

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: West Virginia Culture Center
 Other names/site number: West Virginia Science and Culture Center, West Virginia Cultural Center, Building 9
 Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
 City or town: Charleston State: West Virginia County: Kanawha
 Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national X statewide X local
 Applicable National Register Criteria:
X A ___ B X C ___ D

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer <hr/> Signature of certifying official/Title: Date <u>West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. <hr/> Signature of commenting official: Date <hr/> Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

West Virginia Culture Center
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT/Brutalism

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: Walls: limestone; Foundation: concrete; Roof: rubber

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The West Virginia Culture Center is a large, block-shaped, Brutalist style building on the grounds of the West Virginia State Capitol Complex. The exterior makes heavy use of concrete and limestone, with more selective use of granite and glass. The bottom component of the Culture Center is a 300 square foot concrete plinth and deck. The upper component sits on top, a steel frame cantilevered building clad in limestone extending over a granite foundation. The building has very little exterior ornamentation, displaying mostly unbroken surfaces and clean straight lines. The interior of the building contains a variety of public and governmental spaces, including the State Museum, the State Archives, reading rooms, a gift shop, a theater, and offices and storage for state agencies. The most impressive space is the Great Hall, a large open room at the front of the building. It is adorned with white marble and narrow oak wood panel walls, a marble floor, waffled ceiling, and two ornate dodecahedron chandeliers. With the exception of modifications to the State Museum on the interior and the deck on the exterior, the Culture Center has experienced few alterations and retains all seven aspects of integrity.

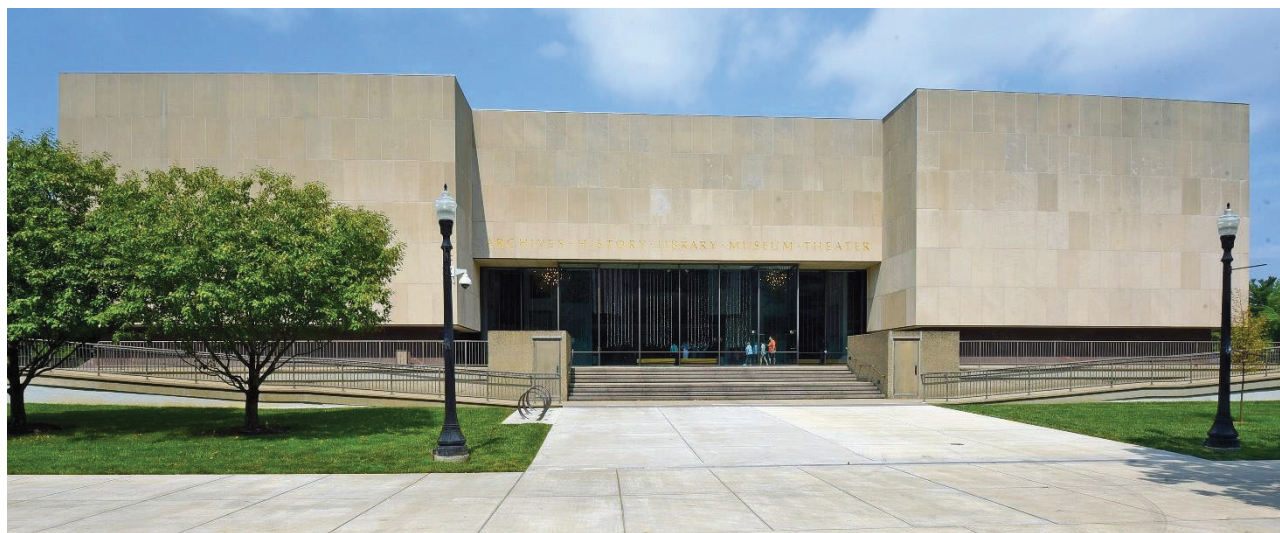


Figure 1 Front of Culture Center in Summer 2023. Courtesy of the WV Department of Tourism.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The West Virginia Culture Center is situated within a campus-like setting. It sits at the west side of the West Virginia State Capitol Complex. The Complex contains a mixture of government buildings, parking lots, monuments, and trees, shrubbery, and greenspace. To the west of the Culture Center lies Greenbrier Street and across from it is the East End Historic District, a National Register-listed, primarily residential neighborhood dating to the early twentieth century. To the east is a pedestrian walkway and across from it is the west wing of the West Virginia State Capitol Building. To the north are parking lots, greenspace, and the West Virginia Veterans Memorial. To the south are another parking lot, the West Virginia Executive Mansion (Governor's Mansion) and Holly Grove Mansion. Ornamental trees surround the Culture Center on its north, south, and east sides.

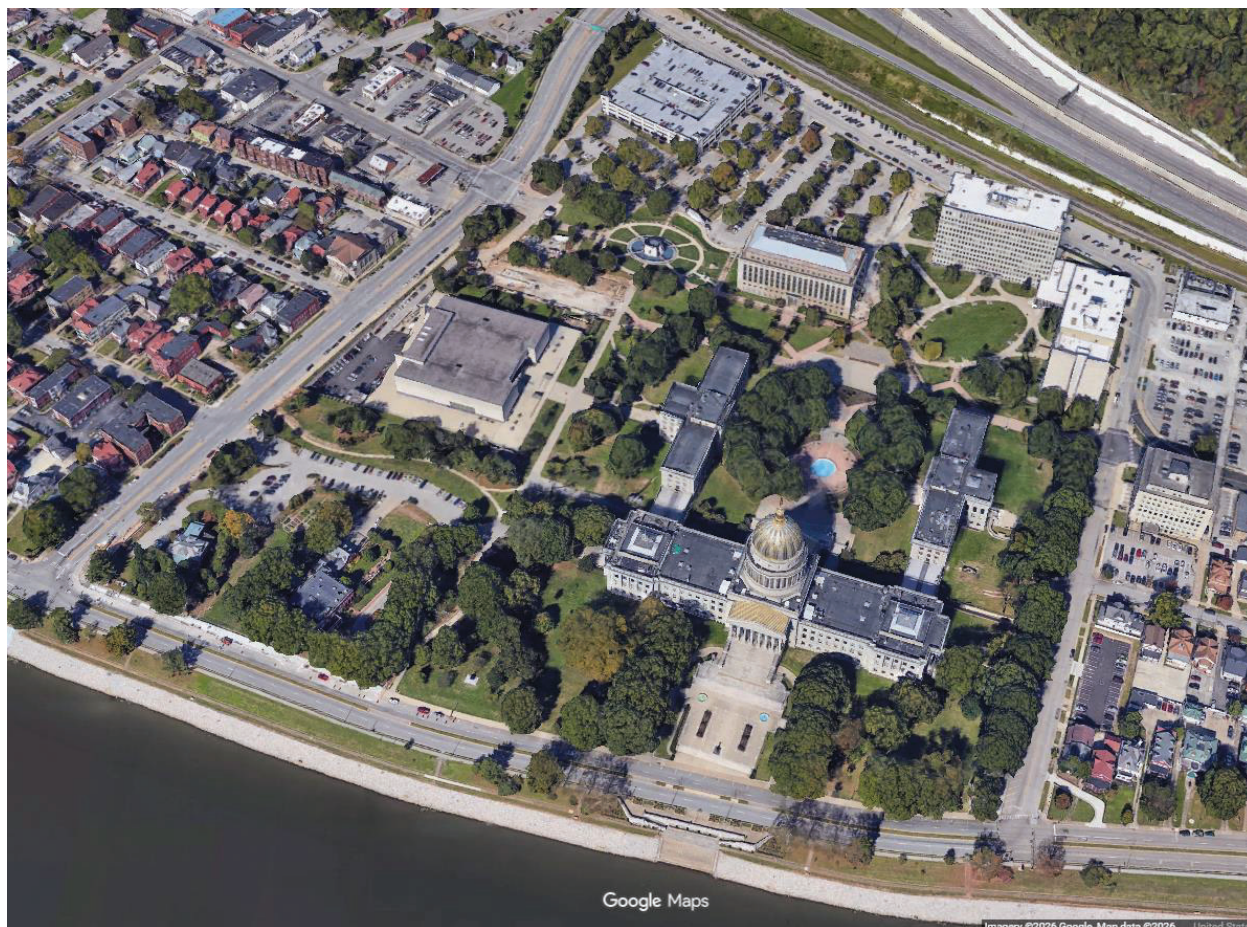


Figure 2 2026 Google Maps 3D Satellite View of West Virginia Capitol Complex. The Culture Center is the square building in the center left.

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1973-1976

Contributing building

Exterior

The base of the Culture Center consists of a large, 300 square foot concrete plinth, sitting partially below ground level. It contains an expansive basement, which can be accessed through doors and a loading dock on the west side or emergency exits on the north and south sides. On top of the plinth is the main building, which is 200 square feet in area and approximately 60 feet tall. The remaining 100 square feet of the plinth's top wraps around the building, forming a 50-foot-wide concrete plaza or deck on all four sides. Steel railing borders the perimeter. Access to the deck (and, by extension, the main building) is provided by granite stairs and two switchback wheelchair ramps on the east side, as well as stairs and a footbridge on the south side. The east side stairs are flanked by two small, square, aggregate concrete utility sheds.

The main component of the Culture Center is a large, rectangular, symmetrical block situated in the center of the deck. It is of steel frame construction, and clad in vertical, rectangular panels of grooved Indiana limestone above a nearly seven foot tall, carnelian granite foundation. The building is cantilevered, extending approximately four feet, two inches beyond the granite base on all four sides to evoke the appearance of floating. It has a flat rubber membrane roof, two projecting square bays flanking the main entrance on the east side, and two vertical square column projections on the west (rear) side extending from the base to slightly above the roofline. The rear columns contain utility stairwells providing access from the first floor to the rooftop and to the theater's gridiron.

The main entrance is on the east side of the building. It consists of a window wall made with twelve large, vertical glass panes framed in metal. The middle eight panes protrude outward, with doors on the northern and southern ends. In front of the entrance, on the deck, is a diamond-shaped series of blue and red stone tiles patterned to resemble a tree, the logo used by the former West Virginia Division of Culture and History in the 1990s and early 2000s. Above the window wall, the words "Archives History Library Museum Theater" are engraved on the limestone panels and colored gold. On both the northern and southern sides of the building are a single row of six vertical, metal-framed, tinted windows. They provide natural lighting to the archives reading room and state library, respectively. Both rows are divided near the bottom by a horizontal granite strip. Next to each row is a single emergency exit door. On the west side of the building, flanked by the vertical projections, is a duplicate of the "Archives History Library Museum Theater" engraving. Centered above that is an engraving of the West Virginia state seal. The northeast and north sides of the granite foundation are engraved with a series of maps and text forming a chronological timeline of West Virginia history and identification of its natural resources. Aside from these details, the exterior is devoid of any ornamentation.

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Figure 3 Culture Center Front Entrance, Summer 2023. Courtesy of WV Department of Tourism.



Photo 19 Rear (west) side of Culture Center with state seal engraving, camera facing northeast

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Two unroofed, sunken lightwells protrude from the plinth, one from the northeast corner and one from the southeast corner. Each is constructed with exposed aggregate concrete and includes terraced, concrete raised flower beds and staircases leading to ground level. They serve as public emergency exits for the State Museum, with glass walls and glass doors connecting the basement to the lightwells. The southeast lightwell has been altered to provide switchback wheelchair ramp access to ground level.



Photo 7 Northeast lightwell, camera facing east



Photo 12 Southeast lightwell, camera facing northwest

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Interior

The basement is accessible to employees through several pedestrian and rollup freight doors on the plinth's west side, in the parking lot area. This entrance leads to a series of corridors containing offices, utility spaces, storage, the theater trap room, a conference room, a mail room, video recording studio, restrooms, and offices and artifact storage space for the West Virginia State Museum. These employees-only parts of the basement are utilitarian in design, with concrete block walls, tiled floors, and acoustic ceiling drop tiles.

The one public space in the basement is the West Virginia State Museum, accessible to visitors via the main entrance on the building's east side. It is approximately 24,000 square feet in size, with a concrete floor and concrete waffled ceiling. Public entrances to the museum lead to a small lobby, which contains exhibit space, two restrooms, a media room, an education room, and the entrance and exit to the "show path," containing the bulk of the museum's exhibits. This 660-foot path with 26 adjoining rooms utilizes audiovisual technology and elaborate set designs to create the appearance of walking through an immersive timeline, with artifacts, display cases, and video screens interspersed throughout. Visitors walk through spaces including a primeval forest, a frontier log cabin, Harpers Ferry, a coal mine, a company store, a soda fountain, a highway, and a fairground.



Figure 4 Visitor's Map of the West Virginia State Museum

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The first floor (plaza level) contains the Great Hall, the Norman L. Fagan West Virginia State Theater, restrooms, a gift shop, the State Archives reading room, microfilm storage space, the State Library reading room, and offices for the State Library Commission, West Virginia Archives & History, and *Goldenseal* magazine.

Visitors coming in through the main entrance first enter the Great Hall. It was described in one promotional document as a “sort of medieval-mood entry hall and central focal point of [the] Center.”¹ The Great Hall measures 100 feet by 50 feet with a 40-foot ceiling. The walls are clad with a combination of white Alabama marble panels and narrow, vertical oak wood panels. The floor is inlaid with red Tennessee marble tiles. The ceiling is adorned with a series of coffered gold and brown light fixtures forming a waffle grid pattern. Also hanging from the ceiling are two intricate chandeliers comprised of crystals and brass tubes. Each one is a dodecahedron, a geometric ball formed by twelve attached pentagons. Each chandelier is ten feet in diameter, contains 92 lights, and weighs approximately 1,000 pounds. They form the visual centerpiece of the room.

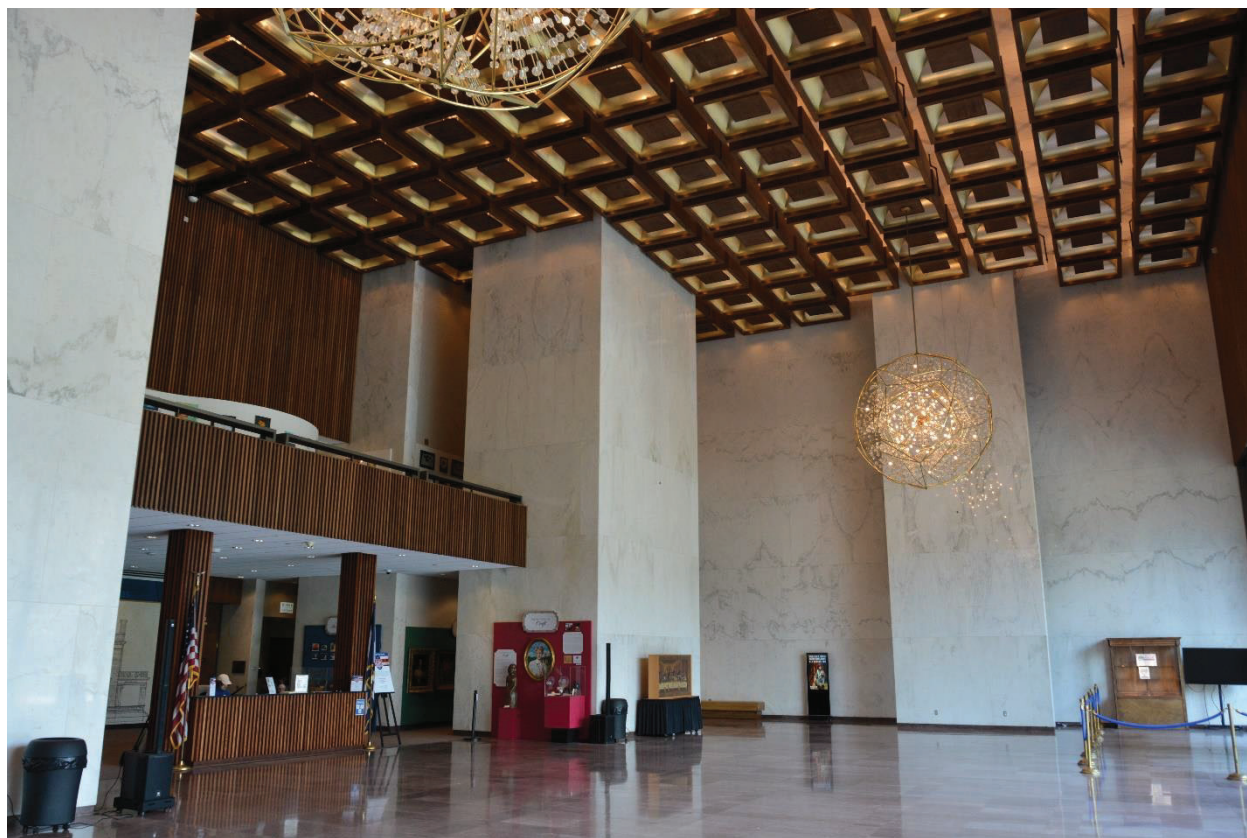


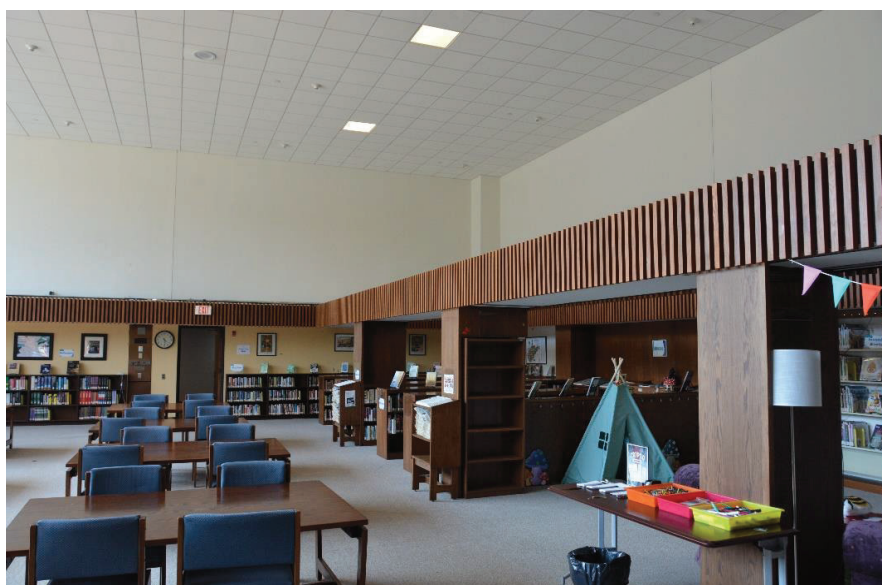
Photo 28 Great Hall interior, camera facing northwest

¹ “Department of Culture and History’s Home Base: The Cultural Center,” *Department of Culture and History News*, n.d.

