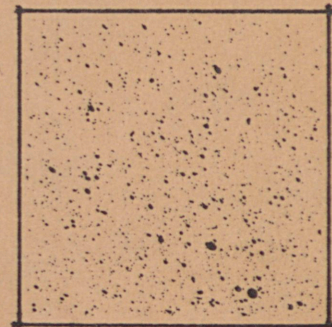


Towards
A New Regional
Architecture

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Paul Bishop

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Paul Bishop

5/30/81

TOWARDS A NEW REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

by

Paul W. Bishop

A professional paper submitted in
partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree of;

BACHELOR OF ARCHITECTURE

Approved: _____



Advisor



Chairman, Thesis Committee



Director, School of Architecture

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

5/30/81

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To:

- My parents and family
- Pat Hubbard and Rick Lee
- My Friends

the more things
change...

the more they stay
the same.

Paul Bishop Feb. 1983

this thesis I would change.

Introduction

This project began as a way for me to express the wonder and richness of experience I find in western Montana. This is a part of the world that holds a great deal of my life, that I have come to know and care for. And, as I begin to understand myself more fully, I am realizing that it is one of the most profound influences on the way I see and deal with life.

From that standpoint this thesis has developed into a personal investigation of a modern regional architecture as a way of enriching our lives with tangible meaning and re-associating us with the natural landscape in an honest and contemporary way.

This thesis was written as a progression, with each section building on its predecessor. The narrative begins with a general description of the failure of our modern lifestyle to provide for our true needs, needs that transcend what mass-produced society can give us.

This book was 'typeset' on a Remington-Rand typewriter that is easily 20 years old.

The Narrative...

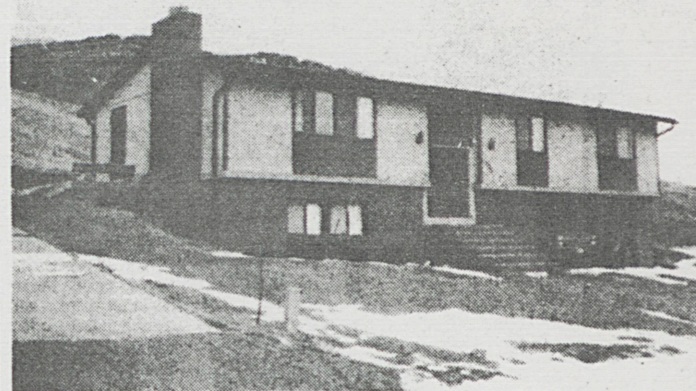
Inspiration, for me, is a very experiential and outward oriented but deeply personal thing. It is shaped by, and this thesis is meant to be an affirmation of, these basic ideas;

- that man is an undeniable part of the natural totality.
- that 'everything'; our lives, works, conceptions and the environments that shape them are tied inseparably together.
- that man's conceptions, as well as his perceptions, are deeply rooted outside himself and become internalized extensions of the environment.

These ideas shape my perceptions of what I feel to be the most pressing intellectual problem of our time; the lack of identity and meaning in the lives of industrialized peoples. Modern Man has the technical ability to insulate himself from the environmental dangers and discomforts that our ancestors lived with, but simultaneously we have insulated ourselves from the environmental character that gave them a rich and varied existence. Our modern world has been condensed and homogenized by the automobile, airplane, computer, television and thousands of other technological advances. The regional definition of our ancestors time has been broken down and the subtle nuances of natural character that gave meaning and variety to their lives are ignored as being simplistic or nostalgic and generally out of place in the pace and direction of 20th century life.

Our architecture also reflects the decline of regional individuality. The American home, the supposed fortress of personal freedom and individuality, has become a stereotyped exercise in mass conformity and cost effectiveness. As a society we have come to accept the idea that a house in Texas should logically be similar to one in Montana or that Spanish-American can be an acceptable 'style' to attach to the exterior of our homes. We wear the same clothing, drive the same cars, watch the same television programs and live in the same houses. The way we live is homogenized at a national scale. Our lives, and the mass produced goods that give them meaning, are becoming interchangeable in the best assembly-line tradition.

Looking back it seems to us that our ancestors, especially those who lived before the industrial revolution, lived a simple but rich existence. Their lives and works, often out of necessity, reflected their close contact and respect for the natural environment that surrounded them. Many people today, when contemplating the complex and depressing problems we face as a society, would like to return to those 'simpler' times, to retreat into history. But other than superficial mimicry this is impossible. The challenges we face are new and cannot be solved by old answers. "Nostalgic recreations and false copies of the past will not produce real values. Change must occur in all living things." ¹ We must remain honest to our own place in history but at the same time we can learn important methodological lessons from the past. Our ancestors lived literally immersed in the natural environment. It was the predominant influence on their lives. It gave them identity and order and they in turn gave it meaning. For modern man- with all his technological camouflage- to regain that lost natural co-existence, to



CLASS AND COMFORT

Split-entry home with 2 fireplaces and radiant ceiling heat. Main floor features 3 bedrooms, main bath, master bath, living room, dining area and large kitchen. Family room, storage and double garage in basement. Brick/cedar exterior, redwood decks on large lot. Spectacular view. 9½% annual interest loan assumable.

rediscover the self-renewing vitality of primitive cultures without reverting to their levels of ignorance and deprivation we must re-establish our physical and psychological ties to the environment. Architecturally this means that "everyone who creates a man-made environment has to find a way of fitting it into the natural world. As he looks out towards the horizon he has to find some way of relating² the environment of his own making to the bigger one that surrounds it."

Often when thinking about 'regional' architecture we imagine the grand old barns covered with grayed shingles and sun-bronzed siding, or small groups of white and red farm buildings hiding behind their shelter belts, or a modest log cabin surrounded by wooded hills. These images and preconceptions help give regional architecture the stigma of a³ "naive and rather soft-headed variation of our architectural mainstream". If these building forms do indeed relate well to their surrounding environments it is because of reasons that go beyond age, function and materials. Successful modern regional architecture, buildings with an honest relationship to the surroundings, are not derived by formula or based on copied historical styles. They are buildings that draw on the unique character of a region, the 'spirit of place', for feeling and form. This is done "by means of buildings which gather the properties of the place⁴ and bring them close to man."

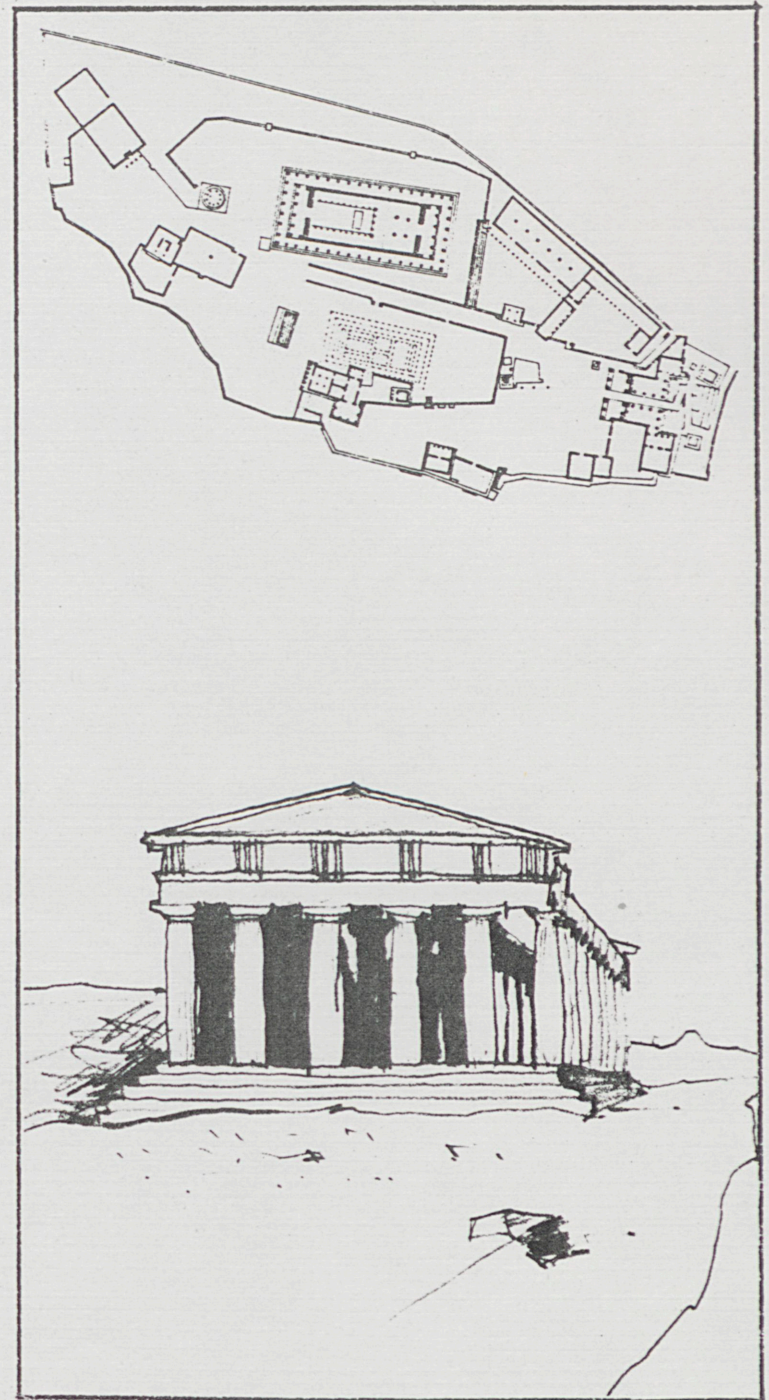
To Le Corbusier architecture was "the first manifestation of man⁵ creating his own universe, creating it in the image of nature." Not a literal image, of course, but an abstract expression of a perceptual relationship with one's environment. Perceptually we deal with an immense amount of visual information carrying complex clues to the character of our surroundings. This information is assimilated mentally by "fitting⁶ the stimulus material with visual templates of relatively simple shape."



Our minds, faced with a staggering amount of visual information seem to do this out of necessity. They "seem designed to conceptualize our existence, to make order out of the chaos of images both in memory and immediate sight."⁷ We use abstraction to 'symbolize', or manifest, the spirit of place by translating it into another medium, the built environment.

The abstraction of natural character is easily perceived in ancient Greek architecture. Their environment was composed of separate, distinct elements combined in a complex but still easily understood landscape. The clearly defined natural places, valleys, meadows, ridgelines etc. were places man could envision himself and identify with. Man became an integral but distinct element in the totality that surrounded him. The architecture of the Greeks, especially their temple buildings, is a manifestation of the natural order they perceived in their relationship with nature. The separate elements of construction, the columns, entablature etc. combined, like the distinct natural elements, into a holistic statement. Their architecture in all of its forms, buildings, walls, roadways and even the giant patterns of agriculture concretized their presence sympathetically in the natural landscape and brought it close to them. The strict geometrical order of the buildings contrasted to their topographic siting is a sophisticated statement of the intellectual as well as physical presence of man in nature. The Greeks certainly had the technical ability to plan their cities and temple sites with the same dominating rigidity of the Renaissance but the subjugation of nature was not their goal, co-existence was.

