

Texas Historical Commission staff (SEM), 7/6/2012, rev (BB) 7/26/12

27" x 42" Official Texas Historical Marker with post

Harris County (Job #11HR18) Subject (Atlas 16881) UTM: 14 000000E 0000000N

Location: La Porte, 554 North Bayshore

SYLVAN BEACH PAVILION

THE TOWN OF LA PORTE, DEVELOPED IN 1892, ORIGINALLY RESERVED A PORTION OF THE BAYFRONT FOR A RECREATIONAL PARK, KNOWN AS SYLVAN GROVE. FOLLOWING THE PANIC OF 1893, MUCH OF THE BAYFRONT WAS SOLD EXCEPT FOR 22 ACRES THAT WERE RETAINED AS SYLVAN BEACH PARK THAT BECAME, IN 1896, A PRIVATELY OPERATED AMUSEMENT PARK AND CAMPGROUND. A 1930s PAVILION, ONE OF THE LARGEST DANCE HALLS IN THE SOUTH, WAS DESTROYED BY A TORNADO SPAWNED BY THE 1943 HURRICANE. THE PARK'S PAVILION WAS NOT REBUILT AS WARTIME RESTRICTIONS CURTAILED NON-DEFENSE RELATED CONSTRUCTION. IN 1954, HARRIS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PURCHASED THE SYLVAN BEACH PARK AND COMMISSIONED THE HOUSTON ARCHITECTURAL FIRM OF GREACEN & BROGNIEZ TO DESIGN A MODERN, HURRICANE-RESISTANT DANCE PAVILION.

OPENED IN MAY 1956, THE SYLVAN BEACH PAVILION CELEBRATED THE PARK'S MUSICAL AND DANCE HISTORY WITH ITS ELEVATED OCTAGONAL GLASS WALLED BALLROOM CONTAINING A LARGE CIRCULAR WOOD DANCE FLOOR THAT APPEARS TO FLOAT ABOVE THE PARK. THIS MID-CENTURY MODERN PAVILION IS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FREESTANDING, OCTAGONAL BUILDINGS BUILT BY GERMAN AND CZECH IMMIGRANTS IN TEXAS AS DANCE HALLS AND COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACES. SIGNIFICANT ALTERATIONS WERE MADE IN 1962 AND 1980. DURING ITS FIRST HALF CENTURY OF SERVICE, THE PAVILION ATTRACTED LOCAL AND NATIONAL TALENT OFFERING MUSIC VENUES RANGING FROM BIG BAND ORCHESTRAS TO COUNTRY TO JAZZ TO BLUES. THE PAVILION ALSO TOUCHED GENERATIONS OF HARRIS COUNTY RESIDENTS AS THE LOCATION OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL EVENTS INCLUDING QUINCEAÑERAS, PROMS AND WEDDINGS. THE SYLVAN BEACH PAVILION REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY STRUCTURES IN HARRIS COUNTY.

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK – 2011

MARKER IS PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

**RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS:
2011 Official Texas Historical Marker
Sponsorship Application Form**

Valid September 1, 2010 to November 15, 2010 only

This form constitutes a public request for the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to consider approval of an Official Texas Historical Marker for the topic noted in this application. The THC will review the request and make its determination based on rules and procedures of the program. Filing of the application for sponsorship is for the purpose of providing basic information to be used in the evaluation process. The final determination of eligibility and therefore approval for a state marker will be made by the THC. This form is to be used for Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (building marker) requests only. Please see separate forms for either Historic Texas Cemeteries or subject markers.

Proposed marker topic (official title will be determined by the THC): Sylvan Beach Pavilion

County: Harris

Town (nearest county town on current state highway map): Houston

Street address of marker site or directions from town noted above: 554 North Bayshore Drive, La Porte, Tx 77571

Marker Coordinates:

If you know the location coordinates of the proposed marker site, enter them in one of the formats below:

UTM Zone Easting Northing
Lat: 29.6517475 Long: 95.0105676(deg, min, sec or decimal degrees)

Otherwise, give a precise verbal description here (e.g. northwest corner of 3rd and Elm, or FM 1411, 2.6 miles east of McWhorter Creek):

NOTE: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers must be placed at the structure being marked.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers definition: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) markers are awarded to structures deemed worthy of preservation for their historical associations and architectural significance. RTHL is a legal designation and comes with a measure of protection; it is the highest honor the state can bestow on a historic structure, and the designation is required for this type of marker. The RTHL designation becomes effective upon approval by the THC. Official Texas Historical Markers signify the RTHL designation, which comes only through application to and approval by the THC and must include public display of an Official Texas Historical Marker. Owners of RTHL-designated structures must give the THC 60 days written notice before any alterations are made to the exterior of the structure. RTHL status is a permanent designation and is not to be removed from the property in the event of a transfer of ownership. Only the THC can remove the designation or recall the marker. The marker must remain with the structure and may not be removed or displayed elsewhere until or unless the THC gives express approval in writing for such action. Once designated as RTHL, properties are subject to provisions of Texas Government Code, Section 442.006(f).

Criteria:

1. **Age:** Structures eligible for the RTHL designation and marker must be at least 50 years old.
2. **Historical significance:** Architectural significance alone is not enough to qualify a structure for the RTHL designation. It must have an equally significant historical association, and that association can come from an event that occurred at the site; through individuals who owned or lived on the property; or, in the case of bridges, industrial plants, schoolhouses and other non-residential properties, through documented significance to the larger community.
3. **Architectural significance:** Structures deemed architecturally significant are outstanding examples of architectural history through design, materials, structural type or construction methods. In all cases, eligible architectural properties must display integrity; that is, the structure should be in a good state of repair, maintain its appearance from its period of significance and be considered an exemplary model of preservation. Architectural significance is often best determined by the relevance of the property to broader contexts, including geography. Any changes over the years should be compatible with original design and reflect compliance with accepted preservation practices, e.g., the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.
4. **Good state of repair:** Structures not considered by the THC to be in a good state of repair are ineligible for RTHL designation. The THC reserves the sole right to make that determination relative to eligibility for RTHL markers.

Special National Register considerations for RTHL marker applications: If a structure has been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under either Criterion A or B **and** Criterion C (Architecture), the historical text compiled as part of the National Register nomination process may be submitted as part of the marker process, provided it includes the required reference notes and other documentation. Acceptance of the National Register information for the purposes of the marker process will be up to the sole determination of the THC. Listing in the NRHP does not guarantee approval for an RTHL marker. See the THC web site at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigns/madnrcrit.html> for National Register criteria.

Check this box if the property is individually listed in the NRHP.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Any individual, group or county historical commission (CHC) may apply to the THC to request an Official Texas Historical Marker for what it deems a worthy topic. Only complete marker applications that contain all the required elements and are submitted online as required can be accepted or processed by the THC (for RTHL markers, the required elements are: sponsorship application form; narrative history; documentation; legal description of the property; site plan; floorplan; historic photograph; and current photographs clearly showing each side of the structure—please resize photographs to 1-2 MB, or approximately 1024 x 768 pixels).

- Completed applications must be duly reviewed, verified and approved by the county historical commission (CHC) in the county in which the marker will be placed.
- The sponsorship application form, narrative history and documentation must be submitted as Microsoft Word or Word-compatible documents and sent via email attachments to the THC by no later than November 15, 2010.
- Required font style and type size are a Times variant and 12-point.
- Narrative histories must be typed in a double-spaced (or 1.5-spaced) format and include separate sections on context, overview, significance and documentation.
- The narrative history must include documentation in the form of reference notes, which can be either footnotes or endnotes. Documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary.

- Upon notification of the successful preliminary review of required elements by the THC, a non-refundable application fee of \$100 is required. The fee shall be submitted to the THC within ten working days of application receipt notification.

APPROVAL BY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The duly appointed marker representative (chair or marker chair) noted below for the county historical commission will be the sole contact with the THC for this marker application. To ensure accuracy, consistency and efficiency, all information from and to the THC relative to the application—and throughout the review and production processes—will be via direct communication with the CHC representative. All other inquiries (calls, emails, letters) to the THC will be referred to the CHC representative for response. By filling out the information below and filing the application with the THC, the CHC representative is providing the THC with notice that the application and documentation have been reviewed and verified by the CHC and that the material meets all current requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker program.

As chair or duly appointed marker chair, I certify the following:

- Representatives of the CHC have met or talked with the potential marker sponsor and discussed the marker program policies as outlined on the THC web site. CHC members have reviewed the history and documentation for accuracy and made corrections or notes as necessary. It is the determination of the CHC that the topic, history and documentation meet criteria for eligibility.

CHC comments or concerns about this application, if any:

Name of CHC contact (chair or marker chair): Louis F. Aulbach, Marker Chair

Mailing address: P.O. Box 925765 **City, Zip:** Houston, Texas 77292-5765

Daytime phone (with area code): 713-683-8379 **Email address** (required): lfa@hal-pc.org

PERMISSION OF PROPERTY OWNER FOR MARKER PLACEMENT

Property owner: People of Harris County, County Judge Ed Emmett

Address: 1001 Preston, Suite 911 **City, state, zip:** Houston, Texas 77002

Phone: 713-755-4000 **Email address:** judge.emmett@cjo.hctx.net

Legal Description of the property (metes and bounds, lot and block, etc.): : “Beginning at a point in the East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive from which a 5/8 inch iron bar bears South 81 degrees 28’54” West a distance of 97.09 feet, said iron bar marking the northeast corner of Block 49 of the Sylvan Beach Subdivision as recorded in Volume 3 at Page 72, said iron bar being in the west right-of-wayline of Bayshore Drive (80 feet wide) at Circle Drive. Thence North 26 degrees 00’00” East along the said East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive, as fenced, a distance of 200.00 feet to a point for an angle to the left; Thence North 8 degrees 26’18” East along said fence, a distance of 143.17 feet to a point for an angle to the right; Thence North 14 degrees 05’07” East along said fence, a distance of 44.50 feet to a gate post for corner; Thence North 86 degrees 26’52” East, leaving said fence, along a line 0.80 feet South of an parallel to a paved driveway, a distance of 81.62 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 26 degrees 00’00” East along a line established by the back of a curb of a traffic island beginning at 36.00 feet and ending at 44.00 feet, in all a distance of 130.81 feet to a point in the back of curb of a parking lot for corner; Thence South 64 degrees 00’00” East a distance of 236.53 feet to a point for corner

on the Bayside of a wooden bulkhead; Thence in a southwesterly direction along the meanders of the Bayside of said wooden bulkhead a distance of 551.11 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 64 degrees 00'00" West, a distance of 455.15 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING and containing 254,107 square feet (5.8335 acres) of land.”

Upon receipt of the application, the THC will provide the owner with a letter that outlines the legal responsibility of ownership under the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark statute. The letter must be signed by the owner and returned to the THC before the evaluation can be completed.

NOTE: The property owner will not receive any additional copies of correspondence from the THC. All other correspondence—notice of receipt, request for additional information, payment notice, inscription, shipping notice, etc.—will be sent via email to the CHC representative, who is encouraged to share the information with all interested parties as necessary. Given the large volume of applications processed annually and the need for centralized communication, all inquiries about applications in process will be referred to the CHC for response. The CHC is the sole liaison to the THC on all marker application matters.

SPONSORSHIP PAYMENT INFORMATION

Prospective sponsors please note the following:

- Payment must be received in full within 45 days of the official approval notice and must be accompanied by the THC payment form. The THC is unable to process partial payments or to delay payment due to processing procedures of the sponsor. Applications not paid in the time frame required may, at the sole discretion of the THC, be cancelled or postponed.
- Payment does not constitute ownership of a marker; Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers and other Official Texas Historical Markers are the property of the State of Texas.
- If, at any time during the marker process, sponsorship is withdrawn, a refund can be processed, but the THC will retain the application fee of \$100.
- The Official Texas Historical Marker Program provides no means of recognizing sponsors or property owners through marker text, incising or supplemental plaques.

Marker sponsor (may be individual or organization): Friends of Sylvan Beach Park & Pavilion

Contact person (if applicable): Ted Powell

Mailing address: 1700 Roscoe St. **City, zip:** La Porte, Tx 77571

Email address (required): 281-799-2920 **Phone:** savethepavilion@comcast.net

SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS

In order to facilitate delivery of the marker, residence addresses, post office box numbers and rural route numbers are not permitted. To avoid additional shipping charges or delays, use a business street address (open 8 a.m.—5 p.m., Monday through Friday).

Name: Ted Powell

Street address: 1700 Roscoe Street **City, zip:** La Porte, Tx 77571

Daytime phone (required): 281-799-2920 **Email** (required): savethepavilion@comcast.net

TYPE AND SIZE OF RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS

As part of its review process, the THC will determine the appropriate size marker and provide options, if any, for the approved topic based on its own review criteria, including, but not exclusive of, historical significance, replication of information in other THC markers, relevance to the Statewide Preservation Plan and the amount of available documented information provided in the application narrative. In making its determination, however, the THC will also take into account the preference of the CHC, as noted below.

