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March 28, 2019

Dear Mr. President, Chairmen, and Mr. Mayor:

Amid the debate over whether to keep Confederate monuments in public places, the tomb of the commander who achieved victory over the Confederates and who as president laid the foundations for the federal government as protector of civil rights needs help.

I write on behalf of the Grant Monument Association (GMA) to alert you to maintenance and operational deficiencies at Grant's Tomb (officially the General Grant National Memorial) and to urge remedial action, as well as to draw your attention to the need to complete the Tomb and improve the learning experience of visitors.

During the recent controversies over Confederate monuments, many Americans learned how the "Myth of the Lost Cause" elevated the Confederate cause and whitewashed the issue of slavery and race for generations beginning in the late nineteenth century. The glorification of the Confederate cause was accompanied by what W.E.B. DuBois called "attack and libel" upon the nation's leaders during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The latter period, the quest for racial equality that followed the Civil War, substantially ended when Reconstruction gave way to the Jim Crow era of state-mandated segregation and disfranchisement. The history written during much of the twentieth century rationalized the government's abandonment of civil rights. That meant vilifying those who worked for civil and political equality, still embodied in three profound constitutional amendments.

No monument embodies this legacy more than the tomb of President Ulysses S. Grant, which was more frequently visited through World War I than the Statue of Liberty. Grant was the principal author of Union victory during the Civil War and the preeminent leader of our nation through Reconstruction. He fought for civil rights after so many others had

begun to abandon them. At a height of 150 feet, rising 280 feet above the banks of the Hudson River, his final resting place is architecturally in the same category as the great presidential memorials in Washington's National Mall, but it receives a small fraction of the appropriations that go to them. In FY 2017, the last fiscal year for which we have publicly available totals, the line item budget was \$4.393 million for the NPS Manhattan Sites unit, of which Grant's Tomb gets a small part, and \$35.193 million—eight times more—for the National Mall and Memorial Parks unit.

The following summarizes key problems facing Grant's Tomb, with photo exhibits annexed hereto.

**Security and maintenance deficiencies on federal property and the south plaza:** The borders that delineate the national park, *i.e.*, federal property, include only the Tomb proper and a small strip of surrounding (mostly bluestone) space up to the retaining wall. All other relevant land, from the bottom of the Tomb's staircase to both the south and the north plazas and including the overlook pavilion/visitor facility across the street, is on Riverside Park property owned by the City of New York. This means that while a reasonable definition of the site known as Grant's Tomb would span several acres, as one would expect to service the largest mausoleum in the Western Hemisphere, the definition of the national park is an artificially cramped .76 acres, making it the twelfth smallest national park in the country, according to the National Parks Conservation Association.

For decades through the early 1990s, vandalism and other forms of desecration marred both the Tomb and the surrounding grounds down to the then-abandoned overlook pavilion. The congressional delegation responded at the time with increased appropriations to provide security. That took the form of a contract between the National Park Service (NPS) and a private company to provide two security guards during the hours the monument is closed. Amid the budget cuts of recent years, however, the number of guards has been reduced to one, which is simply insufficient.

The continuing need for security is illustrated by a graffiti attack that occurred during the recent government shutdown, in the absence of security (Ex. A). But another major attack occurred even after the government reopened. On or about the night of February 15, 2019, the back of the Tomb, near the northwestern corner of the monument, was hit by more graffiti. This time, there was a security guard present, but he was in front of the monument, and by the time he detected what happened, it was too late. The apparent perpetrators of this vandalism, one male and one female, reportedly vaulted over the eastern retaining wall before the guard could catch them. The attack was extensive and involved three different colors of paint (Ex. B). The area involved is simply too large to expect a single security guard to provide effective protection and enforcement.

Security at the site should be restored to a minimum of two guards at all times, without which the Tomb and surrounding grounds down to the pavilion simply cannot be secured. Security should also be provided by the U.S. Park Police, as is done in the National Mall and other national park areas. Moreover, security cameras should be installed both to deter vandalism and to enhance enforcement.

Within the Tomb, there is visible discoloration and peeling from water damage at the cupola/roof level (Ex. C), as well as in the ceilings above the reliquary rooms (Ex. D). It is unclear whether the water damage this reflects is ongoing, but repair is clearly necessary, as is adequate monitoring to ensure that any such damage be appropriately repaired before the problem gets worse. Additional discoloration not believed to arise from water damage afflicts the marble floor surrounding the sarcophagi of Ulysses and Julia Grant (Ex. E).

As the NPS acknowledges in its Project Management Information System (PMIS) proposal describing the need for repairs, the broken, cracked outdoor plaza surrounding the Tomb "has become so deteriorated it has become a safety hazard." This is visible in the area immediately surrounding the Tomb, which is on federal property (Ex. F). It is additionally noteworthy that while we advocate the

relocation of the architecturally jarring abstract mosaic benches installed in this area in 1972 in violation of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the deterioration extends to the benches as well (Ex. G). The granite that constitutes the Tomb's steps and adjoining south plaza, including the two stairways that lead to the sidewalks, also shows some wear (Ex. H). The broken bluestone pavers need to be repointed and in many instances replaced, as do the granite pavers in similar condition. Although the south plaza is on city property, it notably was Congress that appropriated money for its refurbishment during the 1990s.

The monument's external nighttime lights were recently repaired, but the lighting is basically limited to the inside of the front portico, the lower part of the cupola, and whatever light from the city park lamps dimly illuminates the Tomb (Ex. I). This lighting should be expanded so that more of the monument could be illuminated, as was the case early in the Tomb's history (Ex. J) and as is still the case at the presidential memorials on the National Mall (Ex. K) and, for that matter, such non-federal monuments as the McKinley Memorial in Canton, Ohio, and the Confederate Memorial Carving on Georgia's Stone Mountain (Ex. L).

**The dilemma posed by New York City ownership of surrounding grounds:** The plaza north of Grant's Tomb is an integral part of the site that includes the memorial marking Grant's temporary tomb site. Like the south plaza and overlook pavilion, this property is on city rather than federal park land. This bifurcated land ownership has presented major problems. For decades, the City of New York, which has the responsibility to fund the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, appropriated almost nothing for the maintenance of its property surrounding Grant's Tomb. This has changed somewhat in recent years, starting between 2012 and 2014, when current Riverside Park Administrator John Herrold oversaw the removal or pruning of a number of shrubs that were cluttering the area. That was a modest measure, but it was more than occurred under his predecessors.\*

Nonetheless, it took until 2018, nearly a quarter century after the GMA first called for the north plaza's restoration, for the City to replace badly deteriorated walkways and an unusable stairway (Ex. M). Even that work began after a substantial delay in using funds that had been allocated during the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg over five years ago.

