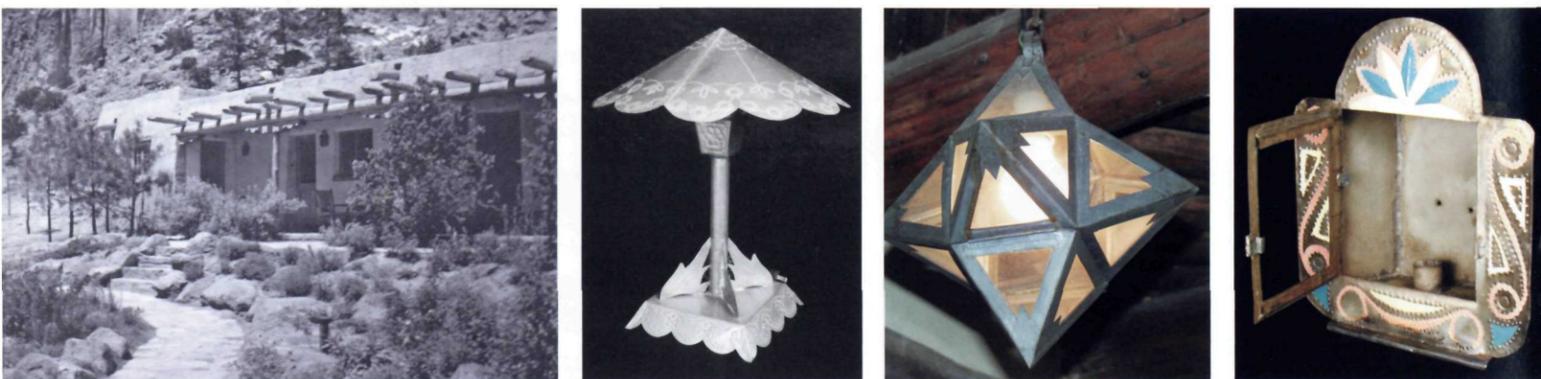
The exhibit examines a wealth of items made by the young CCC enrollees, who were taught on site by older, skilled craftsmen. The tinwork looked back to a New Mexico tradition that reached its peak in the 1850s, an incidental effect of the Army's presence at the time, the military's discarded cans providing a wealth of previously scarce raw material for local artisans. The tinwork was revived in chandeliers, wall sconces, and mirror frames, intricate attractions in and of themselves.

Designs were sketched on paper first, for use as a blueprint by carpenters, tinsmiths, and others. Southwestern motifs adorned woodwork, bed frames, dressers, stools, and moldings—alive with sunbursts, curves, rosettes, and other regional details. The CCC handiwork, which enlivened the visitor center, lodge, and other buildings, is still visible to the public today.

Bringing this remarkable story to the web showcases the little-known riches of a place known mostly for its beautiful landscapes and ancestral Pueblo sites.

The exhibit is at [www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits). For more on the Bandelier collection, contact Gary Roybal, Museum Technician, Bandelier National Monument, HCR1, Box 1, Suite 15, Los Alamos, NM 87544, (505) 672-3861, ext. 544, email [gary\\_roybal@nps.gov](mailto:gary_roybal@nps.gov), or go to the park on the web at [www.nps.gov/band](http://www.nps.gov/band).

**THE TINWORK LOOKED BACK TO A NEW MEXICO TRADITION THAT REACHED ITS PEAK IN THE 1850S, AN INCIDENTAL EFFECT OF THE ARMY'S PRESENCE AT THE TIME, THE MILITARY'S DISCARDED CANS PROVIDING A WEALTH OF PREVIOUSLY SCARCE RAW MATERIAL FOR LOCAL ARTISANS. THE TINWORK WAS REVIVED IN CHANDELIERS, WALL SCONCES, AND MIRROR FRAMES, INTRICATE ATTRACTIONS IN AND OF THEMSELVES.**



BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

**Above: Pueblo Revival park buildings and a collection of lamps displaying the ornate tinwork of CCC artisans.**



**Right: One of the more elaborate pieces from the CCC era at Bandelier, a hanging lamp with pierced and stamped tinwork.**

Reversing Decades of Decay in a Wright Masterwork

Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House—built in 1910 for a bicycle manufacturer—was a stunning leap from Victorian to modern. It is the only one of Wright's designs whose demolition he fought to prevent.

Though designated a national historic landmark in 1963, decay and neglect had taken their toll and, by 1999, the house was at the point of structural compromise. Now, thanks in part to a grant from the National Park Service-administered Save America's Treasures program, visitors will experience the place as Frederick C. Robie did.

The grant—to help repair a badly deteriorated roof, probably the greatest threat—is part of a 10-year, \$8 million restoration organized by the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust.

The University of Chicago owns the house, which leases it to the trust, the site manager. The trust raises funds, oversees restoration, and runs the house as a museum.

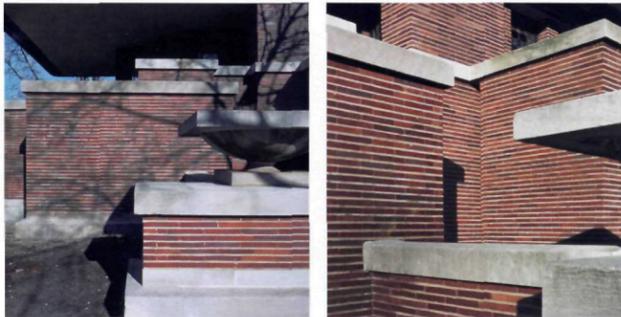
Characterized by a series of overlapping planes—echoing the flat midwestern landscape—the Robie house recedes from the street in stages. The effect, common in Wright's work, particularly suited a client who wanted privacy.

The flat roof exacerbated what the grant application called “substantial and pervasive” water damage. “We had major problems,” says house manager Janet Van Delft. Ice dams in the gutters were particularly destructive. Water worked its way under the roof shingles and penetrated the

The most pressing threat eliminated, the next step is restoring the interior. Once the money is raised, conservators will begin restoring original fixtures, built-in furnishings, and other details.

During the restoration, the house has been open to the 30,000 visitors who annually admire a design that revolutionized domestic architecture, presaging styles later in the century.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the state of Illinois, the Pritzker Foundation, and numerous others also donated funds for the restoration.



CHARACTERIZED BY A SERIES OF OVERLAPPING PLANES—ECHOING THE FLAT MIDWESTERN LANDSCAPE—THE ROBIE HOUSE RECEDES FROM THE STREET IN STAGES. THE EFFECT, COMMON IN WRIGHT'S WORK, PARTICULARLY SUITED A CLIENT WHO WANTED PRIVACY.

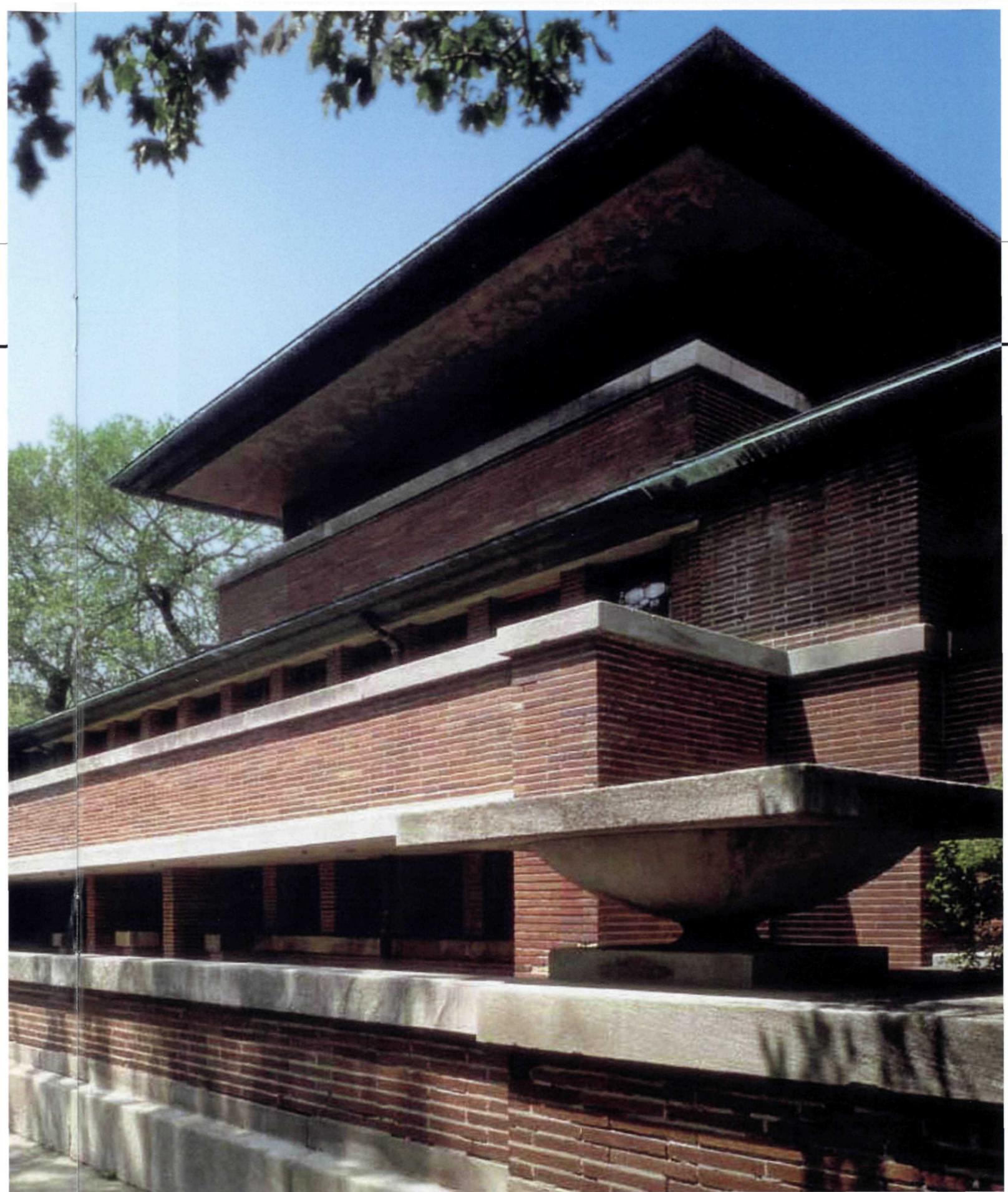
Above: Intersecting planes. Right: Receding from the street to claim a sense of privacy.

