

# Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of American Art, Washington, District of Columbia

**Role:** Museum Planner

**Program:** National Portrait Gallery and the Archives of American Art

**Description:** In 1983, the Smithsonian Institution requested us to assist them with an evaluation of the historic General Post Office Building to assess its suitability for renovation to alleviate the pressing space needs of the National Museum of American Art, National Portrait Gallery, and Archives of American Art, all of which were housed in the adjacent Patent Office Building. Our first step was to document the existing areas and future space needs of the three Bureaus in a Facility Program, which included adjacency and access requirements and other critical design criteria. The Facility Program indicated a need for 370,000 SF of public and support spaces. We then made an assessment of the General Post Office Building to ascertain whether or not the additional space required by the three Bureaus would fit into the building. In order to make this assessment, we developed a Conceptual Use Plan for both buildings, illustrated how they could appropriately be used to house the three Bureaus. After evaluating several options, it was unanimously agreed that the two structures should be treated as one mixed-use complex rather than attempting to assign a single Bureau to the General Post Office Building. The illustrated scheme provides extensive public areas in both buildings.

The Conceptual plan for the General Post Office Building included 10,000 SF of exhibitions and loan shows, a 300-seat auditorium with related video work areas, several classrooms, and a new museum store. An essential element of the plan is the central courtyard, which is raised to the level of the first floor of the building and covered with glass canopy. This space was planned as attractive public dining facility, sculpture garden, and reception area. The concept called for the court to become the building's primary public circulation space, providing direct access into the first floor of the building and, by means of a new monumental stairway, to flexible underground exhibition galleries and the theater/auditorium. Decorative paving, fountains, trees, and shrubs were planned to create a special ambience for this important focal point of the new building.

The public areas of the Patent Office Building were planned to include 100,00 SF of exhibition galleries, a lecture hall, some classrooms, public dining and a museum store. The plan also incorporated extensive shared support areas, exhibit design and preparation facilities, and an underground pedestrian tunnel to allow the staff to freely circulate between the two buildings during inclement weather.