The sponsor/CHC prefers the following size marker:

- 27" x 42" RTHL marker with post (\$1500)
- 27" X 42" RTHL marker without post* (\$1500)
- 18" x 28" RTHL marker with post (\$1000)
- 18" x 28" RTHL marker without post* (\$1000)
- RTHL medallion and 16" x 12" plaque with post (\$750)
- RTHL medallion and 16" x 12" plaque without post* (\$750)

*For an RTHL marker without post, indicate to what surface material it will be mounted:

- wood
- masonry
- metal
- other (specify)

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION (via email required)

When the CHC has determined the application is complete, the history has been verified and the topic meets the requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the materials should be forwarded to the THC via email at the following address:

markerapplication@thc.state.tx.us.

- The CHC or marker chair should send an email containing the following attachments (see attachment function under file menu or toolbox on your computer):
 - This application form
 - The narrative history (including documentation)
 - Legal description of the property
 - Detailed floor plan for each floor of the structure
 - Detailed site plan of the property
 - At least one historic photograph
 - Current photographs clearly showing each side of the structure

RECORDS RETENTION BY CHC: The CHC must retain hard copies of the application as well as an online version, at least for the duration of the marker process. The THC is not responsible for lost applications, for incomplete applications or for applications not properly filed according to the program requirements. For additional information about any aspect of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, see the Markers page on the THC web site (<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigns/madmark.html>)

Texas Historical Commission
History Programs Division
P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276
Phone 512/463-5853
history@thc.state.tx.us



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

An Application for a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Marker for

SYLVAN BEACH PAVILION

by Ted Powell

with the assistance of Stephen Fox

and presented to the Harris County Historical Commission

I. CONTEXT

The town of La Porte, Texas, was developed in 1892 as a summer resort community on the west shore of Galveston Bay that was to be linked by railroad to Houston, twenty-five miles to the west. The original town plan reserved much of the bayfront for a recreational park, originally called Sylvan Grove. The onset of the Panic of 1893 delayed the construction of the railroad line and, eventually, bankrupted the development corporation.^{1,2} Much of the bayfront was sold, but approximately 22 acres were retained as Sylvan Beach Park, that in 1896 became a privately operated amusement park and campground that reached its peak of popularity between 1932 and 1943.³

The opening of the Houston Ship Channel in 1914 and of the Humble Oil & Refining Company's Baytown Refinery across Galveston Bay from La Porte in 1919, as well as construction of a petrochemical industrial complex along the Houston Ship Channel during and after World War II, profoundly changed the economy and demography of eastern Harris County. Construction of the La Porte-Baytown highway tunnel beneath the ship channel in 1953, the opening of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Manned Space Craft Center (now Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center) at Clear Lake in southeastern Harris County in 1964, the opening of the Bayport Industrial District in 1964 and of the Barbour's Cut Container Terminal of the Port of Houston in 1977, reconstruction of State Highway 146 as a freeway along the east edge of the original La Porte town site in the mid-1970s, and completion of the Fred Hartman Bridge replacing the La Porte-Baytown Tunnel in 1995 caused La Porte to become a year-round residential community rather than a seasonal bayside resort.⁴

The 1930s pavilion, one of the largest dance halls in the south, was destroyed by a tornado spawned by the 1943 hurricane. The park's pavilion was not rebuilt as wartime restrictions curtailed non-defense related construction and leisure travel, and park visitation after the war decreased significantly due to lifestyle changes heavily influenced by television and residential air conditioning. In 1954, encouraged by the La Porte Chamber of Commerce, Rotary

Club and other community groups, Harris County bought the property for use as a public park.⁵ In order to rejuvenate regional interest in the seaside park, the County immediately began efforts to reestablish a pavilion on the beach, although at a smaller scale and with a ‘forward’ looking style, whose engineered elements would stand up to nature’s wrath.⁶

II. OVERVIEW

The Harris County Commissioner’s Court acquired the 22-acre Sylvan Beach site in 1954 and commissioned the Houston architectural firm of Greacen and Brogniez⁷ to design a modern replacement for the dance pavilion destroyed in 1943. Construction began in 1955 and in May 1956 the new Sylvan Beach Pavilion was completed and dedicated.⁸ The architects won national recognition for two of their buildings, the Gibraltar Savings & Loan Association Building in Houston (1957-59) and the Sylvan Beach Pavilion.⁹ Both were published in the nationally circulated journal, *Arts and Architecture*, and reflected widespread interest in the modern architecture being produced in Houston during the 1950s. Additionally, the Sylvan Beach Pavilion won an Honor Award for Design from the American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter, in 1957.¹⁰

The pavilion was planned and built during the tenure of Harris County Judge Robert Randolph Casey (1915-1985, judge 1951-1958) of Houston (Casey was subsequently U.S. Congressman from the 22nd District of Texas, 1959-1976) and of Harris County Precinct Two Commissioner V. V. Ramsey (1914-1999, commissioner 1952-1970) of Channelview (Precinct Two includes La Porte).¹¹ Robert L. Reid (1915-1990) of Houston was structural engineer and the Texas Gulf Construction Company of Houston was the general contractor.¹²

The Sylvan Beach Pavilion was an early example of the use of thin shell concrete roof vaulting in Texas and, in engineering terms, a structural design that was relatively complex in its combination of cable-stayed and cantilevered tensile design. This significant engineering feature curves upward to a 10-foot wide central oculus above the center of the ballroom. Eighty-five feet from this center point, the roof is supported by a concrete-encased steel tension ring carried on eight, equally spaced 18-inch diameter concrete columns that encircle the dance floor. The outer 20-foot perimeter of the roof plate is canted upward and counterbalances the thrust of the interior roof plate portion along the tension ring, holding the roof structure in equilibrium even in hurricane winds as high as 120 miles per hour.¹³ Thin shell concrete vaults could span long distances without the support of intermediate interior columns. Consequently, buildings using

this structural system could be built more rapidly and economically than a conventionally framed structure. This system also produced dramatic architectural profiles that vividly materialized the modern architectural identity of the buildings they roofed.

The Sylvan Beach Pavilion consists of an octagonal, glass-walled ballroom of 10,000 square feet crowned by a circular concrete roof plate; an attached, rectangular, flat roofed block containing stairs, a spacious entrance foyer, and a concession bar; and a broad, angled, open air terrace deck. The entire complex is elevated on concrete columns ten feet above grade. The octagonal ballroom pavilion is walled with glass and is transparent. The flat-roofed foyer block is faced with corrugated asbestos cement board interrupted on the front (northwest) and side (southwest) elevations by projecting bays containing access stairs. The northwest stair bay is faced with turquoise painted stucco; the southwest bay is faced with brick. The southeast elevation, facing the terrace deck and the bay, is almost all glass and is fitted with a scalloped, cantilevered canopy above the concession bar. The interior of the Sylvan Park Pavilion is broad and open, reflecting its modern design and bayside location. The most significant interior feature is the circular hardwood dance floor and the conical roof plate above it. The Sylvan Beach Pavilion is a mid-twentieth-century modern interpretation of the freestanding, octagonal wood frame building type built by German and Czech immigrants in Texas as dance halls, social halls and community gathering places in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴

Significant alterations and additions to the building occurred in 1962 and 1980. Storm surges associated with Hurricane Carla in 1961 and Hurricane Alicia in 1983 submerged the underside of the pavilion, leading to the county's construction of an elevated addition to the south end of the building in 1962 and an earthen levee on the building's east facing bayside. The most visually noticeable alteration involved construction of an enclosed handicapped ramp giving access directly to the ballroom in 1980.

As the site of musical performances, the Sylvan Beach Pavilion became an important venue for Houstonian Don Robey, the first African-American to own a successful record label, to showcase his artists following park desegregation in 1962.¹⁵ Other musical personalities who performed at the pavilion were Phil Harris, Alice Faye, Harry James, Buddy Brock, Ed Gerlach, Russell Jackson, Tex Beneke and Mickey Gilley.¹⁶ Alexine Ingraham, a local resident, recently wrote *"Thirty-seven years ago, the first night I spent in La Porte, ... was at the Sylvan Beach Dance which was wonderful with a Big Band (where) they crowned Miss Sylvan Beach. ... It was known all over Texas for these events. My husband ... travelled 75 miles one way with a group in*

the 1960's into the 1980's whenever there was a Big Band Dance featuring Ed Gerlach, Buddy Brock, Russell Jackson, Harry James and others."¹⁷ Rice University's architecture school held its annual Archi-Arts Ball at the pavilion on occasion.¹⁸ The Houston Symphony often performed concerts at the Pavilion, most recently in 2005 during their Summer Concert Series.

Equally important to many was the Pavilion's use as a "rite of passage" social venue. From Baytown to Bellaire, many regional high schools held their proms at the Pavilion until the 1980s.^{19,20} Generations of area residents booked the Pavilion for their weddings. Many chose the Pavilion because their aunt, mother or grandparents were married there. One person recently wrote, "*I got married at the pavilion and it was the most beautiful wedding I have ever seen. We got married as the sun was setting ... and we danced all night long*".²¹

The pavilion served as the site for private social events continuously until it was closed following Hurricane Ike in 2008. In 2009 the county government sought federal funding for its demolition, but its nomination to the National Historic Register by concerned citizens ended those prospects. In April 2010 Harris County Commissioners Court authorized the preparation of a "request for qualification" (RFQ) that will seek a qualified preservation architect whose sole purpose will be to restore the Sylvan Beach Pavilion.²² Updates on the restoration process will be available on the website, SaveThePavilion.org.²³

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Sylvan Beach Pavilion is the most prominent work of mid-twentieth-century modern architecture in La Porte. It is the only building in La Porte to have won an award for its architectural design and to have been published in a national architectural journal. The pavilion retains integrity of materials and design and is significant as the best preserved modern public building in La Porte. It is one of the two most prominent buildings designed by its architects, Greacen & Brogniez. It is additionally significant for its association with the musical and social history of Harris County during the 1950s and '60s and is also significant because it perpetuated, in novel form, the traditional nineteenth-century Texan building type of the octagonal dance hall.

Sylvan Grove was created in 1882 when the Town of La Porte reserved a large section of its bay front along Galveston Bay for recreational purposes. The panic of 1893 resulted in the land being sold. A portion of this bay front became Sylvan Beach Park, a privately owned amusement park and campground. A key park feature has been its dance pavilions, whose size and popularity grew as railroad lines and paved roads put it within reach of Houstonians. The

wood framed pavilion was destroyed by the 1943 hurricane. The park remained closed due to the war effort followed by lifestyle changes, such as television and air conditioning, and area industrialization that reduced bay front tourism.

In 1954 Harris County Commissioners purchased Sylvan Beach Park and commissioned the Houston architectural firm of Greacen & Brogniez to design a modern, hurricane resistant dance pavilion. Opened in 1956, the Sylvan Beach Pavilion celebrates the park's musical and dance history with its elevated octagonal glass walled ballroom containing a large circular wood dance floor that appears to float above the park. Achieving this effect required minimizing structural elements, without sacrificing storm resistant capabilities. A key element in the pavilion's design is the thin shell concrete conical roof plate that spans the ballroom and rests on only 8 thin outer columns. This complex cable stayed and cantilevered tensile roof design is one of the earliest examples in Texas. Designed to withstand 120 mph winds, the Sylvan Beach Pavilion has successfully survived several major hurricanes.

During its first half century of service, the pavilion attracted local and national talent offering music venues ranging from Big Band Orchestras to Country to Jazz and Blues. People came from all over southeast Texas to attend these pavilion functions. Perhaps more importantly, the pavilion has touched generations of Harris County residents as the location of significant social events ranging from proms to weddings to quinceañeras. Many have pleasant memories of dancing the night away while the bay's moonlit waters glistened in the background.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ 'Sylvan Grove' got its name from a grove of shade trees along the waterfront in a region that was a treeless prairie. It is unclear if 'Sylvan' was named after a particular individual. However, as a result of the city's 1896 financial crises, the park was taken over by creditors who changed the name to 'Sylvan Beach' undoubtedly to aid lot sales to 'Northerners' seeking to invest in a resort community. The upstate New York community of Sylvan Beach, on the east shore of Lake Oneida, was a well known, desirable 19th century resort community.

² Foxworth, Erna B. *The Romance of Old Sylvan Beach: A Hundred Years of Amusement and Nostalgia*. Austin: Waterway Press, 1986. pp. 15-21.

³ Foxworth, pp. 76-102.

⁴ Kolodz, Ron. *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "La Porte, Texas." <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/LL/hel2.html> (accessed March 9, 2010).

⁵ "Sylvan Beach Dedication Set," *Houston Post*, January 18, 1955, sec. 1, p. 8. "New Life for Sylvan Beach," *Houston Post*, January 23, 1955, sec. 1, p. 6.

⁶ The set of stamped and signed detailed construction blueprints for the Pavilion is dated 21 October 1954. The set consists of 12 blueprints. Source: Harris County

⁷ The principals in this firm, founded in 1953, were Thomas Edmund Greacen II (1907-1994) and Raymond Hector Brogniez (1918-2008).