interior, threatening plaster, molding, doors, windows, and 174 panels of art glass. Water coursed down the exterior walls and damaged the brickwork.

Work began in spring 2002 following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation, a condition of the grant. Crews repaired termite and water damage to the roof framing and reinforced the steel members that were part of the original construction. They installed a modern waterproof membrane beneath new, historically accurate clay shingles, some of which had to be custom made. Plaster soffits were repaired and painted the original ochre, a copper exterior cornice was restored, chimneys were repointed, and the attic got a new ventilation system.

ALL PHOTOS FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT PRESERVATION TRUST

For more information, contact Suzie Gerow, Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust, 931 Chicago Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302, (708) 848-1976, email [info@wright-plus.org](mailto:info@wright-plus.org), [www.wrightplus.org/robiehouse/restoration/restoration.html](http://www.wrightplus.org/robiehouse/restoration/restoration.html).





ALL PHOTOS DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

# coal town. revival

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A PRESERVE AMERICA AWARD-WINNER—PENNSYLVANIA'S LACKAWANNA VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN COSGROVE PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ANDREWS

John Cosgrove—at the time of this interview the head of northeastern Pennsylvania's Lackawanna Valley National Heritage Area—has recently gone on to bigger things as executive director of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas. Here he reflects on what made Lackawanna one of the first winners of the Preserve America awards.

*Left: At the Anthracite Heritage Museum, a miner greets visitors who descend 300 feet below the valley to glimpse a bygone way of life.*

**Q:** What are the pressing issues today in the Lackawanna Valley?

**A:** About three years ago, we were surprised to learn how little we knew our own story. And we thought, we've got to start this at home, because we found that too many residents actually believed the definition given to us by other people—that we're a tired old coal town whose best days are over.

So we started the Heritage Valley Ambassadors Program. We take about 15 or 20 people every month and give them, for lack of a better description, a whole day of the place.

**Q:** Who are the ambassadors?

**A:** They're from all walks of life. College deans and front-line people from the hospitality industry. Students and teachers. Community activists and retirees. Museum docents and members of the historical society. Convenience store clerks and government officials. Anybody who would benefit from learning the story so they can tell it and retell it as a point of pride. And the beauty of it is how the groups are mixed. Each group suggests the next, so the sphere of influence grows.

Have you seen the *New York Times* piece called "36 Hours"? It's a regular feature. They send a reporter to a travel destination without any warning ahead of time. So the reporter pulls up to our gleaming historic hotel, whose whole staff had gone through the program, from the front desk person to the catering guy. And boom, we get a great article.

How many people came here because of it? Who knows? But we have a saying around here, "Once we get you, you're got."

**Q:** How do you work with the school system?

**A:** We have a number of committees—the Education Alliance, the Environmental Alliance. We also have a trail management committee, an environmental fair advisory board. All of this falls under what we call strategic engagement with the public.

I get into trouble with the staff because I say we have the easiest jobs in northeastern Pennsylvania. All we do is facilitate. We get people around the table and keep them there. We all have the same goal, how to tell this story creatively.

We've done big projects like a documentary and smaller things like the Heritage Valley Station Stops, with Steamtown National Historic Site. We took a locomotive with about 300 tourists up the spine of the heritage area, up to the top of the valley, stopping in communities along the way. The tourists got off for up to three hours of sidewalk sales, art exhibits, chicken barbecues. Incredibly successful.

We're constantly trying to make people aware that we're the center of the universe. The coolest part is going right into the classrooms. We've captured the next generation so we don't have to fight this fight again.

**Q:** You have lesson plans?

**A:** We have curriculum guides for everything we do. I get laughed at because I say if it would help we'd do a curriculum guide for the parking lot. The documentary was created in chapters so it could be taught in the schools. It was nominated for an Emmy.

**Q:** The schools picked it up?

**A:** We work with three districts that cover, not just our area, but also the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area. So, between here and Philadelphia, almost the whole coal corridor. In a perfect world, we could reach 200,000 students.

We also did a book version of the documentary.



**Q:** How do you work in terms of revitalizing main streets and neighborhoods?

**A:** The heritage area is made up of a number of what we call valley towns. The first thing we did was heritage development plans for a good number of them. We took a grassroots philosophy. You've got to get buy-in first. You can fake it for a while, but it's not sustainable. It just isn't.

With any project we hope, long term, to be taken for granted. We hope that it becomes so ingrained in the community that we're out of the picture in a short time. And remarkably, we usually are. In five years, I can't think of a single project that hasn't been sustained.

And that includes the big projects like our trail. Our original idea was 40 miles, mostly along the river through the heritage area. Now Delaware & Lehigh south of us are working on a 60-mile segment. So eventually we'll have 100 miles of hiking, biking, and walking. And then



*Left: Use expired, the tools that built a nation litter the grounds of the Anthracite Heritage Museum.*

*We took a locomotive with about 300 tourists up the spine of the heritage area, up to the top of the valley, stopping in communities along the way. The tourists got off for up to three hours of sidewalk sales, art exhibits, chicken barbecues. Incredibly successful.*

there are the smaller projects like the station stops. We pay for the expensive part, the design and some of the materials. But the communities build them, sometimes with volunteer labor.

And it's amazing how the towns all arrived at the same theme—the people who came before us.

My wife calls me a font of useless information. I'm going to tell you why. Between 1892 and 1930, 20 million people came to the United States, from 36 countries around the world—the Italians, the eastern Europeans, the Welsh. Waves of people.

This weekend or next, we're opening a play called "Under The Lackawanna Moon" in the Dunmore Cemetery. It's all about the people buried there. We have 55 students in the play, which isn't by accident. If you want an audience, put lots of kids in.

**Q:** What about individual renovation projects?

**A:** We work one step up from that, on master plans. If the community wants to do individual projects, we help find the resources.

**Q:** You've got an internal audience with the locals and an external audience with the tourists. Do you measure how well you're doing?

**A:** We do. Who's our market? Here we are in northeastern Pennsylvania. Seventy million people can have breakfast in their kitchens and be here by lunch.

Most of the anthracite went to New York or Philadelphia. We haven't moved since. And we're within five hours of Boston and Washington, D.C. Plus all the communities between here and Pittsburgh.

The state tells us that tourism in this county accounts for about \$600 million every year; that translates to about 10,000 jobs.

As a destination, we still have a lot to do. But people are discovering us.

Why come to a dirty old coal town? Because of the impact we had on the state and the nation and the world. And because of our assets—community life, quality of life, strategic location.

Community life, that sounds mushy. But corporations have a top ten list of attributes, and we consistently have eight of them. Safe, affordable, great cultural amenities, great recreation. We have a brand new conference center—a historic hotel that

was going to be demolished 20 years ago. All we had to do was hose it down. Inside are these ravishing marble mosaics.

**Q:** What's Scranton's economic temperature these days?

**A:** We're losing population. But we're new at redefining ourselves. All the secondary indicators show real promise—attendance at museums, downtown economic development, neighborhood revitalization.

The greatest hope is the train link, a serious effort to reestablish passenger service to New York City. With all the tragedies of 9/11, the major financial industries are developing back offices as a contingency. We're 90 miles from Manhattan as the crow flies. Imagine high-speed rail. Pennsylvania's tracks are done; it's in New Jersey's hands now.