I think it can be generalized that societies like ancient Greece that have well developed relationships with the natural environment

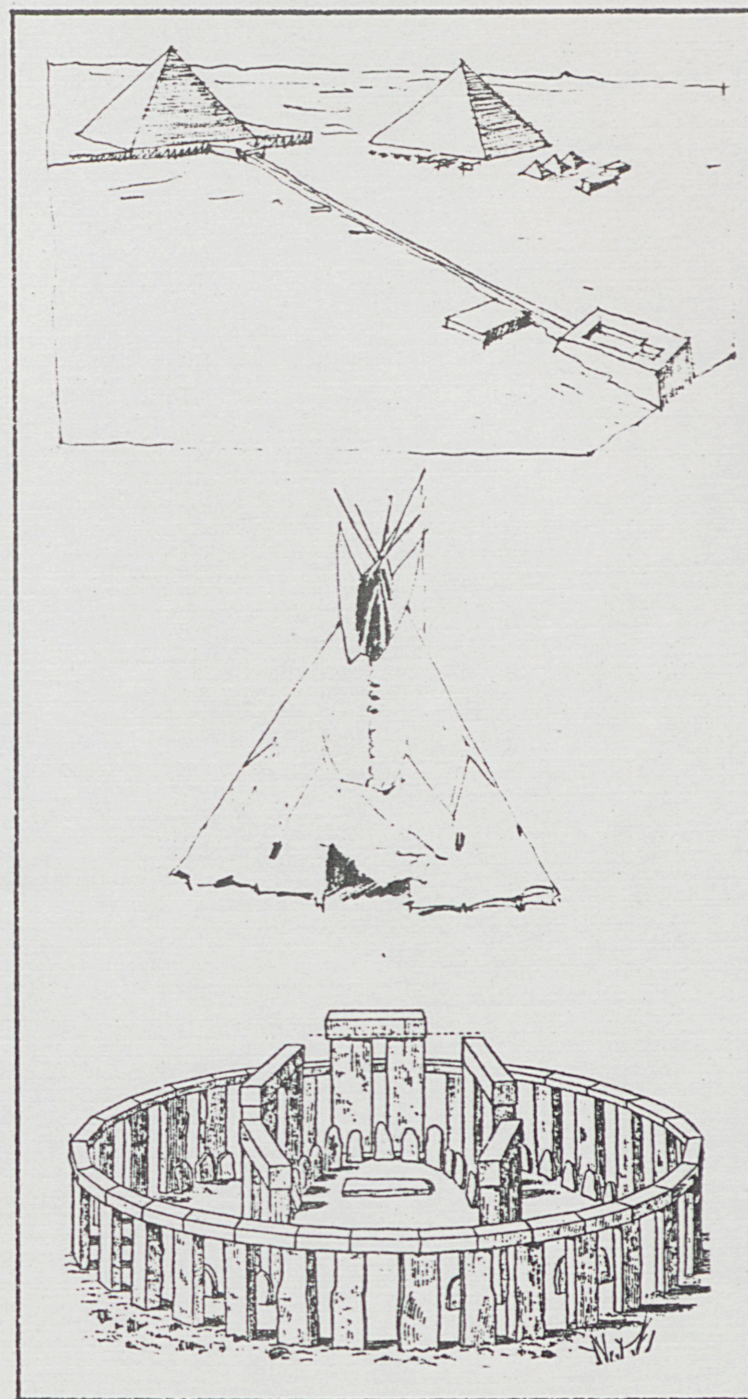


usually respond with equally strong architecture. Some other examples of architecture that powerfully abstracts natural character include;

The giant pyramids of the Egyptians are a sophisticated response to the geographical simplicity and immensity of the desert. The austere precision of their faces relates to the directness of their underlying purpose; the representation of man in a hostile and huge landscape. The simple patterns of life in the desert translate themselves into the concrete simplicities of architecture.

The conical tepee's of the American Indian are an almost pure geometric expression their co-operative presence in the natural landscape. Like the Greek's, the Indians chose places of particular natural power to locate their camps. The camps of the mountain tribes were most often topographically arranged while the camps of the plains tribes, immersed in the immensity of the great plains, were arranged in giant circles. This way the relatively small tepee's could join together into a larger geometrical presence that could better relate to the scale of the plains.

Stonehenge is another circular human statement in an omnidirectional setting. While it may be somewhat insensitive to human-scale alone it becomes, when related to the immensity of the solar system it orders, an intermediary between man and the environmental insignificance he faces. As a creation of mans intellect it represents him at an appropriate scale to the landscape.

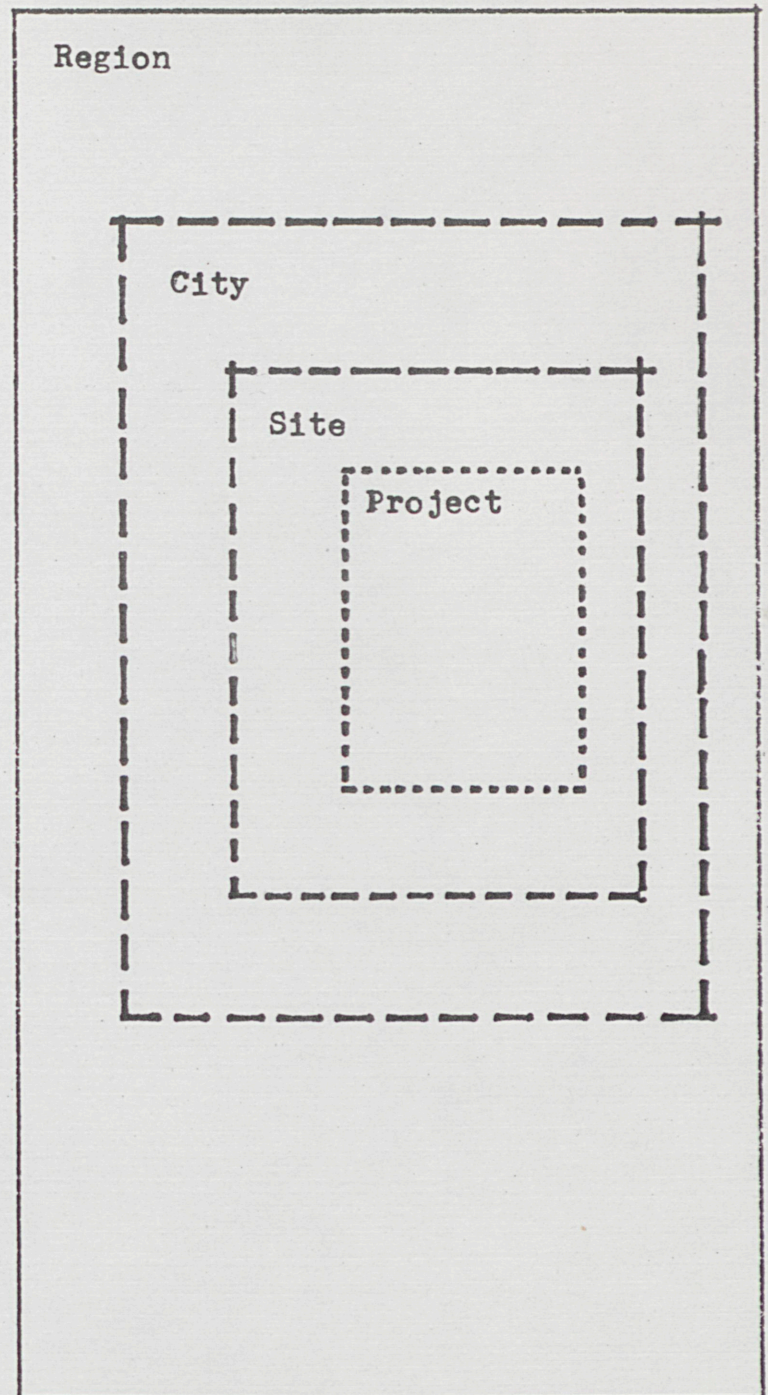


Each of these building types, although they are different in appearance and function share a common denominator; they are all simple, ordered, geometrical, architectural statements that abstractly concretize the dialogue between man and the natural environment. This give-and-take relationship, the environment giving identity and order to man and man intelligently and sensitively inhabiting the landscape is the legacy that has been left for us.

To relate these ideas to a particular regional context this project is to be a vehicle. To accomplish this I've started at a regional scale and worked my way downward through several different levels of containment, the city, site and finally a specific project. Each level of place is developed in three ways;

1. A general description and other data.
2. A brief historical summary.
3. My reactions and inspirations drawn from that level.

This is, finally, where things get tied down to specifics and realities.



The Region.

"Eventually, all things merge into one and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the worlds great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters."

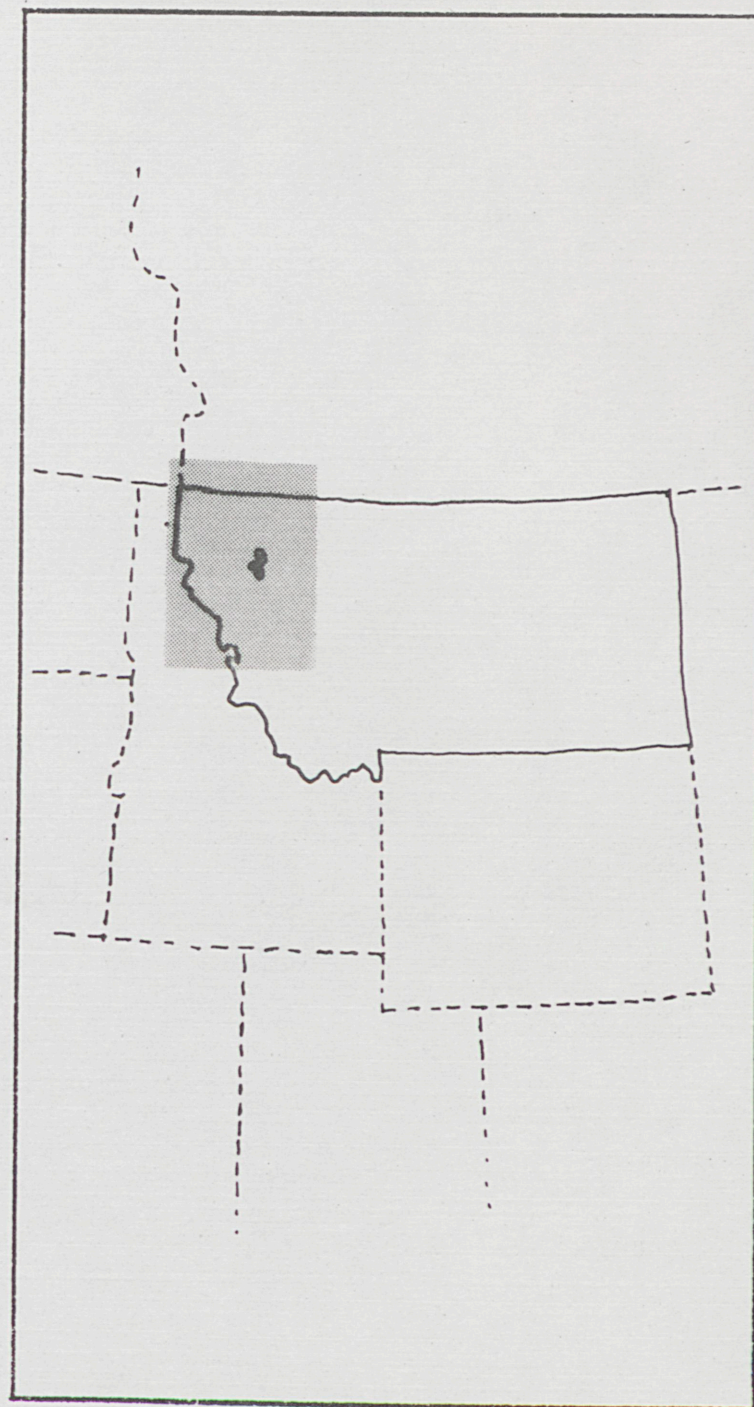
Norman Maclean
A River Runs Through It

DESCRIPTION

The specific region I am dealing with is a belt of rugged, mountainous land roughly 200 miles wide straddling the continental divide from Wyoming to British Columbia. This area shares a vocabulary of mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, climate and weather, plants and animals. Christian Norberg-Schulz was inadvertently describing it when he wrote;