⁸ “County Park Job in Plan Stages,” *AGC News Service*, January 8, 1954, p. 5; “Sylvan Beach Dedication Set,” *Houston Post*, January 18, 1955, Sec. 1, p. 8; “New Life for Sylvan Beach,” *Houston Post*, January 23, 1955, Sec. 1, p. 6; and “Parade to Open Sylvan Beach,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 6, 1956, Section J, p. 4.

⁹ On Thomas Greacen and Raymond Brogniez see: *American Architects Directory*. Ed. George S. Koyl. New York: R. R. Bowker Company and the American Institute of Architects, 1955. pp. 64 (Brogniez) and 208 (Greacen); *American Architects Directory*. Ed. George S. Koyl. New York: R. R. Bowker Company and the American Institute of Architects, 1962. pp. 81 (Brogniez) and 263 (Greacen); and *American Architects Directory*. Ed. John F. Gane. New York: R. R. Bowker Company and the American Institute of Architects. 1970, p. 106 (Brogniez). See also the obituary notices: “Greacen.” *Houston Chronicle*, 17 February 1994, p. A-34, and “Brogniez.” *Houston Chronicle*, 9 March 2008, p. B7.

¹⁰ “Park Development by Greacen & Brogniez, Architects,” *Arts and Architecture* 74 (January 1957): 24-25, 32.

¹¹ On County Judge (subsequently Congressman) Bob Casey, see the entry for “Robert R. Casey” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_R._Casey (accessed March 9, 2010). On Commissioner Red Ramsey, see “Ramsey,” *Houston Chronicle* 9 October 1999, p. A-45.

¹² On structural engineer Robert L. Reid, see “Reid,” *Houston Chronicle*, 15 September 1990, p. B-15.

¹³ “Park Development by Greacen & Brogniez, Architects,” 24-25, 32.

¹⁴ The non-profit preservation organization Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc., has catalogued many individual examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Texas dance halls on the website <http://www.texasdancehall.org/dancehalls.html> (accessed March 9, 2010). Among the most outstanding polygonal dance halls are the octagonal Garten-Verein Dancing Pavilion in Kempner Park in Galveston (1880), the twelve-sided Bellville Turn-Verein Pavilion in Bellville (1883), the octagonal Cameron Park Pavilion in Cameron (1890), the Virginia Field Park Pavilion in Calvert (1895), Liedertafel Hall in Sealy (1914), and the Buckholts SPJST #15 Hall in Buckholts (1936).

¹⁵ “A little known fact: Houston is the blues capital”, R. Mitchell, *Houston Chronicle*, 28 September 2007; ‘Endless Summer’ festival set for Friday,” W. Snyder, *The Baytown Sun*, 14 August 14 2003.

¹⁶ Foxworth, pp. 106-107.

¹⁷ Ingraham, Alexine Strum, ‘Save the Sylvan Beach Pavilion’, Email correspondence to author, 29 April, 2008

¹⁸ Foxworth, p. 73.

¹⁹ Blitzer, Andy, ‘Bellaire High School, Then and Now’, *The Bellaire Buzz*, November 2004, p. 9

²⁰ Ford, James, Email correspondence to Bernice Mistrot, March 22, 2010

²¹ Cheyenne (last name not disclosed), ‘My Wedding’, Email to Author, 23 October 2008

²² Harris County Commissioners Court Agenda, April 27, 2010, page 9, Item 1.e.16. “Recommendation that the court grant authorization to publish a request for qualifications seeking a preservation architect for restoration of the Sylvan Beach Pavilion in Precinct 2.”

²³ http://web.me.com/tapster2/savethepavilion/Current_Events.html

V. RTHL ATTACHMENTS

Legal description of the property

Verbal Boundary Description : “Beginning at a point in the East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive from which a 5/8 inch iron bar bears South 81 degrees 28’54” West a distance of 97.09 feet, said iron bar marking the northeast corner of Block 49 of the Sylvan Beach Subdivision as recorded in Volume 3 at Page 72, said iron bar being in the west right-of-wayline of Bayshore Drive (80 feet wide) at Circle Drive. Thence North 26 degrees 00’00” East along the said East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive, as fenced, a distance of 200.00 feet to a point for an angle to the left; Thence North 8 degrees 26’18” East along said fence, a distance of 143.17 feet to a point for an angle to the right; Thence North 14 degrees 05’07” East along said fence, a distance of 44.50 feet to a gate post for corner; Thence North 86 degrees 26’52” East, leaving said fence, along a line 0.80 feet South of an parallel to a paved driveway, a distance of 81.62 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 26 degrees 00’00” East along a line established by the back of a curb of a traffic island beginning at 36.00 feet and ending at 44.00 feet, in all a distance of 130.81 feet to a point in the back of curb of a parking lot for corner; Thence South 64 degrees 00’00” East a distance of 236.53 feet to a point for corner on the Bayside of a wooden bulkhead; Thence in a southwesterly direction along the meanders of the Bayside of said wooden bulkhead a distance of 551.11 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 64 degrees 00’00” West, a distance of 455.15 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING and containing 254,107 square feet (5.8335 acres) of land.”

Boundary Justification: **Verbal description is based on Harris County Lease document between County and City of La Porte dated 7/1/1986. Description is for 5.8335 acres of land upon which the Pavilion is located.**

Detailed floor plan for each floor of the structure:

Copies of original blueprints (12 files) by Greacen and Brogniez, dated 21 October 1954
[The floor plan of the 2nd floor is provided, but additional plans are available on request.]

Copies of renovation drawings, (6 files) by F.N. Parsons, dated 20 March 1962 *[The floor plans of the ground floor and general floor plans are provided, but additional plans are available on request.]*

Copies of renovation drawings, (6) HC Dept of Eng. (draft), dated 16 December 1977 *[The site plan is provided, but additional plans are available on request.]*

Detailed site plan of the property, by Google Maps, October 2009

Historic Photographs:

Pavilion South View, 1956

Pavilion Front entrance drive view, 1956

Pavilion Ballroom, 1956

Pavilion waterside looking towards ballroom from end of deck, 1956

Sylvan Beach Pavilion, 1956

Pavilion prior to Hurricane Carla, 1961

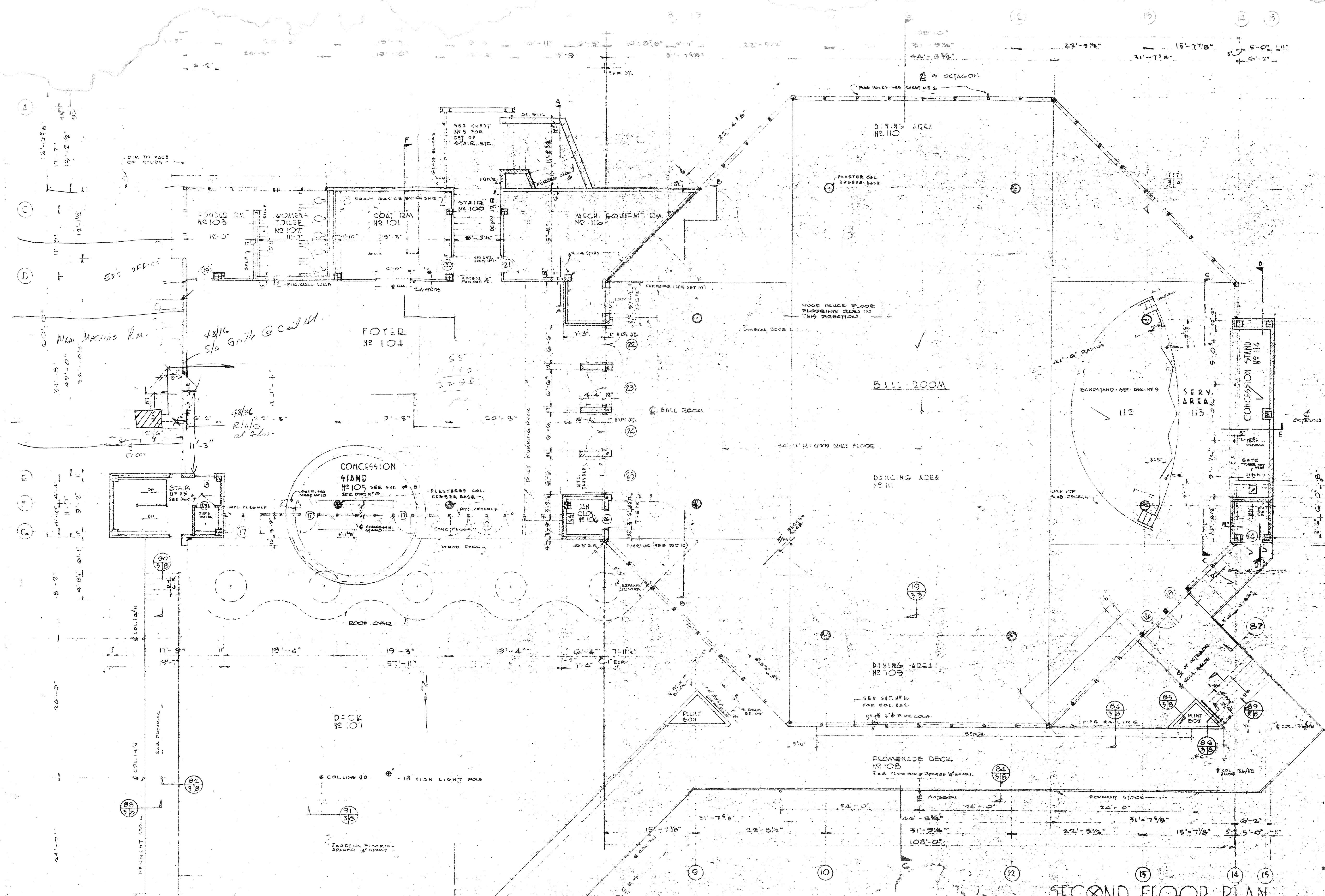
Main Entrance Addition, 1980

Current Photographs:

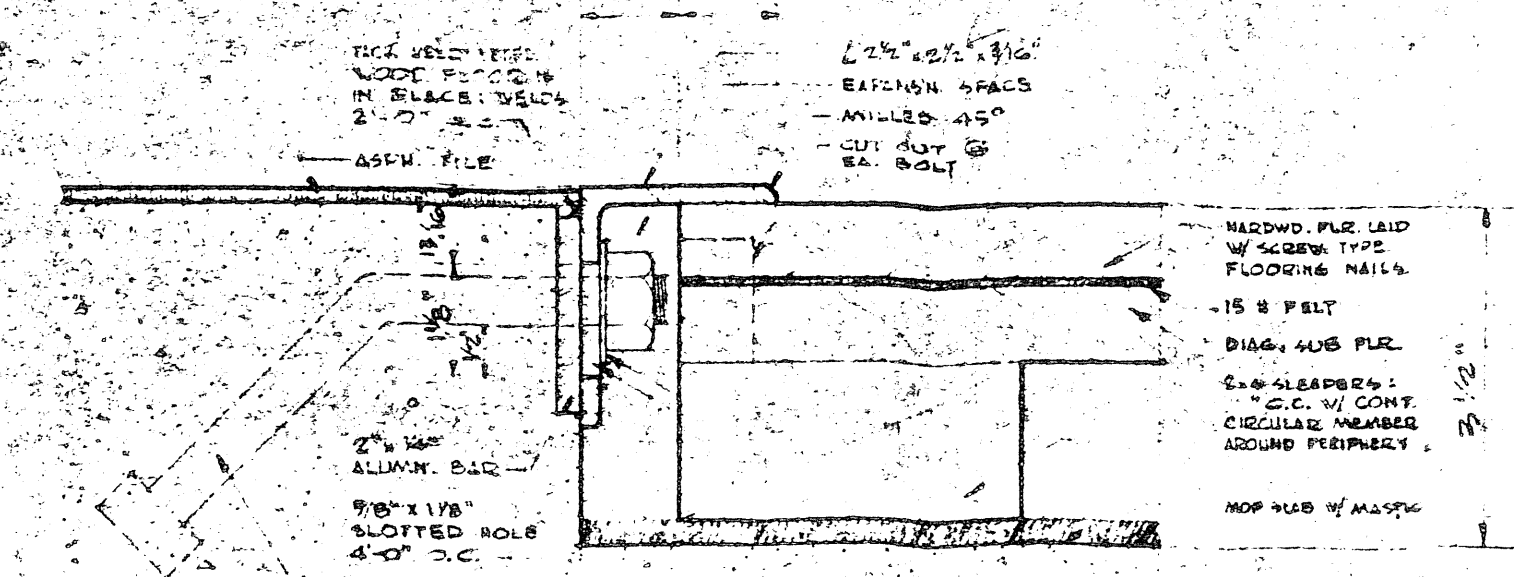
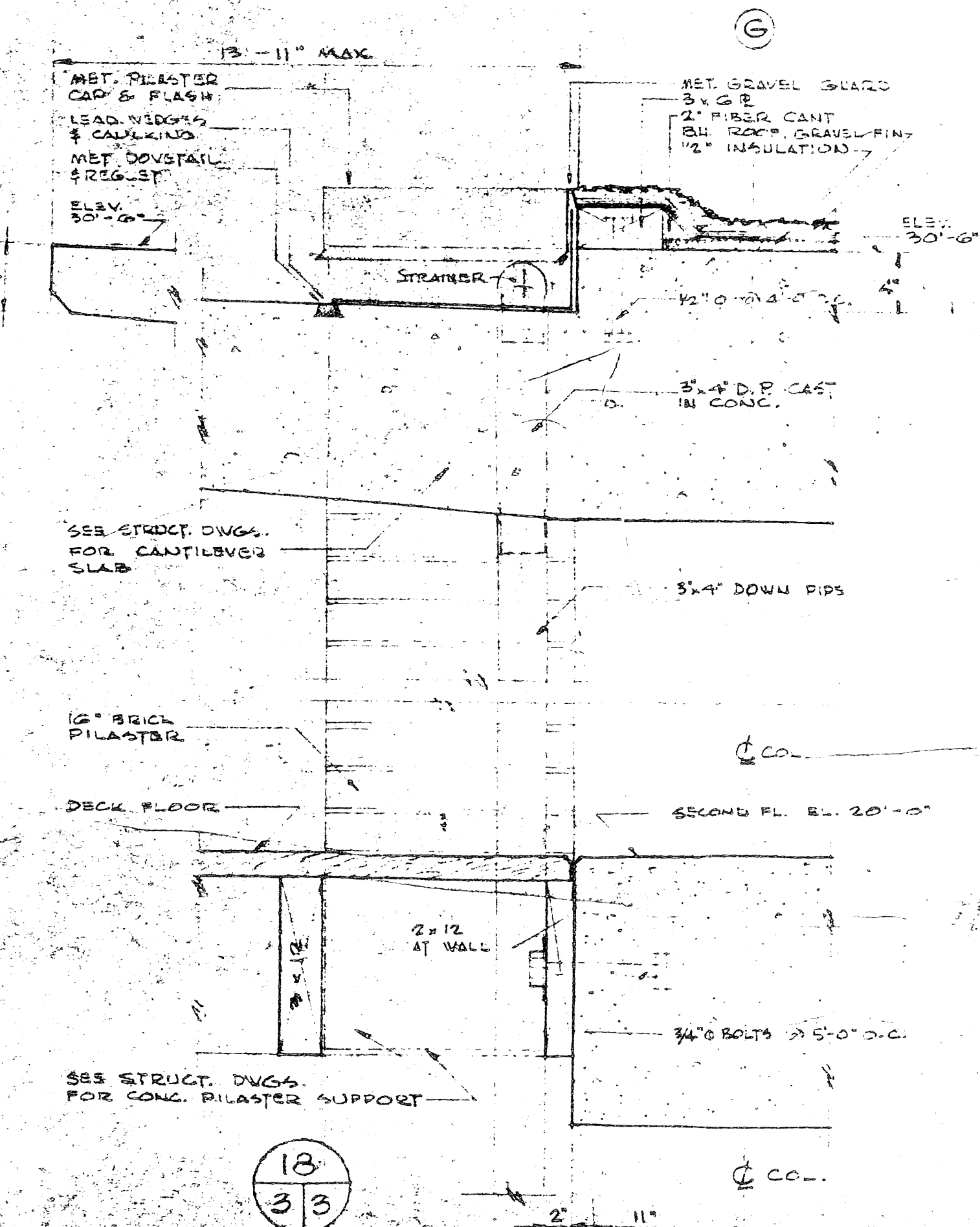
Pavilion street side, Dec 2008