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The south end of the Great Hall has entrances to the J. D. Waggoner Reading Room, offices for the State Library Commission, and an escalator leading to the State Museum in the basement. The reading room entrance is hidden behind a large, square, marble-clad column. The north end of the Great Hall has entrances to a gift shop, the State Archives reading room, offices for West Virginia Archives & History and *Goldenseal* magazine, and an escalator leading out of the State Museum. The office spaces have carpeted flooring, drywall partitions, acoustic ceiling tiles, and sliced red oak veneer doors. Elevators and emergency stairwells within the north and south office spaces provide employees with access to every floor of the building. The gift shop and archives reading room entrances are hidden behind another large, square, marble-clad column, paralleling the one on the south side.



Photos 30-31, the State Library reading room (top) and State Archives reading room (bottom)

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A second story balcony clad in narrow oak wood panels overlooks the Great Hall from its west side. At its north and south ends are double L-shaped, carpeted staircases with thick wood railing, connecting the first floor to the balcony and (for employees) the basement. These are enveloped within large, square, marble-clad columns flanking the balcony. An elevator below the north side of the balcony connects to the State Museum, the first floor, and the balcony. The center of the balcony is supported by two oak wood paneled columns flanking the visitors' desk underneath. Beyond this is a small gallery space and doorways to the Norman L. Fagan West Virginia State Theater. These doors are flanked by public restrooms.



Photo 44 second floor balcony, camera facing south



Photo 42 Balcony's north side staircase, camera facing east and downwards

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The theater space is four stories tall with a curved ceiling. Because of the space's size, the layout for each floor of the building is arranged to wrap around it. The theater contains a stage, backstage, a balcony, seating for 468 people, and an audiovisual equipment booth. The seating area is flanked by four emergency exits on the north and south sides, respectively, which open into the Great Hall. The theater walls use the same materials as the interior of the Great Hall. The bottom third of the walls are clad in white marble. Above them are vertical oak wood panels which curve upwards to cover the ceiling, creating a distinct arch appearance. Two rows of lightbulbs spanning the length of the wood panels provide the main source of illumination.



Photo 34 Theater stage, camera facing west



Photo 35 Theater seating, camera facing east

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The second floor contains the Great Hall balcony and gallery space, employee restrooms, bronze drinking fountains with built-in garbage can and fire extinguisher storage, access to the State Theater balcony, and offices for various state agencies on the northern and southern ends. The office spaces have acoustic drop ceiling tiles, carpet tiles, drywall partitions clad in vinyl wall fabric, and sliced red oak veneer doors. The third floor contains stacks for the archives and mechanical rooms. The fourth floor contains more archives stacks, mechanical rooms, stacks for the State Library Commission, and excess storage spaces for other state agencies. Purely utilitarian, these two upper floors have concrete block walls and concrete floors. The third floor has an exposed ceiling, while the fourth floor uses acoustic ceiling tiles.

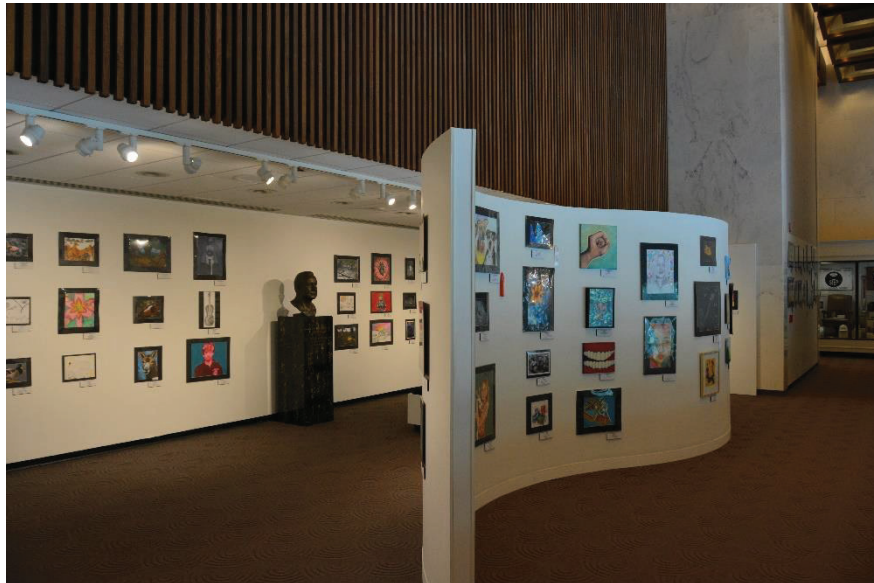


Photo 43 Balcony art gallery, camera facing northwest



Photo 49 Third floor stacks for State Archives, camera facing east

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Retaining Wall

1973-1976

Contributing structure

To the west of the Culture Center is an exposed aggregate cast concrete retaining wall. It holds back earth to accommodate the sunken employee parking lot and loading dock. The wall extends from the southwest corner of the plinth approximately 125 feet west towards the Greenbrier Street sidewalk. From there, it continues northeast for approximately 465 feet, paralleling the sidewalk. The wall is 20 feet high at its tallest and gradually steps down until it terminates in front of a small sidewalk that links the Greenbrier Street sidewalk to the employee parking lot. The southern portion of the wall is supported by exposed aggregate concrete buttresses.

Parking Lot

1973-1976

Contributing structure

Wedged between the west side of the plinth and the retaining wall, in a thin, right triangle shape, is the employee parking lot. It is accessible from the north side via a driveway and sidewalks. The entire lot is paved in asphalt and descends below street level in order to directly access the basement. In addition to parking spaces, the area includes a loading dock, ventilation systems, satellite dishes, and a space for storing garbage. Multiple pedestrian and roll-up doors provide access to the basement.



Photo 20 Parking lot and retaining wall, camera facing southwest

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Fallen Partner Sculpture 1990 Non-contributing object

Also known as the West Virginia Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Located at the northwest corner of the deck. One seven-foot-tall bronze sculpture atop a four-foot-tall granite pedestal. It depicts a police officer holding a shield and scroll in one hand, and a badge and gun belt in the other. It was created by sculptor Bill Hopen in 1990. Commissioned by the West Virginia Fraternal Order of Police, *Fallen Partner* serves as a monument to law enforcement in West Virginia who have died in the line of duty. Bronze plaques attached to the pedestal list the names of over 100 fallen officers. This object is non-contributing due to age.

Fallen Firefighter Sculpture 1994 Non-contributing object

One six-and-a-half-foot bronze sculpture atop a four-foot-tall granite pedestal. Located at the northwest corner of the deck. It depicts a masked firefighter holding an axe in one hand and a small child in the other. It was created by sculptor James Lykins in 1994. Commissioned by the West Virginia Firefighters Association, *Fallen Firefighter* serves as a memorial to firefighters in West Virginia who have died in the line of duty. Bronze plaques attached to the pedestal list the names of fallen firefighters. This object is non-contributing due to age.



Photo 21 Fallen Partner and Fallen Firefighter sculptures on the deck's northwest corner, camera facing east

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Outdoor Exhibit

2024-2025

Non-contributing site

Situated to the south side of the Culture Center, this approximately one acre slice of former greenspace serves as an outdoor exhibit for the West Virginia State Museum. Originally titled “West Virginia: Nature Designs a State that Fuels a Nation,” the exhibit was intended to highlight the natural resources and industrial history of West Virginia. The site contains a meandering concrete sidewalk, trees, shrubs, display cases, large artifacts, a small section of railroad track, a pergola, an artificial waterfall, a footbridge connecting to the deck, and a switchback wheelchair ramp connecting to the southeast lightwell. This site is non-contributing due to age.



Photo 15 Outdoor exhibit on the Culture Center's southside, camera facing northwest

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Integrity

The deck has undergone several alterations. A series of concrete planters with shrubs and trees that were present at the Culture Center's opening have been removed. Metal railing spanning the full perimeter of the deck, and two switchback wheelchair ramps on the front (east facing) side were added sometime after the Period of Significance. The dedication plaque, once placed at the front and center of the main entrance, was later moved towards the northern end of the entrance. Stairs and a footbridge constructed in 2025 as part of the outdoor exhibit now provide access to the deck through its south side.

The southeast lightwell was significantly altered during construction of the outdoor exhibit in the mid-2020s. Its west retaining wall was removed to allow for construction of a connecting switchback wheelchair ramp and an artificial tiered waterfall.

In July 2025, cracks in one of the front entrance's large glass panes forced it to be temporarily replaced with plywood. As of 2026 the plywood remains, but the windowpane is expected to be replaced in the near future.

Changes to the interior have been minimal. A curved partition wall has been added to the exhibit space on the second-floor balcony. A wood paneled partition wall underneath the balcony (in front of the theater entrances) has been removed. The biggest interior alteration has been to the State Museum exhibits in the basement, which underwent a complete overhaul in 2004-2009. Overall, these changes do little to diminish the historic integrity of the Culture Center. It retains integrity of Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association, easily able to convey its historic appearance as a 1970s institutional building.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

Politics/Government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1973-1977

Significant Dates

1976

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

C. E. Silling & Associates

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The West Virginia Culture Center is eligible for the National Register at the state and local level under *Criterion A: Politics/Government* for its association with efforts to expand the state government's humanities-based agencies, and promote the appreciation of West Virginia's arts, culture, and history. Construction of the Culture Center was the most substantial development in a series of expansion projects for the State Capitol Complex in the 1960s and 1970s. Governor Arch Moore lobbied hard for the facility's creation and personally oversaw much of its development. The Culture Center provided a spacious, state-of-the-art, new home for the chronically underfunded and overcrowded state museum and state archives. It also provided space for the State Library Commission, the Arts and Humanities Council, the Historic Preservation Unit, and *Goldenseal* magazine. The building's Great Hall and West Virginia State Theater also offered a new venue for performing arts activities and various public or government events. The Culture Center overall represented a substantial new investment in arts, culture, and history initiatives by the state government. The Culture Center is also eligible at the state and local level under *Criterion C: Architecture* as a rare and impressive representation of the Brutalist style in West Virginia. The building – inspired by the recently completed Ohio Historical Center in Columbus – was designed by C. E. Silling & Associates, a prominent state firm that created several notable Modern buildings in West Virginia. The Period of Significance starts in 1973, when construction of the Culture Center began, and ends in 1977, when the first annual Vandalia Gathering festival was held and when the various state agencies occupying the building were reorganized into the West Virginia Department of Culture and History. One significant date is 1976, the year the Culture Center opened to the public.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Early History of Charleston, West Virginia

Charleston's origins date to 1788, when a group of Greenbrier County rangers led by George Clendenin were sent to Kanawha County and established a military outpost on the north side of the Kanawha River, near its confluence with the Elk River. Named Fort Lee, the outpost was part of a frontier defensive system developed to protect white settlers in western Virginia from attacks by indigenous forces. The settlement around Fort Lee grew, and in 1794 was chartered as Charlestown, named after George's father Charles Clendenin. In 1818, the name was changed to Charleston to avoid confusion with Jefferson County's Charles Town.²

The first major industry in Charleston and the Kanawha Valley was salt making. The region was found to have rich deposits of brine underground, which were drilled and extracted for processing into salt. Salt wells proved key to the area's development during the first half of the nineteenth century. The salt industry relied heavily on enslaved labor. By 1850, over 1,500

² Richard A. Andre, "Charleston," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, June 25, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1048>; Cathy Hershberger Miller, "George Clendenin," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 19, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1258>; Chambers, *Buildings of West Virginia*.

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enslaved Black people in the Kanawha Valley were being used for the labor-intensive process of extracting and evaporating brine.³

One of the elite families involved in the salt industry was the Ruffner family, who moved to the area in the 1790s. Members of the wealthy clan were very influential in the political and economic development of Charleston and Kanawha County. In addition to operating many salt wells, the Ruffners also owned a vast tract of land encompassing much of present-day Charleston, including the downtown and East End areas. In 1815, Daniel Ruffner commissioned the building of a brick house, now known as the Holly Grove Mansion, which became the family seat. Holly Grove faced south towards the Kanawha River and was near a major early transportation route; as such, the house doubled as an inn for travelers. Like with the salt wells, the Ruffner's house and estate were likely supported by enslaved labor.⁴

By the early twentieth century, Charleston – having been designated the West Virginia state capital – was a thriving city. In addition to being the state's center of political power, it was also a major transportation, banking, and industrial hub. The population exploded from approximately 11,000 in 1900 to over 60,000 three decades later. The old Ruffner estate had given way to urban development, and Holly Grove now sat in the middle of a large residential neighborhood known as the East End (being east of the city's downtown business district). New improvements to the area – such as drainage systems to make the land less marshy, and the creation of a streetcar system – made the East End a desirable place to live for Charleston's professional class.⁵

Development of the West Virginia Capitol Complex to the 1970s

When West Virginia became an independent state in the midst of the Civil War on June 20, 1863, its first capital was the City of Wheeling. The industrialized northern panhandle city was the bedrock of Union support in the new state and where pro-Union delegates of northwestern Virginia had gathered in 1861 to initiate the process of separation from Virginia, which had largely sided with the rebellion. After the war, however, complaints over Wheeling's far distance from the rest of the state compelled the legislature to find a new capital. The City of Charleston in Kanawha County was selected due to its more central location. Legislators soon became

³ John Edmund Stealey III, "Salt Industry," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, April 25, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/149>; John Edmund Stealey III, "Slavery," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, April 11, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/428>.

⁴ Gerald S. Ratliff, "Ruffner Family," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 29, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/120>; Paul D. Marshall, "Holly Grove," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 8, 2024, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/424>; James E. Harding, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: Holly Grove Mansion," West Virginia Antiquities Commission, May 13, 1974, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://wvculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Holly-grove-mansion.pdf>.

⁵ James E. Harding, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: East End Historic District," West Virginia Antiquities Commission, March 18, 1977, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/NationalRegister/78002800.pdf>; Jean Boger, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: East End Historic District (Boundary Increase)," Michael Gioulis Historic Preservation Consultant, Inc, July 15, 2014, accessed March 23, 2026, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/NationalRegister/14001060.pdf>.

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dissatisfied with Charleston's lack of infrastructure and businesses, and in 1875 they voted to move back to Wheeling. In 1877, a statewide referendum was held in which citizens voted to make Charleston the permanent capital. The state government moved to Charleston for a final time in 1885.⁶

In Charleston, a stately stone and brick Capitol building with a central clock tower was constructed on a city block between Washington, Lee, Capitol, and Dickinson streets. For several decades it housed the legislature and various government departments. On January 3, 1921, this building was completely destroyed in a devastating fire. The state government rushed to create a replacement Capitol. By the end of the year, it had contracted nationally recognized architect Cass Gilbert to design the new building and selected a location for it. Rather than remain in Charleston's downtown business district, the new Capitol would be in the primarily residential East End neighborhood, fronting the north side of the Kanawha River.⁷

Several blocks of residential houses were purchased by the state and relocated or demolished to create the new Capitol grounds. The space formed a large square – a little over sixteen acres – bordered by Kanawha Boulevard to the south, Washington Street to the north, California Avenue to the east, and Duffy Street to the west.

To reduce costs, the Capitol Building was constructed in three phases, each with different contracts. The west wing was constructed from 1924-1925; the east wing from 1926-1927; and the central unit from 1930-1932, completing the building. Cass Gilbert gave the building an impressive Italian Renaissance style design, clad in Indiana limestone on the exterior with a large, gilded dome in the center. The interior was inlaid with various types of marble and decorated with features such as crystal chandeliers and plaster leaf arrangements.

Meanwhile, during construction of the west wing, work also commenced on an official residence for the governor. The West Virginia Executive Mansion was built just southeast of the Capitol, at the northwest corner of Duffy Street and Kanawha Boulevard. The red brick, Georgian Colonial Revival house was designed by local architect Walter F. Martens. It was completed in 1925. A third floor, part of the original design, was added in 1946.⁸

⁶ Kenneth Bailey, "Capital Cities," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 19, 2024, accessed January 27, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/2252>.

⁷ *The West Virginia Capitol: A Commemorative History* (Charleston, WV: West Virginia State Legislature, 2022).

⁸ *The West Virginia Capitol: A Commemorative History*; Jim Wallace, *A History of the West Virginia Capitol: The House of State* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012).

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Figure 5 Aerial view of Capitol Building in 1934. The neighborhood to the left occupies where the Culture Center now stands. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/91719417/>.

While all the state's offices and agencies were initially housed in the Capitol Building, the sheer growth of the state government apparatus soon necessitated the need for more space. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the government pursued a series of expansions and construction projects that transformed the Capitol from a single building into what is now called the West Virginia Capitol Complex.

After several years of planning, the state constructed a new office building to the north of the Capitol Building, on the opposite side of Washington Street, in 1951-1952. It was dubbed simply Building 3. Designed by Cass Gilbert's son, Cass Gilbert Jr., the eight-story building was clad in Indiana limestone (to match the Capitol Building) and displayed some terra cotta ornamentation. Building 3 initially housed offices for the State Road Commission, the Health Department, and several other agencies.⁹

At nearly the same time, a four-story concrete parking garage was constructed in 1952-1953. It stood east of Building 3, on the opposite side of California Avenue. Also designed by Cass Gilbert Jr., this garage was designated Building 2. It was demolished in 2003 after suffering extensive deterioration.

⁹ Wallace, *A History of the West Virginia Capitol*; "West Virginia Historic Property Inventory Form: KA-5900," accessed March 4, 2026, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/ArchitecturalSites/KA-5900.pdf>.