Ten years ago, we didn't have the infrastructure to handle it. It would have been a disaster. That's all changed.

**Q:** You got some headlines when a national park—Steamtown National Historic Site—opened in the middle of downtown Scranton.

**A:** Yes, we were *Newsweek's* biggest pork barrel project. Yet one man's pork barrel is another man's economic development.



*Above, right: Steamtown National Historic Site melds stories of trains and coal.*

*Who's our market? Here we are in northeastern Pennsylvania. Seventy million people can have breakfast in their kitchens and be here by lunch . . . The state tells us that tourism in this county accounts for about \$600 million every year; that translates to about 10,000 jobs.*



*Left: Survivors from Scranton's gothic golden age.*

When you have a national park literally the epicenter of a \$600 million annual business, you lead with that story. People will say, "Hey, that was a pretty wise investment." Annual expenditures at Steamtown are \$2 million. For a \$600 million return.

What sets our heritage area apart is that the National Park Service is the obvious leader. But we get 180,000 people here every year, and they don't just stay inside the park.

Steamtown isn't just about interpreting trains. Ours is a nationally important story. The park blends trains and coal in creative ways. The tourist locomotive used to run above the valley. Well, the park worked with us on the valley stops. Now, interpreters on the train tell the stories of the boroughs too.

**Q:** How do you work with the environmental folks?

**A:** Probably our most active partner is the Lackawanna River Corridor Association, a 30-plus-year nonprofit that has done a spectacular job.

In our industrial past, the Lackawanna was a sewer, with all the waste running down and into the Chesapeake. When I was a kid, we lived across the street from the river and the railroad tracks. My parents would say, "Don't go near the river and don't go near the tracks. And if you have to choose between the two, play on the tracks."

I remember—we called them rotten-egg mornings. You'd walk to school in between the smell of the river and the smell of the culm—the waste product of the anthracite. This was the commercially unviable stuff that the young boys—they called them breaker boys—picked out. For 15 hours a day. The mines dumped it in huge piles all over the place.



*Above: Signs of life—a sparkling facade looks down on passers-by a stone's throw from Steamtown National Historic Site in downtown Scranton. The edifice was being restored when this photograph was taken in January.*

I pronounce it like a local, “cull-um.” Your heritage doesn’t dissipate in a generation or two. But the story we tell doesn’t focus on the product or the machines. It focuses on the people.

**Q:** You have oral history programs?

**A:** All of our marketing material focuses on the “they.” “They” came here to build a new life and ended up building a new nation.

We don’t ignore the textiles and the coal and the trains, because people come here for that. But we say, “Somebody had to go down in the ground. Somebody had to forge the iron. Somebody had to run the mill.”

If you focus on the people, you connect with all the visitors whose families did this work. I mean, many of us are their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren. We all came from someplace else to make a better life. That’s the story. The courage and the commitment and the focus and the resilience. And we’re finding in anecdotal ways that we’re making that connection.

For every ambassadors program that we do, at least half the people have a story like, “I remember my grandfather sitting in the living-room chair just coughing and coughing and coughing.”

We do a project called Portraits From Life, commissioning an artist and a writer to sit with a senior. Ordinary people with extraordinary stories, people who wouldn’t typically sit for a portrait. One was a woman who worked at Scranton Lace for 59 years.

Scranton Lace mostly hired young single women, developing the workforce from within. These women would work 12 hours a day, go home, get dressed, and come back for dances and social hours. It was a city within a city, with swimming pools, bowling alleys, clubs.

Anyway, this woman never married because the company frowned on it. But she said she was engaged for 40 years. You know, patience, resilience, commitment . . .

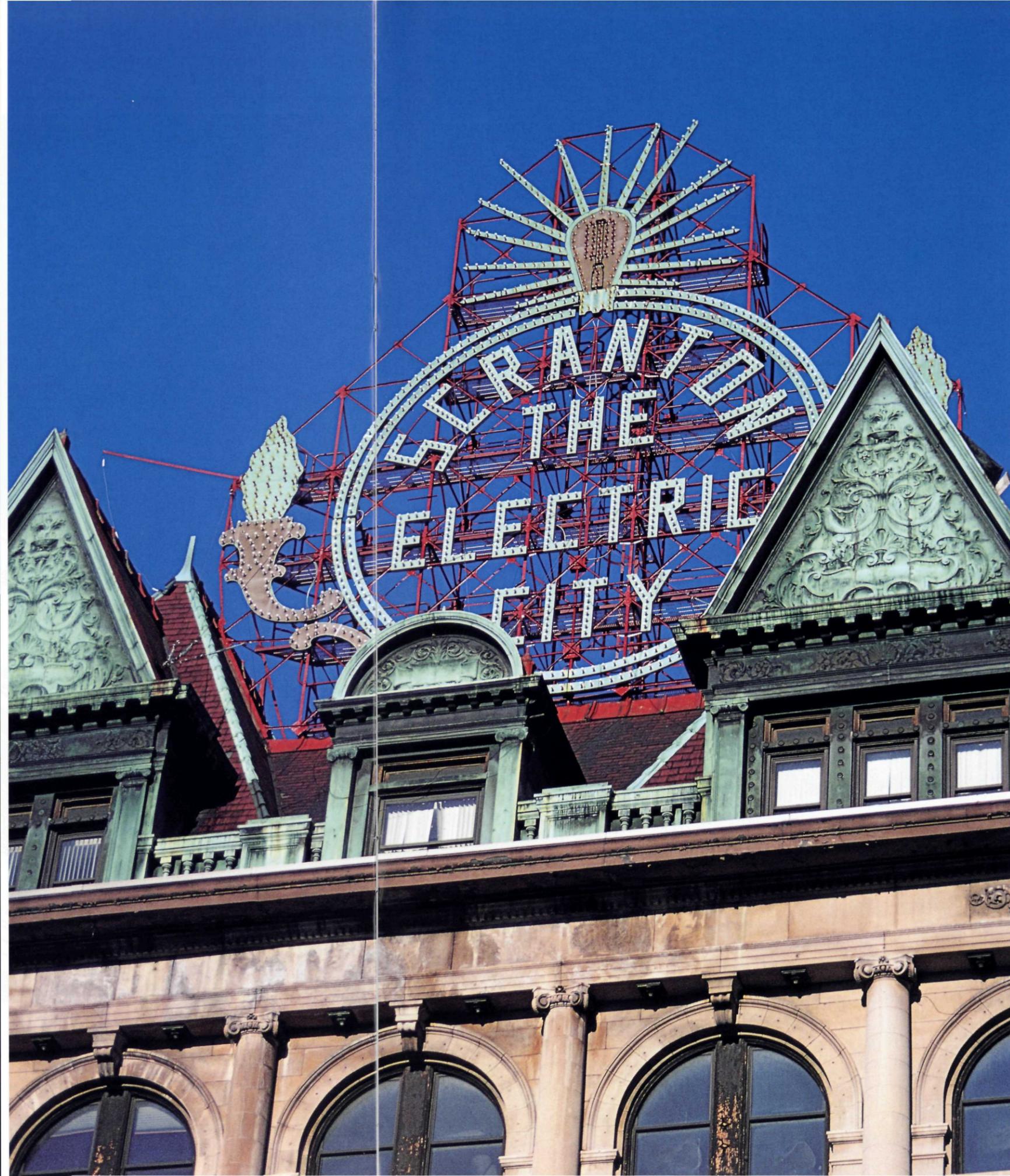
**Q:** Is there a tourism message for the granola crowd?

**A:** There really isn’t. We incorporate our story into theirs. You pitch the river as this once horribly polluted waterway and now it has top-grade trout fishing. That piques people’s interest.

**Q:** How do you bring the locals into the process? What if someone says “not in my back yard” to one of your proposals?

**A:** We engage early and listen. We let people know we’re not going to do eminent domain. We say, “If you don’t want that trail, we’ll realign it.”

My staffers would roll their eyes at this. But our harshest trait here in coal country is pathological modesty. We don’t blow our horn. The Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island—they’re symbols of opportunity, but this is where the opportunity happened. This is where you came to stand next to an eight-zillion-degree furnace or go 300 feet underground to get a better life.



*Left: A reminder of Scranton’s heyday, aglow on a winter’s afternoon, will light up the night in a few hours.*

*My staffers would roll their eyes at this. But our harshest trait here in coal country is pathological modesty. We don't blow our horn. The Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island—they're symbols of opportunity, but this is where the opportunity happened. This is where you came to stand next to an eight-zillion-degree furnace or go 300 feet underground to get a better life.*

But our modesty told us, don't call attention. It didn't matter how horribly the coal companies treated you. It didn't matter how discriminating they were. It didn't matter how unsafe the work was. It's better than whence you came. Don't make waves. Put your head down and work.