Looking north, 2008

Waterside looking west, Sept 2008



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



DETAIL SYMBOL
DETAIL NUMBER
LOCATION
SHEET

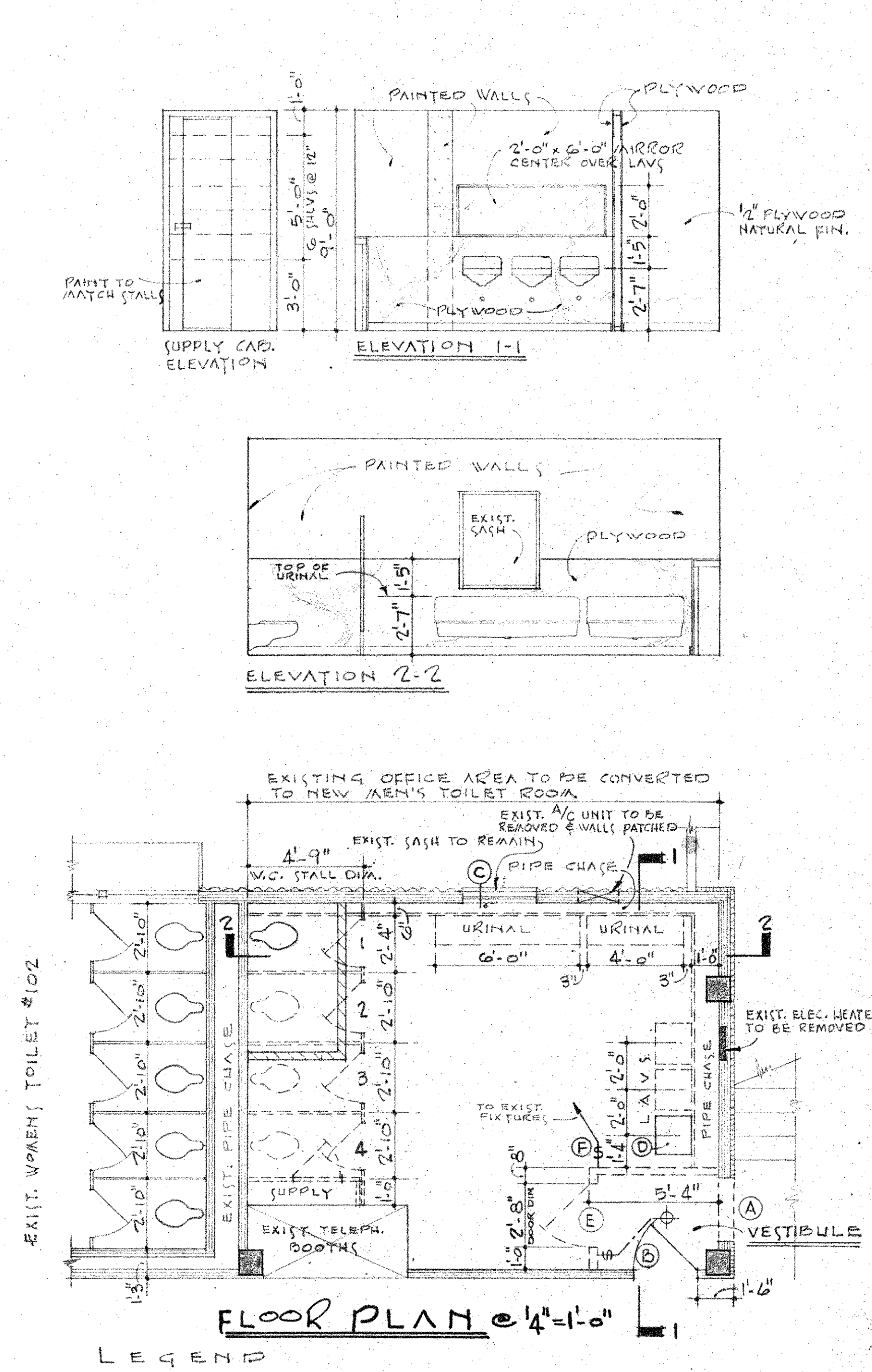
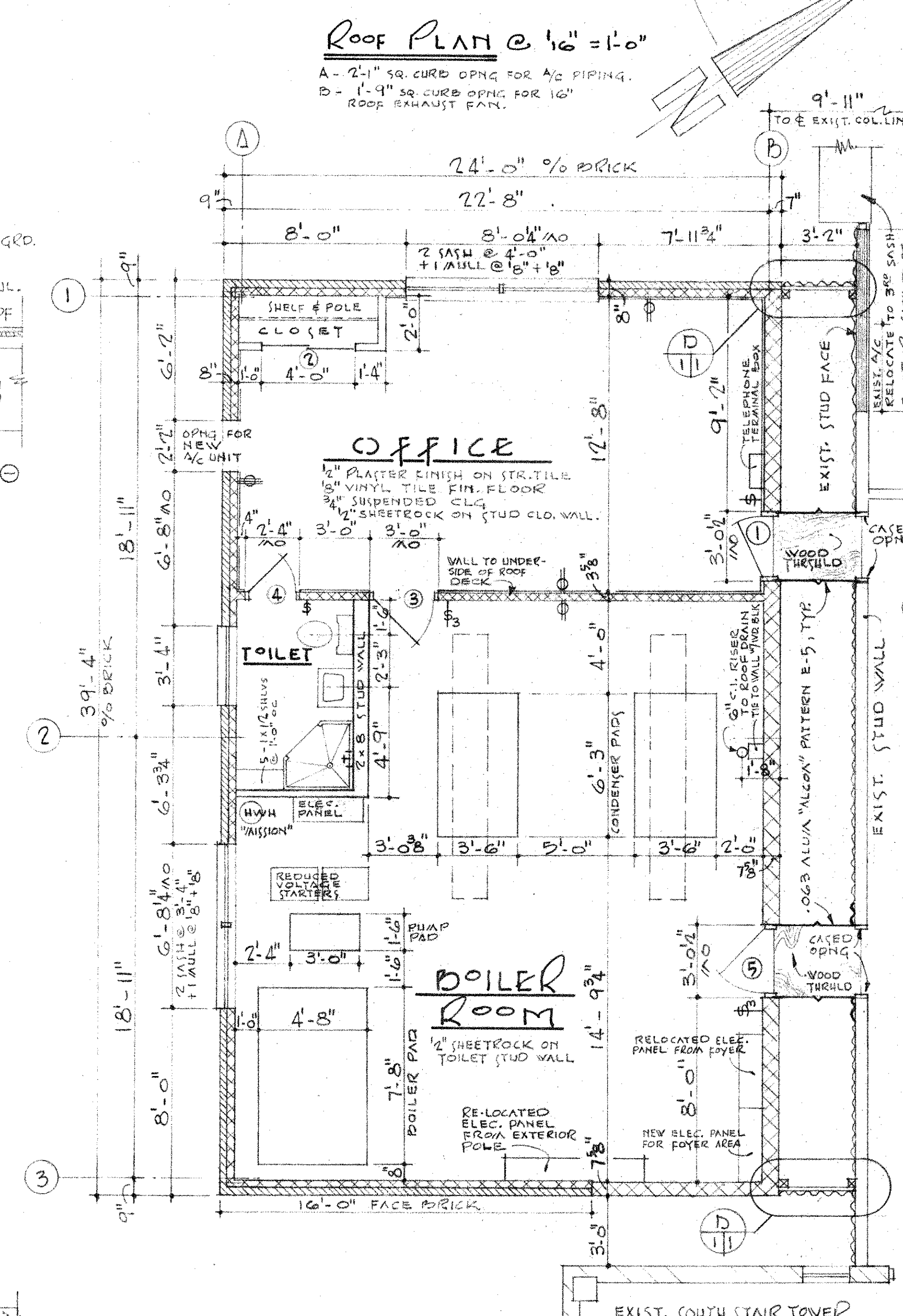
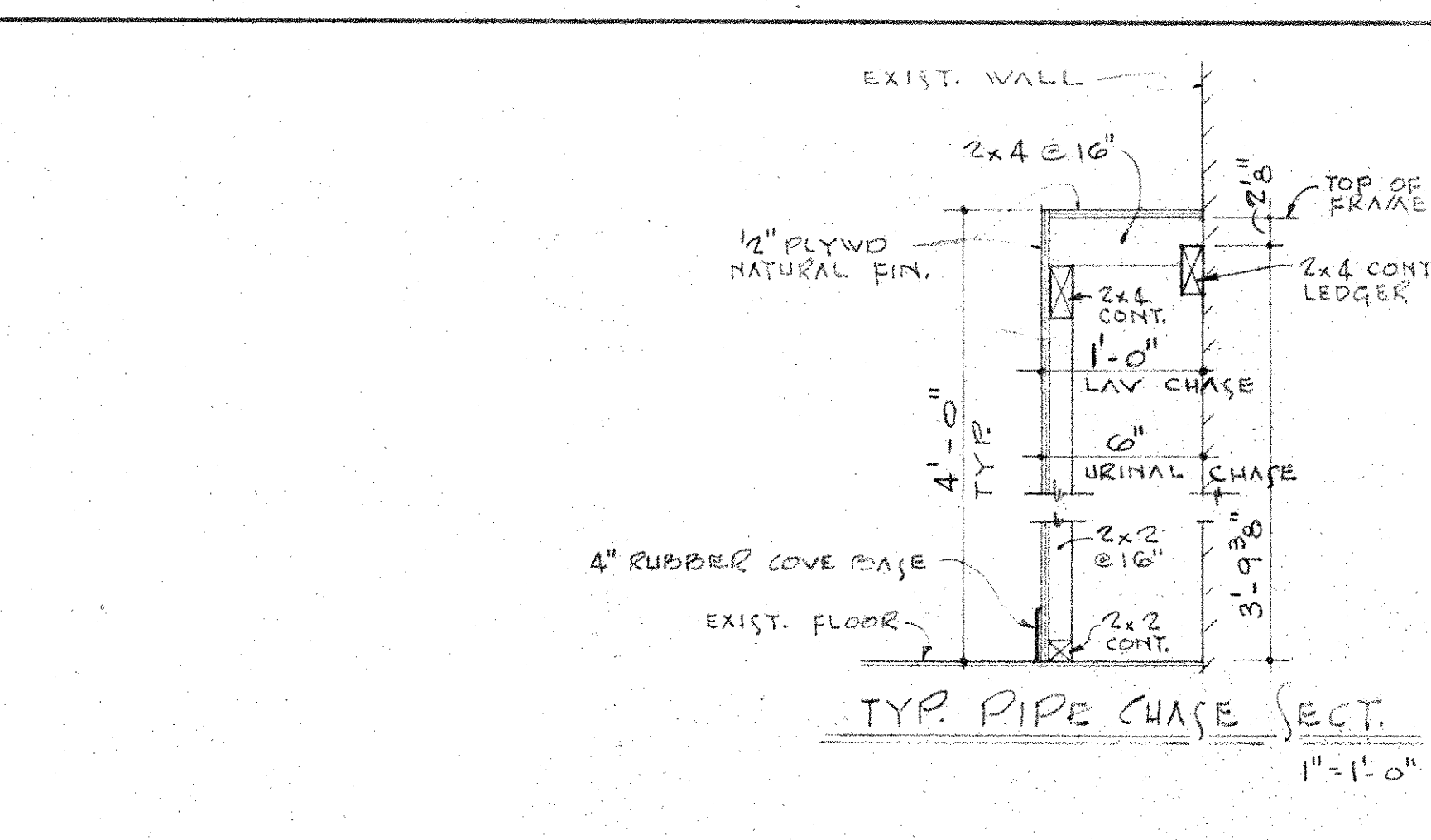
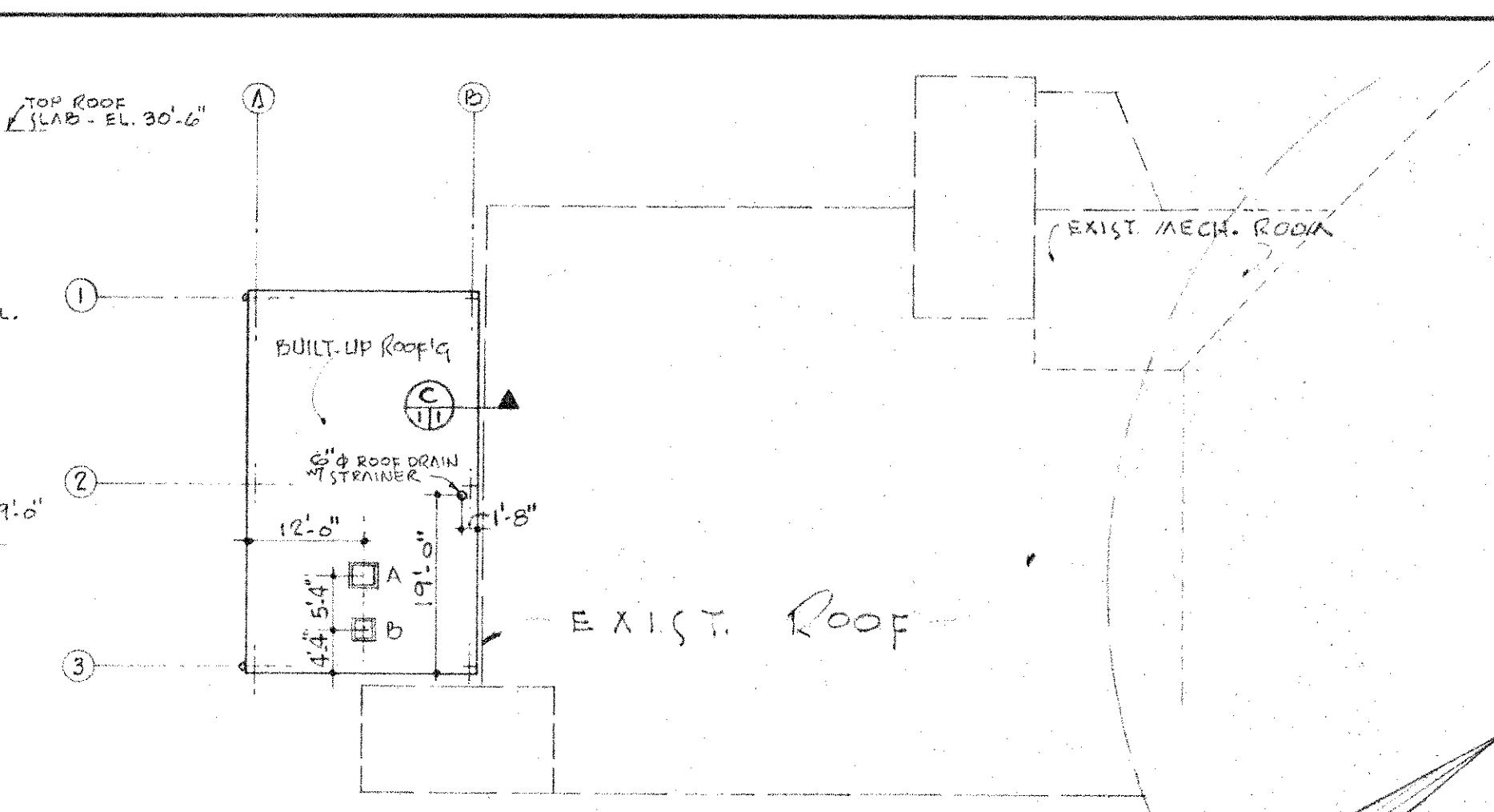
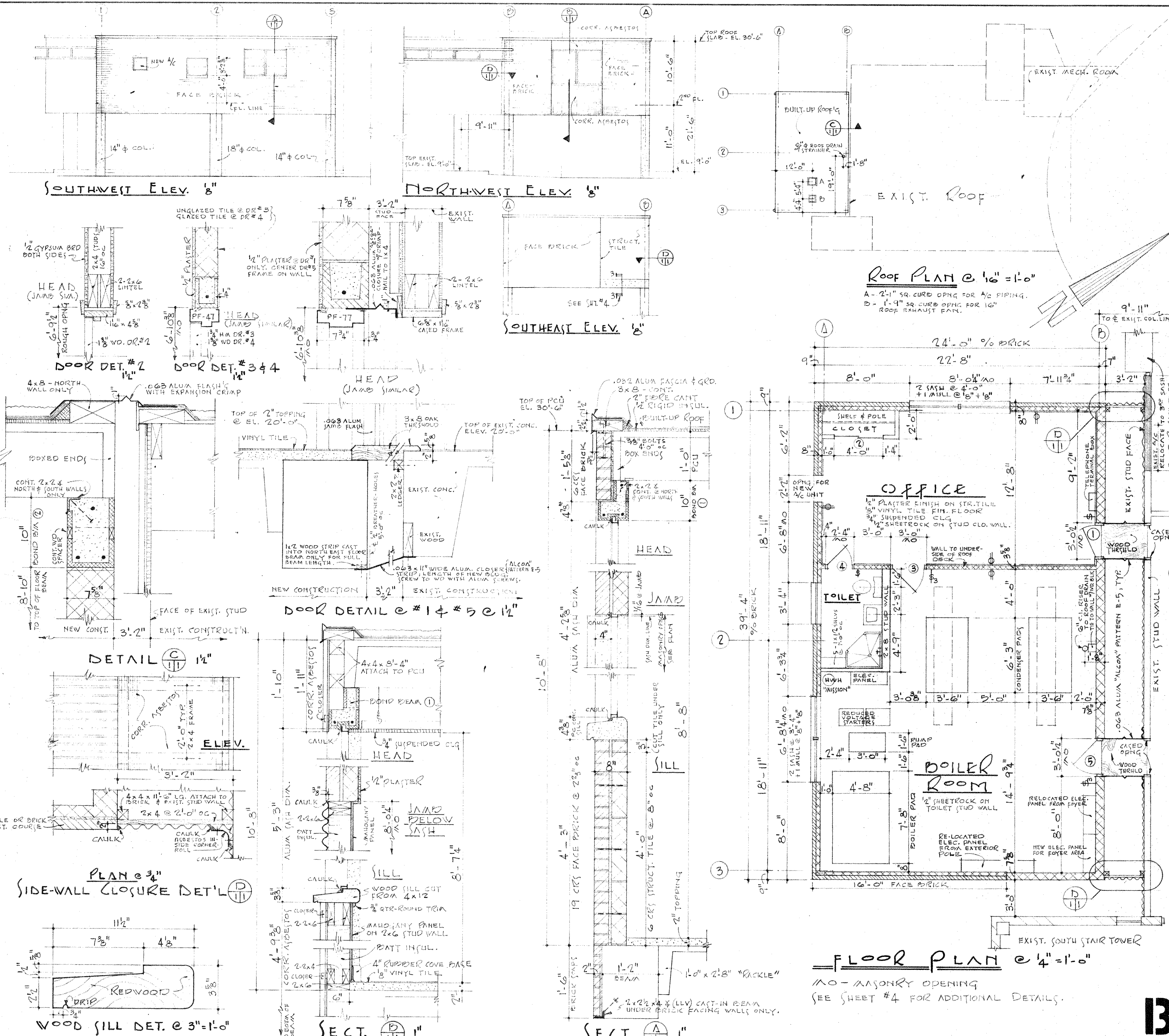
GREACEN AND BROGNIER ARCHITECTS
HOUSTON TEXAS