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Buildings 2 and 3 were followed almost immediately by Building 4, constructed in 1952-1954. It stands on California Avenue, across the street from and east of the Capitol Building and south of where Building 2 once stood. This modest, cube-shaped, six-story office building was designed by C. E. Silling, at the time part of Tucker & Silling. Like the Capitol Building and Building 3, Building 4 was clad in limestone, but it lacked any ornamentation save for a black marble base and front entrance. The facility housed offices for various state agencies including the Workmen's Compensation Commission and the Department of Employment Security.¹⁰

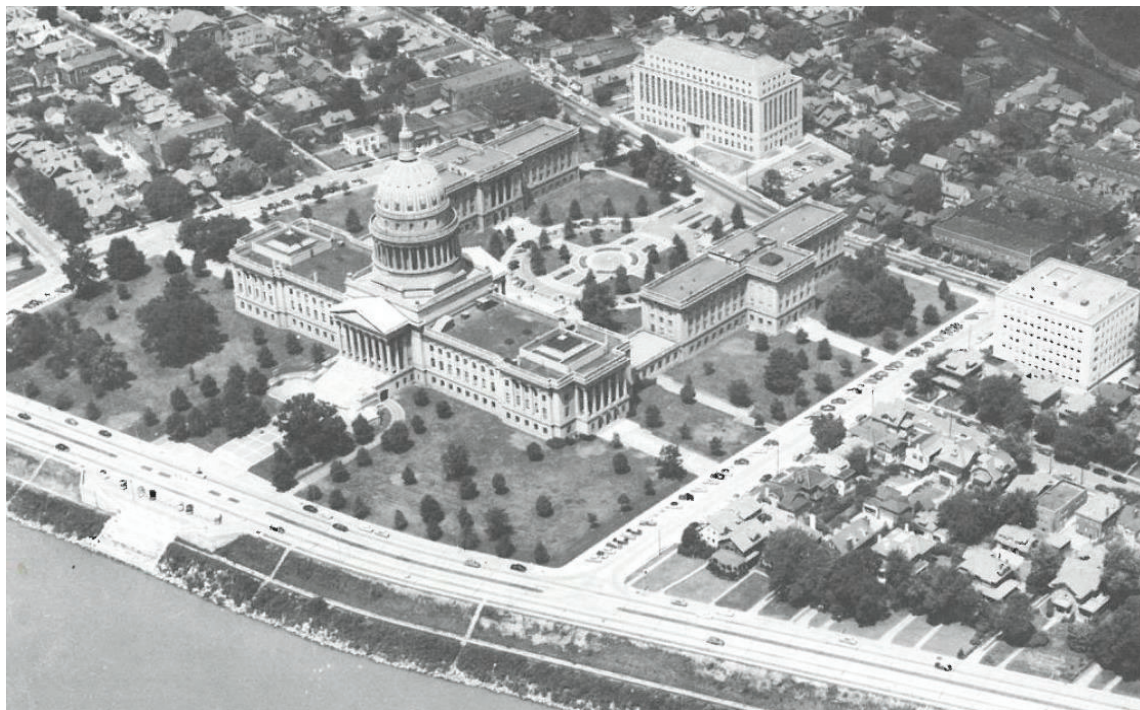


Figure 6 Aerial view of the Capitol Complex, ca. 1964. Building 3 can be seen to the north and Building 4 to the east. Image from Travel West Virginia 3, Vol. 1 (Winter 1964).

In 1966, the State Office Building Commission developed a master plan for the development and expansion of the Capitol Complex going forward. Parcels adjoining the complex were purchased, and homes and businesses demolished to make room for more offices and parking spaces. Construction of three new office buildings at the corner of Piedmont Road and California Avenue proceeded from 1968-1971. Buildings 5 and 6 were ten and eight-story high rises, respectively, built with precast concrete and Indiana limestone. They were physically linked together by a much smaller facility, Building 7, constructed in between them.

Utilitarian in design and lacking any significant ornamentation, Buildings 5-7 received much criticism for their plain, corporate appearance. Several sources referred to their architectural style

¹⁰ Arielle Harris, "West Virginia Historic Property Inventory Form: West Virginia Capitol Complex Building 4," November 20, 2018, West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, accessed March 5, 2026, https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/ArchitecturalSites/KA-4642-0106_Rev01.pdf.

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as “Holiday Inn Modern.”¹¹ Secretary of Administration Rob Ferguson later described them as “the Russian buildings, because they’re just terrible inside.”¹² Architectural historian S. Allen Chambers, Jr. minced no words when he commented in 2004 that they “remain unloved and unnamed and are known simply by their numbers.”¹³

The Capitol Building and Executive Mansion were jointly nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 as the West Virginia Capitol Complex. At the time, the Complex’s other buildings did not meet the age requirements for listing and were excluded from the nomination boundaries.¹⁴

West Virginia Archives and History

Efforts to preserve, interpret, and commemorate West Virginia’s history began not long after the state was born. Multiple iterations of a West Virginia State Historical Society were organized, the earliest dating back to 1869. In 1890, the West Virginia Historical and Antiquarian Society was founded. The following year, it received formal endorsement and funding from the state legislature. For the next fourteen years, the Society collected thousands of artifacts and documents. It used rooms in the Capitol Building for the first West Virginia State Museum and archives library.¹⁵

In 1905, the state legislature established the West Virginia State Bureau of Archives and History (soon renamed the Department of Archives and History), which took over the possessions of the Historical and Antiquarian Society. Legislation called for this new formal government agency to preserve “all valuable papers and documents” relating to West Virginia history and government, as well as operate “a museum illustrative of history, science, the social conditions and life of the people of our country, past and present.”¹⁶ It was led by the preeminent state historian Virgil A. Lewis. The Department soon moved the growing museum and archives to the Capitol Annex building, which had been constructed in 1902 on the corner of Hale and Lee streets to house additional state offices. As it would later turn out, this action saved many of the state’s earliest documents and artifacts from being destroyed in the 1921 Capitol fire.¹⁷

In 1929, the Department relocated the State Archives and State Museum to the fourth floor of the new Capitol Building’s east wing. The archives developed into an important source of research

¹¹ Wallace, *A History of the West Virginia Capitol*;

¹² Wallace, *A History of the West Virginia Capitol*, 77.

¹³ S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *Buildings of West Virginia* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 78.

¹⁴ James E. Harding, “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: West Virginia Capitol Complex,” West Virginia Antiquities Commission, April 11, 1974, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/NationalRegister/74002009.pdf>.

¹⁵ Mary Johnson, “West Virginia Historical Society,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 15, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1025>.

¹⁶ “Senate Bill No. 64,” *Acts of the Legislature of West Virginia Passed at its Twenty-Seventh Regular Session* (Charleston, WV: Moses W. Donnally, 1905), 466-468, accessed January 29, 2026, https://www.wvlegislature.gov/legisdocs/publications/acts/Acts_1905.pdf.

¹⁷ Joe Geiger and Mary Johnson, “West Virginia Archives and History,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, December 11, 2025, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/984>.

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both for the government and the public; over the next half century, its collection grew to around 150,000 volumes. In 1937, the museum moved to the basement of the Capitol Building's center portion, where it became a popular attraction for visitors. Early museum exhibits displayed items such as Native American artifacts, taxidermized animals, objects belonging to Daniel Boone, models of the Blennerhassett Mansion and James Rumsey steamboat, Civil War battle flags, souvenirs collected from other countries, and the preserved bodies of two dressed fleas.¹⁸

The inherent nature of archives and museums meant that the Department's collection continued to expand over the years, necessitating more space. Additionally, the Department was plagued by insufficient state funding from its onset. This hindered the ability to hire enough staff, properly conserve documents and artifacts, and obtain adequate space for storage and display. These issues persisted over the decades.¹⁹

As early as the mid-1950s, Archives and History leaders were calling for the state government to provide them with a separate building in addition to more funding. The State Museum and State Archives "need more space, money and personnel if these facilities are to be of any continuing value to West Virginians," said the Fairmont *Times-West Virginian* in 1957.²⁰ The museum increasingly had to turn away item donations due to lack of space. The small, low-paid staff, many of whom had limited training, struggled to organize and preserve materials. Inadequate air conditioning also threatened to hasten the deterioration of artifacts and documents. West Virginia, reported Archives and History director Mattie Thomas,

is culturally impoverishing itself and its future citizens by not making proper provision for housing the Department and appropriating necessary funds to attract and retain qualified personnel to carry on a continuing program that will preserve for posterity a true picture of the history of our state.²¹

Newspapers published criticisms of the underfunded, overcrowded state of the archives and museum. "But what can you expect of those who are interested only in making money and don't give a tinker's hoot about our history?" complained historian and columnist Shirley Donnelly.²² By the mid-1960s, historians at West Virginia University were agitating for the Department of Archives and History to be reorganized and its collections relocated to Morgantown; nothing came of this effort.²³ In 1969, a report from the firm Zando, Martin and Milstead Architects and Engineers concluded that conditions at the State Archives were "deplorable."²⁴

¹⁸ Mary E. Johnson, "'There's Nothing New, Everything is Old Today': Looking Back on One Hundred Years of West Virginia Archives and History," *West Virginia History* 60 (2004-2006): 49-82. "The State Museum," n.d., "Cultural Center Misc.," Vertical Files, West Virginia Archives & History.

¹⁹ Johnson, "'There's Nothing New, Everything is Old Today.'"

²⁰ Carlo J. Salzano, "Archives Dept. And Museum Need Cash," *Times-West Virginian* (Fairmont, WV), May 26, 1957.

²¹ Mrs. Dale Thomas, "Report of Department of Archives and History, July 1, 1954 – June 30, 1956," West Virginia Archives & History.

²² Shirley Donnelly, "Parsimony on State Archives Said Sinful," *Beckley Post-Herald*, February 18, 1959.

²³ John G. Morgan, "Downgrading of Archives Draws Foes," *Charleston Gazette*, January 22, 1966.

²⁴ Zando, Martin and Milstead Architects and Engineers, "Report on Departmental Space Study for the State of West Virginia State Building Commission," September 8, 1969, West Virginia Archives & History.

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In 1968, news emerged of a multimillion-dollar investment for historical projects in Ohio. Governor James A. Rhodes announced a \$5 million, multi-year project to construct a new museum and archives building in Columbus, as well as a series of smaller, thematic museums across Ohio. The Ohio state government hoped that this new investment in historic preservation and interpretation would boost its tourism industry. “The warning here for West Virginia – where our understaffed and underbudgeted Department of Archives and History is unable to even care for the small number of mementos, books and papers it has collected – is urgent,” wrote the Huntington *Herald-Dispatch*. “We must take quick action to save some of our historical heritage . . . or face the prospect of seeing the growing number of history-minded tourists head for our sister states.”²⁵

Other Humanities Agencies in West Virginia

As the role of government expanded in the mid-twentieth century, West Virginia gradually accumulated an array of new offices and organizations to support the arts, crafts, history, literature, education, and other aspects of the humanities. Many of these programs were funded by the federal government and intended to promote the social, economic, and educational wellbeing of citizens.

The state legislature first established the West Virginia Library Commission in 1929 to support and provide services for the state’s growing network of public libraries. However, it was hamstrung from the beginning because the state did not provide funding for the Commission. Actual operations did not begin in earnest until state funding was allocated in 1941. The Commission’s role significantly expanded following passage of the national Library Services Act of 1956 (and subsequent amendments in 1964-65), which enabled it to receive federal funding to spend on public libraries. With this money, the Library Commission was able to support the construction and operation of more libraries; expand book collections; and develop new resources such as the popular “Bookmobile” program, which dispatched mobile libraries through rural counties.²⁶

One of the biggest hinderances to the Library Commission’s operations was the lack of centralized headquarters. Throughout this first period of its history, the Commission never had dedicated office space in a state building. The organization was first based in Morgantown, then relocated to Charleston in 1953 where it was forced to rent various spaces throughout the metro area. By the early 1970s, Library Commission facilities were scattered between two commercial buildings in Kanawha City and a house on Quarrier Street in Charleston.²⁷

In 1965, the federal government established the National Endowment for the Arts to fund arts and arts education projects. The enabling legislation for the NEA, the National Foundation on the

²⁵ “Historical Centers Needed To Spark Tourism In State,” *Herald-Dispatch* (Huntington, WV), December 26, 1968.

²⁶ Merle Moore, “Libraries,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 22, 2024, accessed March 16, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1329>; “Who We Are,” West Virginia Library Commission, accessed March 16, 2026, <https://librarycommission.wv.gov/who/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁷ “The New Science and Culture Center,” *Goldenseal 2*, No. 3 (July-September 1976): 3.

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Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, required each state to operate a designated arts agency for the purpose of receiving and disbursing this federal funding. In response, West Virginia created the Governor's Council on the Arts in 1967. Its name was later changed to the West Virginia Arts and Humanities Commission, then finally the West Virginia Commission on the Arts. While the Commission itself is a body of appointed members who vote to approve funding, day-to-day operations are overseen by the State Arts Office. The organization distributes grants to various organizations, schools, local governments, and individual artists.²⁸

The 1960s and 1970s saw a resurgence in traditional crafts and folk art. State and federal officials sought to stimulate local economic development through the production of handcrafted products. Using a federal grant from the United States Economic Development Administration, the West Virginia Department of Commerce opened an Arts and Crafts Division to support craftspeople in 1963. The division organized the Mountain State Art & Craft Fair, at Cedar Lakes in Jackson County, that same year to coincide with the centennial of West Virginia statehood. It was so successful that the fair became an annual event, and in 1973 the Arts and Crafts Division established a newsletter to promote it.²⁹

Hearth & Fair was first published in January 1973 under the editorship of Tom Screven and soon grew in scope, covering not just the Mountain State Art & Craft Fair but cultural activities and history across the state. In 1975, Commerce rebranded *Hearth & Fair* as *Goldenseal*, a quarterly magazine focused more broadly on state culture. Articles published ranged in topics from quilting and apple butter making, to the Great Depression and stories of attending one-room schoolhouses. Today, *Goldenseal* remains the premier magazine of West Virginia culture and folk life.³⁰

In 1965, the state legislature established the West Virginia Antiquities Commission to facilitate the preservation of historic properties around the state. It was based in Morgantown and tasked with documenting historic buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects in West Virginia. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, which created the National Register of Historic Places and mandated that each state maintain a "state historic preservation office" to oversee historic preservation programs. The Antiquities Commission fulfilled that mandate, successfully placing more than a hundred sites on the National Register over the following decade. After 1977, the Commission was dissolved and its functions transferred into the new Department of Culture and History's Historic Preservation Unit. Later, this agency was renamed the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office.³¹

²⁸ Lakin Ray Cook, Jenna Green, and Elizabeth Yeager, "West Virginia Commission on the Arts," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 14, 2024, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/994>.

²⁹ Danny Williams, "Folk Arts Revival," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 8, 2024, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/2152>; John Lilly, "Hearth & Fair: Don Page and the Roots of Goldenseal," *Goldenseal* 30, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 52-59; Don Page and Tim Pyles, "Crafts Movement," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 8, 2024, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1614>.

³⁰ Lilly, "Hearth & Fair,"; Nancy Ray Adams, "Goldenseal Magazine," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, November 13, 2025, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/2069>.

³¹ Joe Geiger, "Antiquities Commission," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 8, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/208>.

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Gov. Arch Moore and the Science and Culture Center

The West Virginia gubernatorial election of 1968 saw lawyer and former Congressman Arch A. Moore, Jr. elected governor. Combative but popular, Moore was an adept politician and became one of West Virginia's most influential chief executives. He was the first Governor in a century to serve two consecutive terms, after a 1970 state constitutional amendment allowed governors to succeed themselves. Using federal funds and new bonding authority, he launched an extensive road building campaign, which included construction of more interstates and the New River Gorge Bridge. Moore also increased salaries and insurance benefits for public employees; fired striking highway workers; negotiated the settlement of a national coal miners strike; expanded welfare programs; and advocated for the development of public kindergarten classes.³²



Figure 7 Gov. Arch A. Moore, Jr. From 1969 West Virginia Bluebook.

According to *Goldenseal* magazine editor Stan Bumgardner,

Arch Moore was one of the most controversial and polarizing figures in West Virginia history, but he knew the game of politics like nobody else. For example, despite overwhelming Democratic majorities in both houses of the legislature, the Republican Moore frequently pushed through his own projects. The Culture Center was a prime example.³³

Gov. Moore became interested in a new facility for the state museum and other humanities agencies very early in his administration. In April 1969, he publicly announced his support for a dedicated archives and museum building. The State Building Commission at the time was prioritizing the construction of a Capitol Complex cafeteria as well as another office building, but Moore urged for the archives and museum building to come first.³⁴

Moore was heavily influenced in his decision by the advocacy of Norm Fagan, director of the West Virginia Arts and Humanities Council, with whom he quickly formed a rapport. Moore attended a meeting of the Council early in his administration, where Fagan emphasized the need for a new building. As Fagan told Moore, "The state museum is an embarrassment, and the state Library Commission is located in a commercial storefront. You need a building that can house the museum, archives, Library Commission, and Arts and Humanities."³⁵

³² Richard S. Grimes, "Arch Moore," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, July 2, 2025, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1973>.

³³ Stan Bumgardner, "The Culture Center: West Virginia's "Treasure House,"" *Goldenseal Magazine* 42, No. 2 (Summer 2016), 30.

³⁴ Bob Mellace, "Gov. Moore Favors Higher Priority For Archives Building With Museum," *Charleston Daily Mail*, April 15, 1969.

³⁵ Bumgardner, "The Culture Center."

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Construction of what became termed the West Virginia Science and Culture Center had to wait for several more years. The State Building Commission had to acquire the necessary land and funding to build it. The state legislature initially denied authorization for the Commission to increase its bonding authority, and an effort to raise bonds through an alternate method was blocked by a state Supreme Court ruling. Finally, in 1971, legislation was passed enabling the Commission to raise \$9 million in bonds to fund the Science and Culture Center construction.