"an intelligible composition of distinct elements, imageable natural spaces, a strong evenly distributed light and a transparent air which give the forms a maximum of sculptural presence."

At a more intimate and understandable scale the region this project deals with is centered on Flathead Lake and includes most of north western Montana. This area contains a large amount of undisturbed mountainous landscape. The Bob Marshall, Great Bear, Lincoln-Scapegoat and Cabinet Mtn. wilderness areas along with Glacier Park are included.



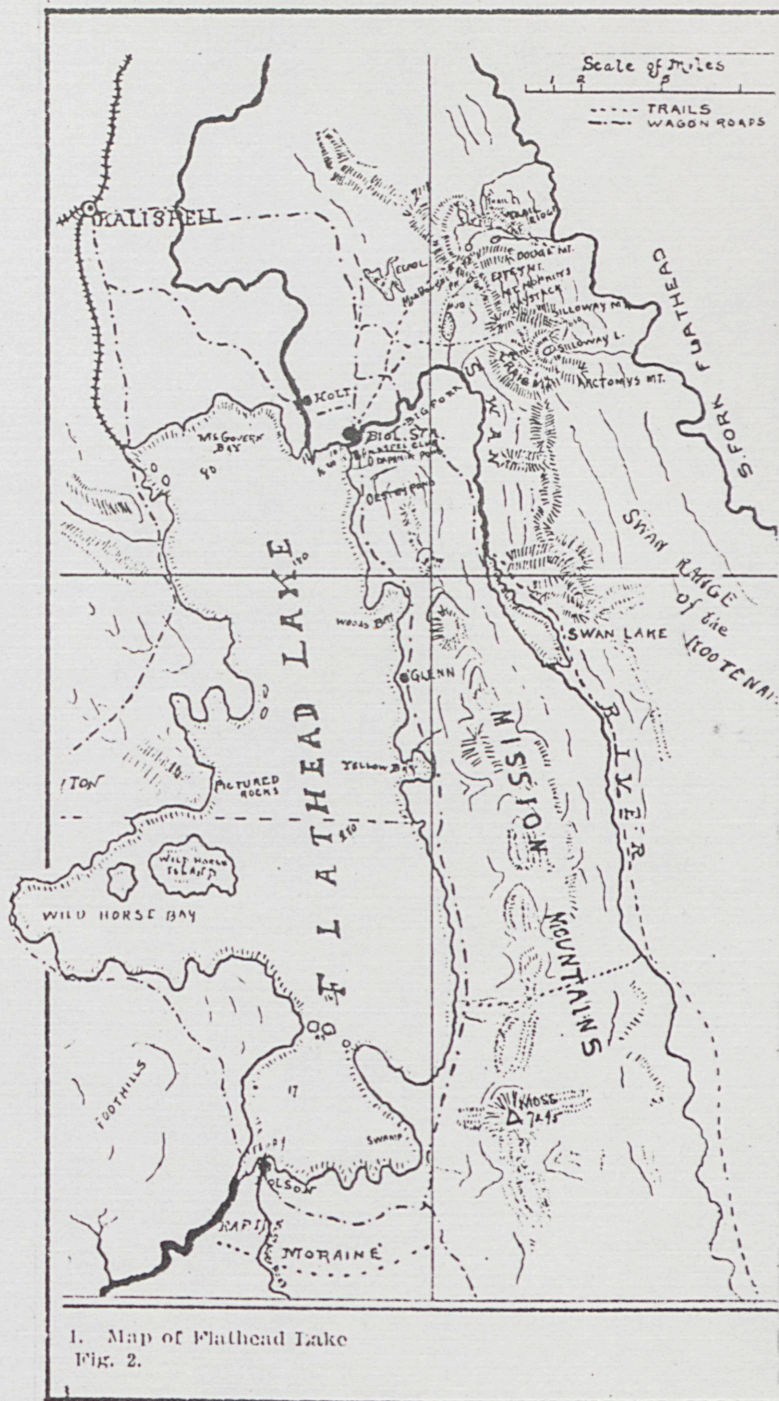
HISTORICAL SUMMARY

This is a place of motion and time. Precambrian rocks between 500 and 1500 million years old have been intensely folded and deformed over the past 70 million years to form this landscape. The Flathead Valley, one of these folds, is the southern end of a series of interlocking valleys called the Rocky Mountain Trench that stretch 800 miles north into British Columbia. During the last ice age glaciers thousands of feet deep flowed south from B.C. carving the valleys until they reached the warmer climate of the Flathead area and melted. Directly south of Polson is a huge terminal moraine that marks the furthest advance of the last glaciers. Flathead Lake is contained by this natural dam and has existed in basically the same form for 10,000 years.

The first humans in the area came relatively recently. Tribes from Washington and Canada gradually migrated to the Flathead Valley to live a fairly sedentary existence. These Indians were relatively easy for the white traders who followed Lewis and Clark into the northwest to 'civilize'. One of these traders, David Thompson, was the first white man to see Flathead Lake. From his journal of 1812;

"A few days afterwards we made an excursion to the Saleesh (Flathead) Lake, and beyond it. The lake is a fine sheet of water of about twenty miles in length by three to four miles in width, the country around especially to the eastward and southward for many miles very fine, and will become a rich agricultural country, for which its climate is very favorable.

Given the richness of the area the influx of whites was rapid. Small informal camps soon turned into bustling communities. An economy dev-



eloped around agriculture and logging. The presence of the white 'invasion' soon was everywhere. Today this region remains relatively modest economically and socially.

INSPIRATIONS AND REACTIONS

This region, western Montana, is a decidedly special place. The Indians felt it and some people do today. But, unfortunately, most people, especially local people, feel little or nothing other than inclement weather from their unique environment. As discussed in the early pages of this paper, man is in need of something to tie him down, to give him definite roots and a sense of belonging somewhere, anywhere. The complexities of nature and the underlying natural order that ties them together could become the ordering system that gives meaning to our regional society as a whole.

This would, of course, be a radical shift away from our present nature-dominating mindset. It would signal a new unselfish attitude, an attitude of awareness and sensitivity towards ones chosen place. In the words of Barry Holstun Lopez;

I have lost, as I have said, some sense of myself.

I no longer require as much. An adjustment as smooth as the way the river lies against the earth at this point, this is no longer the issue with me. I am more interested in this: from above, to a hawk, the bend must appear only natural and I for a moment inseparably a part. I cannot say well enough how this single perception has dismantled my loneliness.

The Town.

"For a long time it has been said that a small town is a good place to be from, but now for the first time the serious question is being raised as to whether or not the small town might be a good place to go to."

Barker and Fazio
The Small Town as an Art Object

DESCRIPTION

A small western town situated at the south end of Flathead Lake, Polson is the seat of Lake County and is its largest town. The town is 'centered' on a wide point that defines the mouth of the Flathead River as it begins its journey towards the Pacific. Commercially it is oriented around two major traffic routes; U.S.Highway 93 and the ubiquitous 'Main Street' which lies perpendicular to it. Residentially the town spreads out along the lake shore and up the side of the large moraine to the south. Its major industries are agriculture, logging and summer tourism. The population and activity of the city increase dramatically during the summer months because of its unique setting and recreational potential.

Other Data: Population..... 3000

Temperature, Average.... 45.5f

Record High 104f

Record Low. -30

Jan.Average 25

July Avg... 67

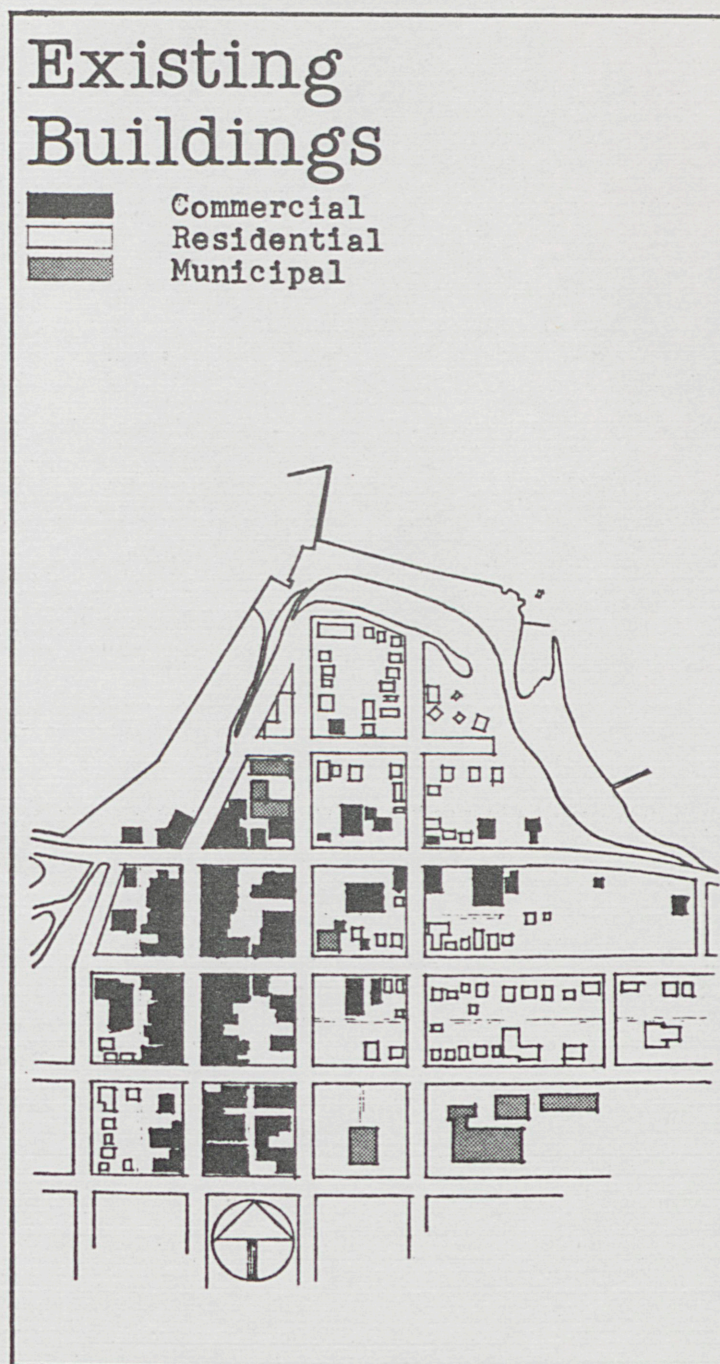


Precipitation, Avg..... 15.03"
Wettest.... 21.90" @ 1958
Driest..... 10.17" @ 1931