DATE	10-21-54	SHEET	105
REVISED		SHEET	3

PAVILION
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

1/2 F.S.
10
3/3

3. CUT

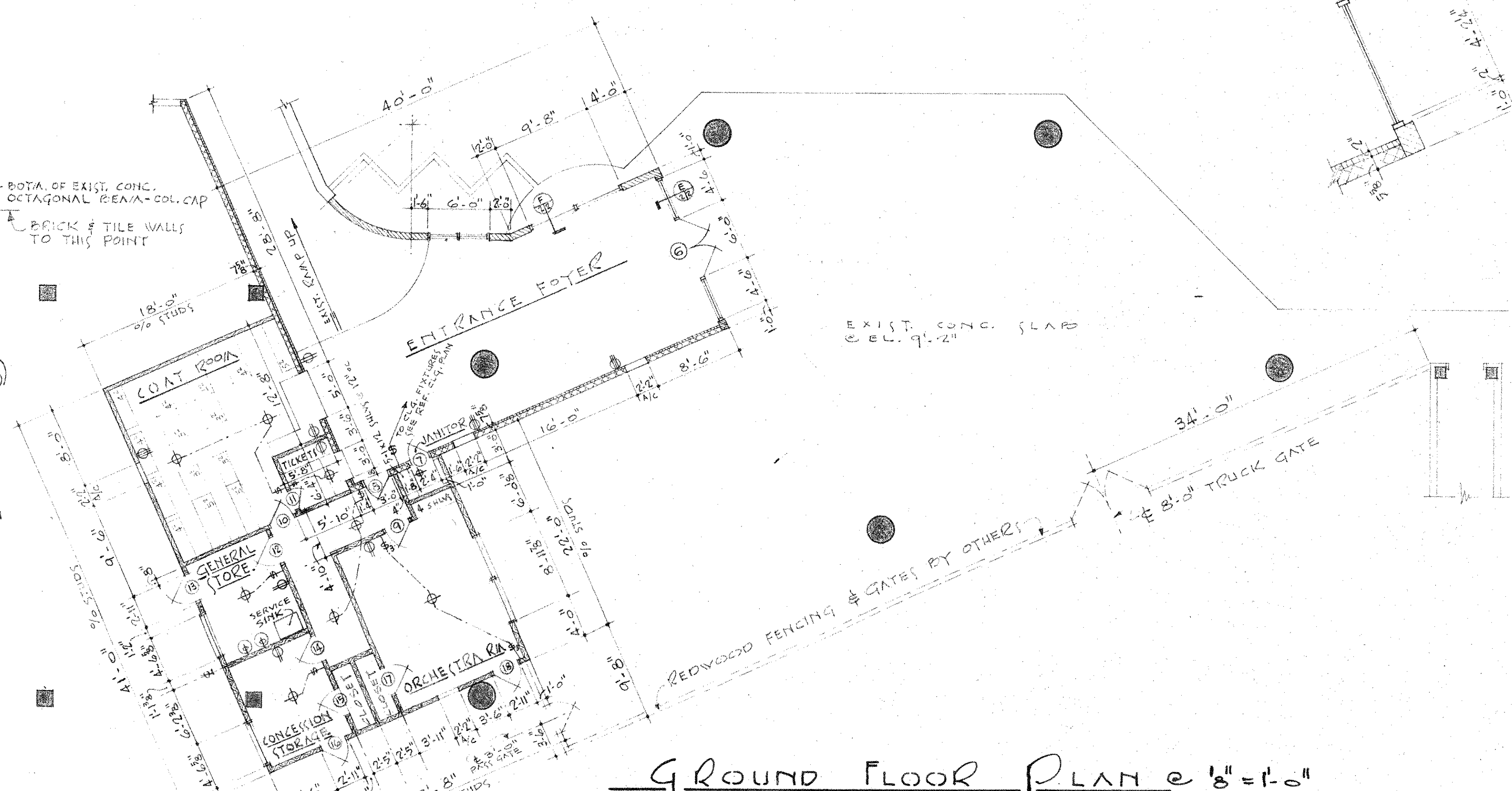
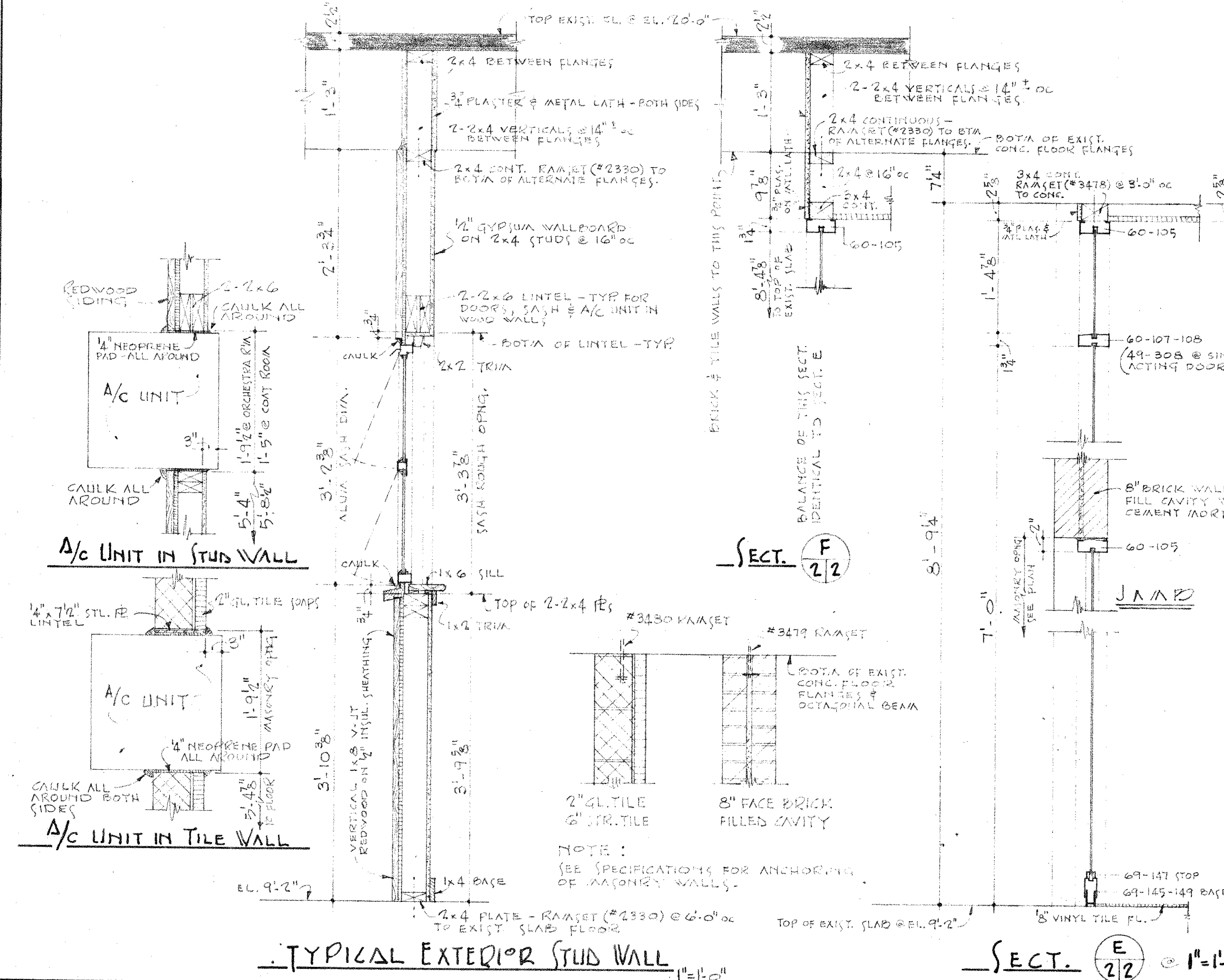
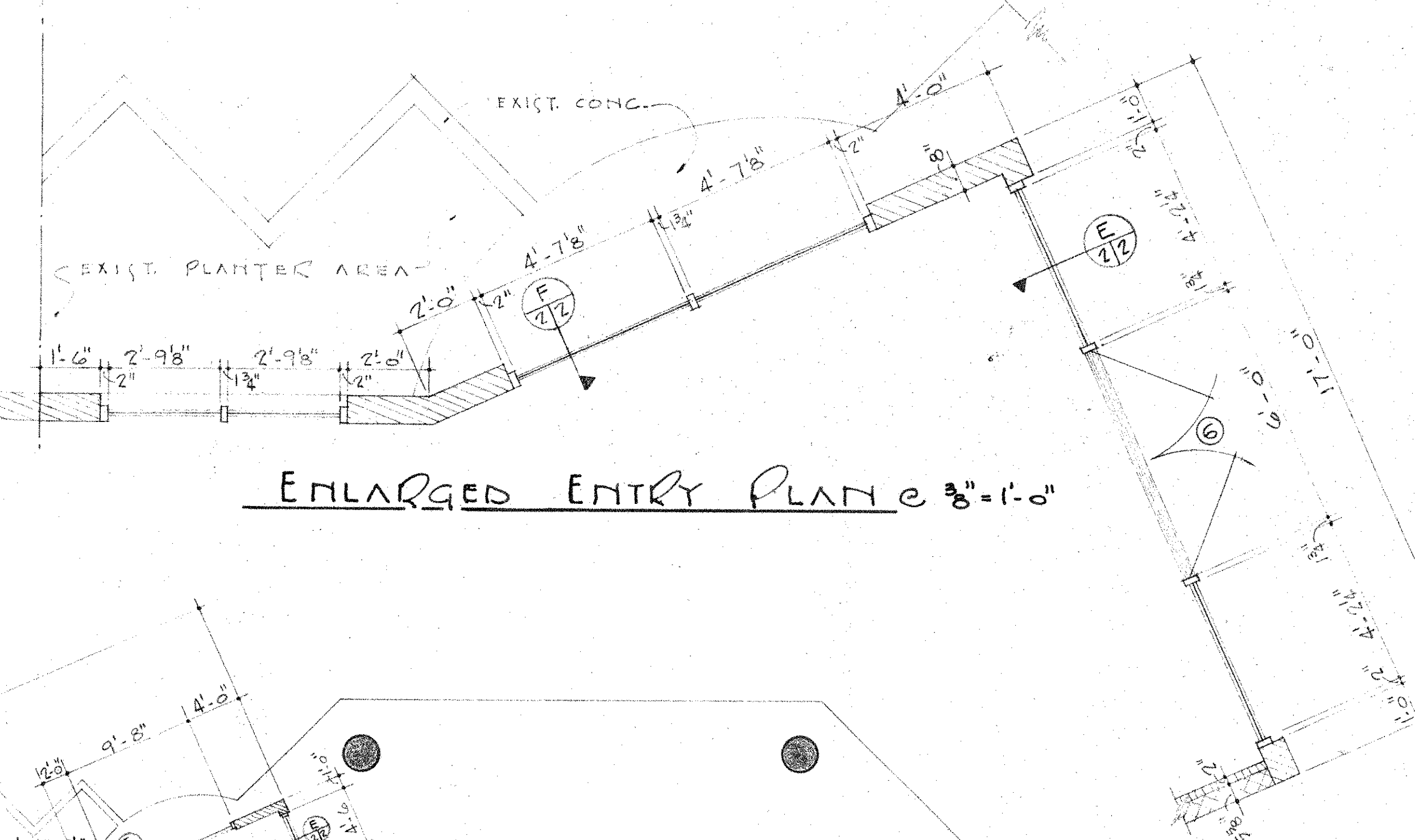
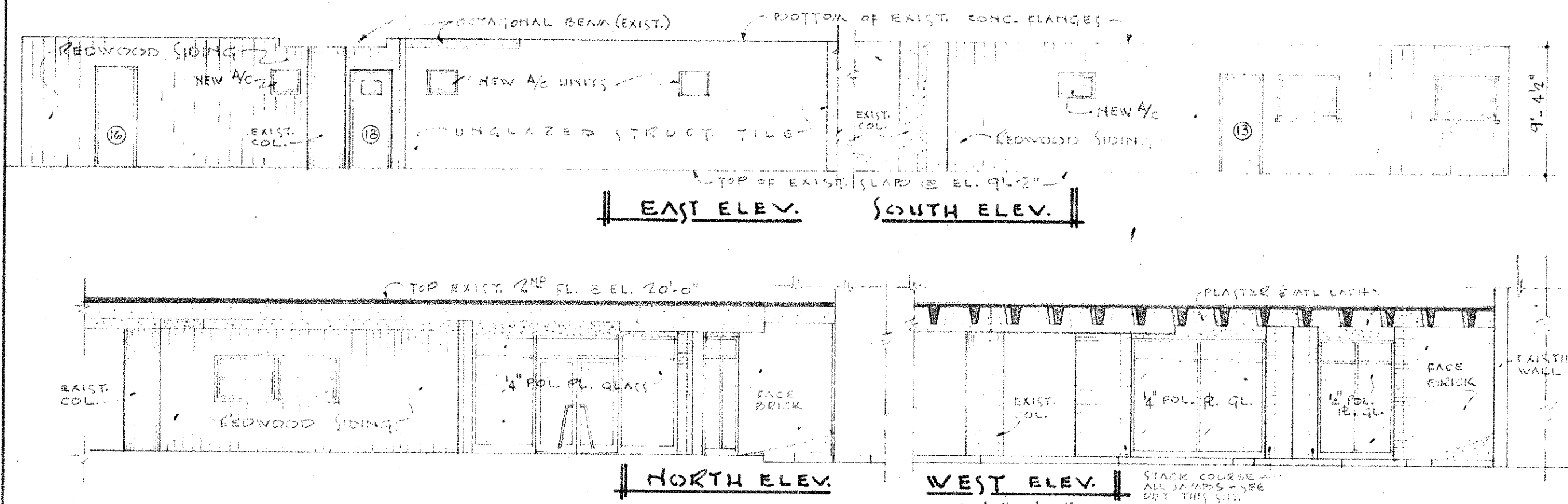
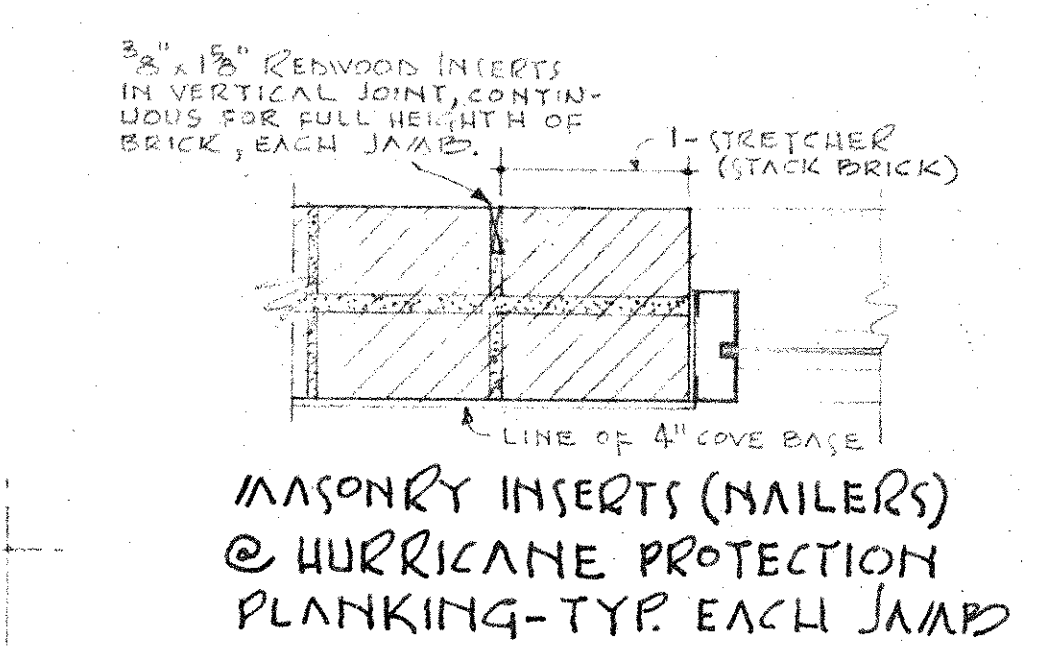
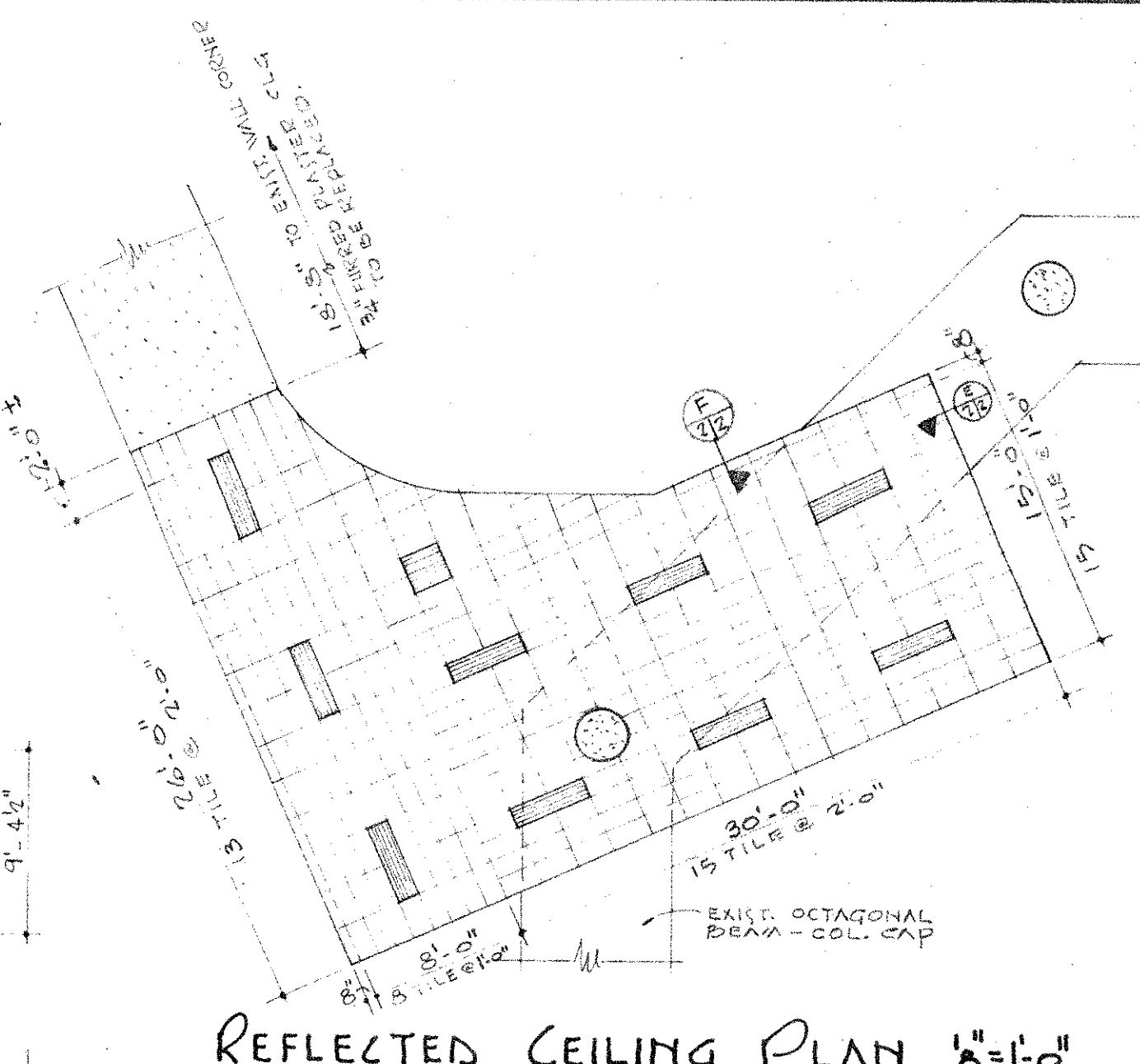
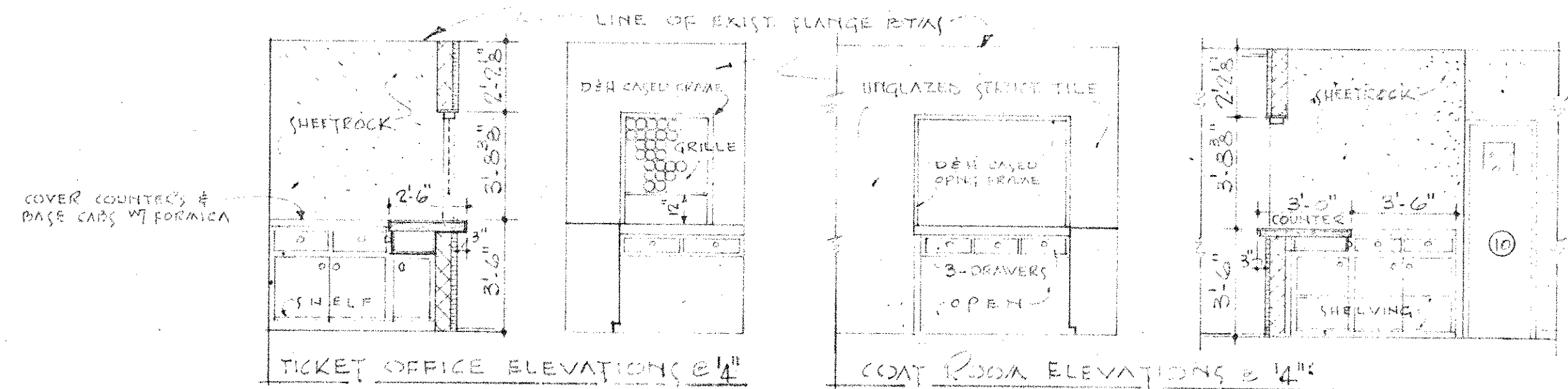