While this was going on, Moore and Fagan continued planning the size and scope of the new facility. Initial conceptions of a complex with separate buildings for the museum, archives, and a cafeteria soon gave way to a single building with all humanities agencies consolidated within it. The greatest inspiration for Moore and Fagan came from the Ohio Historical Center, Ohio's new dual state museum and archives building, which opened in Columbus in 1970. The \$10 million, cantilevered, concrete and glass building was hailed as a bold and visionary example of modern architecture. According to the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, "many states looked to the Ohio Historical Center for inspiration in their own public buildings and museums."³⁶ Both Department of Archives and History director Dr. James Hupp and National Society of American Archives secretary Dr. Robert Warner recommended that Moore base the Science and Culture Center off the Ohio Historical Center.³⁷

At Fagan's urging, Moore also incorporated a state theater into the proposed facility. The national John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. opened in 1971, and Fagan had left West Virginia to work for the new organization. He envisioned the Culture Center could be West Virginia's equivalent to the Kennedy Center, a place to showcase the Mountain State's own performing arts talent. An official with the Culture Center described what became the West Virginia State Theater as "a 'living museum' of the state," and "one of our proudest possessions." They predicted, "It will showcase the talent of the Mountain State – from intimate poetry readings to large symphony orchestras – and always will operate on a free-ticket policy."³⁸

In 1972, West Virginia commissioned the Charleston-based architectural firm of C. E. Silling & Associates to design the Culture Center. Silling at the time was the oldest continuing architectural business in West Virginia, dating back to 1904 when it was founded by architect H. Rus Warne. In 1950, it was renamed C. E. Silling & Associates after architect Cyrus Edgar "Cy" Silling became leader. The company boasted a large portfolio stretching back decades, and by the early 1970s it had designed several buildings in distinct, modern architectural styles. Silling's most recent significant designs included the International style National Bank of Commerce

³⁶ Abby Marshall, Barbara Powers, Carrie Simmons, Petra Knapp, Brent Eberhard, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Ohio Historical Center and Ohio Village," Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, January 2023.

³⁷ Ibid.; "Center Acclaimed," *Echoes Magazine*, April 1970.

³⁸ Carolanne Griffith, "New Science and Culture Center," *Wonderful West Virginia* 40, no. 10 (December 1976): 24-27.

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building in Charleston (1968) and the Brutalist style West Virginia University Coliseum in Morgantown (1970).³⁹

Taking a page from the Ohio Historical Center, Silling envisioned a Brutalist style design for the Science and Cultural Center. Moore also wanted the Culture Center to be grand and modern, but not overwhelming. He required that the form, massing, height, and style of the new facility not overshadow or detract from the Capitol building. As such the building was proposed to have a simple exterior with Indiana limestone cladding (the same material used for most other buildings on the Capitol Complex) and a height lower than the Capitol's wings. To accommodate these height restrictions, a substantial basement was made part of the design.

Early proposals for the Culture Center written up by Silling in October 1972 originally planned for the building to be three stories. The building layout was described as follows:

- a – The partially below grade level – a large square plinth on axis with the Capitol Building entrance. It contains:
 - 1 – The Museum with its manifold exhibits and service areas.
 - 2 – The part of the State Library that accommodates its state-wide program for the blind, and dispenses, receives and processes materials and facilities as a state-wide circulating service to local libraries and communities.
 - 3 – Certain State Theater stage and other services for the performing arts.
 - 4 – Trucking and receiving services for the building; incidental storage spaces; mechanical and electrical equipment areas.
- b – The main floor level – in a lesser square building on top of the plinth, in classic simplicity, on the same axis; surrounded by an open, paved sculptural and exhibit area serving as roof for the remaining larger plinth space below. The main floor level contains:
 - 1 – The Great Hall as entrance to the State Theater, State Library, State Archives. It is a handsome high ceilinged room of architectural elegance. Here Receptions of State, the Governor's Ball and other formal occasions can occur. An ever-changing series of varying exhibits can be exposed in this area. Nearby is a changing Fine Arts gallery.
 - 2 – The State Theater with its Foyer and balcony above fitted for presentation of the Performing Arts. This area will also function daily for audio-visual briefing of groups of people preliminary to their Archives and Museum Tours. It can be scheduled for scientific, cultural, recreational, and other types of lectures.
 - 3 – The State Archives special historical exhibits and library with controlled Search Room and services related to its stack areas above. The material is at hand, now can present itself and be appreciated by the public visitors.
 - 4 – The State Library with its large Reading Room and services related to its book stack areas above, its first opportunity to impinge formally.

³⁹ "Silling Associates, Inc., Architects-Planners," publication unknown, Preservation Alliance of West Virginia Files.

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c – The second floor level, in this lesser square building, contains large book, manuscript, and records stack storage areas for State Archives and State Library, each served by stairs and elevator; also the stage loft, and the State Theater balcony above the theater foyer below.⁴⁰

The designs were later revised to have five floors instead of three. The second floor was changed to house offices for state agencies, while the new third and fourth floors were intended to store the materials of the State Archives and Library Commission. The first floor and basement level designs remained mostly the same. Early ideas of a cafeteria were dropped over concerns it would impact the safety of artifacts. A reflecting pool was also planned at the front of the building, but Moore later removed that concept over concerns people would try to wade in it.

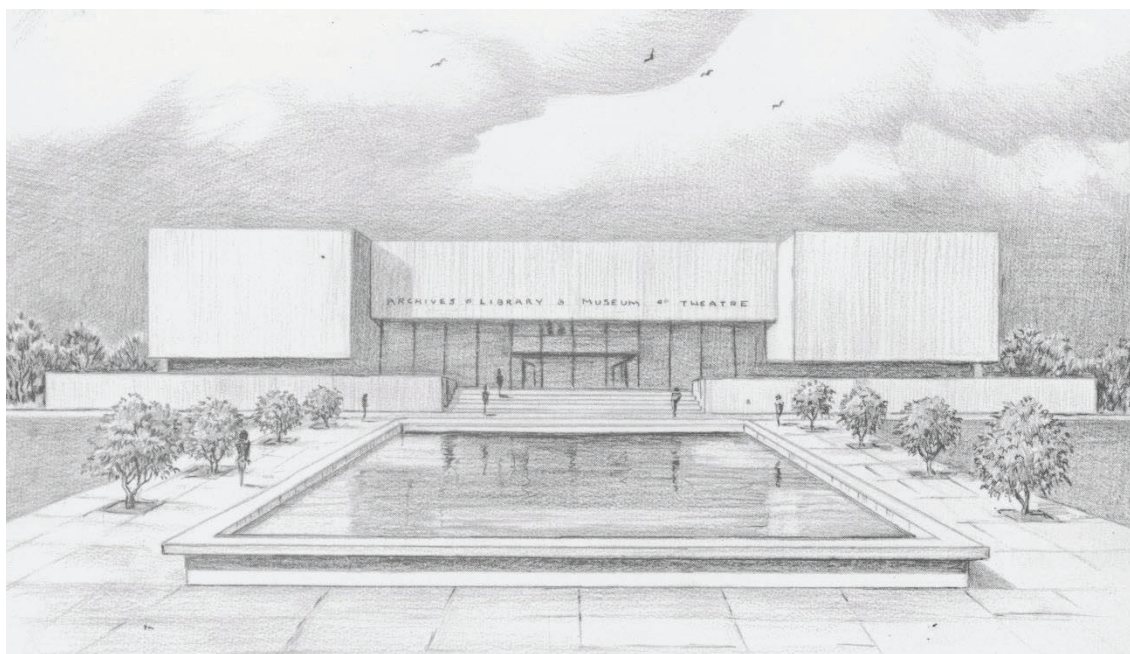


Figure 8 1973 concept art for the Science and Culture Center by James Swann. Courtesy of West Virginia Archives & History.

Moore unveiled design plans for the proposed Science and Culture Center in late January 1973. The *Charleston Gazette* described the proposed building as “A rich panorama of archives, history, and the arts, all coming to life in a West Virginia treasure house.”⁴¹ The minimalist exterior appearance would be that of a large square block. It had clean, straight lines, an unadorned limestone façade, and modest cantilevers over the foundation to provide a subtle floating look. The Governor predicted that the Center would be completed and operational within four years.

⁴⁰ C. E. Silling & Associates, “Science and Culture Center,” October 11, 1972. West Virginia Archives & History.

⁴¹ John G. Morgan, “Alive Culture Panorama Moore’s Vision of Center,” *Charleston Gazette*, January 31, 1973.

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Construction and Opening of the Culture Center

Construction of the new Science and Culture Center required substantial alterations to the landscape abutting the Capitol Complex. The State Building Commission's preferred site was an area to the west of the Capitol Building's west wing known in Charleston as the Rose City Block. The Rose City Block (officially the 1700 block of Quarrier Street) was a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood bounded by Duffy, Quarrier, Greenbrier, and Washington streets. It was named after the Rose City Cafeteria, a popular eatery located at the corner of Duffy and Washington streets. Other properties on the block included a market, barber shop, shoe repair shop, dry cleaning business, and various homes and offices.

The site was desired both for its proximity to the Capitol Complex and because it was less than half a mile south of the planned highway interchange for Interstate 64 and Interstate 77, which was constructed in the mid-1970s.⁴² This interchange would provide many travelers – especially tourists – with easy access to the new Science and Culture Center.

Some property owners in the Rose City Block objected to the sale of their buildings, especially for the prices offered by the State Building Commission that they considered too low. Many had strong ties to the neighborhood. "Some people had lived and worked in the Rose City Block as long as the capitol had been there," wrote Stan Bumgardner.⁴³ Some owners sued unsuccessfully to stop the state from seizing their properties through eminent domain. The state legislature passed a bill offering more compensation to property owners in the block, but Governor Moore vetoed it on the grounds of being too expensive. "Gov. Moore is taking the businesses of the people here and letting them starve to death," fumed one local barber who lost his business to the state.⁴⁴ By the spring of 1973, the state had secured control over all property within the Rose City Block. Small relocation payments of up to \$3,000 were offered to affected property owners. All buildings in the block were demolished in phases between March and May 1973.⁴⁵ This left a space roughly the size of three football fields upon which to build the Center. Duffy Street was also permanently closed and converted into a pedestrian walkway, integrating the Culture Center site and the Capitol Building into one seamless campus.

⁴² Courtney Zimmerman, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Kanawha & Michigan Railway Depot Warehouse," May 20, 2024, accessed March 11, 2026, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/NationalRegister/100011005.pdf>.

⁴³ Bumgardner, "The Culture Center," 30.

⁴⁴ Andrew Gallagher, "Rose City Block Sinking Slowly; Some Hang On," *Charleston Gazette*, May 9, 1973.

⁴⁵ "Culture Center Demolition Starts," *Charleston Gazette*, March 14, 1973; "State Property Buying Ends Near Capitol," *Charleston Gazette*, May 4, 1973.

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Figure 9 Rose City Block Partly Demolished. From the Charleston Gazette, May 9, 1973.



Figure 10 Culture Center under construction in 1973. From Goldenseal magazine, Summer 2016.

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Construction proceeded immediately after the demolitions were concluded. The State Building Commission assembled a coalition of contractors to build the Science and Culture Center, under the supervision of C. E. Silling & Associates. The McKinney Drilling Company performed excavation work and built the foundation. Six Industries, a Springfield, Ohio firm, did the general construction work. Stone came from the Vickery Stone Company of Havertown, Pennsylvania. Franz Lipp-Marvin Wehler arranged the landscaping, which included plantings on the deck, in the lightwells, and the surrounding grounds.

Some specialty artists were also brought in to create the building's few ornamental features. Virginia-based sculptor Harold C. Vogel carved a depiction of the West Virginia state seal on the rear (west) side of the building. New York artist Willy J. Malarcher of Rambusch Associates designed the two brass and crystal dodecahedron chandeliers for the Great Hall. Meanwhile, Ireland and Associates – the same firm that designed the Ohio Historical Center – was contracted to design the new State Museum exhibits and select interior furnishings.

Since the Executive Mansion was located next to the construction site and because of his personal interest in the project, Governor Moore frequently visited the Science and Culture Center to inspect its progress. He often intervened to order adjustments in the facility's design. According to Stan Bumgardner, "Moore was involved in every facet of the building's construction – down to choosing paint schemes and engaging Bloch Brothers Tobacco of Wheeling to paint a Mail Pouch barn sign in the museum. He was on the construction site so often the builders called him 'The Boss' ... Moore dearly loved the building he'd helped shape."⁴⁶ The governor personally gave press tours of the building under construction, and even handpicked the marble used, rejecting 40% of the stone received because the color wasn't right.⁴⁷

Moore was so closely associated with the Culture Center project that it was often called "Archie's Bunker," a nod both to the building's visual appearance (which some described as like a bunker) and to the character Archie Bunker from the popular sitcom *All in the Family*.⁴⁸ Some political opponents referred to it derisively as the "Arch Moore Memorial."⁴⁹ Supporters of the governor, meanwhile, raised money to install a bronze bust of Moore on a black marble pedestal inside the Culture Center. The committee responsible for the bust wrote that it would insure "that Governor Moore will always be remembered for his efforts in bringing about the magnificent center."⁵⁰ Moore biographer and former staffer Brad Crouser wrote, "Along with [the New River Gorge Bridge], the Cultural Center symbolized the Arch Moore Period, his massive building

⁴⁶ Bumgardner, "The Culture Center," 31-32.

⁴⁷ Richard Grimes, "'Archie's Bunker' Governor Reveals Additional Plans During Tour," *Charleston Daily Mail*, March 27, 1976.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Tom D. Miller, "Culture Center is 'monument' to Arch Moore," *Huntington Herald-Dispatch*, May 30, 1976.

⁵⁰ John A. Shanklin, Charles R. Hooten, Jr., and John M. Wells to Mary H. Harden, December 29, 1976, Citizens for Bronze Commemorative Bust Arch A. Moore, Jr., Ar1904, Capitol Building Commission Minutes, West Virginia Archives & History.

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projects and the new and modern era he helped usher in. They were done in a first rate manner, with beauty, class and style, as well as to serve a utilitarian purpose.”⁵¹

Moore tried to emphasize the apolitical nature of the Culture Center and how the facility was intended to serve all West Virginians. “It brings the State of West Virginia together . . . there is no parochialism, no politics within these walls. When you look at everything here, it becomes the catalyst that made us a state,” he said, when giving a press tour of the facility.⁵²

Construction of the Science and Culture Center was expected to cost a little under \$10 million, paid for mostly with the \$9 million in bonds sold by the State Building Commission. As the building neared completion in the summer of 1976, costs had spiraled to over \$14 million. In addition to the bond revenue, extra funds came from a \$1 million contribution from the Appalachian Regional Commission, \$500,000 from the State Library Commission, and rent payments the State Building Commission extracted from the Department of Highways. The significant overrun drew scrutiny from the press and criticism from legislators, especially when it came to the Department of Highway money. An investigation conducted by legislative attorney Jack McCarty concluded that Moore “had acted improperly, but not criminally, in imposing the rent.”⁵³



*Figure 11 Aerial view of Culture Center near the time of its opening.
Courtesy of West Virginia Archives & History.*

⁵¹ Brad Crouser, *Arch: The Life of Governor Arch A. Moore, Jr.* (Chapmanville, WV: Woodland Press, LLC, 2008), 366.

⁵² Richard Grimes, “Cultural Center: Special Entertainment Will Mark Facility’s Dedication,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, March 27, 1976.

⁵³ Bumgardner, “The Culture Center,” 32.

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Governor Moore and Norm Fagan planned to open the Science and Culture Center in the summer of 1976 to coincide with the American Bicentennial. The grand opening was even dubbed “West Virginia’s largest and most visitor-oriented Bicentennial event.”⁵⁴ An elaborate, three-day opening ceremony was scheduled for June 18-20, aligning with West Virginia Day on the 20th. Construction delays, however, forced the event to be postponed and revised into a one-day series of activities on July 11, 1976.⁵⁵

Work on the Science and Culture Center was mostly completed by July 1976. The building housed an expanded State Museum and artifacts storage in the basement; a Great Hall, a 468-seat theater, library and archives reading rooms, and gift shop on the first floor; offices and art gallery space on the second floor; and storage for library books and archival materials on the third and fourth floors. Governor Moore brought Norm Fagan back from Washington, D.C. to serve as the first Director of the Culture Center, a position he held until 1989.⁵⁶

Special guests and members of the press invited to a special preview tour of the Science and Culture Center with Governor Moore on July 8, 1976, were left with highly favorable impressions of the facility. “The ‘low profile’ of the exterior . . . is deceiving,” wrote the *Charleston Daily Mail*. “No matter how many pictures one has seen or descriptions read, no matter how many times the structure has been viewed from the outside, there is no way to anticipate the impact of the interior’s massiveness.”⁵⁷ The *Charleston Gazette*, meanwhile, heaped praises:

There was much to see and admire in the modernistic structure, designed, Moore said, to blend with the majestic character of the Capitol. The enormity and splendor of the center bear little resemblance to the cramped museum in the Capitol basement where generations of children ogled tattered flags, historic memorabilia and the most bizarre attraction, a pair of dressed fleas that could be observed through a magnifying glass. Clearly, the flea era has ended.

Nowhere was the aura of grandeur more dominant than in the great hall, a room aglow with polished marble, rich leather furnishings, chrome and glass tables, and a gold waffled ceiling. The hall’s two most arresting features are dodecahedrons, massive chandeliers of crystal and gold that represent the Greek geometric systems of infinity.⁵⁸

The Science and Culture Center opened to the public in a grand, twelve-hour series of activities on July 11, 1976. Between 30,000 and 35,000 people attended the day’s events. Visitors toured the new museum and other facilities, received free mementos and refreshments, and were treated to puppet shows from West Virginia University. The State Theater hosted continuous

⁵⁴ Carolanne Griffith, “WVARBC – Tourist Impact / Summer 1976,” AR 1786 WV American Revolution Bicentennial Comm Box 7, West Virginia Archives & History.

⁵⁵ Bumgardner, “The Culture Center.”

⁵⁶ Bumgardner, “The Culture Center.”

⁵⁷ Ann Griffith, “New Science-Culture Center ‘More than Just a Building,’” *Charleston Daily Mail*, July 9, 1976.

⁵⁸ Martha Smith, “State Gift Unveiled by Moore,” *Charleston Gazette*, July 9, 1976.