Latitude: 47 41' N
Longitude: 114 9' W
Degree Days: 7900

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The townsite was first used by the Salish and Kootenai Tribes as a favored campsite. In 1880 Harry Lambert, a white trader, built a log trading post which became the focus of an informal community known as 'Lamberts Landing'. Drawn by the richness of the soil and mild climate settlers began to move into the valley. Simultaneously the Flathead Valley north of the lake was being settled. To connect these two growing areas and avoid the difficult overland routes around the lake a 20 ton sailboat, the "Swan", was built in 1883. Soon it was replaced by a growing fleet of large steamers that hauled people and freight to develop much of northwestern Montana. Its importance as a shipping center combined with the richness of its agriculture caused Lamberts Landing to grow larger and in 1898 the town was renamed "Polson" after an early area rancher. Originally the main travel route came down the hill to the south, through Polson and down to the docks. All of the early commercial development took place along this street. Later, Hiway 93 was completed along the shoreline and crossed main street perpendicularly resulting in the dead-end commercial district that still exists today.



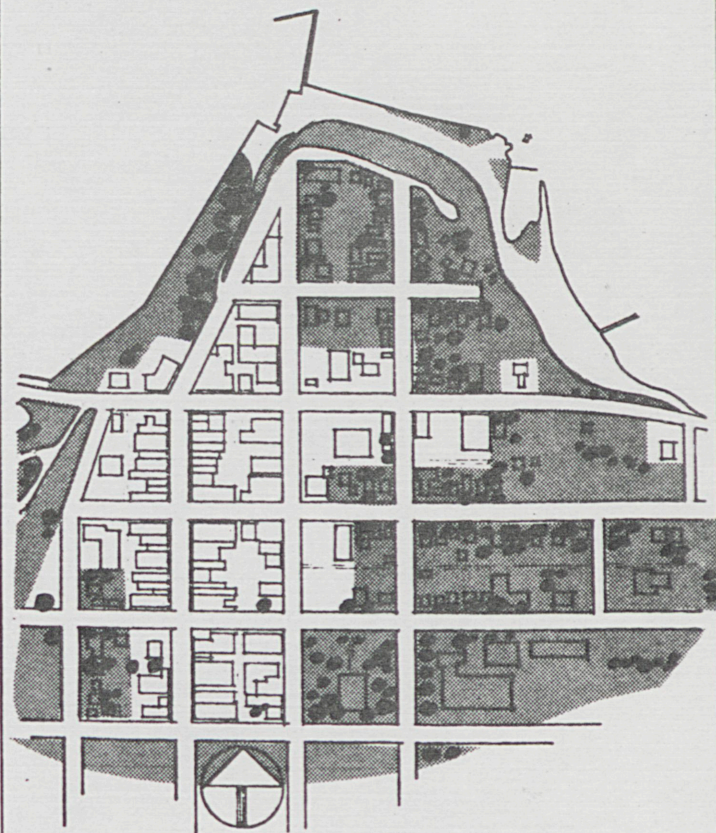
INSPIRATIONS AND REACTIONS

The siting of Polson is extraordinary. The presence of Flathead Lake gives what is basically a typical small western town a unique and lasting atmosphere. Polson has always been associated with travel, first as a jumping off place for the steamer trade and later as a tourist and retirement 'discovery'.

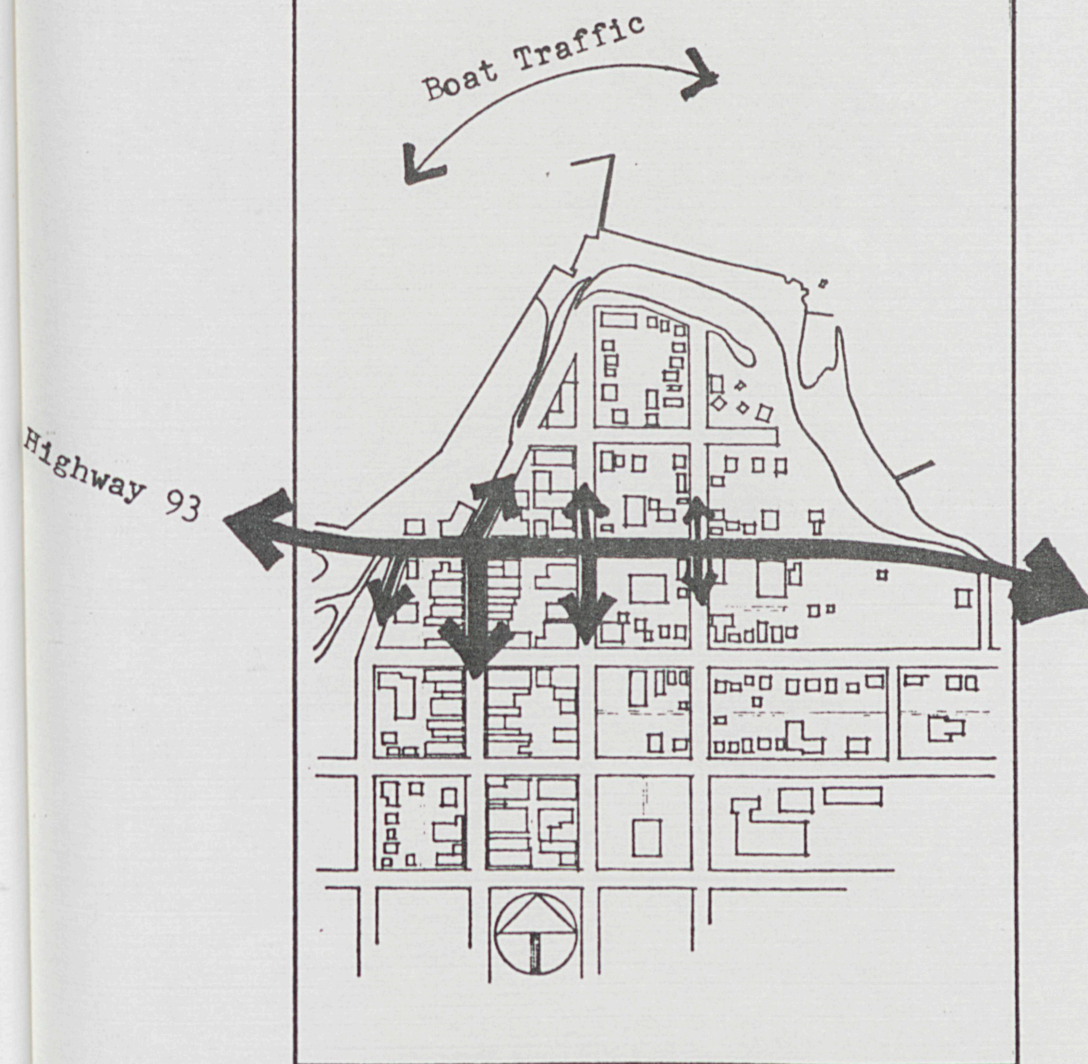
To be based on travel and people makes the present situation all that much more regrettable. The town today is much like its citizens. It, and they, are very closed and inward focusing in spite of the 'ideal' location. The town is a contextural dichotomy; its association to the lake that built it now seems only coincidental. The image of Polson is fragmented and confused. Though it is geographically well defined it lacks a real image or identity. The problem is, I feel, only compounded by the nautical theme the business community has adopted as its commercial image.

Given its setting Polson has the potential of being an ideal vehicle for a concrete relationship between man and the natural environment. The city grid, a conceptualization of man that has nothing to do with the local context, sweeps down from the hill to the south and collides into the lake which represents a metaphorical region. This symbolize the basic problem; the inability of Polson, as a city and as a group of people, to reconcile its relationship to its surroundings. It is situated in the middle of some of the most spectacular wild country on the continent and at the edge of one of the largest lakes in the country but it makes no gesture to either.

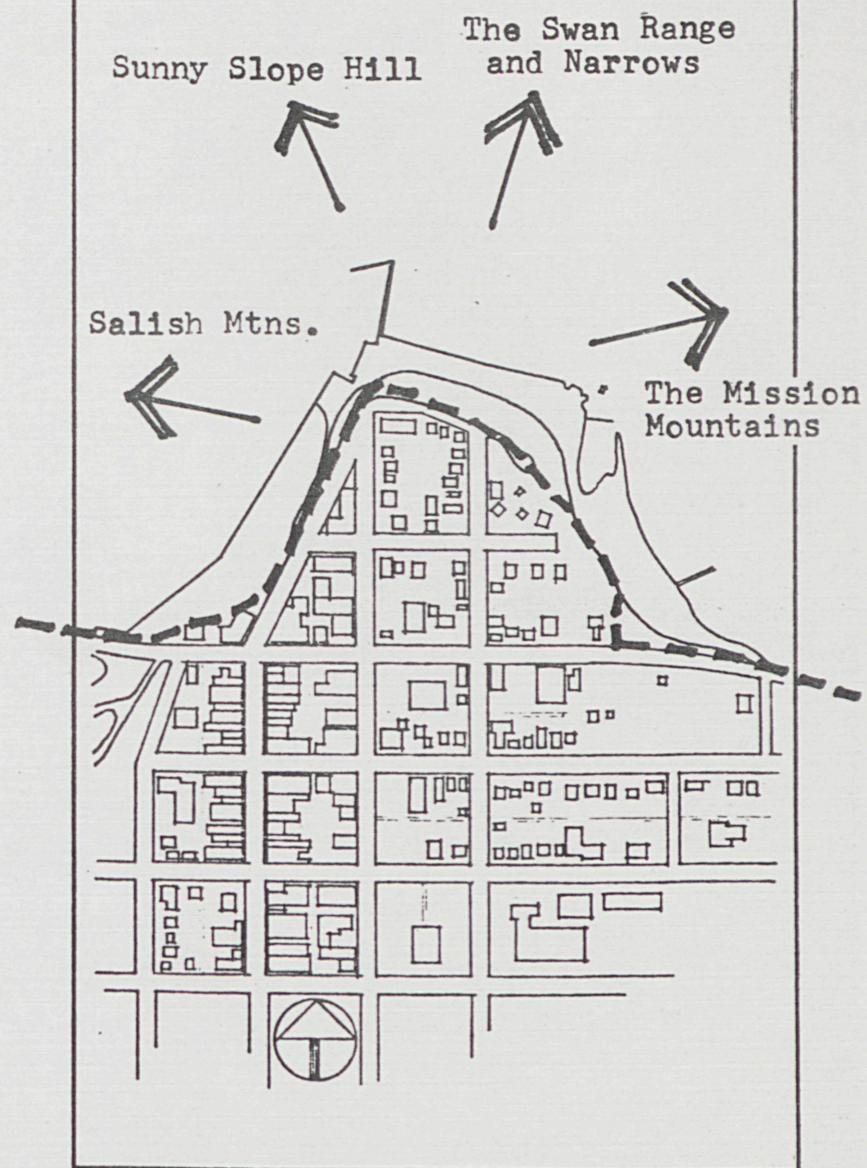
Vegetation



Traffic



Views



The Site.