FLOOR PLAN @ 1/4" = 1'-0"

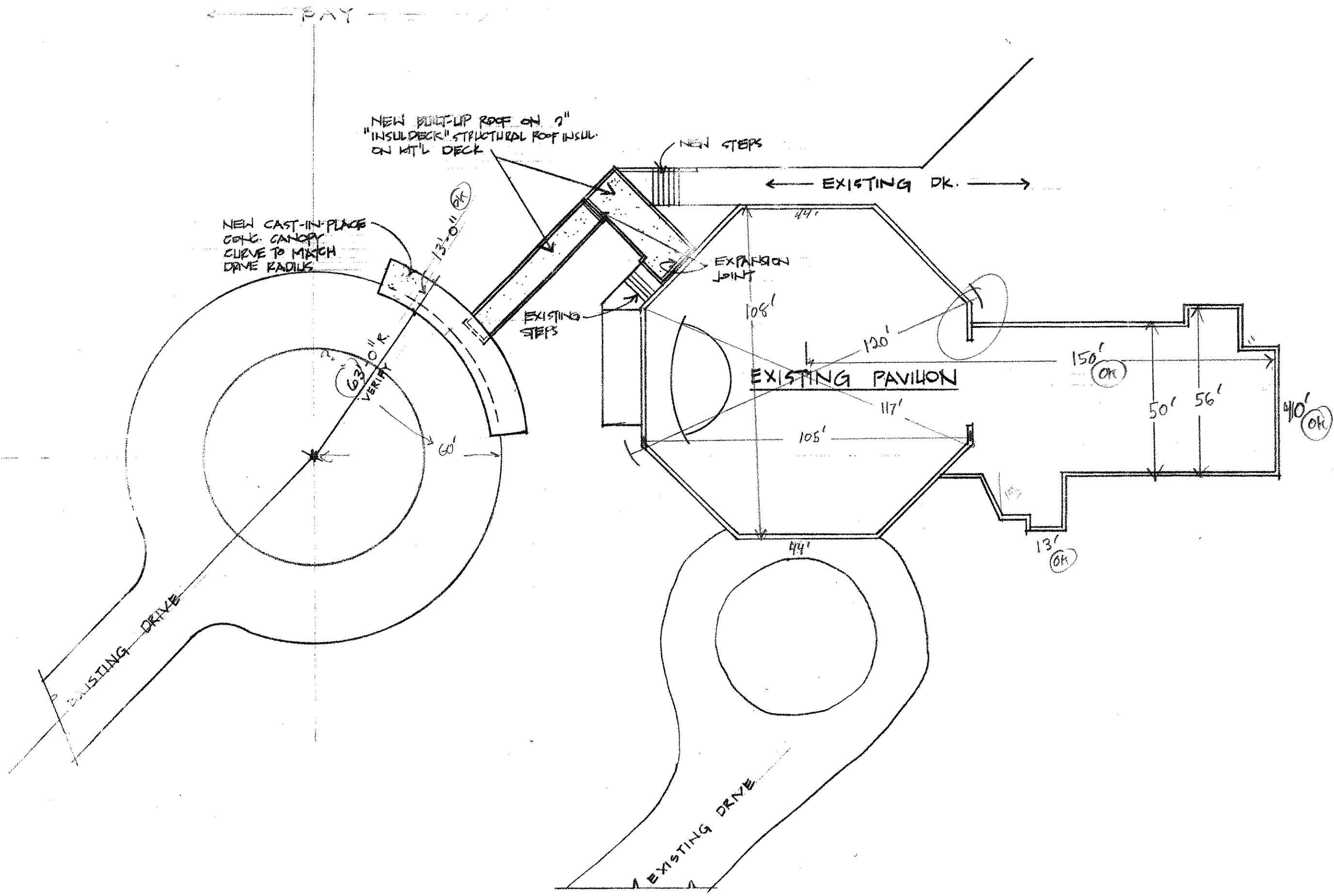
MO - MASONRY OPENING
 SEE SHEET #4 FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS.

HARRIS COUNTY ENGINEERING DEPT.
 ROAD & BRIDGE DIVISION
 RICHARD P. DOSS, COUNTY ENGR.

PLANS, ELEVATIONS, SECTIONS
 REPAIRS TO SYLVAN BEACH PAVILLION — 5-23
 F. N. PARSONS - ARCHITECT DATE: 3-20-62



- MATERIAL LEGEND:
- EXIST. MASONRY WALLS
 - 8" FACE BRICK
 - 2" GLAZED TILE WITH 6" STRUCT. TILE BACK-UP
 - 4" STUD PARTITIONS (INTERIOR: 1/2" SHEETROCK BOTH SIDES; EXTERIOR: VERTICAL V-JT. REDWOOD)
 - 150 WATT INCANDESCENT FIXTURE
 - 110 WATT DUPLEX
 - 220 " SINGLE
 - FIXTURE SWITCH
 - A/C - LOCATION OF AIR CONDITIONERS
 - GAS (MISSION) HOT WATER HEATERS



SITE PLAN

SCALE 1" = 30'

SYLVAN BEACH PAVILION ENTRY FACILITY		
SCALE: AS SHOWN	APPROVED BY:	DRAWN BY LAF
DATE: 11/10/78		REVISED
HARRIS COUNTY ENG. DEPT.		
SITE PLAN		DRAWING NUMBER: A-1 OF 8

RECEIVED

JOB # 11 HR 18

FEB 28 2011

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

FEB 28 2011

History Programs Division

Authorization for Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Designation

Date of RTHL designation: January 28, 2011

Property Name: Sylvan Beach Pavilion

Physical Address: 554 North Bayshore Dr

City: La Porte County: Harris Zip: 77571

Property reference number (Appraisal District/Tax Office property #): HCAD Facet 6253D3, 040-279-000-0060

Legal Description (Lot and block, metes and bounds, etc.): UTM: Zone Easting Northing 15 305379 3281835

Additional description Verbal description is based on Harris County Lease document between County and City of La Porte dated 7/1/1986. Description is for 5.8335 acres of land upon which the Pavilion is located "Beginning at a point in the East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive from which a 5/8 inch iron bar bears South 81 degrees 28'54" West a distance of 97.09 feet, said iron bar marking the northeast corner of Block 49 of the Sylvan Beach Subdivision as recorded in Volume 3 at Page 72, said iron bar being in the west right-of-wayline of Bayshore Drive (80 feet wide) at Circle Drive. Thence North 26 degrees 00'00" East along the said East right-of-way line of Bayshore Drive, as fenced, a distance of 200.00 feet to a point for an angle to the left; Thence North 8 degrees 26'18" East along said fence, a distance of 143.17 feet to a point for an angle to the right; Thence North 14 degrees 05'07" East along said fence, a distance of 44.50 feet to a gate post for corner; Thence North 86 degrees 26'52" East, leaving said fence, along a line 0.80 feet South of an parallel to a paved driveway, a distance of 81.62 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 26 degrees 00'00" East along a line established by the back of a curb of a traffic island beginning at 36.00 feet and ending at 44.00 feet, in all a distance of 130.81 feet to a point in the back of curb of a parking lot for corner; Thence South 64 degrees 00'00" East a distance of 236.53 feet to a point for corner on the Bayside of a wooden bulkhead; Thence in a southwesterly direction along the meanders of the Bayside of said wooden bulkhead a distance of 551.11 feet to a point for corner; Thence North 64 degrees 00'00" West, a distance of 455.15 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING and containing 254.107 square feet (5.8335 acres) of land."

The Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) designation is awarded to historic structures deemed worthy of preservation for their architectural integrity and historical associations. Authorized by the Texas Legislature under Texas Government Code, Chapter 442, RTHL is the highest honor the state can bestow on historic structures in Texas. Designated properties are afforded a measure of legal protection and become part of the recorded history of the state's built environment.

Benefits of the RTHL designation:

- Recognition that a property is of local, regional or state significance.
Protection for up to 90 days from exterior alterations, including demolition or relocation.
Ad valorem tax exemptions, where granted by local taxing authorities.
Inclusion in the Texas Historic Sites Atlas.
Technical preservation assistance through the THC.

Responsibility of the property owner under the RTHL provision, as noted in Texas Government Code, Chapter 442.006 (f):

A person may not damage the historical or architectural integrity of a structure the commission has designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark without notifying the commission at least 60 days before the date on which the action causing the damage is to begin. After receiving the notice, the commission may waive the waiting period or, if the commission determines that a longer period will enhance the chance for preservation, it may require an additional waiting period of not longer than 30 days. On the expiration of the time limits imposed by this section, the person may proceed, but must proceed not later than the 180th day after the date on which notice was given or the notice is considered to have expired.

Additionally:


- The designation requires the public display of the RTHL marker. The marker is the property of the State of Texas and may not be removed or relocated without the prior permission of the Texas Historical Commission.
RTHL status is a permanent designation which is retained with the property even upon transfer of ownership. Only the Texas Historical Commission may remove the designation.
Structures designated as RTHLs do not have to be open to the public, but the marker must be accessible to the public.
RTHL designation does not imply eligibility for federal tax incentives for rehabilitation.

I, the property owner or legal administrator of the property noted herein, signify below that I have read the information regarding Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and that I voluntarily seek the designation for the property. I further promise to comply with the provision noted in the Texas Government Code.

Name (print): Commissioner Jack Morman X

Mailing address: 1001 Preston, Suite 950

City, state, zip: Houston, TX 77002

Signature: 

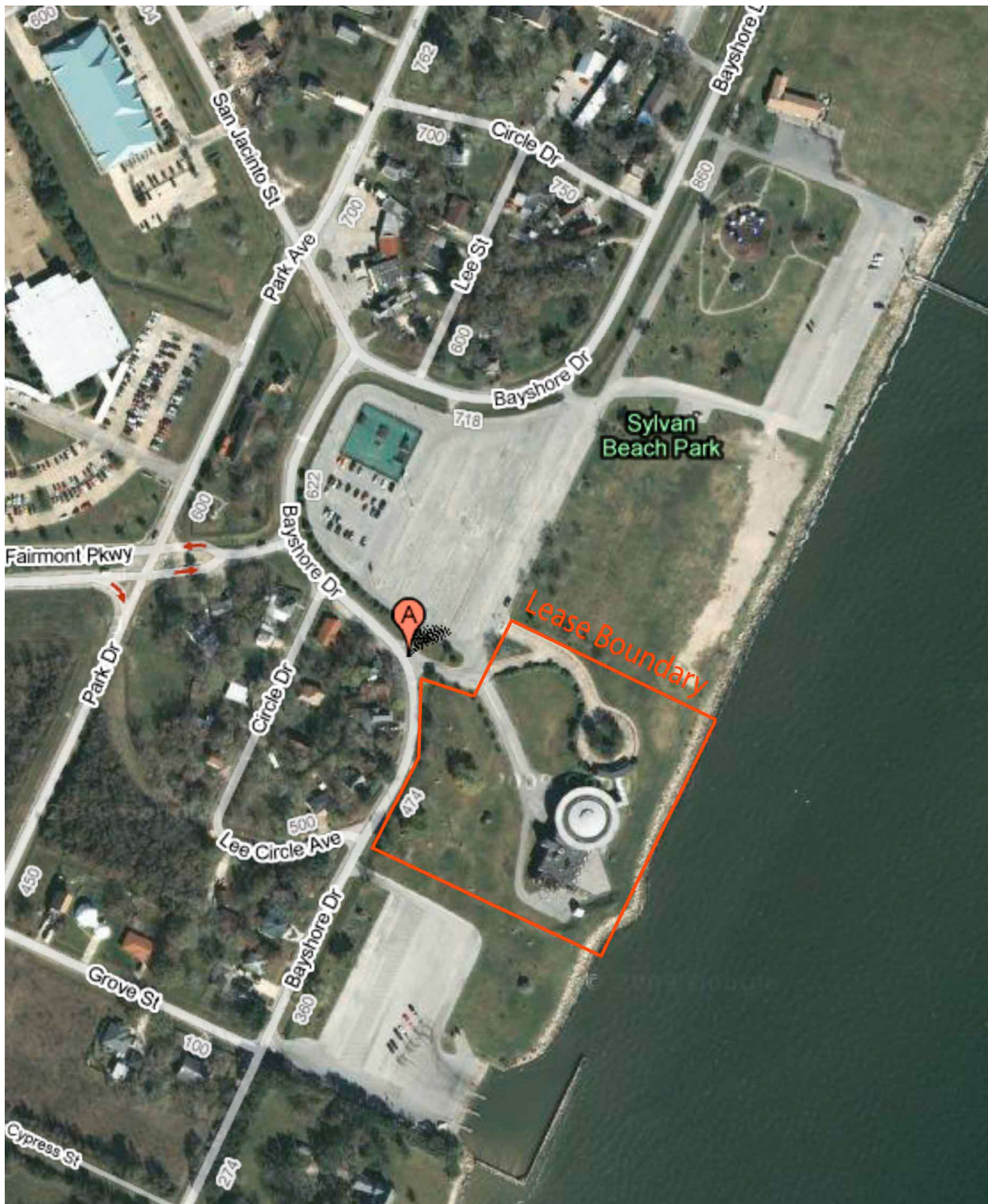
Phone: 713-755-6220 Date: 2-23-'11



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

P.O. BOX 12276 • AUSTIN, TX 78711-2276
PHONE 512.463.6100 • FAX 512.475.4872
www.thc.state.tx.us

Detailed site plan of the property, by Google Maps, October 2009



Detailed floor plan for each floor of the structure

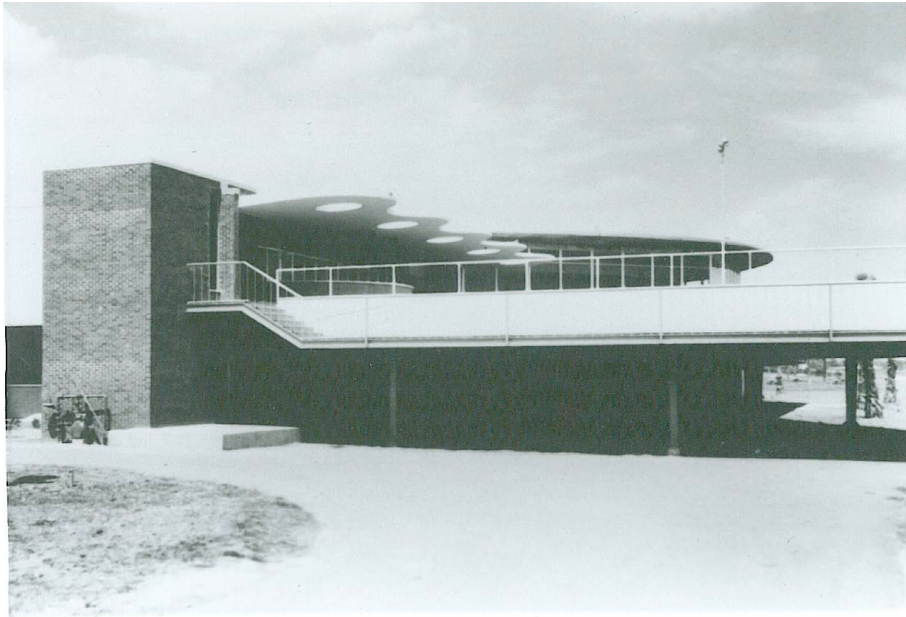
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Copies of renovation drawings, (6) by F.N. Parsons, dated 20 March, 1962

Copies of renovation drawings, (6) HC Dept of Eng., (draft version), dated 16 Dec, 1977

Note: (sent via separate Email)

Historic Photographs



Pavilion South View, 1956



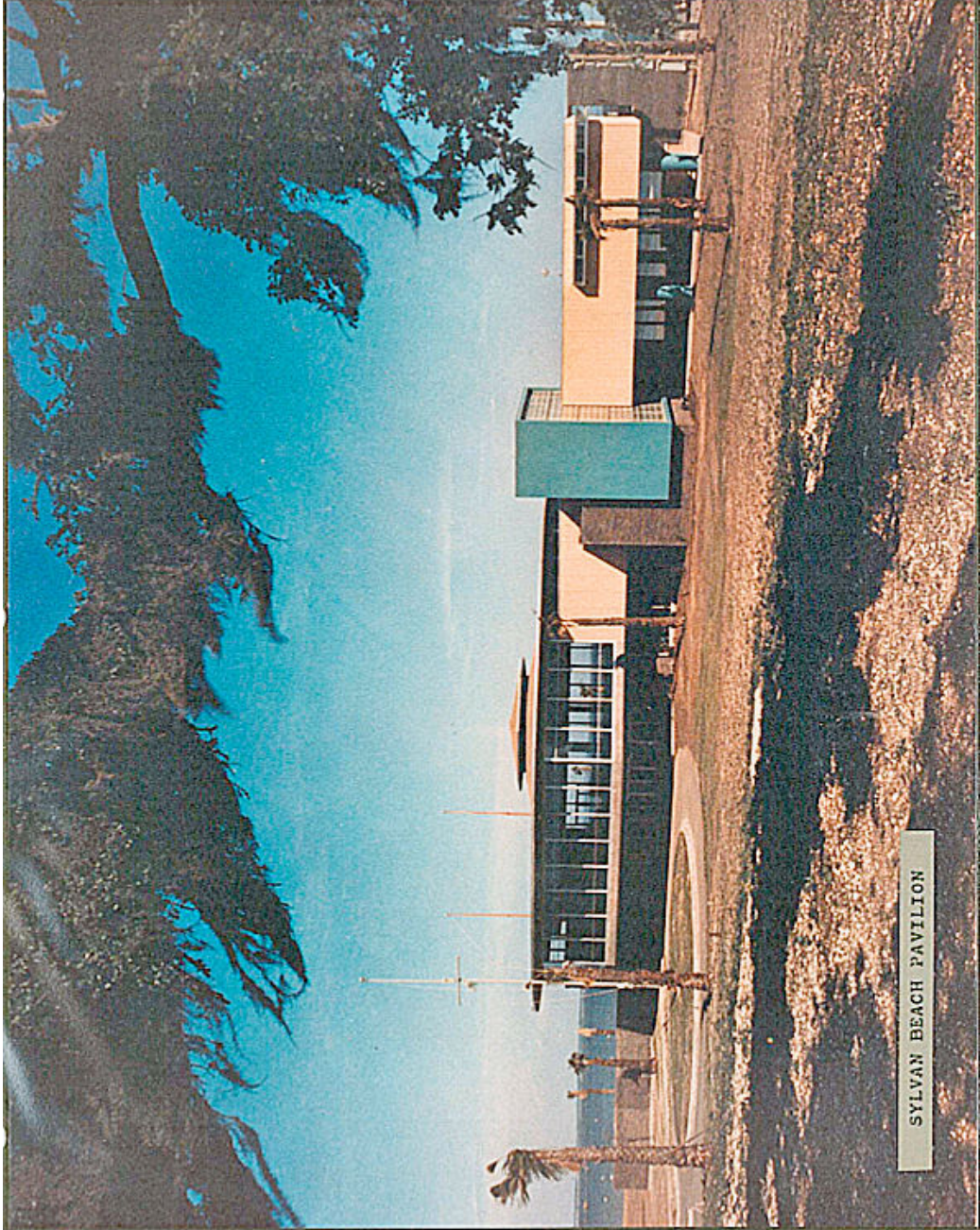
Pavilion Front entrance drive view, 1956



Pavilion Ballroom, 1956



Pavilion waterside looking towards ballroom from end of deck, 1956



Sylvan Beach Pavilion, 1956



Pavilion prior to Hurricane Carla, 1961



Main Entrance Addition, 1980

Current Photographs



Pavilion street side, Dec 2008



Looking north, 2008



Waterside looking west, Sept 2008