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performances by folk musicians, string bands, orchestras, a jazz band, a pianist, a gospel chorus, and a ballet troupe. A dedication ceremony was also held in the State Theater at 1:30 with prayers from a Methodist pastor, a Catholic priest, a rabbi, and remarks from Governor Moore. The governor dubbed the Culture Center the “historic, scientific, and cultural tapestry of a mountain people which will afford the opportunity to understand ourselves better as West Virginians.”⁵⁹ Norm Fagan remarked,

West Virginians are different, and hooray for the difference. We’re going to bury that syndrome once and for all that we are poor Appalachians with nothing to be proud of. We have a heritage – and a wonderful and unique one at that. This is reflected in every inch of the Center. We try always, without gloss, to reflect the true feeling of the State.⁶⁰

The opening day festivities were paid for using a \$55,000 grant from the West Virginia American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. \$27,500 of that funding in turn came from the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. This federal body provided West Virginia with nearly \$350,000 to support 27 Bicentennial-related projects in 1976. To give the state greater flexibility in using the money, the \$55,000 grant was awarded to the Randolph County Creative Arts Council, which agreed to administer the funds on the state’s behalf for the Culture Center activities.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Beulah Hash, “Governor says new science and culture center will help West Virginians discover, appreciate heritage,” *Dominion Post*, July 13, 1976.

⁶⁰ Unnamed press release, *Department of Culture and History News*, n.d., “Cultural Center Misc.,” Vertical Files, West Virginia Archives & History.

⁶¹ Johnson, ““There’s Nothing New, Everything is Old Today””; Ar1786, WV American Revolution Bicentennial Comm, Box 7, West Virginia Archives & History.

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Figure 12 East (front) facade of the Culture Center in 1976. Courtesy of Silling Associates.



Figure 13 Southwest corner of the Culture Center in 1976. Courtesy of Silling Associates.

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Figure 14 Southeast lightwell in 1976. Courtesy of Silling Associates.



Figure 15 Northeast lightwell in 1976. Courtesy West Virginia Archives & History, Theodore Edlen Slides, Ph2020-015.

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Figure 16 Great Hall in 1976. Courtesy of Silling Associates.

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Figure 17 West Virginia State Theater in 1976. Courtesy of Silling Associates.

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The Culture Center After 1976

In a statement provided to *Goldenseal*, Norm Fagan described the expected purpose of the center:

The Science and Culture Center is a building of which all West Virginians can be proud . . . But it is not just a physical presence – rather the coming together of forces dedicated to the complete development of every West Virginian. The library is here to expand our minds. Programs in the Arts and Humanities increase our sensitivity to our environment. The Archives and History Department and the State Museum provide an understanding of who we are, where we are, where we came from – which can help us decide where we’re going and how to get there. Seminars, lectures, conferences, and festivals will be held at the Center; and through exhibits and performances it will showcase the creativity of West Virginians. It is indeed what a government institution should be, a resource for all the people.⁶²

The Culture Center proved enormously popular in its early years. It was inundated with tourists, school field trips, researchers, and arts patrons. In its first year alone, the Culture Center averaged approximately 36,000 visitors a month. There were over 200 performances in the state theater, 19 arts exhibits, and over 85 crafts demonstrations. Still using the Randolph County Creative Arts Council as its administrator, the Culture Center received additional American Bicentennial funding to sponsor exhibits and performances through the remainder of 1976 and 1977.⁶³ “Our goal for the first year was to build a base for an institution of state government that didn’t exist. We wanted in our first year to present a record that would reflect the culture of the entire state. I feel we have accomplished that,” said Norm Fagan.⁶⁴ By 1981, a spokesperson for the Culture Center claimed that it had received 1.5 million visitors in its first five years of operation.⁶⁵

The new storage space available to Archives and History allowed the Department to vastly expand its inventory. The State Museum received over fifty new collections of artifacts within a year of the Culture Center’s opening, and within seven years the State Archives had grown from seven hundred linear feet of documents to more than six thousand. The building was designed to provide room for an estimated 200,000 items.⁶⁶ These new improvements to Archives and History vastly improved its ability to facilitate the study, research, teaching, and promotion of West Virginia history.

On Memorial Day Weekend 1977, the Culture Center inaugurated the first annual Vandalia Gathering, a festival of state culture. Conceived by Norm Fagan and musicians John and David Morris, the Vandalia Gathering embodied the state government’s efforts to celebrate West Virginia music, craftsmanship, food, folklore, and ethnic diversity. Activities included live

⁶² “Science and Culture Center,” *Goldenseal Magazine* 2, No. 3 (July-September 1976), 2-3.

⁶³ Ar1786.

⁶⁴ Richard Grimes, “State Experiment Cultural Success,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, June 10, 1977;

⁶⁵ Joyce Almond, “Cultural Center Turns 5 Years Old Saturday,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, July 10, 1981.

⁶⁶ Johnson, ““There’s Nothing New, Everything is Old Today.””

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music, storytelling, dancing, craft demonstrations, and various traditional foods and handcrafted products for sale. According to the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*:

Vandalia was built upon a cadre of older musicians and craftspeople who returned to the festival for many years, some attending, performing, and even competing into their 90s. In addition to traditional musicians from across the state, Vandalia highlights West Virginia craftspeople demonstrating their skills and selling their products, which include wind chimes, pottery, quilts, and baskets, as well as foods such as jelly and salad dressings. Food booths offer traditional and ethnic fare, from hot dogs, hamburgers, and roasted corn, to Greek and Italian specialties and German sausages.⁶⁷

The Vandalia Gathering proceedings were held both inside and outside the Culture Center as well as the surrounding Capitol Complex grounds. It continues to be held here annually, drawing thousands of visitors to the Capitol. The festival plays an important role in making traditional West Virginian arts and cultural activities accessible to the public.

In 1977, the West Virginia legislature passed an act establishing the Department of Culture and History, which went into effect on July 1. It brought together West Virginia's various humanities-related government agencies under one organizational umbrella. The new department included most of the entities operating in the Culture Center – the State Archives and State Museum (previously united as the Department of Archives and History), the newly-created Historic Preservation Unit (later renamed the State Historic Preservation Office), the Arts and Humanities Council (later renamed the State Arts Office) and *Goldenseal* magazine. Culture and History was given responsibility for managing the Culture Center.⁶⁸

The Culture Center began experiencing structural problems very soon after opening. Many of the plants comprising the outdoor landscaping promptly died because of poor drainage issues. By the fall of 1976, grounds crews were spray painting dead, browning pine shrubs green to keep them from looking unattractive.⁶⁹ Eventually, all the plantings on the deck were removed. A more serious issue arose with structural deficiencies in the retaining wall, believed to be caused by an insufficient amount of steel reinforcement. By 1978, the wall was sagging, cracking, leaking, and threatened to collapse. At one point, it shifted 18 inches within a two-week span. Substantial repairs were required to mitigate the problem.⁷⁰

Due to the conspicuous lack of science-related exhibits or activities at the site, the word “Science” quietly began to be dropped from Science and Culture Center’s name. In 1978, it was

⁶⁷ “Vandalia Gathering,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, March 31, 2025, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/821>.

⁶⁸ *Acts of the Legislature of West Virginia 1977*, (Beckley, WV: BJW Printers, 1977); the State Library Commission remained independent until it was transferred into the department in 2022.

⁶⁹ “Poor Drainage Cited in Center Plant Deaths,” *Charleston Gazette*, October 13, 1976.

⁷⁰ “Repair on Center’s Wall Scheduled,” *Charleston Gazette*, January 30, 1979; Edward Peeks, “Contractor to Offer Plan to Mend Wall,” *Charleston Gazette*, March 10, 1979; John Ragsdale, “Roof and Wall Providing Material for State Lawsuits,” *Charleston Gazette*, August 10, 1979; Fanny Seiler, “2nd Tilting Wall Found at Cultural Center,” *Charleston Gazette*, October 2, 1979; Nanya Gadd, “Cultural Center Has 2nd Wall Tilt,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, October 2, 1979.

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publicly rebranded as the Cultural Center. In 2009, the name was changed to the Culture Center to better reflect the original title.⁷¹ This is the current name as of 2026.

By the 1990s, the State Museum – which had remained mostly the same since 1976 – was perceived by many as static and outdated. The museum closed for renovations in 2004, but planning and budgetary issues delayed work for several years. A coalition of local and national firms including Hunt Development Service, Matthew Martin Designworks, RSL Commercial Architecture, Maynard C. Smith Construction Company, Design and Production Incorporated, and Themeworks, Incorporated developed a new series of exhibits utilizing the latest technology and museum practices; costs ultimately ran to \$17.3 million. The updated layout included 12,000 artifacts on display and new features such as walk-through scenes from different time periods, documentary videos, talking portraits, an animatronic soldier, and interactive touchscreen displays. The new and improved State Museum opened on June 20, 2009.⁷²

Architecture of the Culture Center

The architectural firm of C. E. Silling & Associates was well-suited to design the Culture Center. Staff had decades' worth of experience and were versed in the most current architectural styles of the era. During construction of the Culture Center, architects with the company included Cy Silling, Howard Johe, Clifton Bowyer, Billy Marcum, William Murray, and Richard Blankenship. Because the project was a team effort, it is unclear which architect had the most involvement in designing the Culture Center. Some sources claim that Johe, who specialized in modern architecture, was “instrumental in the building’s design.”⁷³ Other accounts give more credit to Cy Silling himself. The Culture Center was one of, if not the, last projects he completed before retiring.⁷⁴

By the 1970s, governments and other organizations were embracing new Modern styles of architecture. Among these was Brutalism, which emerged in the United Kingdom during the 1950s and became popular internationally for the next two decades. Brutalist buildings were most recognizable for their large size, blocky or rectangular shapes, and heavy use of exposed concrete on the exterior. Some institutions favored Brutalism for the comparatively low cost of its building materials, but there were legitimate philosophical ideals behind the style as well. Brutalist architecture was based on the belief that buildings should be “honest,” with appearances that convey their function and construction. The display of raw materials and structural elements on the exterior was emphasized, while ornamentation and other unnecessary visual features were discouraged. “Forms are as simple as can be and materials are stripped to be as base and raw as

⁷¹ “‘Cultural Center’ Name Now Becomes Official,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, April 12, 1978; H. G. Young III, “The Culture Center,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, November 13, 2025, accessed January 27, 2026, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/1634>.

⁷² Wallace, *A History of the West Virginia Capitol*; The West Virginia State Museum Dedication, Friends of West Virginia Culture and History and West Virginia State Museum Board, Inc., June 20, 2009.

⁷³ Almond, “Cultural Center Turns 5 Years Old Saturday.”

⁷⁴ Charles Connor, “CY: Impressive Imprint,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, January 19, 1978.

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possible,” says architect Geddes Ulinskas.⁷⁵ Brutalist architecture was most commonly used for government or institutional buildings, offices, and apartments. Widely recognized defining characteristics of the Brutalist style include a minimal number of different materials on the exterior, often concrete but can also be stone or masonry; large, blocky, geometric shapes, often cubical or rectangular; raw, rough, exposed surfaces; modular elements; clean, straight, simple lines; the use of cantilevered features; little-to-no ornamentation; and spacious interiors with coffered concrete ceilings.⁷⁶

Silling & Associates had recent experience with Brutalist architecture, one of their last projects prior to the Culture Center being the West Virginia University Coliseum in Morgantown. Though they also designed the Culture Center in the Brutalist style, Governor Moore’s directions that the new building not upstage or distract from the Capitol Building imposed some limitations. This underscored a desire to project modernity and progress for West Virginia, but while also deferring to the classical styles of the past as seemingly superior designs. As a result, the Culture Center was a more subdued interpretation of the Brutalist style, utilizing limestone instead of concrete, limiting the extent of the cantilever feature, and lacking any unusual or distinct shapes. Silling described the Culture Center building as “a classic temple complementary to the State Capitol, matching its limestone,” with a “simple classic posture . . . mounted on a granite base.”⁷⁷ The Culture Center features some of the highlights of Brutalist architecture on its exterior. The plinth was constructed as a large, square block with clean straight lines and exposed concrete. The main building is a rectangular, flat-topped, cantilevered block with projecting front bays. It has a substantial size and massing, with straight clean lines throughout. Except for the foundation and windows, the exterior walls are clad solely in limestone panels, grooved to form a rough surface. Aside from the gold lettering and West Virginia State seal, the exterior is devoid of any ornamental features. The sheer scale and simplicity of the building command attention.

The interior of the building is where the Culture Center diverges some from typical Brutalist principles. The large, open space of the Great Hall, and the coffered light fixtures – which subtly evoke coffered concrete ceilings – are in line with standard Brutalist style interiors. However, the heavy use of marble and the ornamental chandeliers in the hall call back to older styles of the early twentieth century.

⁷⁵ Katherine McLaughlin, “Brutalist Architecture: Everything You Need to Know,” *Architectural Digest*, March 2, 2026, accessed April 2, 2026, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/brutalist-architecture-101>.

⁷⁶ McLaughlin, “Brutalist Architecture”; Barbara Orbach Natanson, “What’s So Brutal About Brutalism?,” Library of Congress Prints & Photos, July 10, 2019, accessed April 2, 2026, <https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2019/07/whats-so-brutal-about-brutalism/>.

⁷⁷ C. E. Silling & Associates, “Science and Culture Center,” October 11, 1972. West Virginia Archives & History.

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Figure 18 Culture Center exterior, Summer 2023. Courtesy of the WV Department of Tourism.

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The Culture Center’s design was heavily influenced by that of the Ohio Historical Center. The firm that designed Ohio’s building, Ireland and Associates, was even involved in the Culture Center project, although their role appears to have been limited to the State Museum and some interior designing. The National Register nomination form for the Ohio Historical Center provides a comparative analysis of the two buildings:

Similarities can certainly be seen in [the Culture Center’s] design that reflect those of the Ohio Historical Center. The block-shaped building appears to “float,” comparing to the significant feature of the Ohio building. However, the West Virginia State Museum does not contain the large cantilevers as seen in the Ohio design. Instead, the two large square bays that flank the main entrance protrude slightly over the foundation. This excess space coupled with strategic lighting results in a floating effect – specifically at nighttime. Other similar features at West Virginia include dark oak woodwork, a glass enclosed plaza, and waffle-slab ceilings. Some of the interior features directly reflect those found in the Ohio Historical Center – such as the narrow oak panels found in the auditorium and the library . . . However, there are significant differences in the design of the West Virginia building, including limestone construction, cedar marble finishes, and extravagant chandeliers. This building’s interior provides more of a classic style versus the Ohio Historical Center’s modern features.⁷⁸

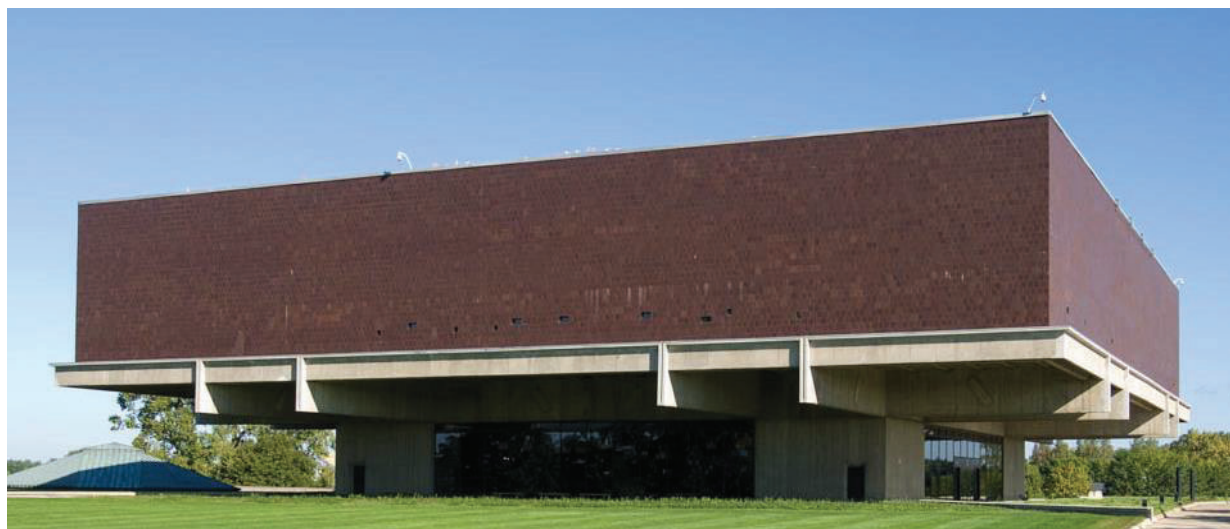


Figure 19 The Ohio Historical Center. Though similar to the West Virginia Culture Center, it has a much more prominent cantilevered design, clay tile cladding, and more visible structural features on the exterior. From SAH Archipedia.

Reaction to the Culture Center’s Brutalist design, while more favorable than the criticism over Buildings 5, 6, and 7, was still mixed. “The simplistic exterior of the structure turns many people off. It has been compared to a gigantic World War II bunker. And it does seem to blend well

⁷⁸ Marshall, Powers, Simmons, Knapp, Eberhard, “Ohio Historical Center.”

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with the concrete retaining walls on the Interstate construction along the hillside behind it,” commented the Huntington *Herald-Dispatch*.⁷⁹

Other reviewers wrote more positively. The *West Virginia Daily News* deemed the Culture Center an “awesome structure,” while the *Mountain Statesman* described it as simply “magnificent.”⁸⁰ The Indiana Limestone Institute of America, commenting on the building’s envelope and its energy efficiency, opined that “The Science and Culture Center may well represent the basic direction toward which American architecture of the 1980s should move.”⁸¹

Even decades later, the Culture Center drew contrasting opinions regarding its style. Architectural historian S. Allen Chambers, Jr., writing in 2004, offered a sardonic assessment of the Culture Center, describing it bleakly as “an almost windowless cube of Indiana limestone.” He continues:

A few large expanses of glazing, notably at the entrance, give a modicum of relief. The walls provide no clues to the building’s height (which is five stories, more or less), much less its purpose . . . the design was deliberately kept low key. Governor Moore made a point of this in stating that it would not ‘rival the Capitol from an architectural standpoint.’ Rest assured, it doesn’t.⁸²

Noted Charleston architect Henry Elden, meanwhile, praised the Culture Center’s simplicity and lack of ornamentation in a 2003 interview. He characterized the building as embodying the principle of “less is more.”⁸³

Despite some classical embellishments, the Culture Center is significant as one of the only major Brutalist style buildings in West Virginia. Among the few other examples is the West Virginia University Coliseum, also designed by C. E. Silling & Associates. This circular building extensively uses exposed poured concrete. Its most arresting feature is a pie-shaped, overhanging concrete dome. Another minor example is the Citizens National Bank building in Martinsburg, listed in the National Register under *Criterion C: Architecture* in 2023. With a heavy, bulky massing, straight lines, distinct geometric form, and lack of ornamentation, it represents a rare and important example of Brutalism used for a smaller commercial building in the Martinsburg area. The Culture Center is visually and functionally distinct from both buildings. Its location next to the State Capitol Building, its status as the state’s repository of historical materials, and its frequent use for performing arts and other public events makes it the most viewed and most accessible work of Brutalist architecture in West Virginia.

