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THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - HARPER'S FERRY

Interpretive Proposals for  
HOPEWELL VILLAGE nr Birdsboro Pa.

(Stage 1 Concept Plan)

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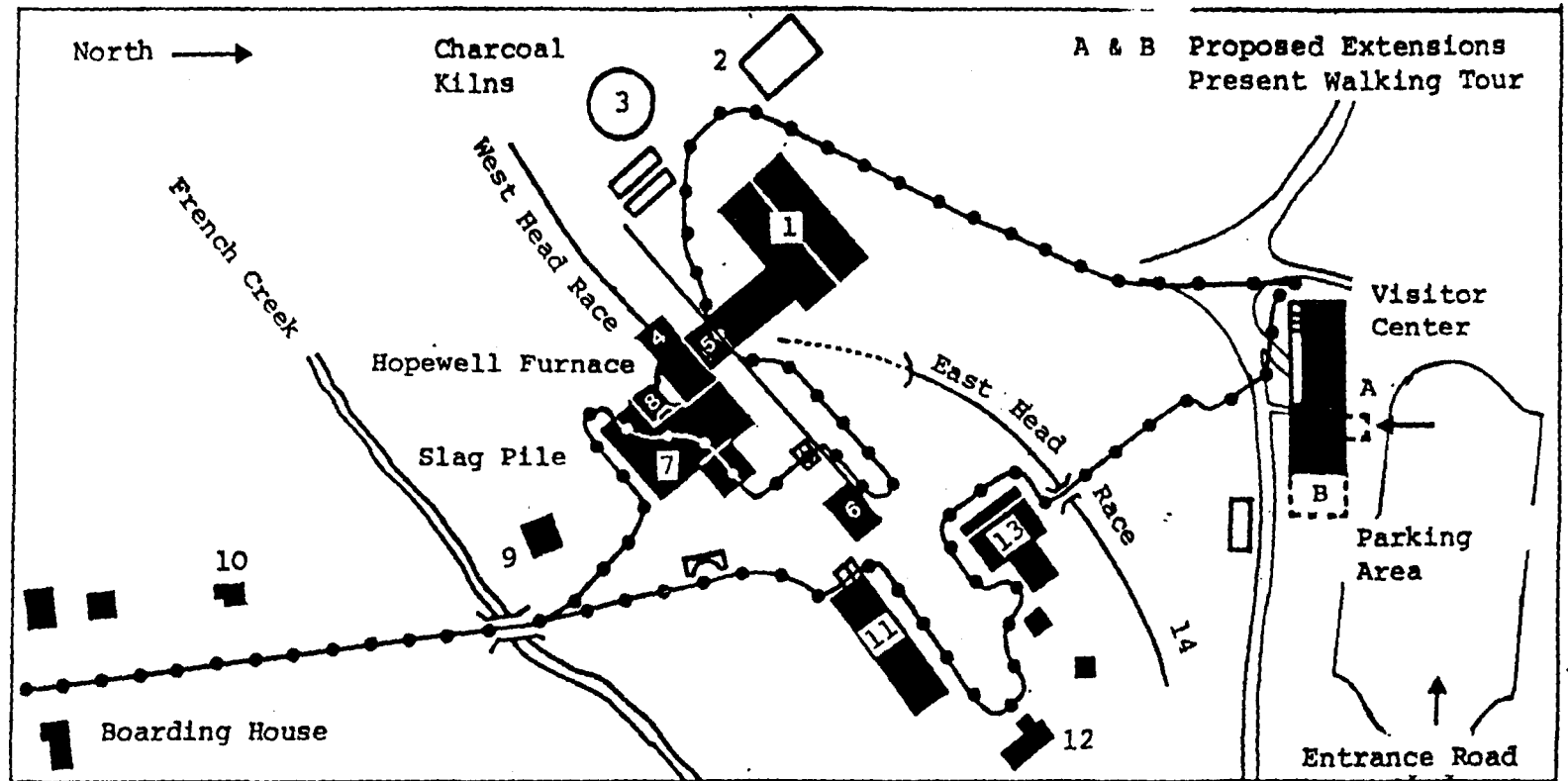
## INTRODUCTION

Hopewell Village National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service of the United States, and is located 6 miles from Birdsboro, Pa. The village is an iron "plantation" with blast furnace restored to show the heyday of the working community between 1820 and 1840. The site is served by a Visitor Centre, built in the 1950's.