That doesn't go away in a generation or two. Growing up, if I admired myself in any way, if I said, "Gee, this tie looks great," my grandmother would say, "Tis yourself that knows it." Who likes a braggart? But when it starts to hold you back, you have to question it.

Look at the D-Day anniversary. These men in their twilight saying, "Ah, it wasn't a big deal. We just did it." Sixty years to build a monument because they didn't want it.

Modesty is important, but not when you're talking about the future of your community. We've got a vital story to tell.

Another way that we engage is a monthly breakfast called the Heritage Valley Roundtable. And the purpose is this: "For the love of Pete, talk to each other." Because that wasn't really happening.

**Q:** Who came up with the idea?

**A:** This one we didn't steal; we came up with it ourselves. It was born of my frustration with the modesty thing. The documentary was the first product to come out of it.

And I said, "I don't want another video that winds up on the shelf. I want a top-of-the-line product. And I want to focus on the people."

We worked with these terrific local filmmakers. They found footage at the National Archives that nobody here knew existed. Mine-safety films. A cave-in. They researched the heck out of the 1902 United Mine Workers strike, which stopped the country. Teddy Roosevelt had to call in a commission to arbitrate, the first time a President intervened in a labor dispute. It was of international importance.

**Q:** How did you pay for the documentary?

**A:** We put a partnership together. We worked mostly with the state heritage program, but also with businesses, foundations, educational entities.

**Right:** *The Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel, once a target for demolition, is the former headquarters of a railroad empire.*

**Q:** Did you hire a fundraiser?

**A:** No. We went off grants and begged. It took us about a year and a half to put the finances together. Meantime, the filmmakers were like cowboys. They'd say, "Well, we have enough money to film this part, let's just do it."

In the end, we shopped it to PBS. It's played, or is going to play, in 80 markets across the country.

There were two goals. Number one, we wanted to reach a national audience. We wanted the family in Oklahoma to be as interested as our own people. And number two, we wanted to teach the next generation of our own kids.

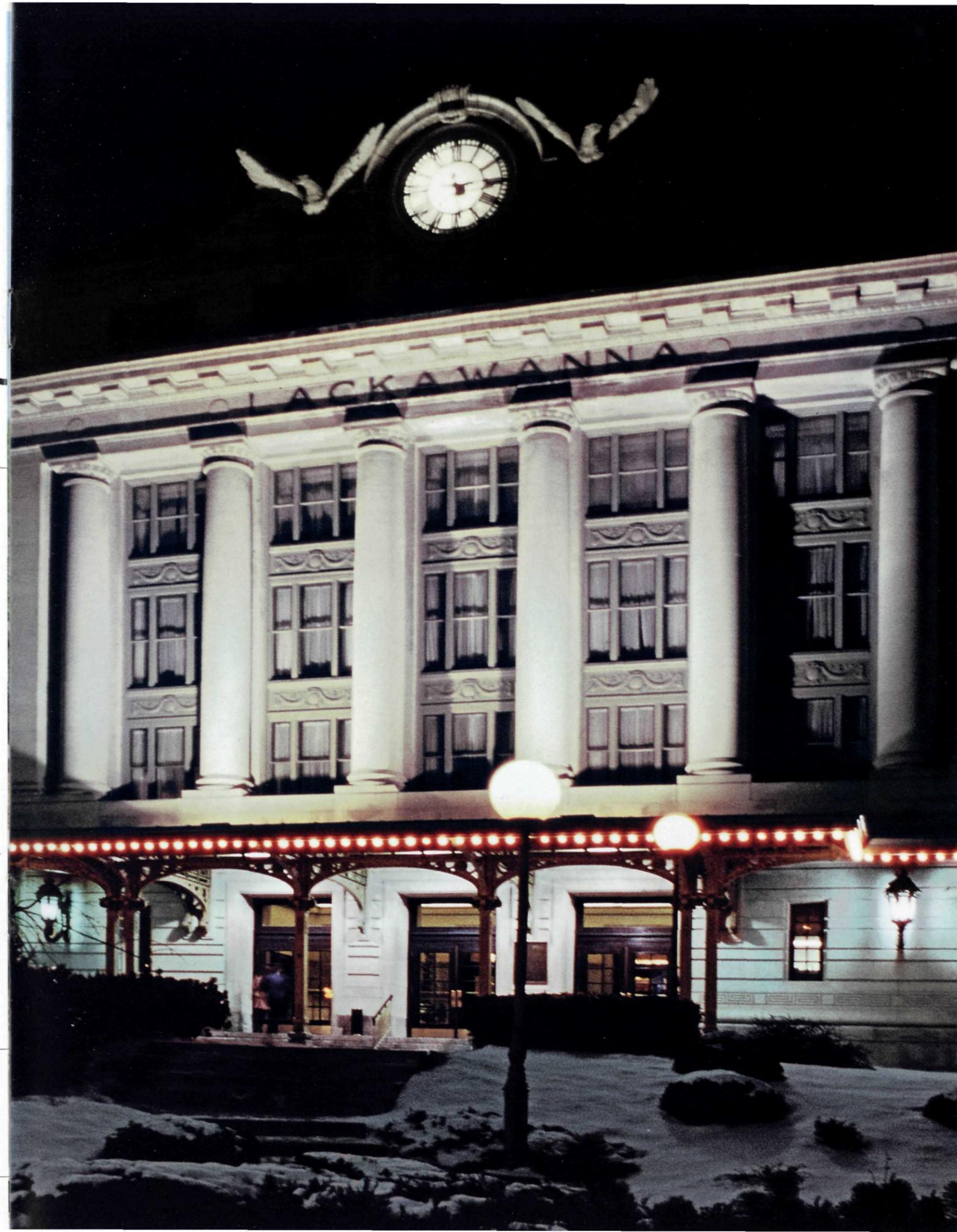
The opening was like Hollywood in Scranton, with the klieg lights and the tuxedos. The people interviewed in the film—the mineworkers, the breaker boys, a woman who lost her husband, brother, and father to the mines—they were all there but one.

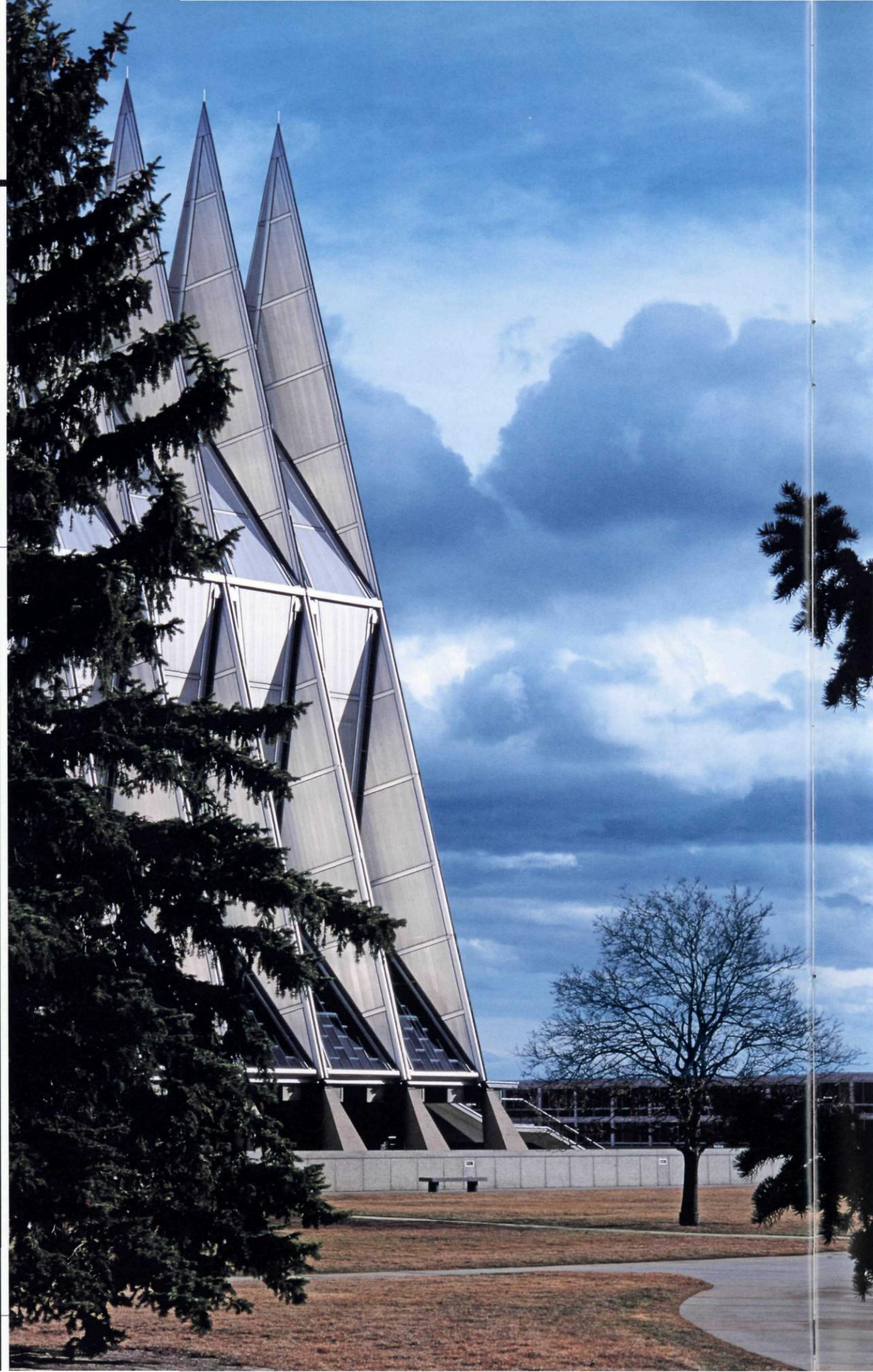
"Let's trumpet this on a national stage," I said at a roundtable meeting. You know, if John Cosgrove calls the big media saying, "This is a great story," it doesn't work. But if you've got federal partners and state partners and local partners all around the table, somebody's brother knows somebody's brother who knows somebody who will listen. And that's the way it works.