⁷⁹ Miller, “Culture Center is ‘monument’ to Arch Moore.”

⁸⁰ “Center Opens to Public Sunday,” *West Virginia Daily News*, July 9, 1976; “Science and Culture Center ‘should bring state together,’” *Mountain Statesman*, July 9, 1976.

⁸¹ “A Building for People,” Case History 11, WV Science & Culture Center, Indiana Limestone Institute of America, Inc., 1977.

⁸² Chambers, *Buildings of West Virginia*, 78.

⁸³ Susan Williams, “Modern Majesty: Cultural Center’s simplicity pleases architect Henry Elden,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, April 6, 2003.

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Figure 20 The WVU Coliseum, also designed by C. E. Silling & Associates, is one of the only other major Brutalist buildings in West Virginia. From SAH Archipedia.



Figure 21 The former Citizens National Bank of Martinsburg building, constructed in 1970, was added to the National Register in 2023 for being a rare and important local example of Brutalist architecture. Courtesy WV State Historic Preservation Office.

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Conclusion

The Culture Center embodied the state government's assumption of a new, larger role in the promotion of West Virginia culture. The Arch Moore Administration recognized the value of public art, performing arts, historic preservation, archives, and libraries to the wellbeing of society. Governor Moore became a staunch proponent for the facility's development, cementing it as a key part of his political legacy. The Culture Center was one of the most tangible products of Moore's time in office, and the subsequent establishment of the Department of Culture and History shortly after the end of his second term ensured permanent state support for the humanities. Demonstrable improvements in arts, culture, and history-related agencies occurred in the Culture Center's early years. The West Virginia State Theater hosted hundreds of shows, many supported by government funding. The State Museum, once more of an afterthought, was brought front and center in a conspicuous new home. The State Archives was better able to conserve both government documents and private manuscript collections, making them available for future generations of research. The State Library Commission was able to offer more resources to libraries and patrons both in Charleston and throughout the state.

The Culture Center is significant as a government institution dedicated, at its core, to the preservation and dissemination of West Virginia heritage. One 1983 article aptly described it as "a valuable anchor for the state's arts, crafts, and culture," observing that it "reflects all of West Virginia and its people, from past to present, from city to mountains, from the sophisticated to the down home."⁸⁴

The Culture Center also dramatically changed the landscape of the Capitol Complex. The solid, simple, blocky, linear design of its exterior makes the building a distinct presence at the Complex. It is one of the most prominent examples of Brutalist architecture in West Virginia, a state where the style has only a small presence. It is also among the most famous creations of the architectural firm C. E. Silling & Associates, who developed several major Modern buildings in the 1960s-1970s. Though its design has received contrasting opinions over the decades, the Culture Center remains an architectural icon in the heart of West Virginia government.



Figure 22 Dancing and live music in the Great Hall, with quilts on exhibit, date unknown. Courtesy West Virginia Archives & History.

⁸⁴ "West Virginia Has a Capital Cultural Complex," untitled magazine clipping, March 1983, "Cultural Center Misc.," Vertical Files, West Virginia Archives & History.

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West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: West Virginia Archives & History

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property approx. 4.5

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17N | Easting: 446408 | Northing: 4243502 |
| 2. Zone: 17N | Easting: 446358 | Northing: 4243368 |
| 3. Zone: 17N | Easting: 446223 | Northing: 4243430 |
| 4. Zone: 17N | Easting: 446321 | Northing: 4243565 |
| 5. Zone: 17N | Easting: 446313 | Northing: 4243538 |

Verbal Boundary Description

The nomination boundaries are delineated in Figure 23.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass the entirety of the Culture Center, its parking lot, retaining wall, outdoor exhibit, and no other resources.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Steven Cody Straley, National Register and Architectural Survey Coordinator

organization: West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office

street & number: 1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East

city or town: Charleston state: West Virginia zip code: 25305

e-mail: Cody.Straley@wv.gov

telephone: 304-414-1777

date: April 3, 2026

Special thanks to the staff of West Virginia Archives & History for their valuable research assistance.

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

Additional Documentation



Figure 23 Culture Center NR Boundaries with UTM reference numbers

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

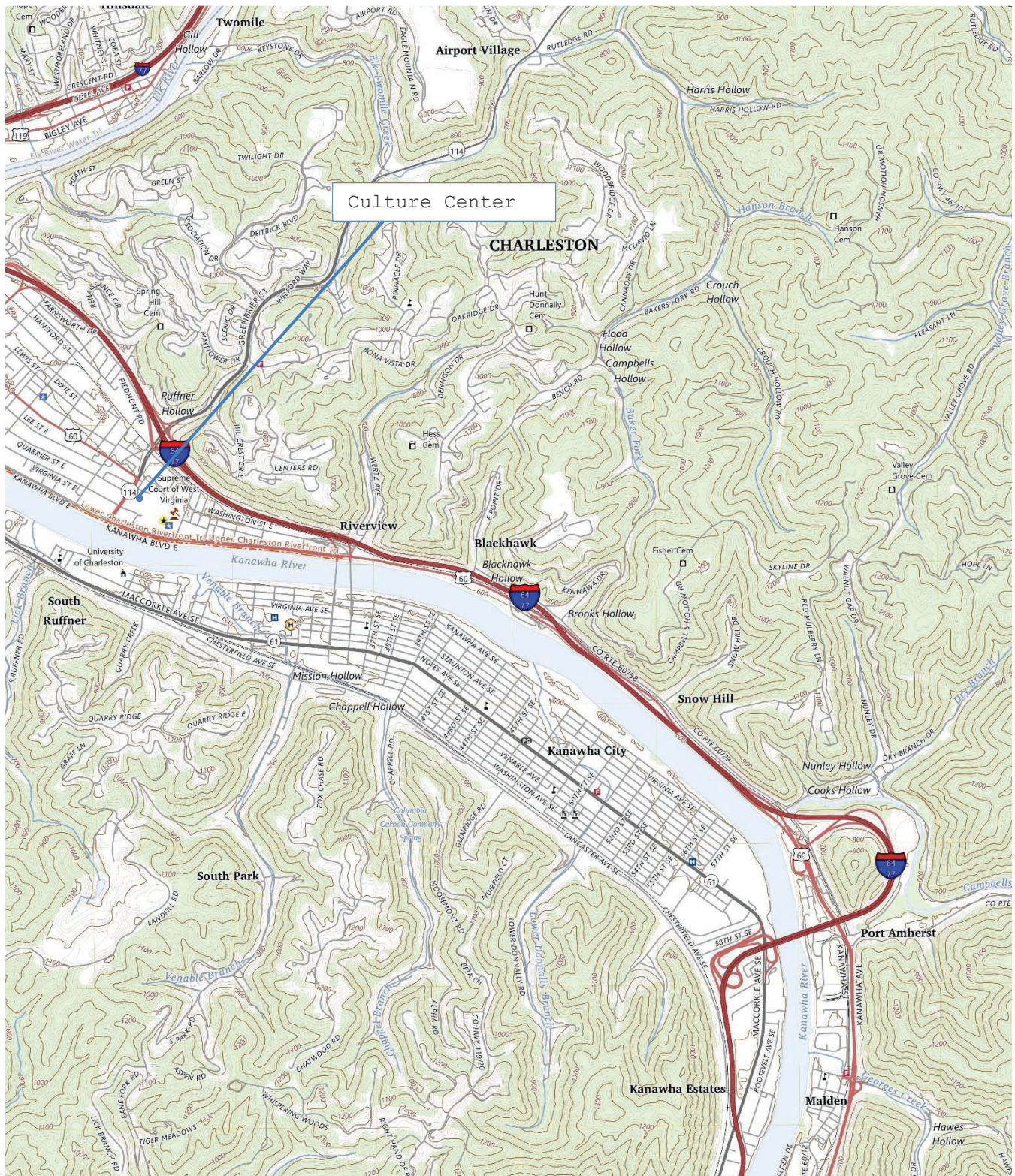


Figure 24 USGS Map - Charleston East Quadrangle, West Virginia - Kanawha County, 7.5-Minute Series, 2023

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

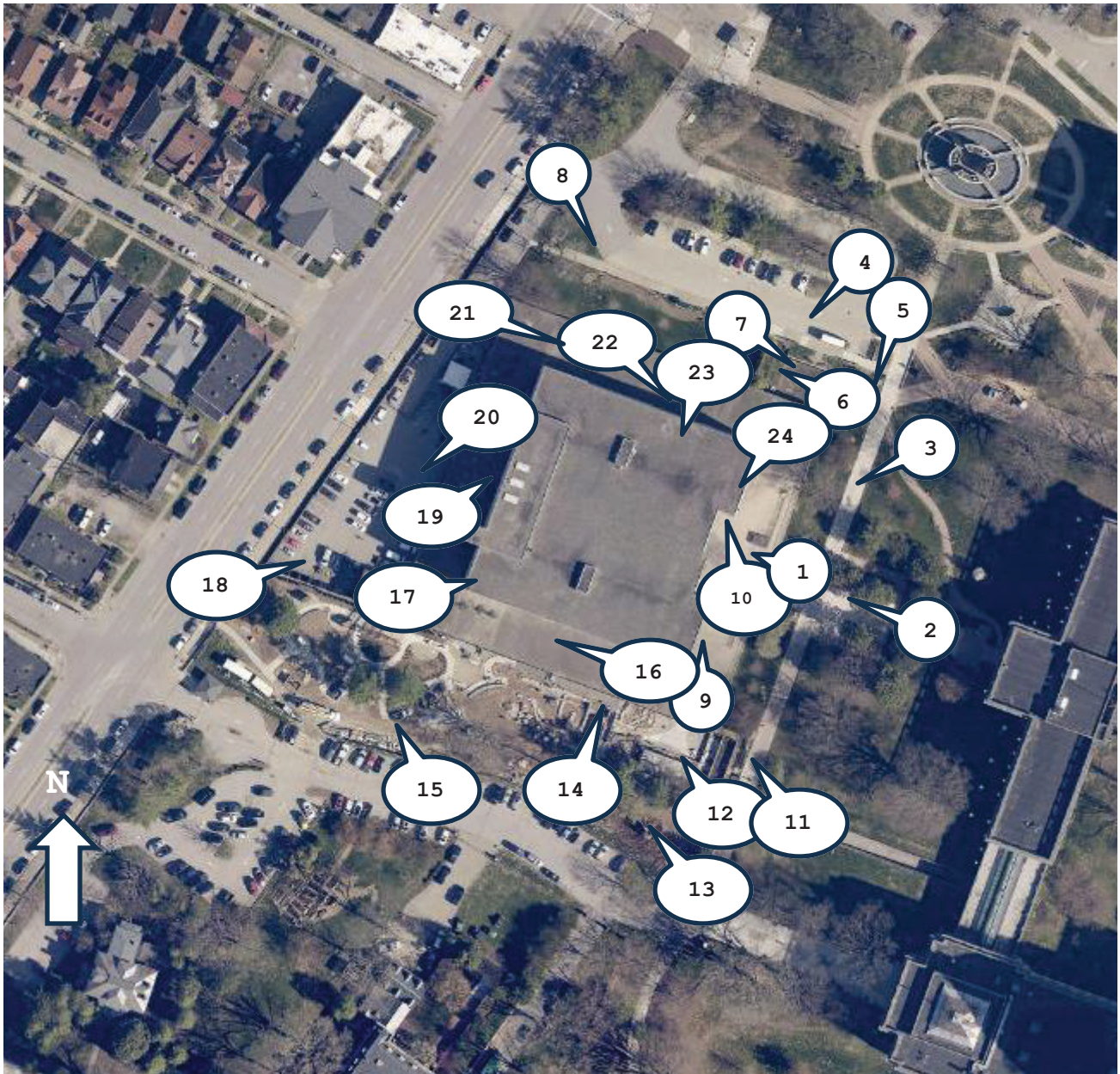


Figure 25 Exterior Photo Keyed Map

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State



Figure 26 Culture Center at night, date unknown. Courtesy West Virginia Archives & History.



Figure 27 Live music in the Great Hall, date unknown. Courtesy West Virginia Archives & History.

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Figure 28 General store exhibit in the Culture Center's first iteration of the State Museum, date unknown. Courtesy West Virginia Archives & History.



Figure 29 Culture Center gift shop, date unknown, courtesy West Virginia Archives & History.

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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County and State

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: West Virginia Culture Center

City or Vicinity: Charleston

County: Kanawha

State: West Virginia

Photographer: Cody Straley

Date Photographed: March 26, 2026

Photographs are keyed to Figures 25, 33, 35, 36, 37, and 38.

- 1 of 50. Exterior, front entrance of Culture Center, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0001
- 2 of 50. Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0002
- 3 of 50. Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0003
- 4 of 50. Exterior, north side of Culture Center, camera facing south
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0004
- 5 of 50. Exterior, northeast corner of Culture Center, camera facing south
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0005
- 6 of 50. Exterior, northeast lightwell, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0006
- 7 of 50. Exterior, northeast lightwell, camera facing southeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0007
- 8 of 50. Exterior, northwest side of Culture Center, camera facing southeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0008
- 9 of 50. Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0009

West Virginia Culture Center

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State

Name of Property

- 10 of 50. Exterior, Culture Center dedication plaque, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0010
- 11 of 50. Exterior, southeast corner of Culture Center, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0011
- 12 of 50. Exterior, southeast lightwell, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0012
- 13 of 50. Exterior, outdoor exhibit, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0013
- 14 of 50. Exterior, south side of Culture Center from outdoor exhibit, camera facing north
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0014
- 15 of 50. Exterior, outdoor exhibit blank sign, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0015
- 16 of 50. Exterior, south deck of Culture Center, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0016
- 17 of 50. Exterior, southwest corner of Culture Center, camera facing northeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0017
- 18 of 50. Exterior, west side of Culture Center, camera facing northeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0018
- 19 of 50. Exterior, text and seal on west side of Culture Center, camera facing northeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0019
- 20 of 50. Exterior, parking lot and retaining wall, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0020
- 21 of 50. Exterior, statues on deck, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0021
- 22 of 50. Exterior, north side windows, camera facing southeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0022
- 23 of 50. Exterior, example of map engraving on granite foundation, camera facing south
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0023
- 24 of 50. Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0024

West Virginia Culture Center

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Name of Property

- 25 of 50. Interior, front entrance from Great Hall, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0025
- 26 of 50. Interior, Great Hall, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0026
- 27 of 50. Interior, Great Hall, camera facing northeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0027
- 28 of 50. Interior, Great Hall with balcony, camera facing northeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0028
- 29 of 50. Interior, Great Hall with balcony, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0029
- 30 of 50. Interior, library reading room, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0030
- 31 of 50. Interior, archives reading room, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0031
- 32 of 50. Interior, gift shop, camera facing north
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0032
- 33 of 50. Interior, doors to State Theater, camera facing southwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0033
- 34 of 50. Interior, State Theater stage, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0034
- 35 of 50. Interior, State Theater seating, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0035
- 36 of 50. Interior, corridor leading to State Museum, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0036
- 37 of 50. Interior, escalator to State Museum, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0037
- 38 of 50. Interior, State Theater emergency exit doors, camera facing south
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0038
- 39 of 50. Interior, corridor leading out of State Museum, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0039

West Virginia Culture Center

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Name of Property

- 40 of 50. Interior, corridor leading out of State Museum, camera facing west
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0040
- 41 of 50. Interior, State Museum frontier exhibit, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0041
- 42 of 50. Interior, stairwell to balcony, camera facing east, looking down
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0042
- 43 of 50. Interior, balcony art gallery, camera facing northwest
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0043
- 44 of 50. Interior, balcony art gallery, camera facing south
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0044
- 45 of 50. Interior, display cases on south side of balcony, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0045
- 46 of 50. Interior, overlooking Great Hall from balcony, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0046
- 47 of 50. Interior, second story, bronze drinking fountain, camera facing southeast
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0047
- 48 of 50. Interior, second story office hallway, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0048
- 49 of 50. Interior, third floor stacks, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0049
- 50 of 50. Interior, fourth floor storage, camera facing east
WV_KanawhaCo_WestVirginiaCultureCenter_0050

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 1 Exterior, front entrance of Culture Center, camera facing west

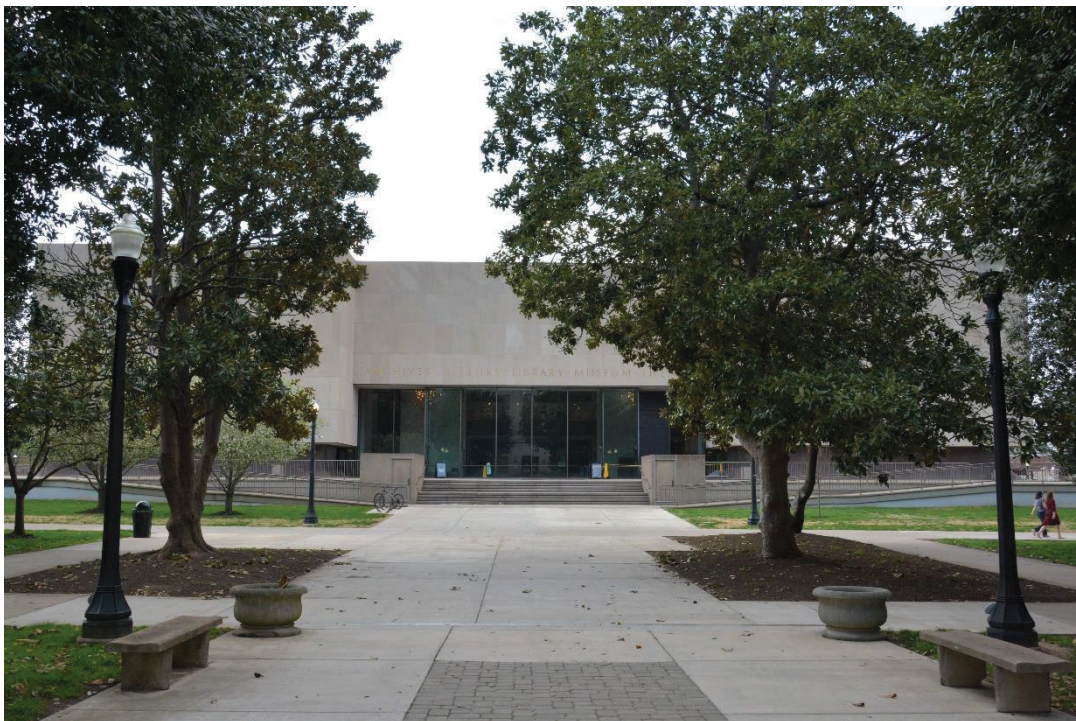


Photo 2 Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing west

West Virginia Culture Center
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Photo 3 Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing southwest