"To stick your hands into the river is to feel the cords
that bind the earth together in one piece."

Barry Holstun Lopez
River Notes, The Dance of the Herons

DESCRIPTION

The chosen site is 3.25 acres of city owned land located on the tip of Salish Point. It is defined on the lake side by a timber and piling 'sea wall' and on the city side by a gentle 30' high embankment that leads up to the bench that most of Polson is situated on. Between these two strong lines, one absolute and the other implied, is a flat corridor of unused land 2-3 feet above the high water line. Immediately west of the site is the mouth of the Flathead River which drains 11,000 cubic feet of water per second from approx. 7,000 square miles of northwestern Montana and Southern Canada. In the winter months the lake is drawn down 10 feet to its natural level. In the summer Kerr Dam holds the lake at its new elevation for recreation, irrigation and flood control. The site is situated between two lake-shore parks, Ducharme and Sacajawea. It is fully exposed to the lake and meets the major storms head-on.

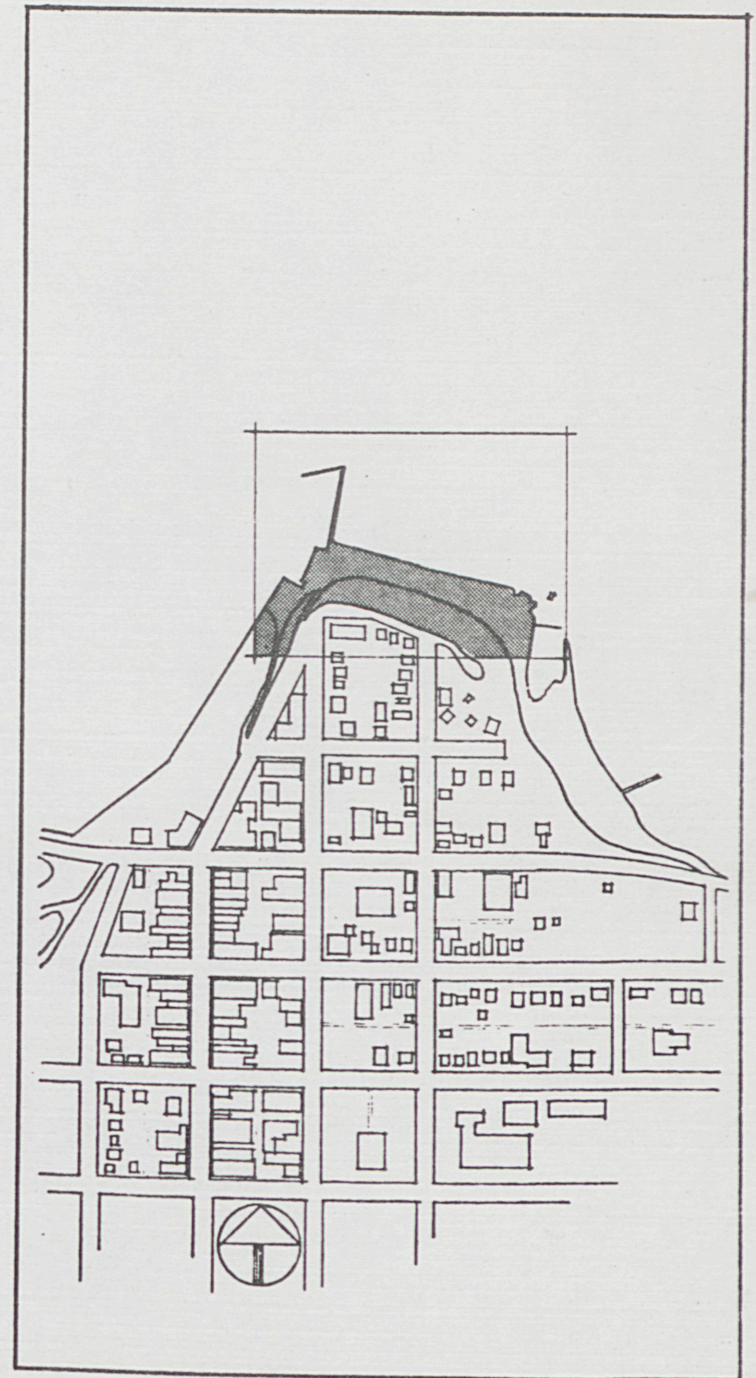
Other Data: Elevation: 2895'

Winds: SW-W 3-10 mph

Soil Cond. glacial loam, gravel

Water Table: 5'

Available Utilities: all except piped gas

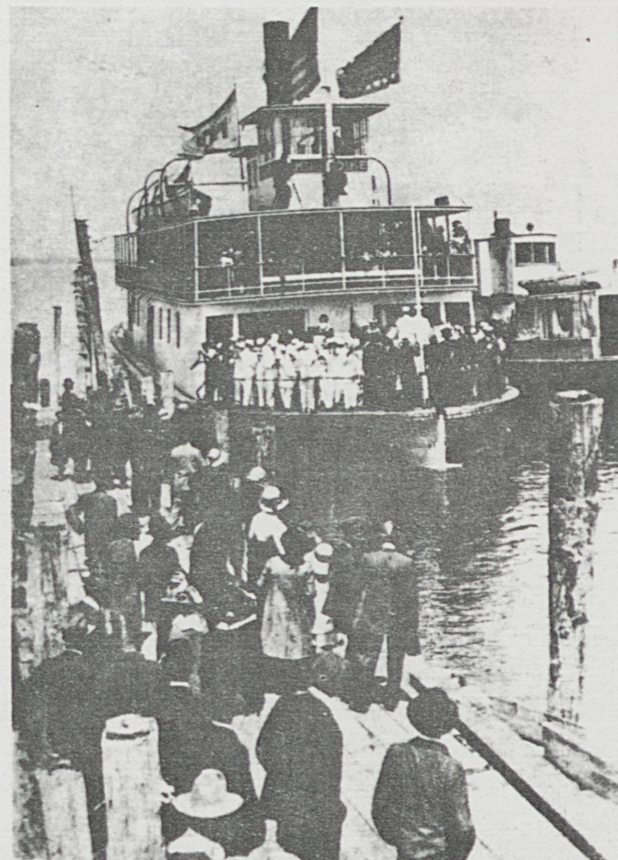


HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Historically this site played an important role in the development of Polson and much of northwestern Montana. First used as an indian encampment it eventually became the focus of a bustling steamboat trade and a growing community. In 1915, the height of the steamboating era, there were over 20 large steamers with a capacity of 100 passengers and 900 tons of freight per day travelling the lake. Docks and warehouses on this site handled people, freight and baggage that brought civilization to western Montana. After railroads and the auto brought an end to the steamers the site fell into a melancholy dis-use that continues today. There was for a time a lumber mill operating just east of the site but all that remains of it today is a large concrete machinery footing sitting out in the water. The only real activity on the site is provided by 2 boat ramps and a city moorage dock.

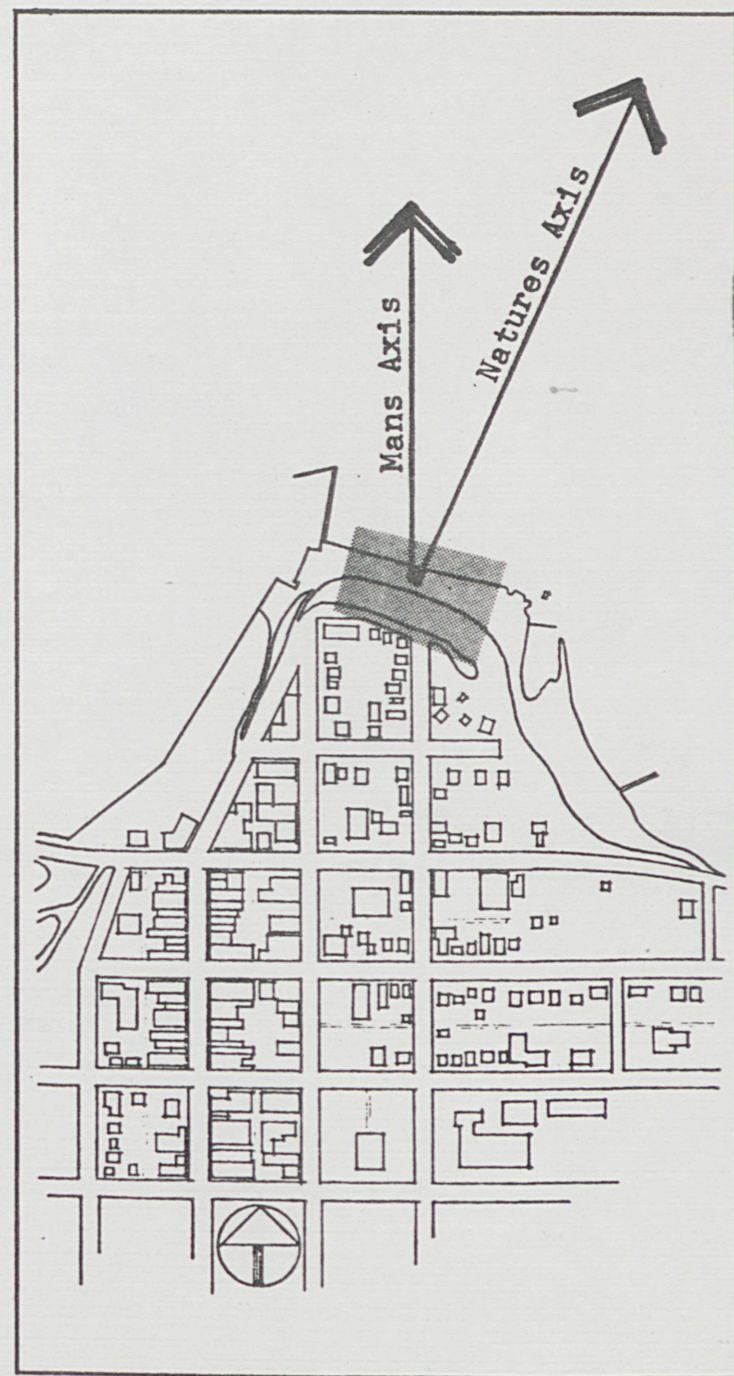
INSPIRATIONS AND REACTIONS

This site was chosen because it is the obvious location for a dialogue between city and lake (read 'man and nature'). It is not a part of the town nor is it easily associated with the lake. It is in a sense a "between", an intermediary. With the hill and town to its back it is a very outward oriented site. In a way it transcends the shore-water relationship and addresses larger and more distant issues. The site projects the viewer out across the great plane of water towards the distant Swan Range with the islands of the 'narrows' in the foreground. These visual, natural goals along with the orientation