Laudable as the repaving has been, the area around the pavement still requires landscaping to restore grass to the large areas that have become dirt and maintenance to remove leaves and snow as the seasons demand (Ex. N). Moreover, the black fence that encloses the temporary tomb site, which contains a plaque in Chinese and English along with memorial trees planted at the direction of Chinese Viceroy Li Hung Chang in 1897, is weathered and bent in a distortion of its original shape (Ex. O). That must be repaired or replaced as well.

The overarching problem is the City of New York's failure to allocate the resources required to maintain the property it owns surrounding Grant's Tomb on any consistent basis. Indeed, it was the federal government that replaced the city-owned south plaza during the 1990s despite its lack of ownership. Moreover, while the NPS has an easement to use the property, it makes little administrative sense that its park rangers, to the exclusion of any city park rangers, would service this area and the city-owned but federally renovated overlook pavilion across the street. Now as before, no city park rangers are stationed at the site.

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\* This was a modest step toward the original vision of Grant's Tomb's architect, John H. Duncan, to have the monument starkly situated on a treeless plane. Unfortunately, trees planted in the plaza area in 1938–1939 are now overgrown and impede a view of Grant's Tomb, once visible from over 50 blocks away, such that the Tomb is barely visible from across the street. In 2014, the City did remove two trees that had died. If other trees that continue to block the view of the Tomb could be removed, the GMA would fund replacement trees elsewhere.

During the 1990s, legislation proposed in Congress beginning with H.R. 4393 during the 103rd Congress would have remedied much of this problem by expanding the park boundaries to include the overlook pavilion and roughly the southern half of the “island” of land on which Grant’s Tomb sits enclosed by the northbound and southbound lanes of Riverside Drive, from the north plaza’s temporary tomb memorial area to the stone plaza extending south from the entrance of the monument (Ex. P). This would have aligned the actual boundaries of the national park with the common sense boundaries of the site associated with Grant’s Tomb. In order to accommodate the possibility of an expanded visitor center north of the temporary tomb site (discussed below), the ideal boundary for the national park site would extend somewhat north of that site, as outlined in Exhibit Q. Even with this expansion, the site would remain one of our smallest national parks. The legislation never made it out of committee, and two decades later, that inaction has taken its toll on the site. The GMA requests that Chairman Daines, Senators Schumer & Gillibrand, Chairman Haaland, and Congressman Espaillat revive legislation to effect this land transfer and that the City of New York cede this land to the NPS. We would additionally suggest that the legislation redesignate the monument as Grant’s Tomb National Monument, acknowledging the familiar name by which the site was best known from the beginning while it was formally called the Grant Monument.

**Insufficient access and facilities for visitors:** The overlook pavilion across the street from the monument, which once provided public restrooms before being abandoned for over 40 years, reopened in 2011 to accommodate a ranger station, gift shop, public restrooms, and small exhibit space. While that marked an improvement for a site that had not been making use of this space or offering any public restrooms, the combination of budget cuts and the need to staff the property has seriously diminished visitor access to Grant’s Tomb. During the 1990s, when the site underwent a major refurbishment following years of desecration and neglect, its open hours expanded from five to seven days a week. That remedied a deficiency that kept the site closed two days every week, to the consternation of many visitors who had traveled long distances. In recent years, however, budget crunches led to the reversal of this improvement as the Tomb returned to a five-day schedule. While the rangers at the site are excellent, they are spread so thin that the Tomb proper has been closed for staggered hours even during its five open days because rangers are needed to staff the overlook pavilion as well. This marks a regression in visitor access to a point even worse than during the days of desecration. The GMA has heard from a number of visitors who were chagrined at their inability to enter the monument. The Tomb proper should be open to the public seven days a week throughout the year and adequately staffed for the entirety of its open hours.

Additionally, the visitor facility falls short on meeting visitor needs. While the space dedicated to the gift shop suffices for that purpose, the remaining space offers only two single-user restrooms, which is inadequate. Large crowds that include sizable tour bus traffic regularly visit the monument.

The remaining visitor space is a multi-purpose room that squeezes in 40 chairs, a screen for audio-visual programs, two small display cases containing artifacts, and six small exhibit panels on the wall with text and pictures to illustrate Grant’s life and the history of the Tomb (Ex. R). Visitors to the site deserve more than a cursory introduction to Grant. The NPS should have space adjoining the Tomb allocated for interactive exhibits in order to leave visitors with an appreciation of Grant’s life and rich legacy, from preserving the Union to fighting for civil rights. Along with expanded restroom facilities, such a facility would serve as a more complete visitor center. M. Garland Reynolds, chairman of the GMA’s Building Committee, has made preliminary studies about using available underground space on the western side of the monument (Ex. S) or constructing a new facility behind the Tomb (Ex. T), which is not to rule out other options. Reynolds’ studies should be examined alongside preliminary studies conducted for the NPS by architect Newton P. Bevin in 1965 to provide an alternative entrance

to the crypt level by extending the southwest staircase one level lower and hollowing out a passageway from there (Ex. U). Significantly, Reynolds recommends adapting Bevin's study by adding the installation of an elevator for persons with disabilities in or near that stairway, noting that recent advances would enable the construction of an adequate elevator that minimizes demands on space.

A full visitor center would also remedy the inaccessibility of Grant's Tomb to the handicapped by utilizing the underground space adjoining the lower level of the Tomb on its western side. If possible, that space, besides offering expanded facilities for visitors, should be extended so that it connects the overlook pavilion with the Tomb proper, which would improve access to both structures.

Visitors and others among the general public would also be better served by greater access to the NPS's collection of a vast archive of artifacts relating to Grant's life and the history of Grant's Tomb. These items are currently housed at Fort Wadsworth, on Staten Island, a relatively remote location. Many items have been digitized and made accessible via the NPS's Manhattan Historic Sites Archive. The same should be done for the majority of items that are not yet available in that format. The archival catalog should also be updated for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and optimal online access.

**Completion of the Tomb:** Those responsible for the construction and administration of Grant's Tomb prior to the NPS recognized from its earliest days that the monument had yet to be completed. Two features in particular were still missing when the monument was dedicated: a crowning figure for the summit of the building, which consists of an empty pedestal, and an equestrian statue of Grant. In his dedication day address in 1897, GMA president Horace Porter referred to the crowning figure as a goal to be reached in the near future. The finial was even added to the photo of Grant's Tomb on the cover of the official dedication day program (Ex. V).