Photo 4 Exterior, north side of Culture Center, camera facing south

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 5 Exterior, northeast corner of Culture Center, camera facing south



Photo 6 Exterior, northeast lightwell, camera facing west

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
County and State



Photo 8 Exterior, northwest side of Culture Center, camera facing southeast



Photo 9 Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing northwest

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Name of Property

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Photo 10 Exterior, Culture Center dedication plaque, camera facing northwest

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 11 Exterior, southeast corner of Culture Center, camera facing northwest



Photo 13 Exterior, outdoor exhibit, camera facing northwest

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Name of Property

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Photo 14 Exterior, south side of Culture Center from outdoor exhibit, camera facing north



Photo 16 Exterior, south deck of Culture Center, camera facing west

West Virginia Culture Center
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Photo 17 Exterior, southwest corner of Culture Center, camera facing northeast



Photo 18 Exterior, west side of Culture Center, camera facing northeast

West Virginia Culture Center
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Photo 22 Exterior, north side windows, camera facing southeast



Photo 23 Exterior, example of map engraving on granite foundation, camera facing south

West Virginia Culture Center
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Photo 24 Exterior, front of Culture Center, camera facing southwest



Photo 25 Interior, front entrance from Great Hall, camera facing east

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 26 Interior, Great Hall, camera facing southwest

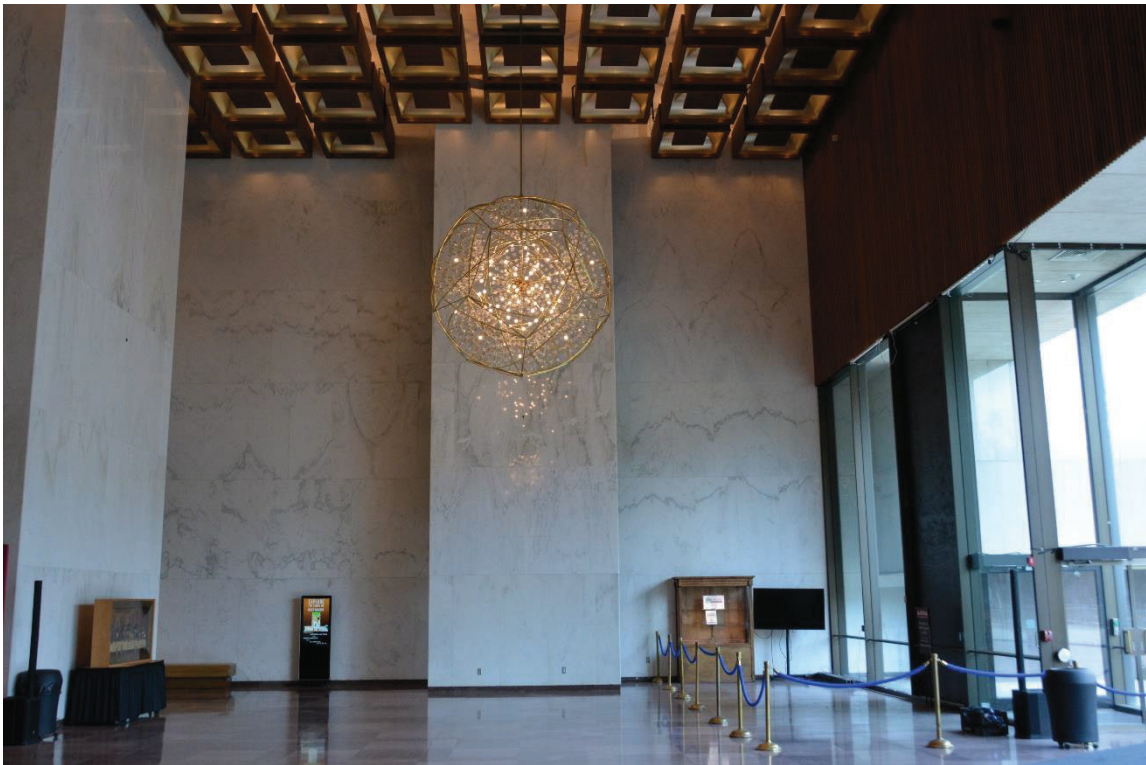


Photo 27 Interior, Great Hall, camera facing northeast

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 29 Interior, Great Hall with balcony, camera facing southwest



Photo 32 Interior, gift shop, camera facing north

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 33 Interior, doors to State Theater, camera facing southwest



Photo 36 Interior, corridor leading to State Museum, camera facing west

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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County and State



Photo 37 Interior, escalator to State Museum, camera facing east

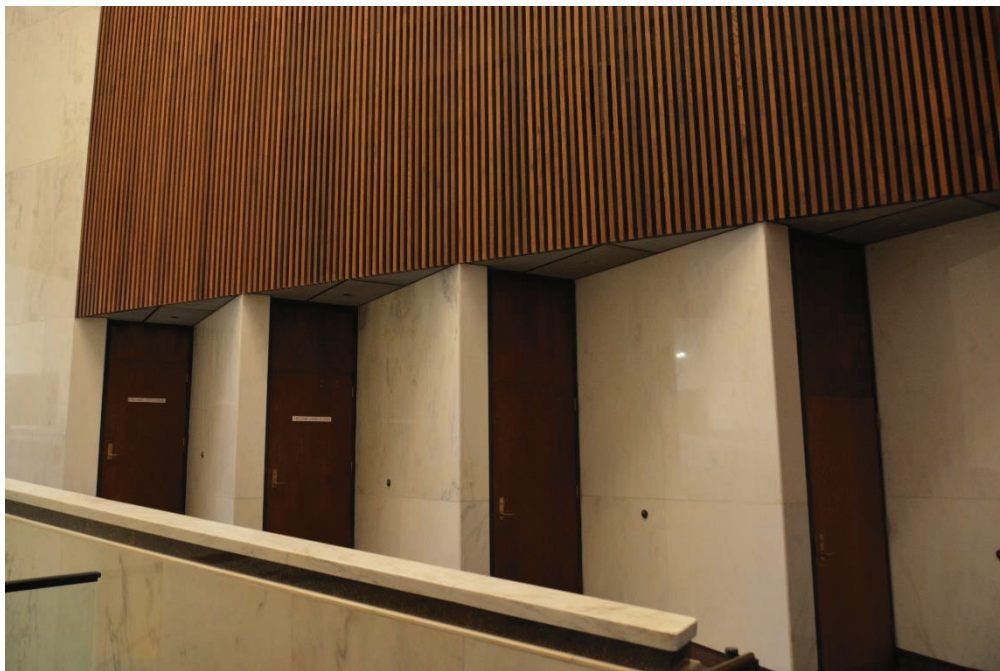


Photo 38 Interior, State Theater emergency exit doors, camera facing south

West Virginia Culture Center
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Photo 39 Interior, corridor leading out of State Museum, camera facing east



Photo 40 Interior, corridor leading out of State Museum, camera facing west

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Photo 41 Interior, State Museum frontier exhibit, camera facing east



Photo 45 Interior, display cases on south side of balcony, camera facing east

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

Kanawha, West Virginia
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Photo 46 Interior, overlooking Great Hall from balcony, camera facing east



Photo 47 Interior, second story bronze drinking fountain, camera facing southeast

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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County and State



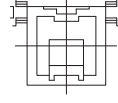
Photo 48 Interior, second story office hallway, camera facing east

West Virginia Culture Center
Name of Property

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Photo 50 Interior, fourth floor storage, camera facing east



THESE DRAWINGS ARE BASED UPON HISTORICAL DRAWINGS OF THE EXISTING BUILDING.
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■ = Print Quadrants

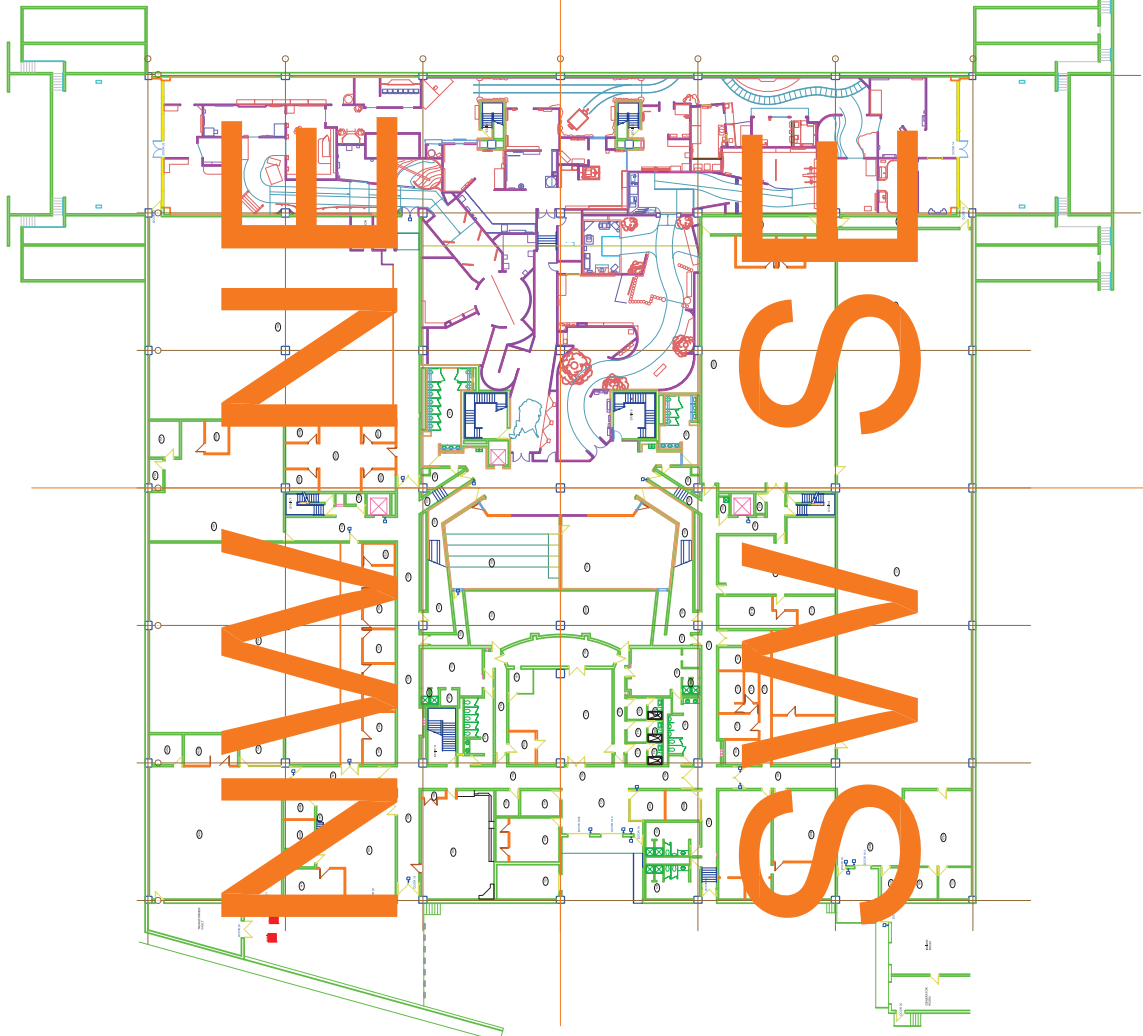
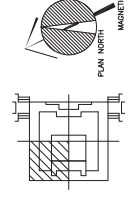


Figure 30 Floor Plans, Part 1



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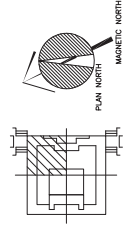
Figure 31 Floor Plans, Part 2

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DRAWN BY: M.L.
SCALE: 1/8" = 1' - 0"
SKETCH BY: MARK LYNCH



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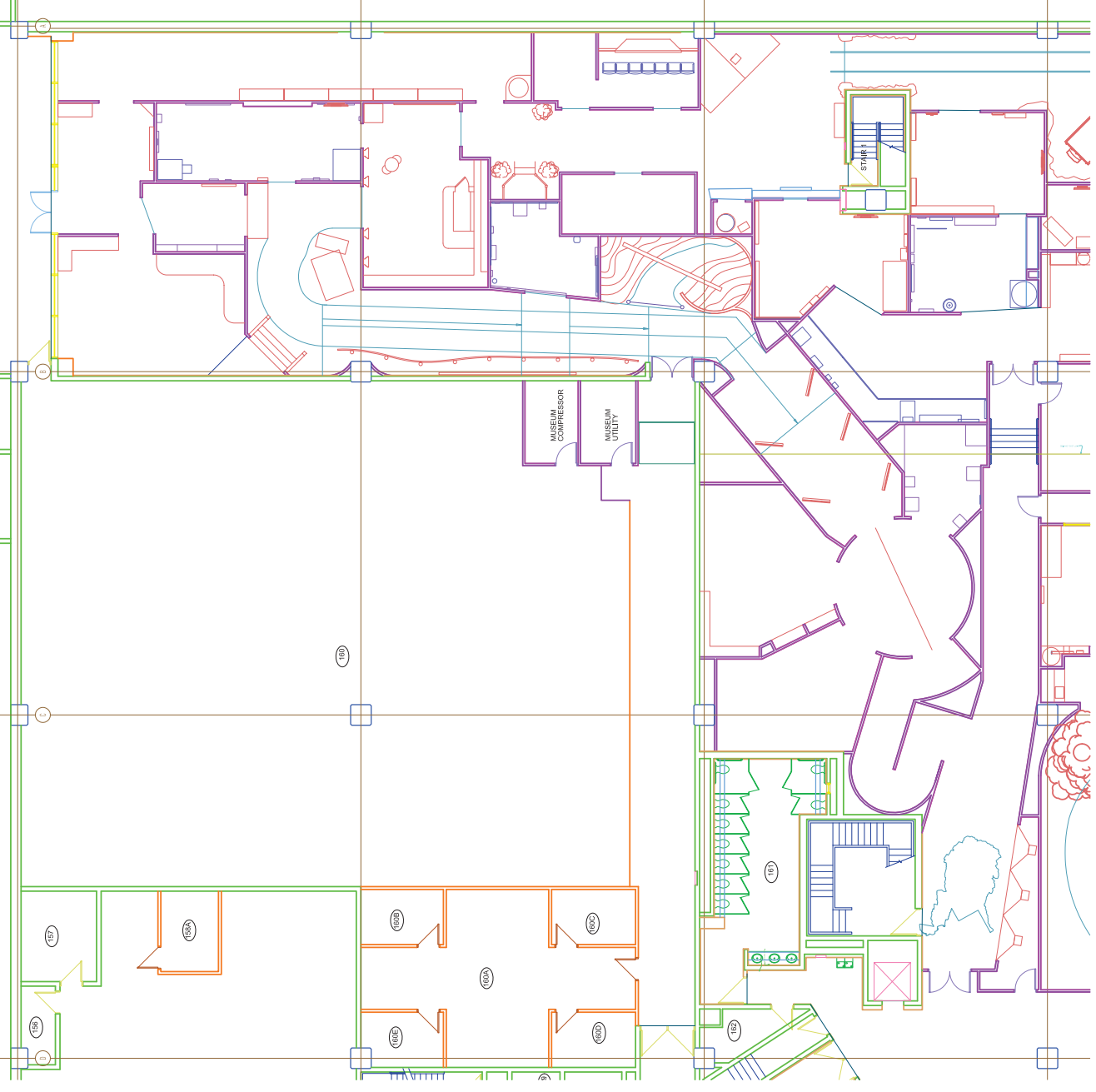
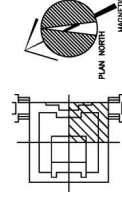