**Q:** Final words?

**A:** I believe we're poised for the next big step. We'll never be what we once were. We'll never be a center of the nation's financial universe, unless anthracite makes a comeback—we still have eight billion tons under us. We've got to depend on other things like quality of life. And the absolute most important part—the core characteristics of the people who came here 100 years ago.

For more information, contact the Lackawanna Valley National Heritage Area, 1300 Old Plank Road, Mayfield, PA 18433, (570) 963-6730, [www.LHVA.org](http://www.LHVA.org). Contact John Cosgrove at [anhac@adelphia.net](mailto:anhac@adelphia.net).





ALL PHOTOS DAVID ANDREWS/NIPS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ANDREWS

# SALUTE TO GLASS AND STEEL

THE RISING SUN LIGHTS UP THE RAMPART RANGE, high on a mesa 10 miles out of Colorado Springs. Clouds billow over the ridges, like fingers emerging from the flanks. To the east, the undulating plains stretch to infinity. The mountains are so near you feel their grandeur, their shadows a soft caress as dusk closes in.

IT'S THE IDEAL PLACE FOR AN "AIR-AGE ACROPOLIS," as *Architectural Forum* called it. Here, "on a base scaled to rival the grandest pedestals of antiquity," young men trained to command satellite squadrons and rocket fleets, the weapons of the Cold War.

THE HEART OF THE COMPLEX—the cadet campus—hugs the hillsides, demurring to the magnificent landscape. At night, the low-slung rectilinear forms—clad in steel, aluminum, white marble, and above all glass—glow with soft incandescence.

## **FORGING A MONUMENT AT THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

**Left:** The cadet chapel. Effused the *New York Herald Tribune* on the academy plan's unveiling: "Just as West Point, with its medieval fortress-like appearance, symbolizes the traditions of land warfare, so does the sharplined and soaring Air Force Academy represent the newest and swiftest military science."

The sweeping horizontals, and the insistent presence of sky and space, do not so much suggest flight as evoke it, says Kristen Schaffer in *Modernism at Mid-Century: The Architecture of the United States Air Force Academy*. “The eye rushes along the façade . . . faster and faster eastward until the pavement falls away, while the eye continues, out over the parade ground below and, ultimately, off the end of the mesa and eastward into the distance . . . On sunny days the expanse is exhilarating; on windy, snowy ones, even in the discomfort, there is a sense of triumph.”

Yet what the eye beholds depends on the beholder. “Many similar buildings were put up about that time, not very good ones,” graduate and former superintendent Lieutenant General Bradley Hosmer tells Duane Boyle—the current chief architect—in *Modernism at Mid-Century*. “Many people associate this style with a cheap mass-produced artifact. [Today] most of that lousy stuff . . . has fallen of its own

The academy—now a national historic landmark, recognized for its role in military history and aviation as well as architecture—may be the zenith of postwar minimalism. Still, the symbolism is baroque, and sometimes open to interpretation. To an extent, that’s probably a product of architects having to represent a broad constituency, and themselves, in abstract form. And everyone, it seemed, wanted in on the action.

**IT WAS A COMPLEX TIME, AS AN ASCENDANT SUPERPOWER SOUGHT** symbols for a technological era. The academy had to stand for both the nation and a new wing of the military.

The institution’s visibility, here and abroad, made it a lightning rod for debate. In the vortex was the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

“Just who was our client?” ruminates co-founder Nathaniel Owings in his autobiography. “By definition this at times could and did include every official with any opinion . . . There were the President of the United States, 12 to 14 members of the cabinet, some 96 members of the Senate at the time, 435 members of the House, the bureaucracy of the armed forces with special emphasis on the secretary of the air force, the undersecretary, and the generals.”

Add to that the lobbying legions—like scorned competitor Frank Lloyd Wright. Pontificating before a congressional committee, he dubbed the design a “factory for birdmen.” The firm slogged through, its nature helping navigate the challenge. And even land the contract.



**Lesson in air power** Teaching guide looks at the academy and its times

Cold War geopolitics, strategic air power, and aviation history come together in an online lesson plan—the latest in the National Park Service Teaching with Historic Places series. **The United States Air Force Academy: Founding a Proud Tradition** helps students understand how fast-developing aviation technology changed military thinking in the quest to contain Communism, accelerated by the founding of the Air Force in 1947. The lesson

looks at how the academy’s design and symbolism reflect this context—and how Annapolis and West Point likewise recall the times of their founding. The plan, for grades 5 through 12, includes activities, readings, maps, and photographs that trace the rise of air power since World War I. Students are encouraged to interview people who remember life in the Cold War. The series now has over 100 lesson plans. **For more information, go to [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp).**

weight, and the quality construction remains.”

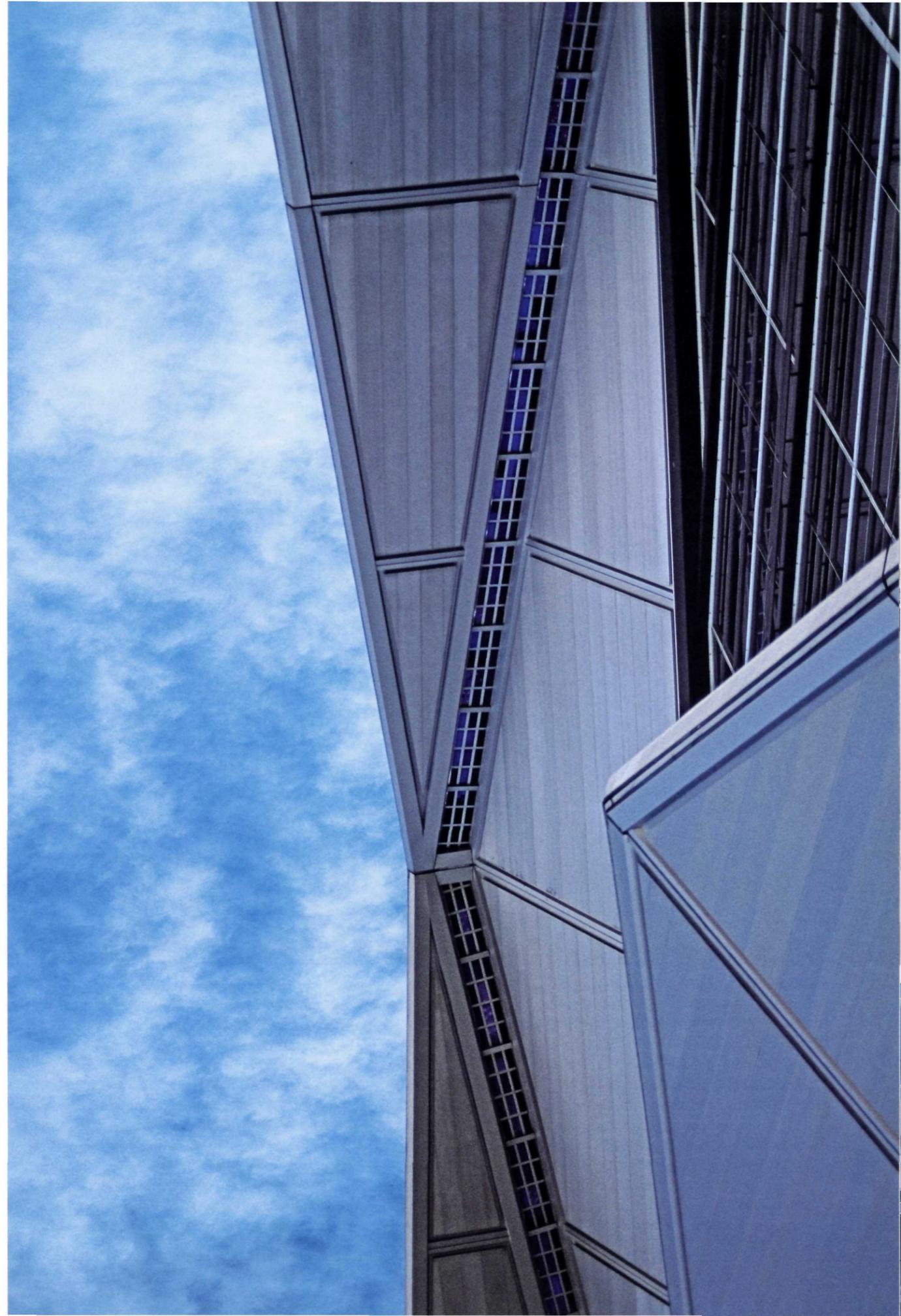
In the meantime, perceptions continue to shift, adds co-author Robert Bruegmann. “While for many visitors [the] marble lines in the [central plaza] pavement echo beautifully the controlled precision required of an Air Force pilot . . . for others they suggest the rigidity of military bureaucracies.”