Statuary proposals for the top of the monument changed over the years, with options that included allegorical representations of victory or peace, but a finial representing the latter would best reflect the original designs and existing dimensions of the monument. In 1925, John Duncan, the architect of Grant's Tomb, recalled that the original design for the Tomb included a "group of statuary" on the cap of the building, but the reduction in size of the monument, necessitated by cost, reduced the scale so that it would prohibit using a group; and the only finial possible would be a single figure—that of peace . . . ." That would also reflect the spirit of the Tomb's epitaph, "Let us have peace."

An equestrian statue of Grant also made its way into the earliest designs for the Tomb, and architect John Russell Pope envisioned such a statue, situated in front of the monument, as the "one main sculptural motif" in his 1928 plan to redo the plaza surrounding Grant's Tomb (Ex. W). The plaza was ultimately redone, but the Great Depression prevented the equestrian from being funded.

Relevant government authorities have historically been supportive of the above goals. New York State authorized by Chapter 670 of the Laws of 1897 a contract with park commissioners that stipulated that the GMA was to "provide additional sculpture and statuary." In 1959, the year the NPS took over the site, that agency authorized the GMA to raise money for an equestrian statue. But most of the 20th century was marked by fundraising difficulties at the site, aided in no small part by the rise of the "Myth of the Lost Cause" and corresponding disparagement of Grant's reputation.

It is well past time for Congress to pave the way for the completion of Grant's Tomb with a crowning allegorical finial representing peace at its apex and an equestrian statue in its front plaza. The GMA is willing to support this endeavor with fundraising from the private sector, but it cannot do so unless the federal government allows it.

**The Ulysses S. Grant Bicentennial:** April 27, 2022, barely over three years from now, will mark the 200th anniversary of Grant's birth. So it could not be more timely to address the above issues. Two more modest, but also time-sensitive items: As happened in 1922 for Grant's 100th birthday and more recently for the Lincoln Bicentennial, Congress should authorize a commemorative coin. The obverse of the coin should have an image of Grant with an image of Grant's Tomb engraved on its reverse. Besides serving a commemorative purpose, proceeds from its sale should be used to defray the cost of maintenance and operations at the site.

We will propose an additional Grant Bicentennial measure since it requires both legislative and executive action: Congress should pass legislation authorizing and requesting the appointment of Grant posthumously as "General of the Armies of the United States," as was done for George Washington, with the appointment effective April 9, 1865, the date General Robert E. Lee surrendered to him. (In Washington's case, it was effective July 4, 1776.) Only one active-duty officer, General John J. Pershing, has held this rank. It would be fitting to accord the same honor to the man widely considered the greatest general in U.S. history. Congress could do this via a resolution using language similar to Public Law 94-479 (1976), which authorized Washington's posthumous promotion.

**Summary of proposals:** Here is a summary of the above proposals, categorized by whether they call for appropriations to support the NPS's existing statutory mandate or for authorizing legislation:

Appropriations measures:

- Increase security at the site with a minimum of two guards, preferably drawn from the U.S. Park Police, at all times, and the installation of security cameras.
- Repair the discoloration and peeling from water damage at the cupola/roof level and reliquary room ceilings, along with any associated waterproofing deficiencies, and establish ongoing monitoring to prevent further damage.
- Remedy the discoloration of the marble floor surrounding the sarcophagi of Ulysses and Julia Grant following sound preservation standards.
- Repair the broken, cracked outdoor plaza surrounding the Tomb, including repointing and, where necessary, replacement of bluestone pavers, granite pavers, the monument's steps, and the adjoining south plaza and two stairways.
- Ongoing maintenance of the stone plaza and stairway north of the Tomb, as well as repair or replacement of the black fence surrounding the temporary tomb site and restoration and maintenance of the landscape.
- Installation of enhanced outdoor lighting to properly illuminate the monument at night.
- Complete the monument with a crowning finial for the summit of the building and an equestrian statue of Grant in the front plaza.
- Expand the open hours of the site to seven days a week throughout the year and ensure that staffing is adequate to provide public access to the Tomb proper during all open hours.
- Digitize and make accessible to the public all items in the NPS's General Grant National Memorial archives. Update the archival catalog for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and optimal online access.

Authorizing measures:

- Redesignate the monument as Grant's Tomb National Monument.
- Expand the park boundaries to include the overlook pavilion and roughly the southern half of the "island" of land on which Grant's Tomb sits enclosed by the northbound and southbound lanes of Riverside Drive, from the area behind the north plaza's temporary tomb memorial

area to the stone plaza extending south from the entrance of the monument. This proposal is illustrated in Exhibits M and N.

- Authorize the creation of an expanded visitor center with space for improved, interactive exhibits, along with expanded restroom facilities and access to both the visitor center and the Tomb for persons with disabilities.
- Authorize a commemorative coin marking the 200th anniversary of Grant's birth, the proceeds of which shall help fund maintenance and operations at the site.
- As a further bicentennial measure, pass legislation authorizing and requesting the appointment of Grant posthumously as "General of the Armies of the United States," as was done for George Washington, with the appointment effective April 9, 1865.

Nearly twenty-two years ago, Grant's Tomb was rededicated for its centennial following a restoration that occurred because the people's elected representatives took a stand and reversed a generation of neglect and desecration. The NPS personnel who have staffed Grant's Tomb over the past few years have been the most dedicated I have seen in a quarter century, but in the absence of sufficient resources, current visitors are denied the enjoyment promised by the National Park Service Organic Act that comes with an adequately maintained and fully staffed park. Several of the problems described above are a matter of staffing and performing periodic maintenance that requires little time or resources. Problems that were not addressed during the 1990s will require greater effort. The GMA offers its assistance toward that end. We are encouraged that public officials have recently taken a heightened official and personal interest in monuments and historic sites, starting with the President's exceedingly generous donation of his first quarter presidential salary following his inauguration to the Antietam National Battlefield. Ultimately, Grant's Tomb depends on you, as the elected officials of today, to restore the government's commitment to the proper care of the site that memorializes the man whose legacy includes the survival of our republic and its constitutional promise of equal rights.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Frank Scaturro

President

Grant Monument Association

cc: Hon. Charles Schumer, U.S. Senate, New York  
Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senate, New York  
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, 13th Congressional District  
Hon. David Bernhardt, Acting Secretary of the Interior  
P. Daniel Smith, Deputy Director, National Park Service  
Joshua Laird, Commissioner, National Parks of New York Harbor  
Shirley McKinney, Superintendent, Manhattan Sites  
Hon. Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Mark Levine, New York City Council District 7  
Mitchell J. Silver, Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation  
John Herrold, Riverside Park Administrator  
Ulysses S. Grant Association  
National Parks Conservation Association

## Exhibit A

Graffiti attack during the recent government shutdown (late 2018/early 2019)