The Visitor Centre is a long two-storey building situated on a rise overlooking the historic site. The lower level houses Park staff and administration, a library and workroom. The upper level is devoted to a reception area, an exhibit and an audio-visual theatre. The present displays are heavy on the written word and light on artefacts and the superb views of the site from the Centre have not been sufficiently exploited. On the historic site itself are various on-site interpretive displays.

It is recognised by the Park Service that the present buildings suffer from certain physical inadequacies. The administrative level of the building is cramped and simply needs more space. The audio-visual room is too small to cope with current demands. The museum is inadequate for the potential interpretation and display of available exhibits. A very large quantity of actual artefacts is at present in store. The displays are frankly outmoded and do little justice to this superb site.

We understand that the bulk of the exhibits have not yet been conserved. Discussion of a programme for this work would need to be implemented.



General Plan of HOPEWELL VILLAGE

- 1 Coaling Shed and Charcoal House
- 2 Anthracite Furnace
- 3 Charcoal Hearth
- 4 Water Wheel and Blast Machinery
- 5 Connecting Shed and Bridgehouse
- 6 The Office Store
- 7 Casting House
- 8 The Furnace
- 9 Blacksmith Shop
- 10 Tenant Houses
- 11 Barn
- 12 Spring House

## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

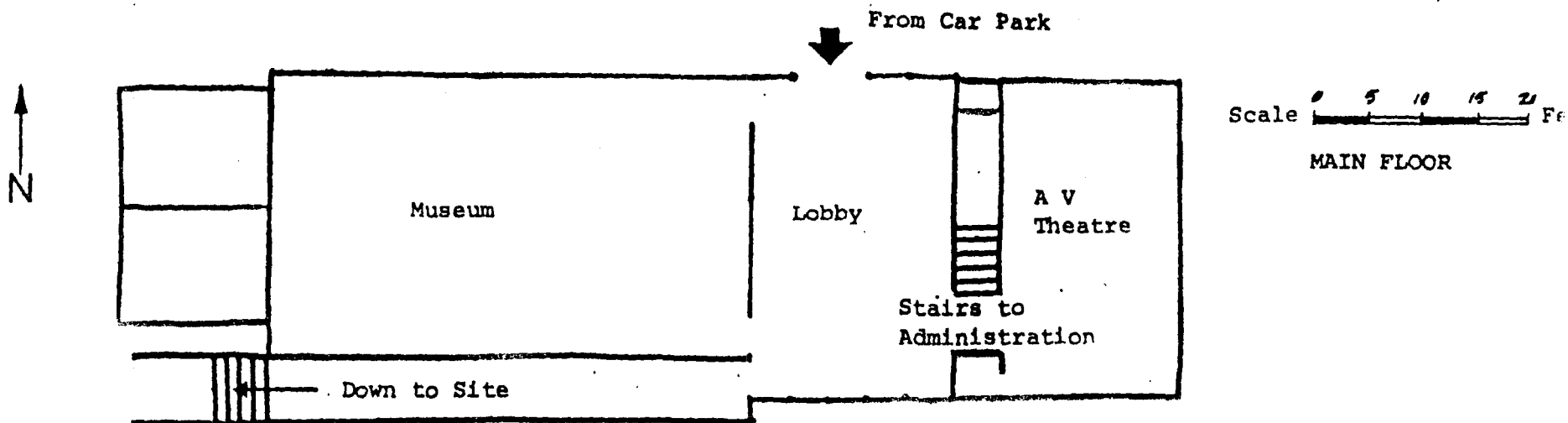
One purpose of this report is to suggest how (not more than) 2000 sq. ft. for administrative and display purposes can be added to the Visitor Centre. We would not wish to enter into the controversy over whether or not the Visitor Centre was originally sited correctly, but would suggest that the main extension merely elongate the present roofline and silhouette eastwards (see Plan). The audio-visual theatre will then be able to seat 80 comfortably (it now seats 35) and the present audio-visual space can be taken into the exhibition area, thereby increasing it by some 500 sq. ft. On the lower level, pressure will be relieved by the creation of a further 900 sq. ft. (approx.) of administrative space. We have made no attempt, at this stage, to reapportion space at this level, assuming that the additional area will be adequate to alleviate the present overcrowding. It should be noted that the extra space available here is the direct result of the more definable needs at the upper level. Adjustments would obviously need to be made at the detailed design stage.