**Above:** Color captures the sun’s rays; the eye escapes to nature through interstitial openings.

“SOM was so large that a bureaucracy like the Air Force could relate to them,” says Boyle. Of a breed that evolved during World War II, it was a multilayered corporation that handled siting, design, engineering—the works.

“A partner in one of these firms shared a number of attributes with a top military officer,” Bruegmann says. “Usually highly trained, he too was aware of belonging to an elite profession, one that, like the military, had a long and impressive history, and one that, again like the military, if not always appreciated or understood, at least commanded considerable prestige.”

**Right:** The chapel’s skin inflamed opponents; supporters said if cadets were to fight and die in aluminum, they could worship in it too.



**WEST POINT AND ANNAPOLIS HAD NOTHING ON THIS PLACE . . . LOOKING OUT OVER LANDFORMS RISING AND FALLING TO THE SOUTH—WITH VALLEYS IN BETWEEN**—THE SITE STOOD AT THE FOOT OF THE FRONT RANGE, A GRAND STROKE OF GEOLOGY THAT RUNS DOWN FROM CANADA FACING WHAT WAS ONCE AN INLAND SEA.

Notably, SOM used the one-stop-shop approach to erect “Atom City”—Oak Ridge, Tennessee—almost overnight. That feat was tough to match.

Out of over 300 competitors, the firm took the ring; a Wright-led consortium was runner-up.

At firms like SOM, architects were rational businessmen, not temperamental artists. At least that was the image. The goal was “anonymous architecture,” not “flashy ‘stunt’ design,” in the words of émigré Walter Gropius, an acknowledged leader in the field. Teamwork was in, the individual was out, science was in the driver’s seat—an approach Gropius pioneered at the Bauhaus as Germany rebuilt after World War I. Some believed it deprived personal credit, others that it produced lifeless work, devoid of individual genius.

At SOM, anonymous was the house style. “The firm bears its name like a trademark,” says the catalogue from the company’s exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1950. “It is like a brand name identifying its work, which is persistently characterized by the idiom of the firm rather than that of any individual within the firm.”

The International Style—glass its signature—suited the corporate landscape of the 1950s. Says Bruegmann, “In SOM’s open, transparent facades American industrialists found a perfect expression of their attempts to present a cool, technologically advanced image to the world.”



**WITH 27 SQUARE MILES, THE SITE WAS QUITE AN EXPANSIVE CANVAS.**

Architect Eero Saarinen, another finalist who joined SOM as advisor, found the future home of the cadets while developing his own proposal.

Some wanted the centerpiece down by the highway, a billboard for the academy and the Air Force. Superintendent General Harmon saw it less dramatic, tucked between ridges à la Shangri-La. Chapel architect Walter Netsch recalls that, in the end, “he was convinced that once you had a mountain site, it was foolish to cower down in the valley . . . [it] did not have, ipso facto, to be flamboyant.”

West Point and Annapolis had nothing on this place. Perched high in the northwest corner, looking out over landforms rising and falling to the south—with valleys in between—the site stood at the foot of the Front Range, a grand stroke of geology that runs down from Canada facing what was once an inland sea.

**Above:** Nature envelops the academy, sky ever-present; clever siting hides the sprawl of Colorado Springs. During the planning, Air Force generals recalled their West Point days in trying to imagine the cadet experience. Lacking firsthand knowledge of architecture and the arts, many may have preferred “a cautious, eclectic approach” of applying modern touches to a classical configuration, say Robert Bruegmann in *Modernism at Mid-Century*. At the same time, an oft-heard nugget was that “West Point has 160 years of tradition unhampered by progress.”

This was monumental from the get-go. Here the Air Force could show that it stood for the new. At the same time, the sense of place would soon sow the seeds of tradition. SOM likely saw a national stage to sweep away the styles of the past, and post its own ad, too.

Nature as counterpoint to architecture, that was the concept. The architects sought the indigenous—the expansiveness of the West, the sense of “not being confined or pushed together in an artificial little community,” says Netsch. They drew contrasts

between nature’s curves and an emphatic rectilinearity, between greenery and glass, marble, aluminum. And they brought the land right into the buildings.

From the central plaza, the spaces between structures—and over and under—frame nature peeking in from outside. A stroll is cinematic, as frames flicker with changing views of trees, scrub, slope, cloud. The idea was to “contain and release and relax within an exhilarated space [that is] an earth-bound version of the sky.”



**THE COMPLEX IS AN ICONIC DELICACY, MASSIVE AND LIGHT, OVER-SCALE FROM THE OUTSIDE AND HUMAN-SCALE FROM THE INSIDE.** THE ENSEMBLE'S BULK, NESTLED INTO THE MESA, IS CONCEALED FROM PEDESTRIANS ON THE CENTRAL PLAZA, WITH TWO FLOORS TUCKED BELOW. AND GANGING FUNCTIONS IN A FEW STRUCTURES DELIVERS MASS ENOUGH FOR A MONUMENT, YET ONE THAT KNEELS IN AWE OF THE BACKDROP.

**TODAY, THE PLACE HAS A SENSE OF INEVITABILITY.** But in early 1955, SOM had a tough sell ahead, contracting the likes of Ansel Adams and top exhibit designer Herbert Bayer to help present the plan at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, an artistic venue that would help confer validation.

Architects of spectacle, the firm knew how to put on a show, tapping formative experiences at the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibit and the 1939 World's Fair, where, says Robert Allen Nauman in *On the Wings of Modernism: The United States Air Force Academy*, the architecture "often served as large billboards, either directly or through allusion."

As the Air Force handed Nathaniel Owings \$100,000 for the exhibit, they advised him to design "for clarity and simplicity, keeping in mind always that criticism of the waste of taxpayers' funds for the presentation could easily stem from an elaborate and expensively executed affair. For example, a simple stenographed fact sheet could serve the same purposes as an expensively printed brochure." Owings suggested that Bayer design with a "monastic quality [using] clear austere backgrounds of muslin or monk's cloth with exhibits standing out starkly and simply under effective lighting."

**The architects argued against a hierarchy that bestowed size on a library versus, say, a mess hall (left) or a dorm (below). The most avant garde of the modernists decreed that "if a building were fit for its purpose and structurally sound, that was enough," says Robert Bruegmann in *Modernism at Mid-Century*. "Certainly, the palace, the church, the opera house, the museum—all of the monumental buildings that represented the control of bourgeois authority—needed to be replaced by new egalitarian monuments: the efficient factory, the communal housing block, the workers club."**

Dan Kiley, renowned landscape architect, lit up the central plaza with a glow-in-the-dark garden.

The complex is an iconic delicacy, massive and light, over-scale from the outside and human-scale from the inside. The ensemble's bulk, nestled into the mesa, is concealed from pedestrians on the central plaza, with two floors tucked below. And ganging functions in a few structures delivers mass enough for a monument, yet one that kneels in awe of the backdrop. Only the chapel, with its soaring verticals, converses with the peaks behind.

The Air Force wanted a total environment, and they got it. The airfield, the stadium, the salt-and-pepper shakers, even the cadets parading in their dress blues, slipped on the Look. The uniforms—sleek with a touch of Roman gravitas—drew cheers from the cadets, a salute to Cecil B. DeMille and his costumers. Walter Teague Associates designed the furniture and equipment—enough to cover 80 acres.

The place was a commercial for technology, pushing breakthroughs in the building arts. With all the nature afoot, the classrooms were enclosed with wall-to-wall blackboards, fostering eyes-front, no splendor to distract. Indoors, the academy abounds with small touches, mitigating the coldness for which mid-century modern is often accused.