## Exhibit B

Graffiti attack of February 15, 2019



## Exhibit C

Discoloration and peeling in the cupola/roof level







## Exhibit D

Discoloration and peeling in a ceiling above a reliquary room



## Exhibit E

Sarcophagi and surrounding discolored marble floor



## Exhibit F

Surrounding plaza on federal property







## Exhibit G

Broken mosaic bench



## Exhibit H

Stairs adjoining the south plaza





# Exhibit I

Grant's Tomb at night, 2017

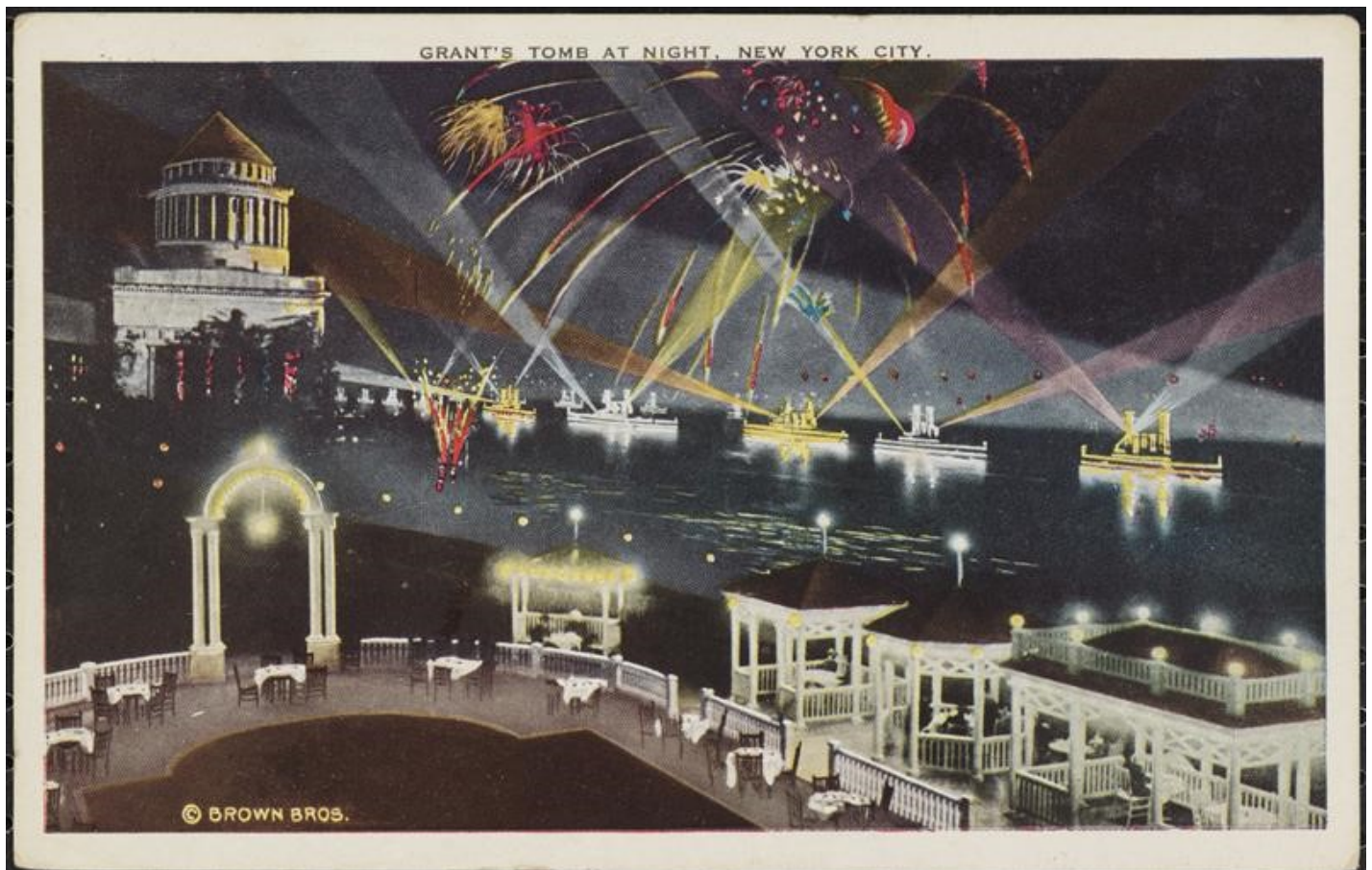


## Exhibit J

Grant's Tomb at night (behind Claremont Hotel), 1910's and 1920's



c. 1910



c. 1923

## Exhibit K

Lincoln Memorial and Jefferson Memorial at night



## Exhibit L

McKinley Memorial and Stone Mountain's Confederate Memorial Carving at night



## Exhibit M

Grounds north of Grant's Tomb



Years of unremedied deterioration of the eastern pathway to the temporary tomb site visible in 2002 (left) and 2017 (below)





Years of unremedied deterioration of the western pathway to the temporary tomb site & stairway visible in 2002 (above) and 2017 (below)



Replaced pathways to temporary tomb site in 2018



## Exhibit N

Landscaping and maintenance needs on grounds north of the Tomb



## Exhibit O

Fence enclosing Chinese temporary tomb memorial



## Exhibit P

Proposed expanded national park boundaries, H.R. 4393 (103rd Congress)