The "Klondike" at the site ca. 1900

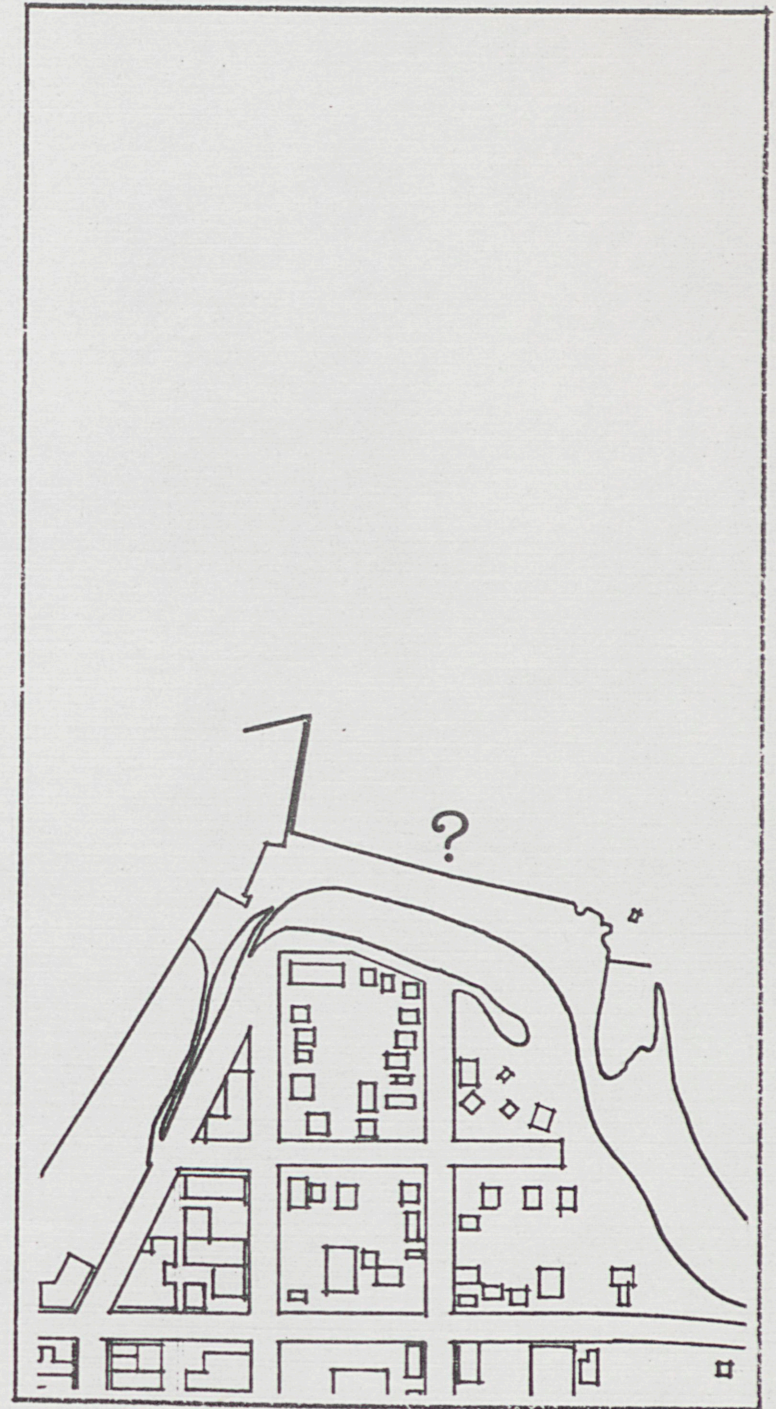
of the site suggest a new natural axis that is askew to the north-south, man imposed grid of the city and the nearby farmland that repeats it. Where man's grid and nature's axis meet seems to be the obvious place to attempt to reconcile these two seemingly opposite ideas. From the top of the embankment that links the site and town the site forms a natural stage for the concrete acting out of the man-nature dialogue. This dialogue, symbolized by the skewed axis, takes the form of simple dualities; land-water, inside-outside, city-lake; man-region.



The Project.

Throughout these three levels of psychological containment, the region, city and site, there is, to me, a distinct need for a change in orientation and emphasis at regional, civic and personal scales. To reinterpret and then reinforce our position in the natural landscape we must become more outward oriented, as individuals and as a community. The attitude has got to eventually change from opportunistic exploitation and separation from the environment to one of coexistence and reconciliation. I believe that this can take place on a populous level that transcends the superficiality of the 'back to nature' movement. A small step in this direction would be the construction of a facility that would somehow re-educate and re-orient people to their surroundings at a regional scale.

The Flathead Lake region is a culturally, historically, geographically and recreationally rich area. The function(s) of this new facility should reinforce these positive aspects but not at the price of redundancy of existing facilities or established businesses. An inventory of existing facilities devoted to the cultural, historical and recreational promotion and interpretation of this region shows the sad state of representation.



INFORMATION

Polson Chamber of Commerce

Primarily commercial type information limited
in terms of promoting non-commercial activities.

CULTURAL FACILITIES

Museums.... Polson City Museum

A fair collection of local memorabilia collected
in an old warehouse and presented in the best
small town museum tradition.

Galleries... Sandpiper Art Gallery

A small local art gallery operated by an art club.
Housed in a difficult to find, aging building.

Theater..... Port Polson Players

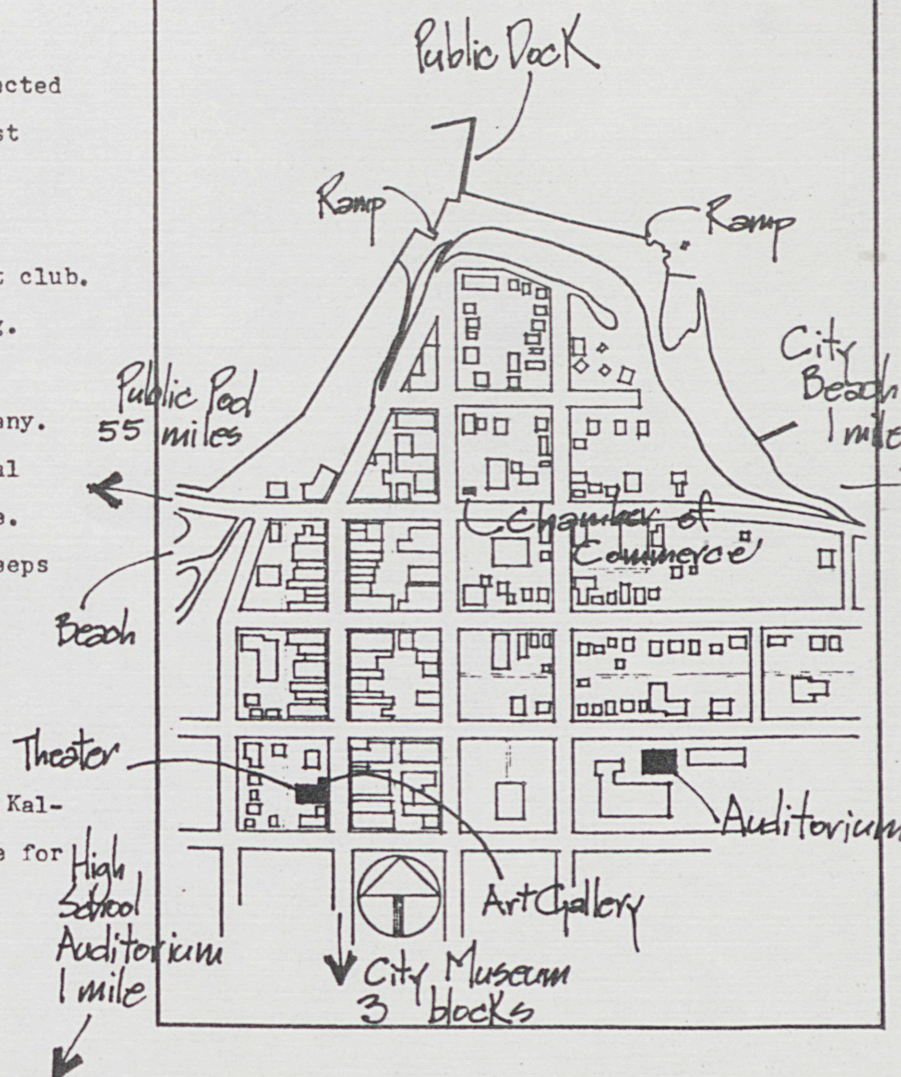
A fluctuating and unpredictable acting company.
Currently working in conjunction with a local
restaurant as a summer dinner theatre troupe.
A definite lack of appropriate facilities keeps
the Players in limbo.

RECREATION

Swimming Pools

Non-existent. The closest public pool is in Kal-
ispel 55 miles away. The lake is comfortable for
swimming only a few months out of the year.

Existing Facilities



PUBLIC SERVICES

Public Restrooms

Located at three city parks. Open summer only.

Public Showers

Nonexistent

Garbage Disposal

A few dumpsters and cans

This lack of basic cultural and recreational facilities signals the need for a comprehensive facility devoted to the intellectual and physical enrichment of resident and visitor alike. This new facility would become the docking place for a metaphorical journey out into the region, and would provide a forum for personal investigation and discovery. To accomodate both visitor and local resident this facility should be able to do three things;

1. Introduce people to the region and educate them about its special qualities.
2. Provide for the basic needs, especially those of the visitor.
3. Promote recreation as a way of experiencing the region and promote cultural events as a way of amplifying and bringing variety to our lives.