Bruegmann says that the International Style was tailor-made for the academy. "Unlike the users of most government buildings, who could clutter up the clean lines of the buildings with inappropriate personal effects, the military could impose a discipline on the way the buildings were used. At a more basic level, moreover, one of the most important tenets of modernism was a belief that architecture could not just influence its inhabitants but could play a major role in molding individuals and society. This coincided perfectly with the idea of the military academy."



**Right: Chapel steps leading to a lower-floor "crypt" shared by Catholic and Jewish worshippers, inspired by the two-floor arrangement of Italy's Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. The top floor is for the more populous Protestants; architect Nathaniel Owings joked that they "needed those extra seventeen-and-a-half feet for a head start to heaven."**

In other words, project an illusion of economic restraint. Owings called the result "great theater."

The exhibit, says Nauman, "created a vision of an Air Force Academy based on the notion of a heroic past progressing toward a utopian and technologically determinate future. [This] allowed the viewer to engage in a psychological dialogue in which [the] conquest of the West by heroic pioneers could be metaphorically linked to the heroic achievements of a country emerging triumphant from a world war." An image recalling the Greek Acropolis—the first in a series of illustrations—set the tone. Rows of cadets in formation seemingly emerged from the mountain backdrop, marching en masse past the proposed chapel and library. Here, Nauman says, was the wedding of God, nature, and the temple of technology.

The other illustrations in the set, all superbly rendered, continued the theme. Adams chimed in with sanctified images of the landscape, God's-eye-view aerials supplied by renowned lensman William Garnett. The models, too, were from a heavenly perspective, showing the manmade nesting with nature.

SOM wanted a national run for the show, to garner support. It was not to be.

A few years earlier, this kind of fare had played pretty well at the firm's Museum of Modern Art exhibit. But that was New York City.

**THE EXHIBIT TOUR WAS MIXED AS SOM FACED CRITICS IN THE CONGRESSIONAL** hearing room. At first, Congress, well represented at the Colorado Springs opening, seemed to go along. No one expected a rubber stamp—not SOM and not the Air Force—but they were not prepared for the firestorm either.

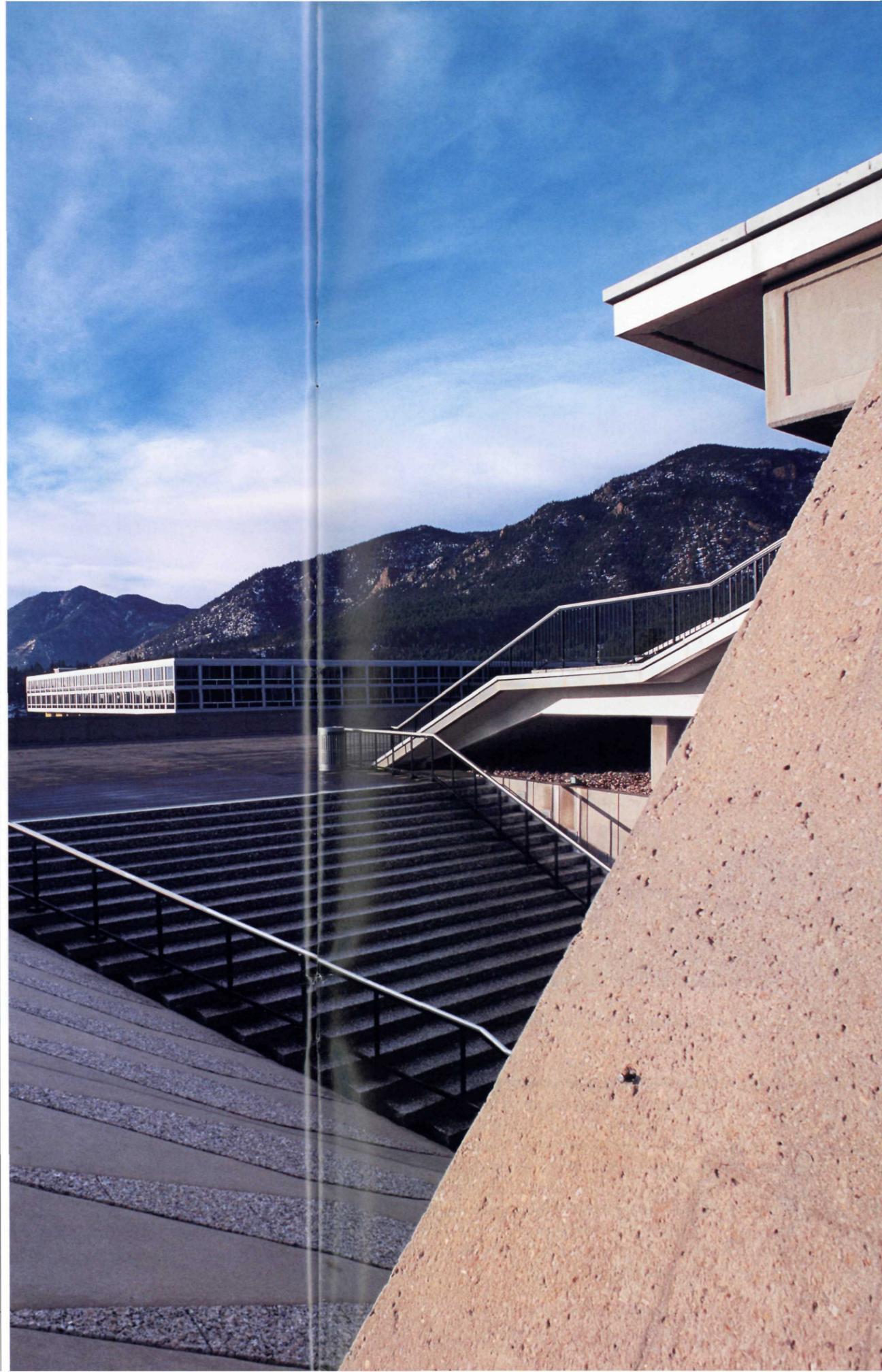
"The implication was that matters of judgment on aesthetic issues should be left to the profession itself," says Bruegmann. "The controversies surrounding the design of the academy marked a distinct escalation in the ability of the public at large to challenge the architects' assumptions and translate their views into political action."

Reviews in the media ran the gamut. The architectural press, in the throes of modernism, waxed ecstatic. The negative views, however, found a bullhorn in the hearings.

Advocates for a classical design joined forces with the masonry industry, their key spokesman Representative John Fogarty of Rhode Island, former head of a bricklayers' union. "It is difficult to find any trace of American heritage in the cold, impersonal, and mechanical appearance of these buildings," he said.

All found an ally in Frank Lloyd Wright, who sidestepped the code of architects, which frowns on criticizing others lest it look like trying to commandeer a commission. Wright ran his own plan up the flagpole.

Wright's inspirations—organic forms by way of Emerson and Whitman—colored his critique. The design was "a violation of nature," he said. "[This] is not genuine modern architecture . . . It is a glassified box on stilts which is practiced abroad and has now become fanatic with certain of our commercial architects. They are the ones that unfortunately succeed in government work. A man like myself would never be thought of in connection with a government job."



**WOULD PEOPLE SALUTE A GLASS AND METAL**

monument? That was the question.

The authoritarian visage of Albert Speer's Zeppelinfeld—immortalized by Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*—signaled that classicism was in trouble. The Soviets, after a brief flirt with modernism, also made it house style, threatening to co-opt the brand.

Monuments were by nature oppressive, said the Bauhaus. "Many modernists argued that all of the great monuments of the past, from the great pyra-

**"[THIS] IS NOT GENUINE MODERN ARCHITECTURE . . . IT IS A GLASSIFIED BOX ON STILTS WHICH IS PRACTICED ABROAD AND HAS NOW BECOME FANATIC WITH CERTAIN OF OUR COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTS. THEY ARE THE ONES THAT UNFORTUNATELY SUCCEED IN GOVERNMENT WORK. A MAN LIKE MYSELF WOULD NEVER BE THOUGHT OF IN CONNECTION WITH A GOVERNMENT JOB." —FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT**

mids to the Capitol in Washington, were symbolic expressions of power and coercion," says Bruegmann. "A true modern democratic society should [have] no need to express power and no desire to create invidious hierarchal distinctions between civic structures and housing blocks."

Most architects likely still felt the need. But how could an evanescent architecture—which aimed to topple tradition—replace palpably heavy columns, arches, and beams that recalled a mythic past? Says Bruegmann, "The idea that one could create a genuine monument, which by definition meant a structure that reflected the values of the people, in a style that was avant garde . . . must have seemed even to many modernists to be contradictory on the face of it."

SOM had already run into trouble overseas when its design for a new Munich consulate drew local fire



Owings put on a repeat performance the next day for the full committee on appropriations. Representative Whitten observed, “The pictures . . . which were presented to us before, and the pictures you have today—there is no substantial difference in general appearance?” The character of the buildings was the same, he was told.