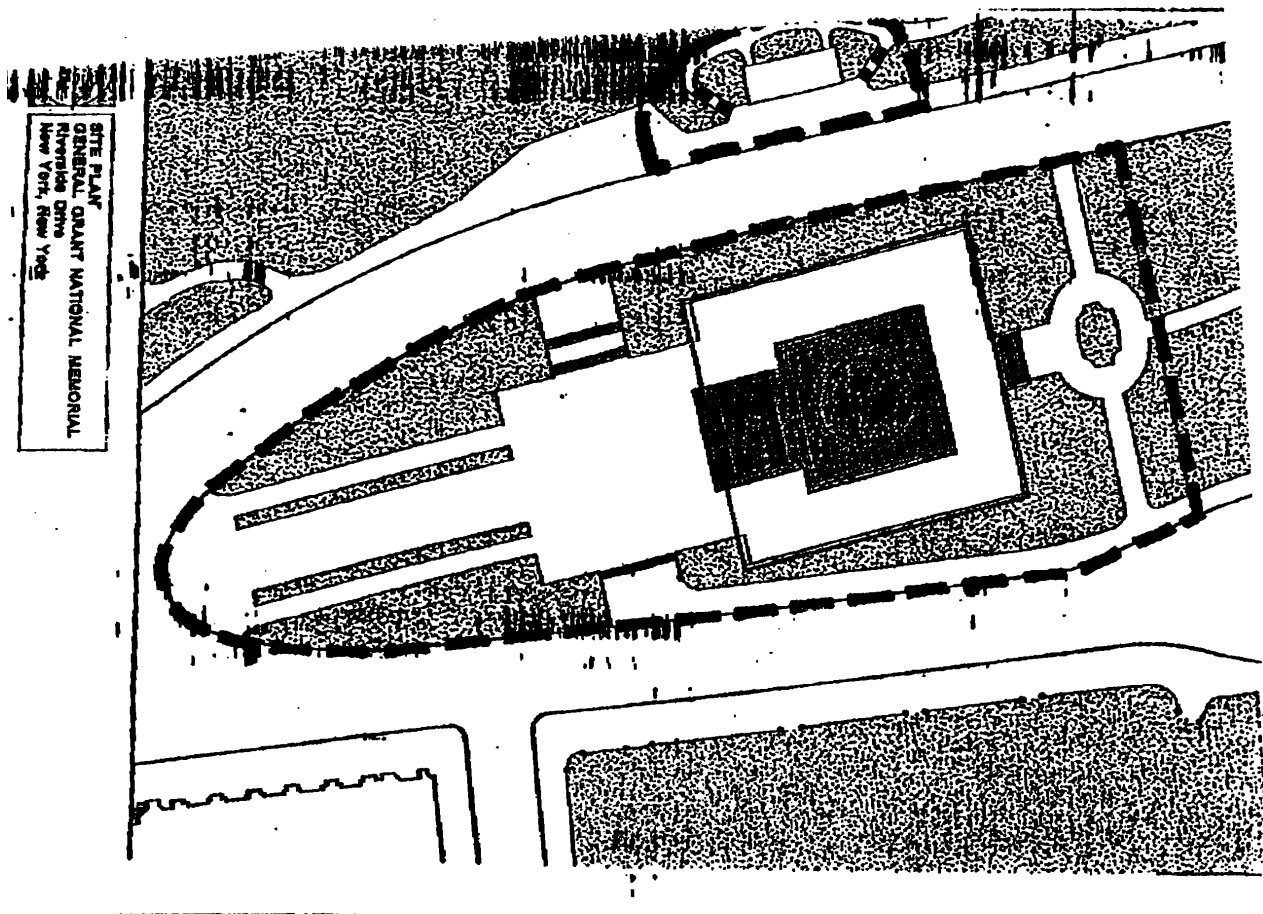
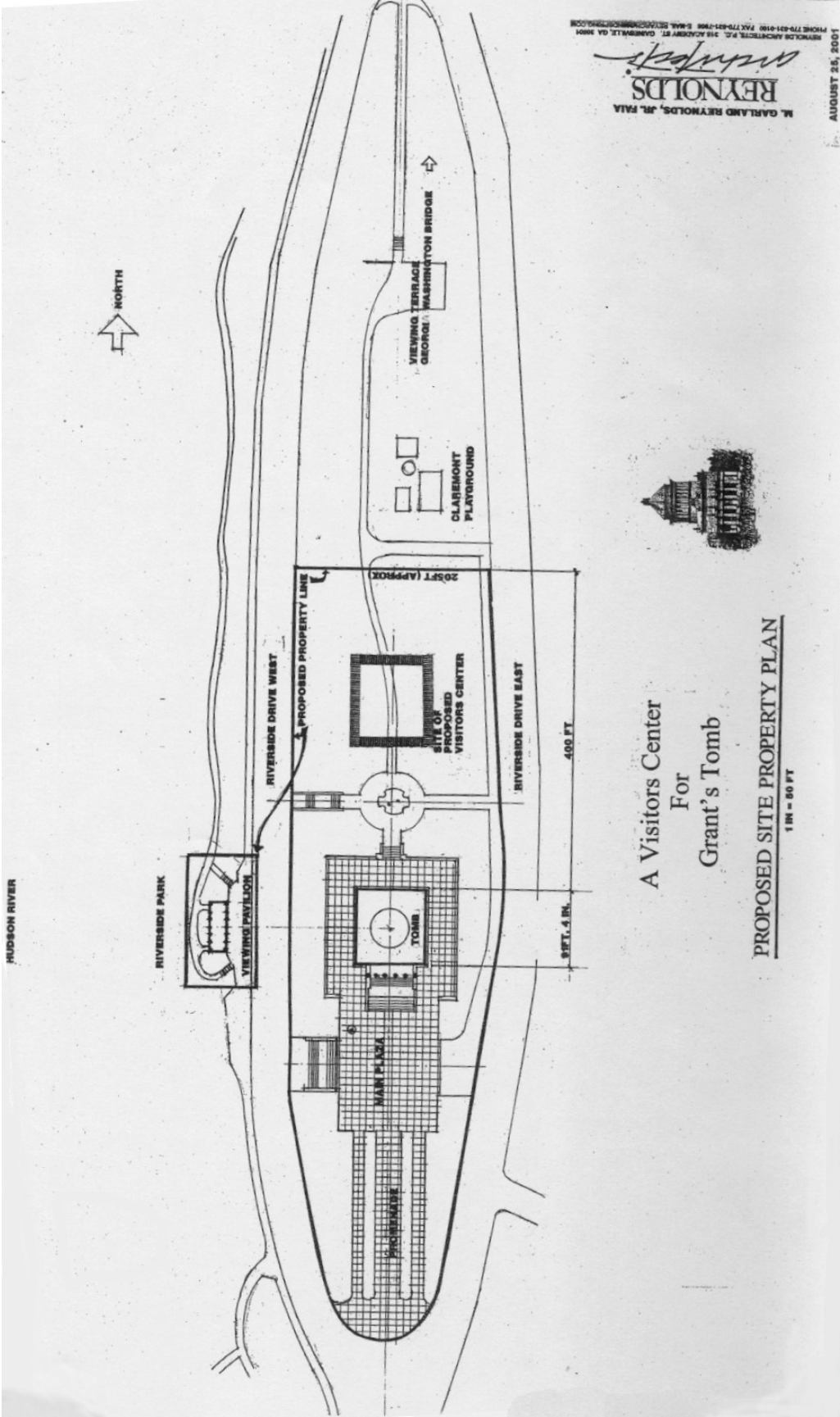