To achieve these goals requires a fairly diverse building program. The general goals and the specific functions meant to accomplish them are;

1. Introduce and Educate

Information Office

Museum

2. Satisfy Needs

Public Restrooms

Public Showers

Garbage Disposal

3. Provide Opportunities

Swimming Pool

Theatre

Gallery

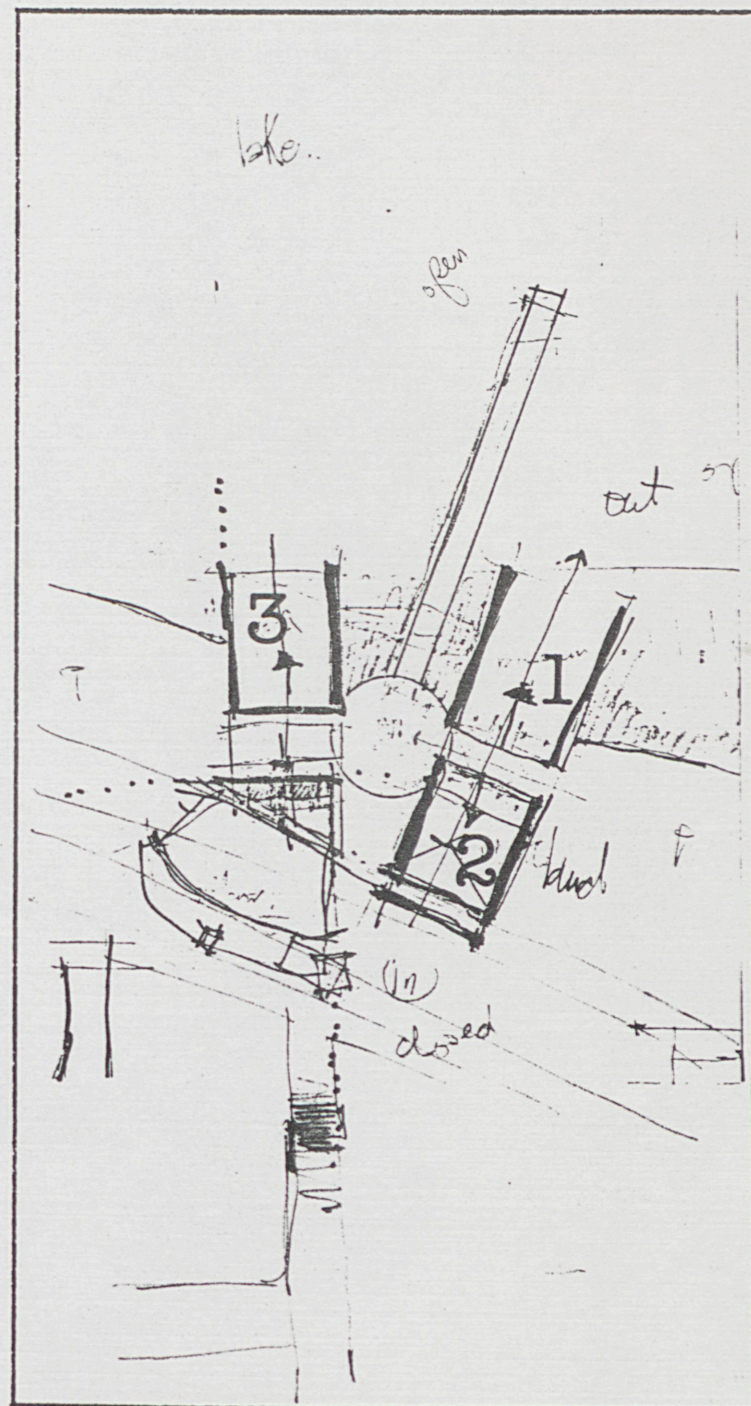
Tour Boat Concession

These diverse functions suggest the need for separate buildings. By combining compatible functions the required spaces can be accommodated in three buildings.

1. A Museum and Information Office

2. A Community Theatre and Meeting Hall

3. A Community Swimming Pool.



1 The Museum

The Museum is a very outward focusing building. Its purpose is to to psychologically direct the visitor outward into the region. It requires ample wall space and floor area to display artifacts and exhibits that create a mental background or vocabulary for the visitor to personally build on by travel through the region.

An information office should be included in the museum area. The attendant would answer any questions that visitors may have about the exhibits, or the region or questions about food, lodging, recreation etc. The exhibits should be arranged chronologically along a path while maintaining a constant visual link with the environmental context they were taken from.

2 The Theatre

The theatre is a more sheltered and introspective facility. The core of a theatre is its stage. The ancillary functions of prop room, box office, administration office, and public restrooms should augment the placement of the stage. As the museum is a reflection of our outer selves and is oriented to the region, the theatre is a reflection of our inner selves and should draw back to the town.

3 The Pool Building

A small regulation pool that high school classes and teams could use as well as the general public. The pool should be covered and environmentally stable. It should also symbolically recreate the act of swimming in the natural lake by emulating the lake bed and being outward oriented from the interior. Swimming here would inherently be a centralized thing- a destination place, especially in winter- and should read as such from the exterior. Lockers, showers and toilets arranged along a logical path flesh out the building functionally.

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INSPIRATIONS

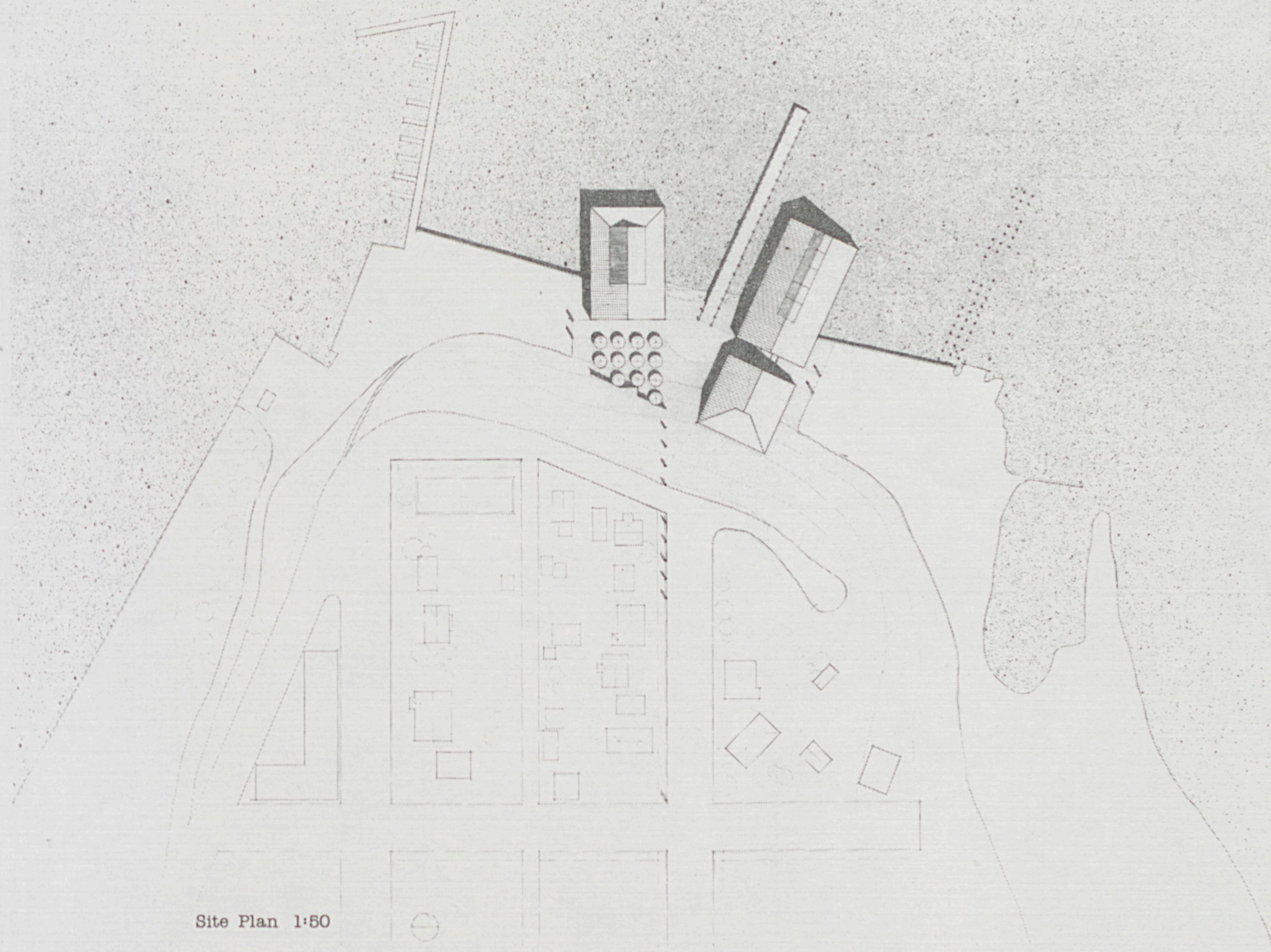
- The Small Town As An Art Object. Barker, Fazio & Hildebrandt, 1975
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River Notes. Lopez
Feeling and Form. Langer
This House of Sky. Doig

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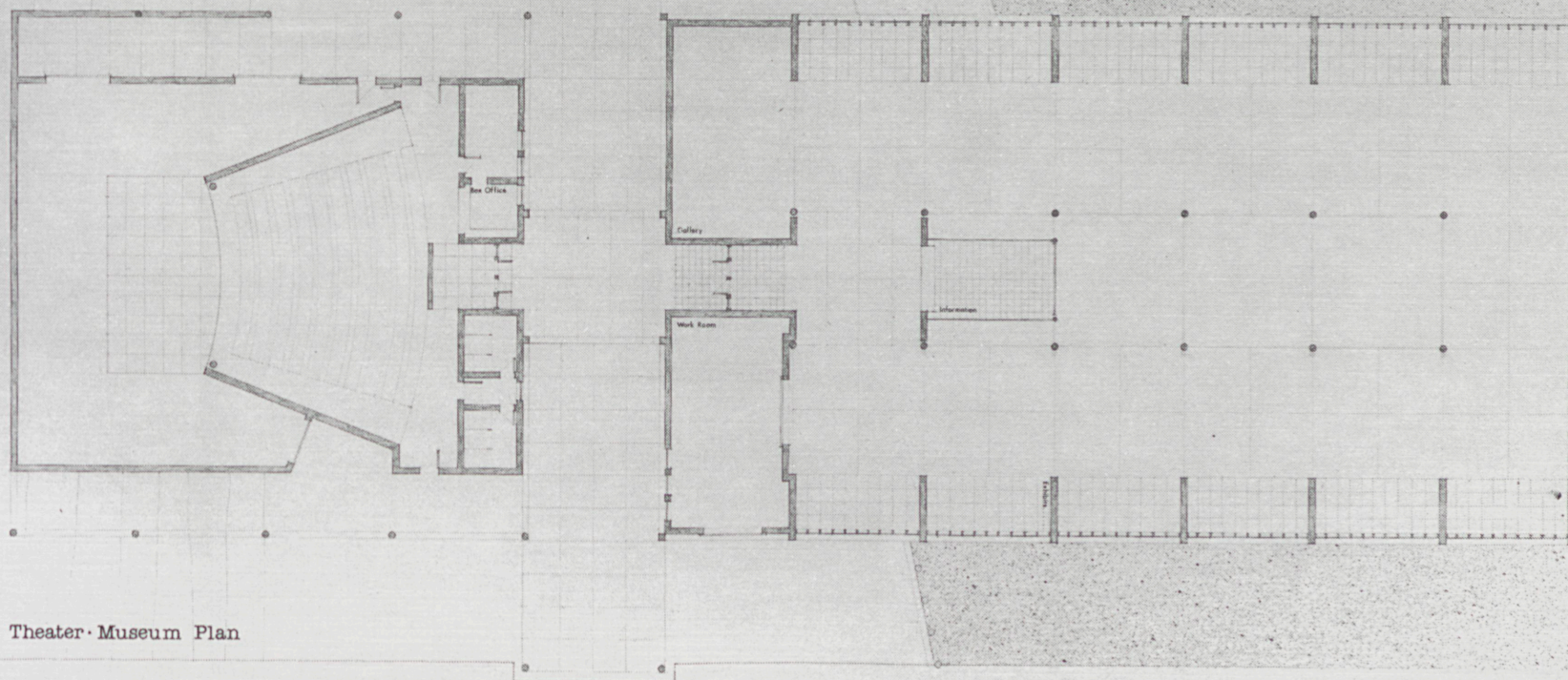
Footnotes...