Other members said the “new” design was a compromise between the “antiquated past and modern present.” Representative Miller asked, “Is there any place for ivy?” Owings replied, “Yes; that is one of the nicest things you can have around these things. It really warms it up.”

Congress approved funding.

**WRIGHT CONTINUED TO BLUSTER: “THE DESIGN WAS OF THE SORT** to be expected of an efficiency expert selecting efficiency-architects . . . [It] slanders the strength and beauty of the American spirit. In abstract but realistic terms it is the perfect picture of the beautiful mountain-maid betrayed by the city slicker.”

Maybe Congress had reached an impasse. Should Wright be put in charge, or would his cantankerousness combust with the bureaucracy? Perhaps modernism lacked expressive range. Was literal the answer?

The construction went forward, and today the academy survives largely intact, thanks to the perseverance of the Air Force. SOM was called in after a decades-long hiatus to draft guidelines for infill buildings; today, even the new Burger King sports the Look.

Netsch—excused from the “anonymous” dictate—came back from the continent to design the academy’s masterwork, the cadet chapel. An instant icon, its metallic majesty recalls the gothic spires of rural Europe. Some see upended fighter jets. Others see hands held upward in prayer.

Ultimately, the International Style—“as styleless as the most modern guided missile,” Owings said—waned. Even missiles are of their time. And not many years later, the memorials to Vietnam and World War II would bring an eerie replay of the academy debate.

Another century may see something different in these places. It may always depend on who’s looking.

For more information, contact Duane Boyle, Chief Architect, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO 80840, email [Duane.Boyle@USAF.af.mil](mailto:Duane.Boyle@USAF.af.mil), [www.usafa.af.mil](http://www.usafa.af.mil).

for snubbing the historic surroundings. That experience was likely still ringing in the ears of Congress when the academy plan appeared on the hearing docket.

**THANKS TO THE NEGATIVE TESTIMONY, ON JULY 14, 1955, THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE DENIED** allocations pending a revised plan. The next day, Representative Rogers of Colorado demanded an explanation, and was told the design “would appear to be an appropriate edifice for a modern factory.”

Rogers responded that the architects were busily replacing glass with stone. Colorado Representative Chenoweth added that the chapel (a prime target of ire) had already been changed. SOM, dodging the flak, tabled the chapel until project’s end, with architect Netsch dispatched on a tour of Europe’s churches.

Pressure building, and with papers like the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Denver Post* decrying the legislators’ lack of knowledge in matters architectural, hearings in the Senate reconvened July 18.

Nathaniel Owings—the firm’s most persuasive partner—took the mike. He explained the new emphasis on stone, tying into the rocky site. And he stressed the bottom line. “Architecturally we are in a modern age. Modern architecture as such has been dictated by

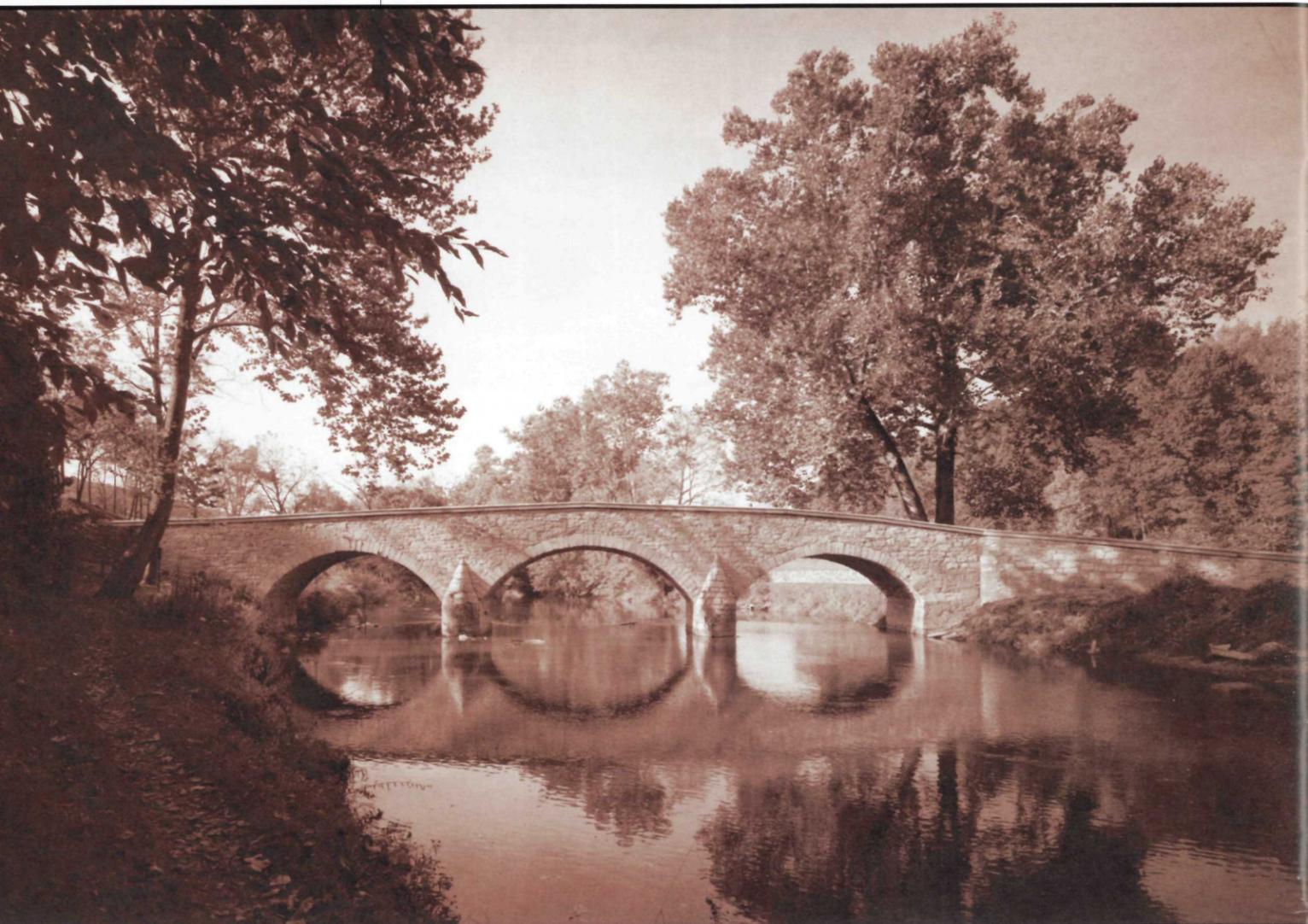
economics. If we tried to reproduce a gothic or colonial architecture, we would have to ask for almost double the appropriation.”

He brought a raft of visuals along too. Senator Ellender asked for assurance: “If any other design had been submitted, as some of us thought would be the case—perhaps a colonial style or something else—the academy would have cost a good deal more, would it not?” “Absolutely,” Owings replied.

Though the new design evidenced largely cosmetic changes—stone replacing glass—the discourse turned to how far it was to the toilets vis-à-vis West Point. The subcommittee gave its support.



**Above left:** The goal was to create “an earth-bound version of the sky,” said the architects. **Near left:** Doors of the chapel “crypt.” The academy is one of the most intact architectural ensembles of its era.



**THE WESTERN MARYLAND COUNTRYSIDE** still retains much of its rural character, its barns, bridges, and farmhouses a testament to the immigrant's dream of an American paradise. And since the 1930s, the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service has recorded Washington County in large format photographs, measured drawings, and historical reports. More than 1,500 sites have been documented, some of which no longer exist. **AN EXHIBIT OF WORK** in the area, featuring mounted photographs and drawings with descriptive text, just ended its run at Antietam National Battlefield, moving in May to the National Main Streets Conference in Baltimore, an annual meeting of local groups dedicated to revitalizing downtowns. The exhibit tells the story of the region's architecture while reflecting on times past. **MUCH OF THIS LEGACY** is preserved in the vicinity of the battlefield. The bloodiest day in American history raged around places like the idyllic Burnside Bridge, shown here, rendering the landscape indelibly somber. Many of the county's barns and houses were impromptu hospitals or headquarters during Robert E. Lee's 1862 foray into the North. **OTHER PLACES ILLUSTRATE** the farming of the time, how people lived and moved goods. The county is home to an impressive collection of arched stone bridges and "bank barns," so called because they were built into hillsides, allowing ground floor access at two levels. **IN SIMILAR PROJECTS** around the country, HABS partners with local governments and preservation groups to safeguard our invaluable architectural legacy. **FOR MORE INFORMATION** on HABS work in Maryland, contact Martin Perschler at martin\_perschler@nps.gov. To learn more about other HABS projects, go to [www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer/habs](http://www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer/habs).

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*—John Cosgrove, “Coal Town Revival,” page 18*

ABOVE: STEAMTOWN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE. DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

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