Exhibit Q

Land transfer proposal to accommodate expanded visitor center



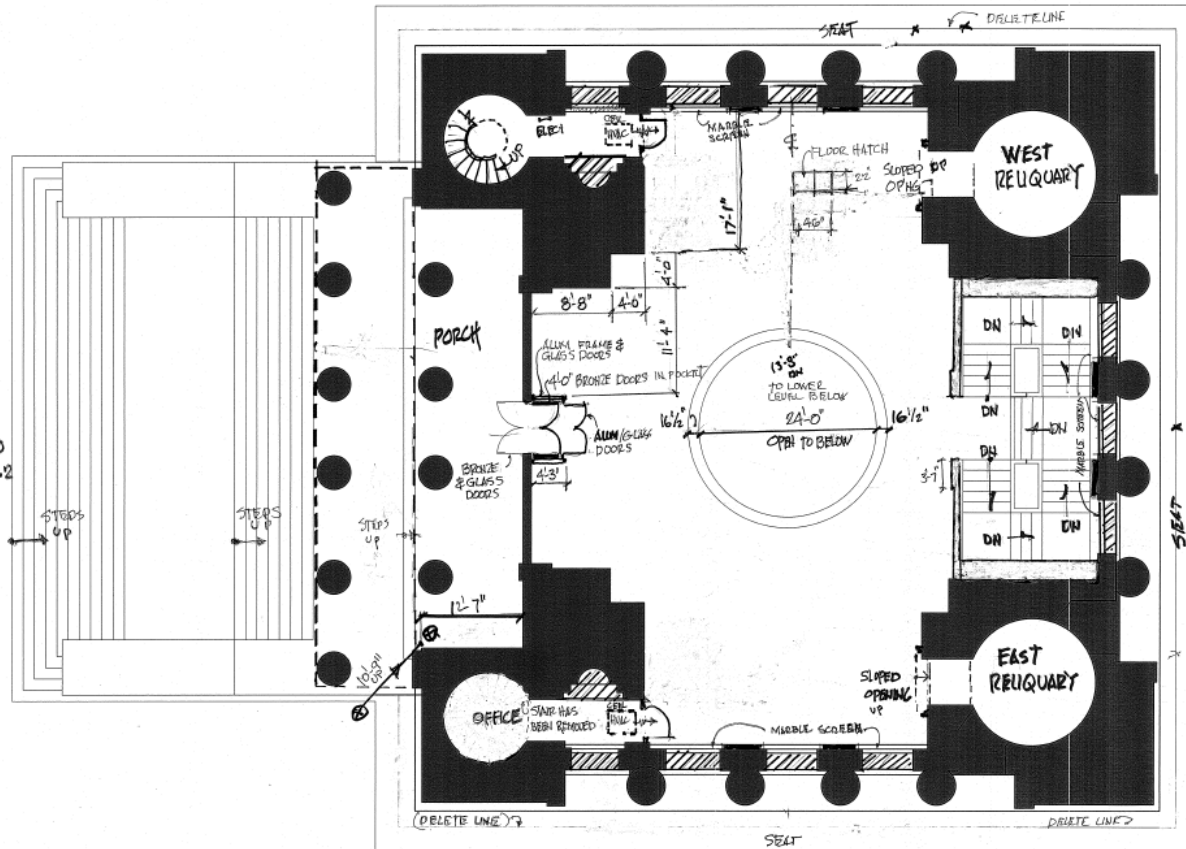
## Exhibit R

### Overlook pavilion multi-purpose room





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$$13'-8'' - 10'-9'' = 2'-11''$$

Main Level Floor Plan

A1

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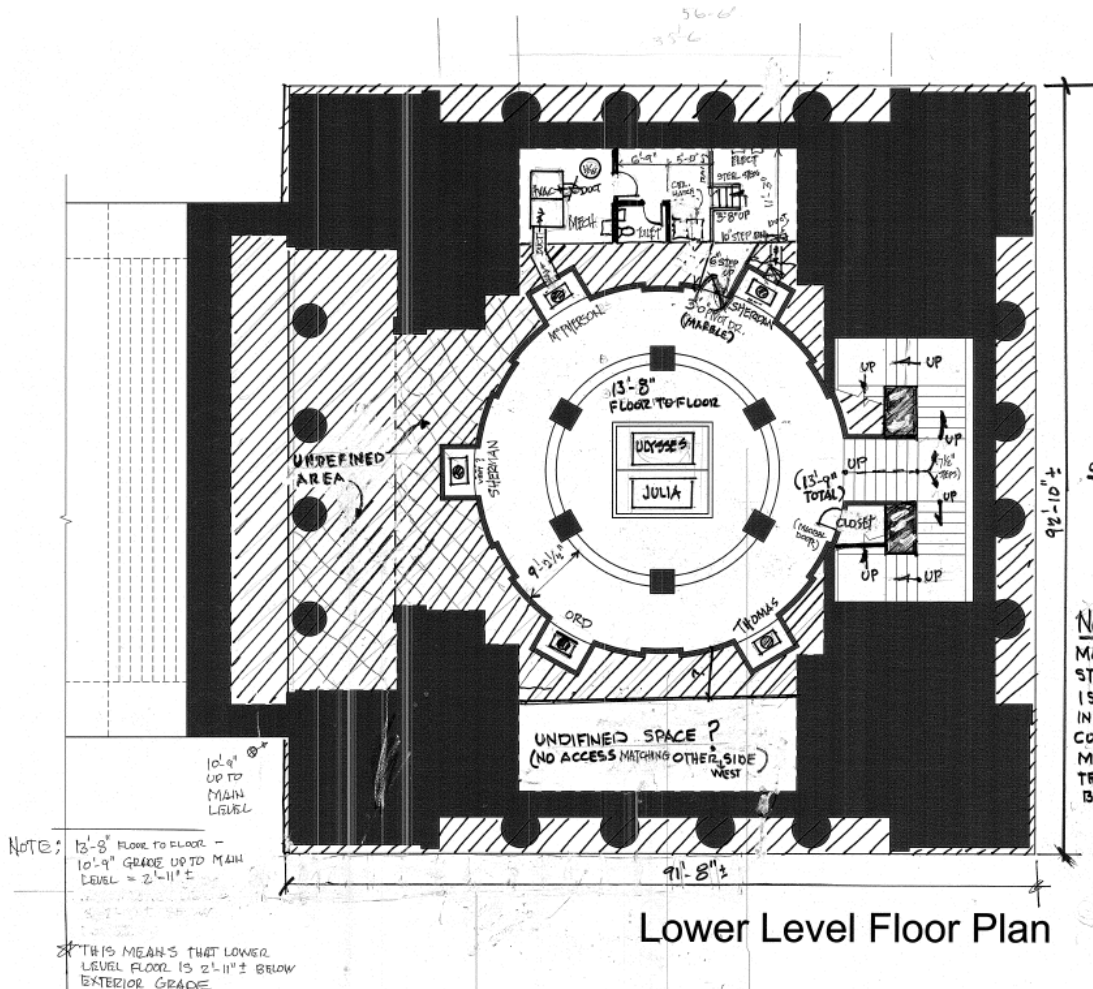
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Grant Monument Association  
Preliminary Floor Plan Study  
New York, NY

PROJECT NAME  
DRAWING NAME  
Main Level Floor Plan

SCALE  
3/16"=1'-0"  
DRAWING BY  
A.S.S.I.  
DATE  
07.15.15  
DRAWING NO.