1. Barker & Fazio, The Small Town as an Art Object
2. Nuttgens, The Landscape of Ideas
3. Belluschi, The Meaning of Regionalism In Architecture
4. Norberg-Schulz, Genius Loci
5. Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture
6. Arnheim, Visual Thinking
7. Langer, Feeling and Form



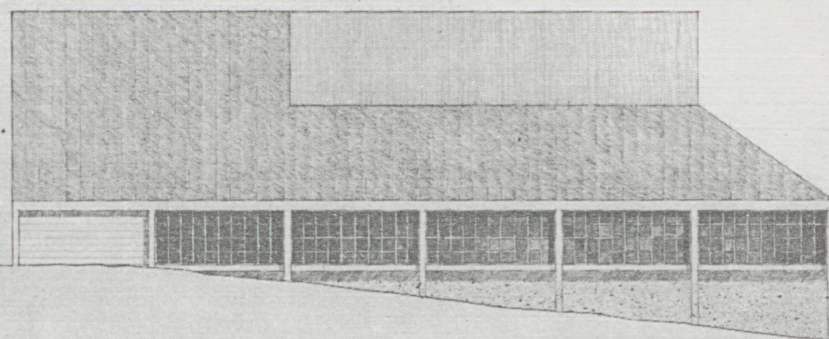
Site Plan 1:50

East Elevation

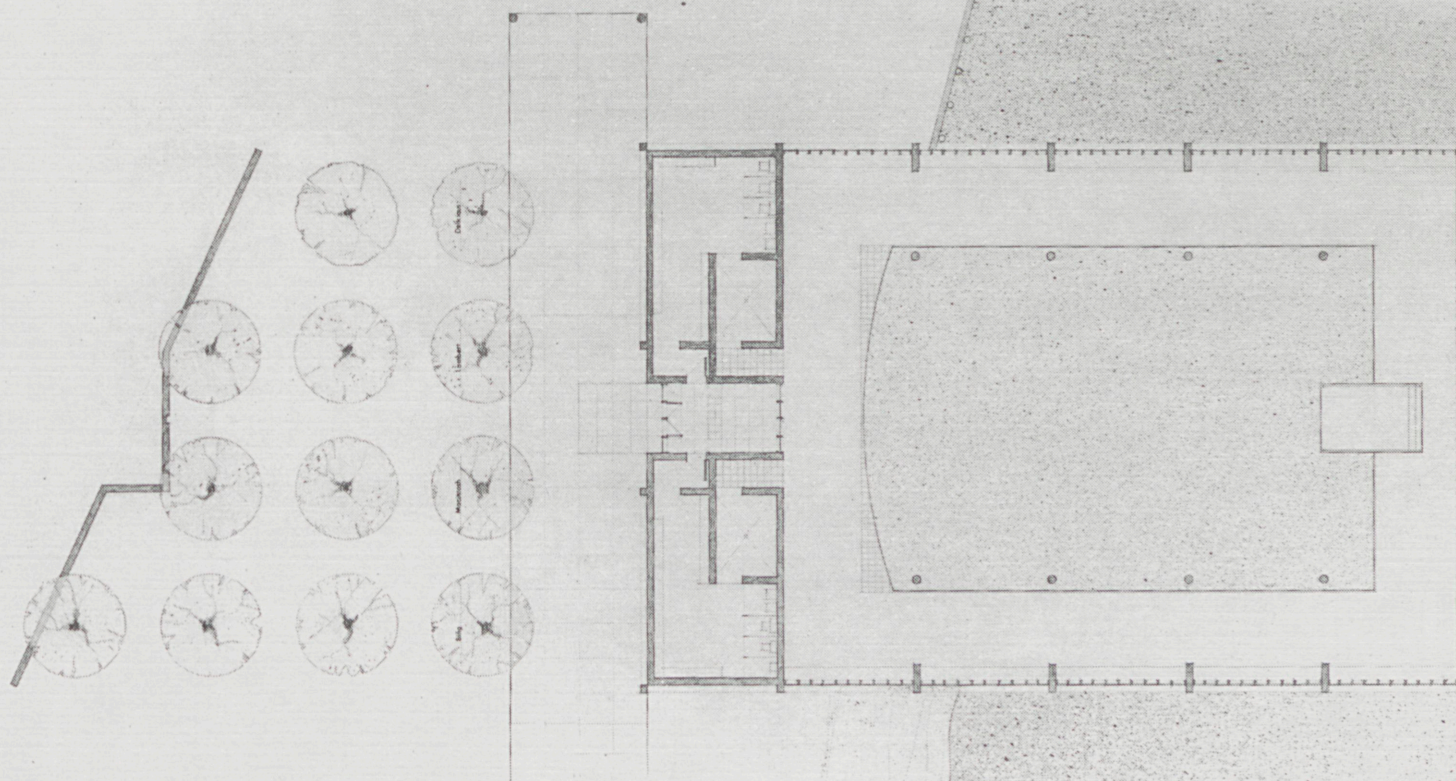


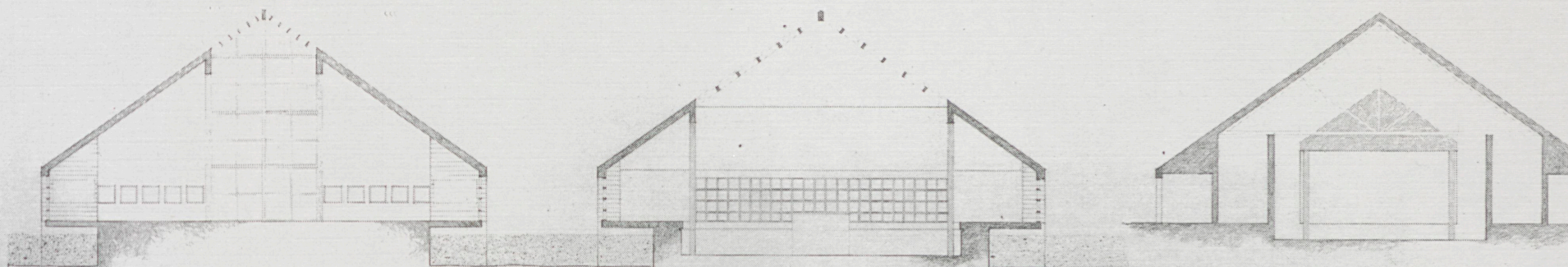
Theater-Museum Plan

East Elevation

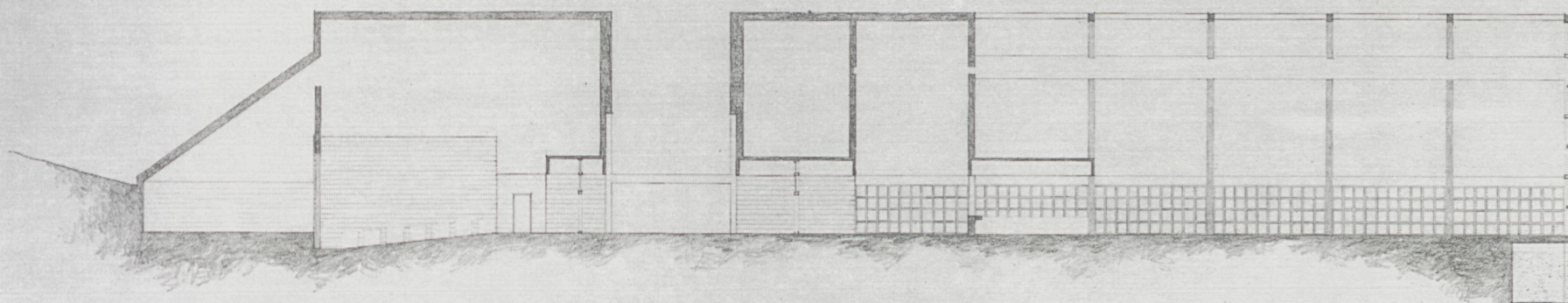


Pool House Plan

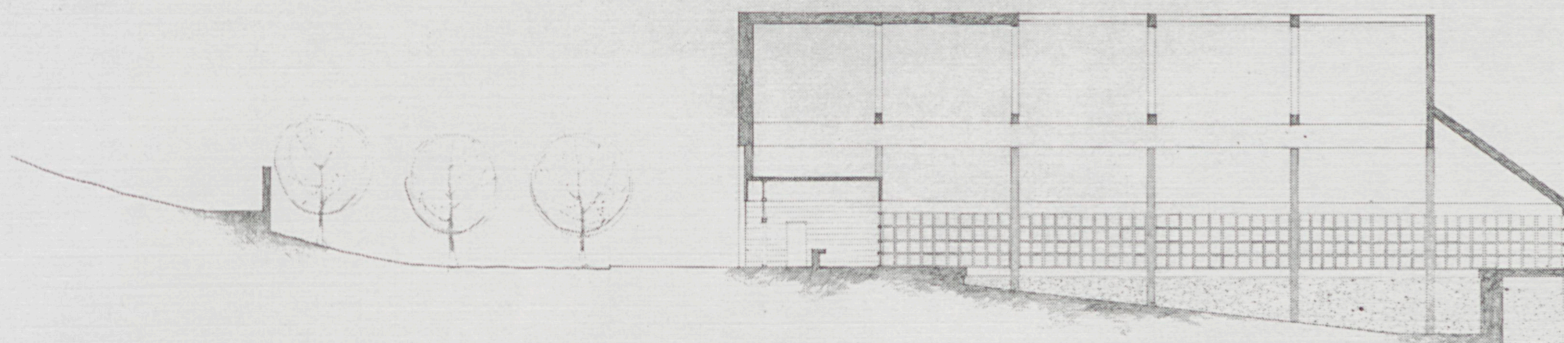




Museum · Pool · Theater



Theater · Museum



Pool House

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