Figure 32 Floor Plans, Part 3



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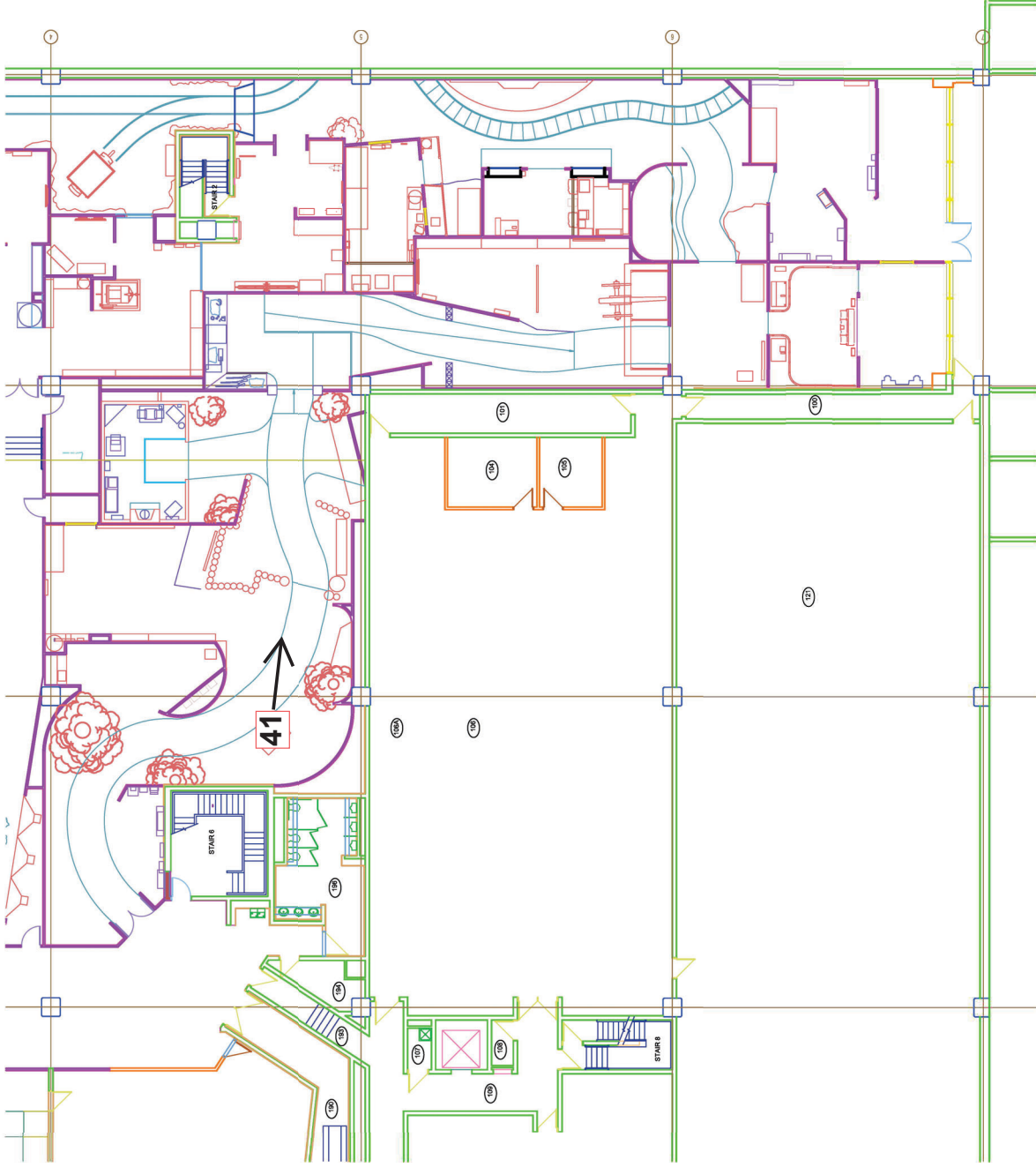


Figure 33 Floor Plans Part 4, with Photo Keyed

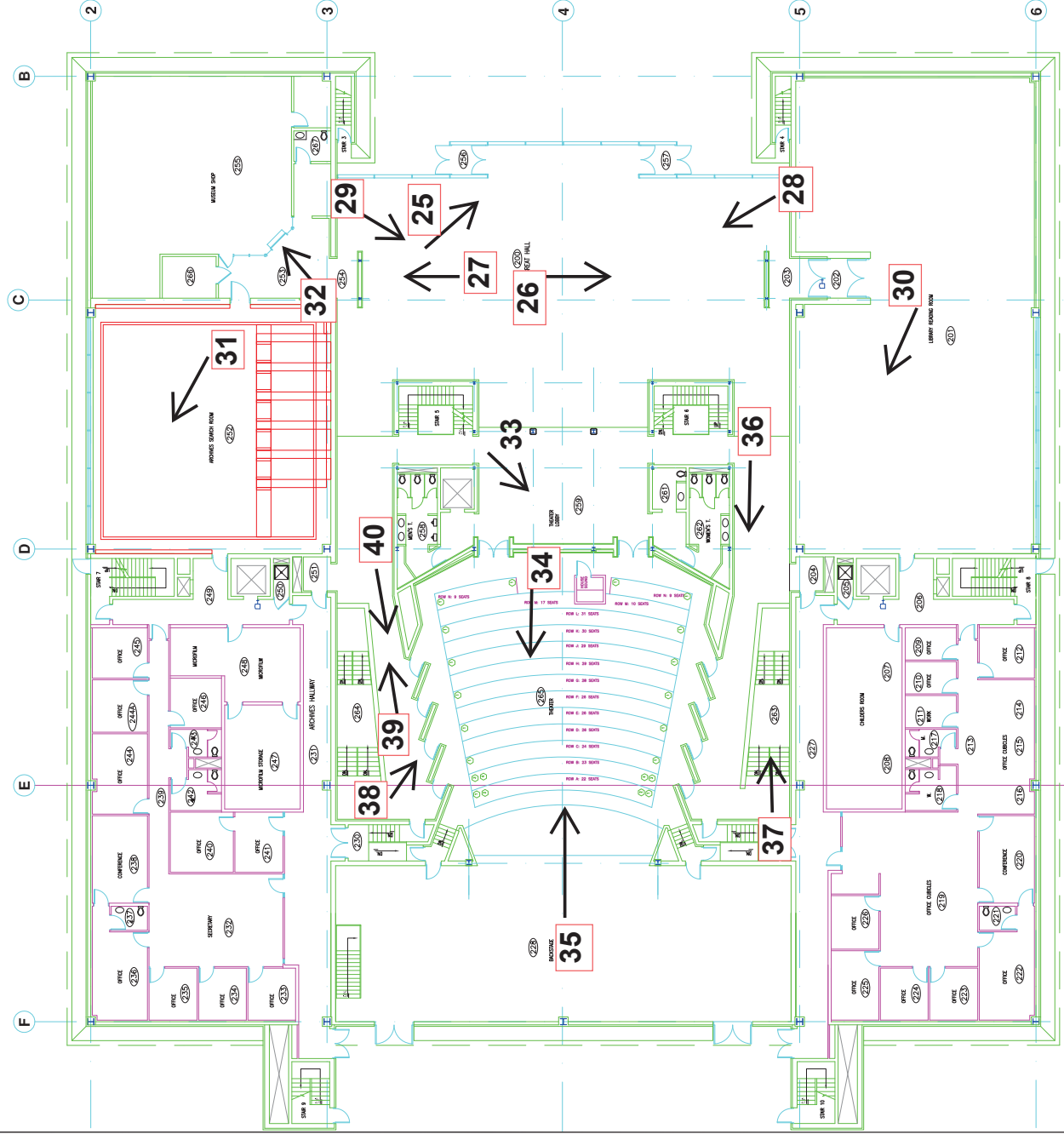
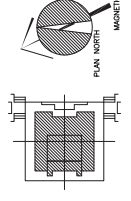


Figure 35 Floor Plans, Part 6, with Photos Keyed

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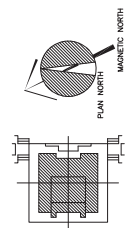


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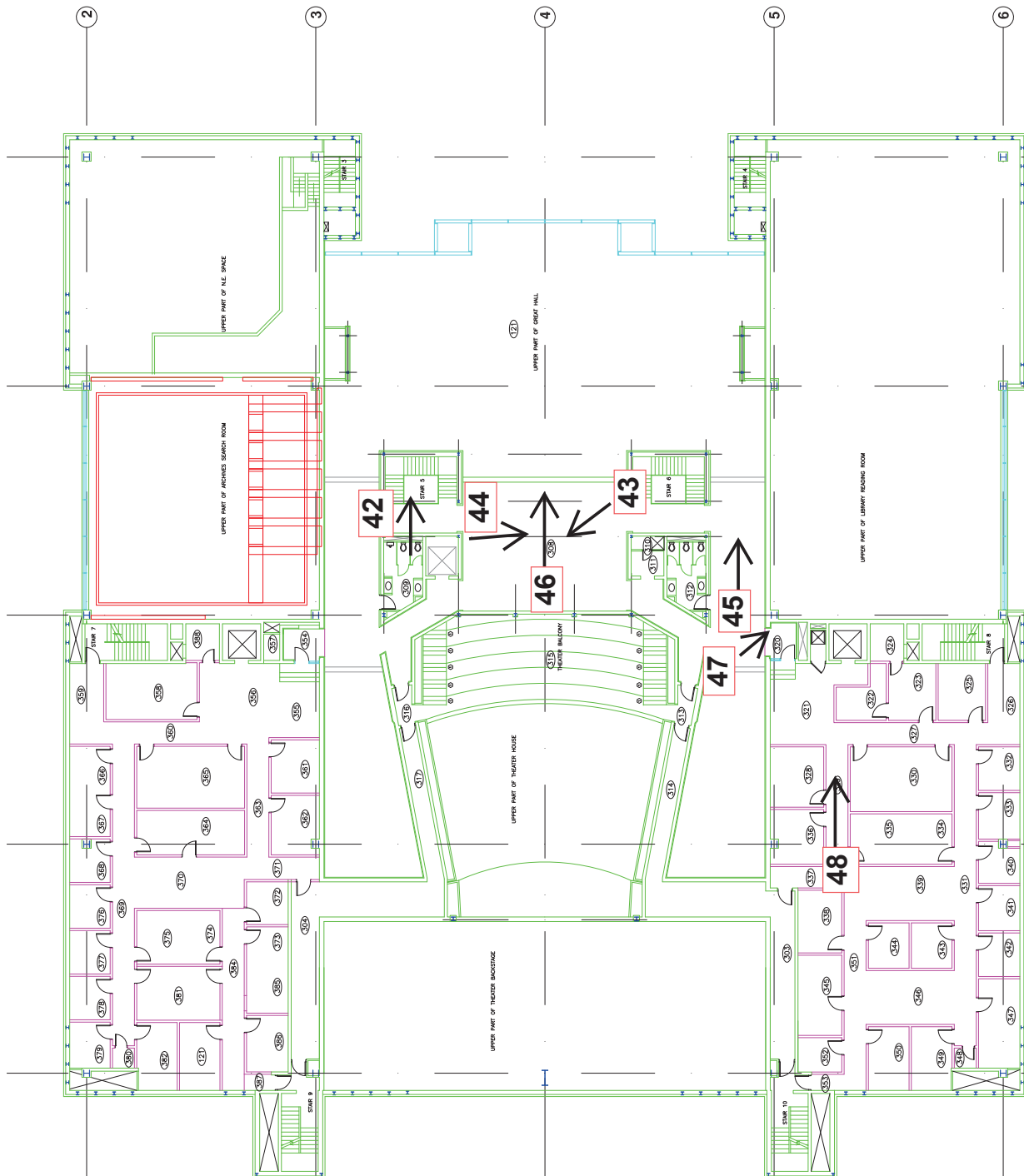
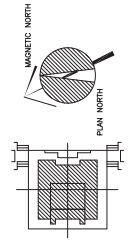
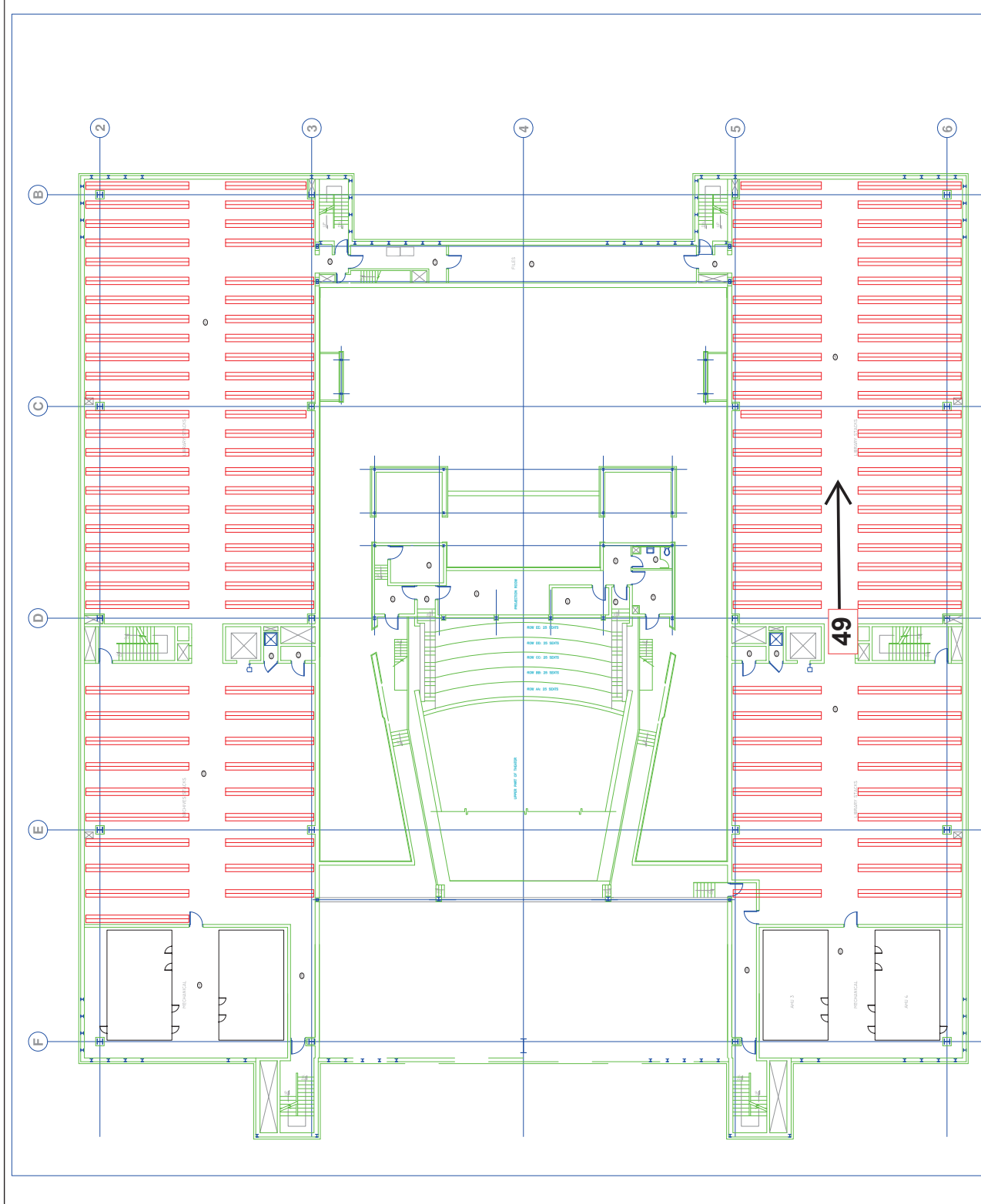


Figure 36 Floor Plans, Part 7 with Photos Keyed



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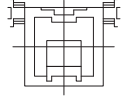
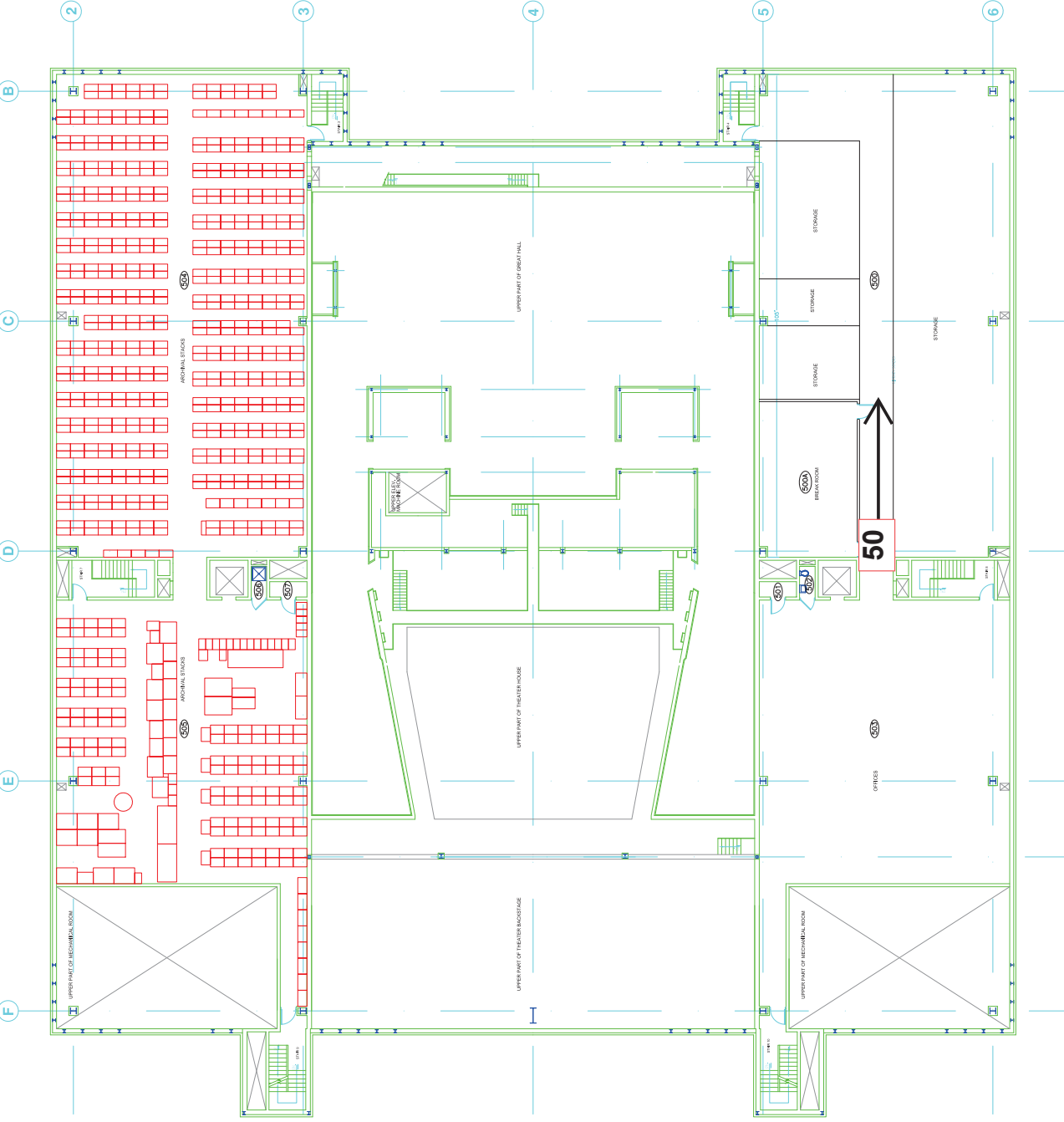
8

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Figure 37 Floor Plans, Part 8, with Photo Keyed



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Figure 38 Floor Plans, Part 9, with Photo Keyed



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