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Lower Level Floor Plan

A2

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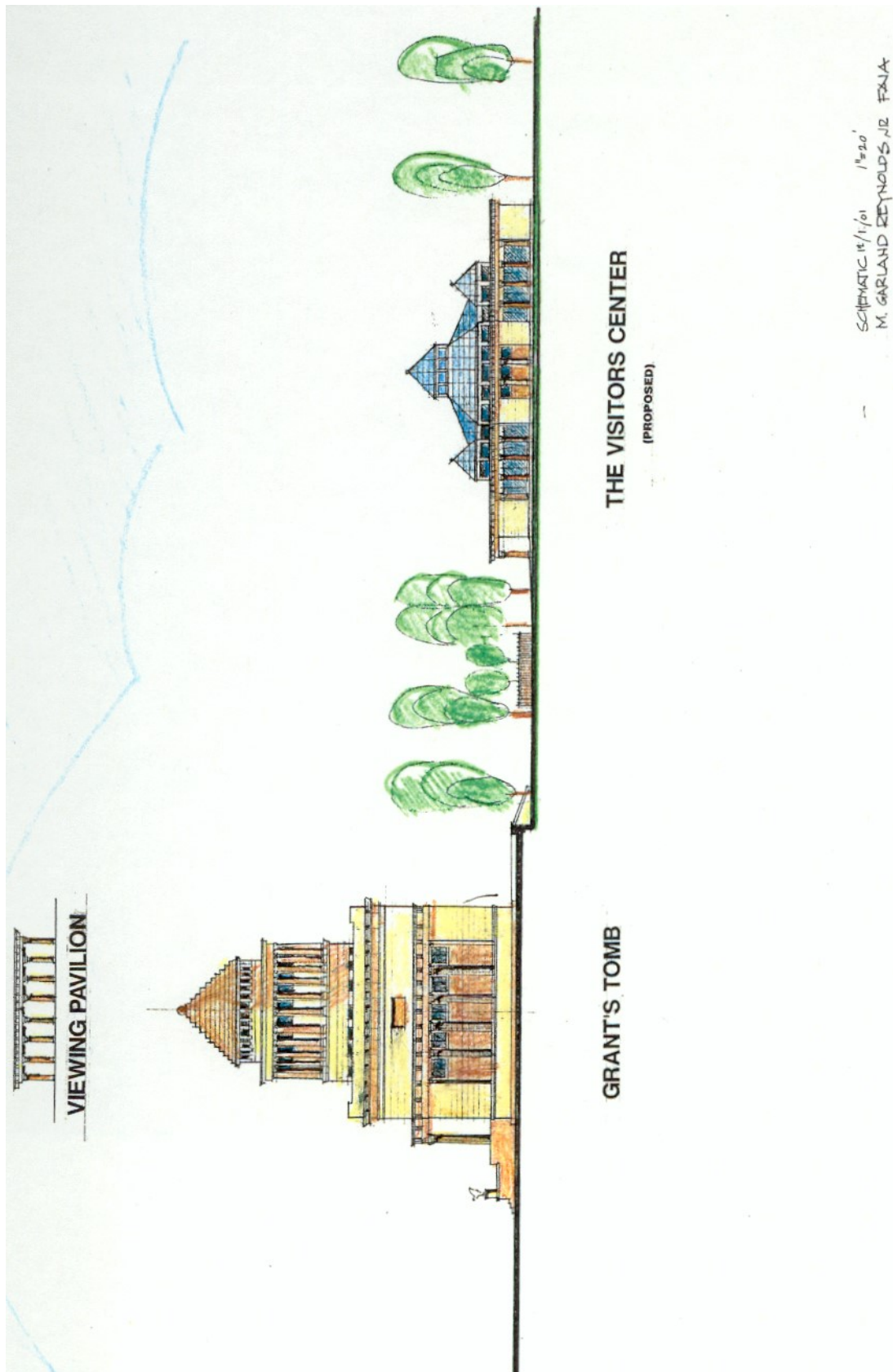
PROJECT NAME  
DRAWING NAME  
Lower Level Floor Plan

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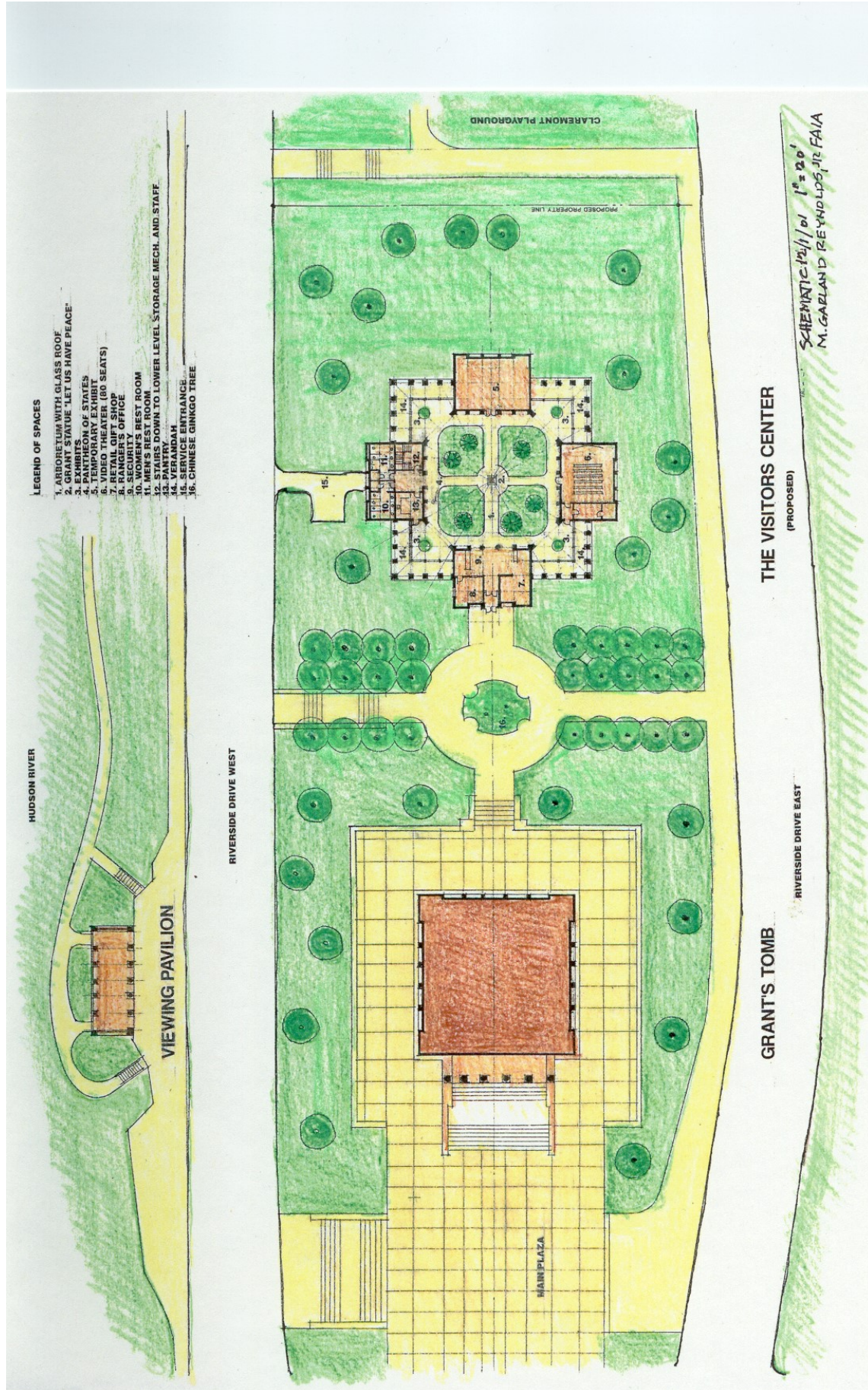
NOTE:  
MAIN LEVEL FLOOR  
STRUCTURE ABOVE  
IS STEEL BEAM FRAME  
IN FILLED WITH  
CONCRETE  
MIXED WITH  
TERRACOTTA  
BOULDERS

## Exhibit T

Side view of prospective new visitor center north of Grant's Tomb



Aerial view of prospective new visitor center north of Grant's Tomb



# Exhibit U

1965 National Park Service study by Newton P. Bevin illustrating extension of southwestern stairway to crypt level

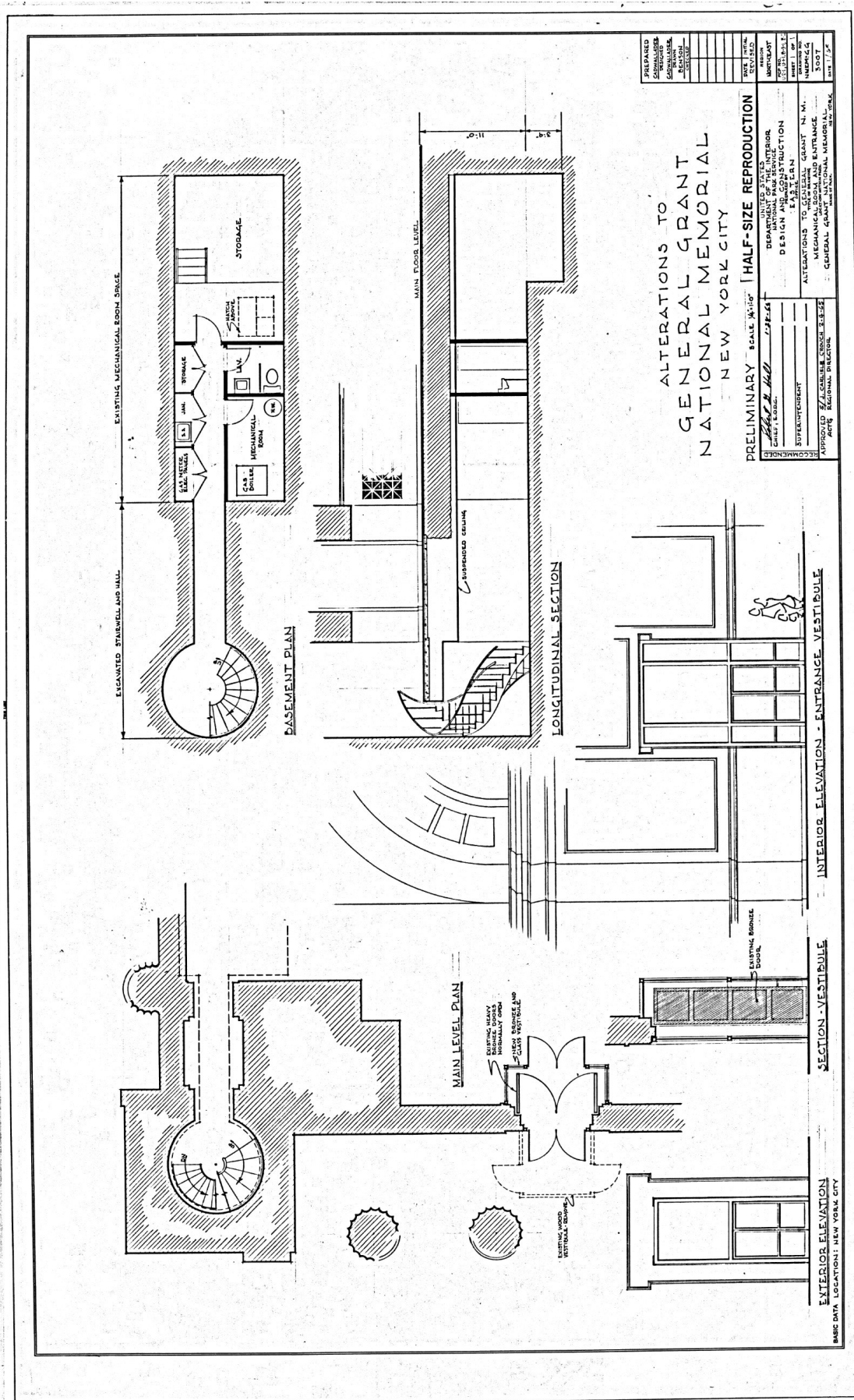


Exhibit V

Front page of official Grant's Tomb dedication program showing finial on summit



OFFICIAL PROGRAMME  
OF THE EXERCISES AT THE DEDICATION  
OF THE  
MONUMENT AND TOMB  
OF  
GENERAL VLYSSES S GRANT  
VNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
THE MUNICIPAL GRANT MONUMENT COMMITTEE

RIVERSIDE  NEW YORK CITY

APRIL XXVII MDCCCXCVII

## Exhibit W

Details of John Russell Pope's 1928 plan showing equestrian statue, front and side views