Our first thoughts on the scheme suggest that the exhibit and the area where visitors are welcomed (and given or sold information and publications) should be physically distinct. We would wish to create an uninterrupted historical atmosphere by removing non-museum or non-interpretive functions from the middle of the exhibition space. We propose to achieve this by building a new and attractive glazed lobby extending northwards into the parking lot (see Plan). This would draw more attention to the entrance and break up the elevation which is in danger of appearing even longer with the proposed eastward extension. The lobby would be large enough (approx. 400 sq. ft.) to contain a reception desk, publication display stands, and, possibly, coat racks and a small publications store. In summer large sliding glass doors could be opened up to turn the lobby into an indoor/outdoor space.

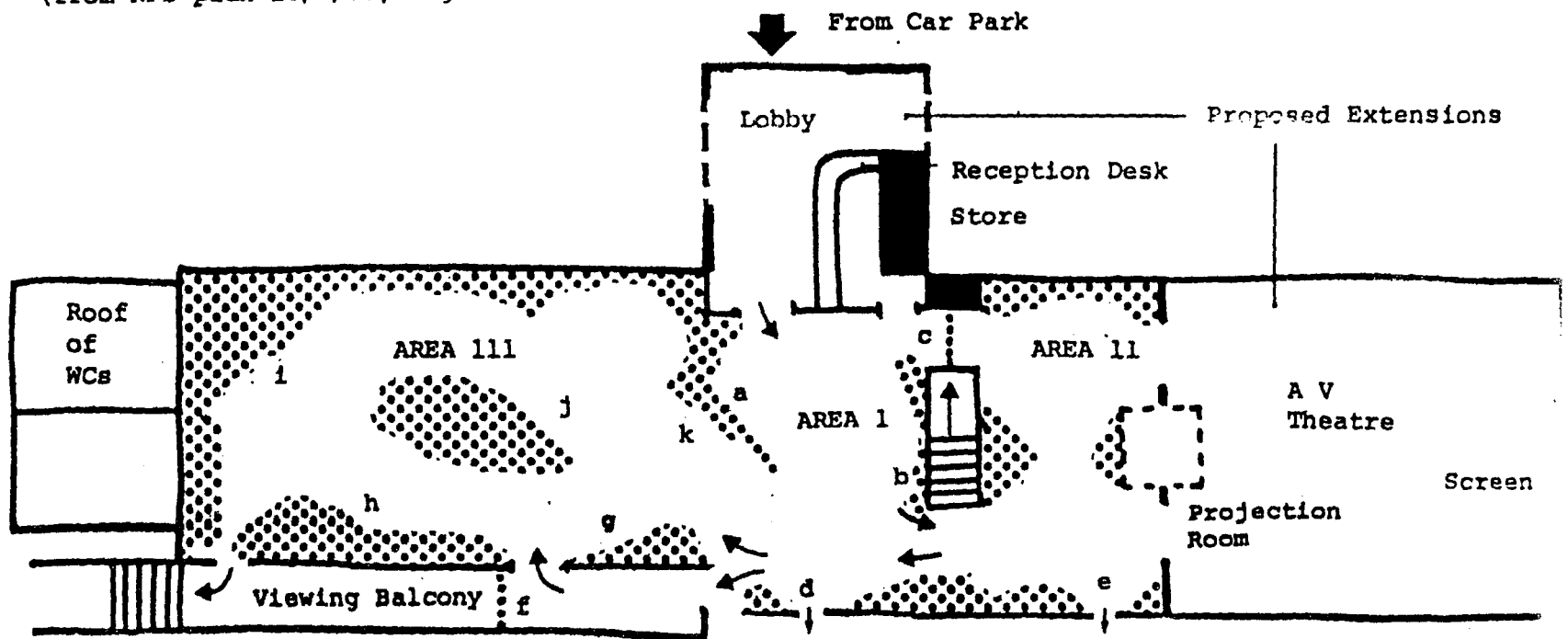
## INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES

The history of Hopewell spans more than one hundred years. Within that period of time, several intertwined elements can be discerned which together make up the whole. Without separating these elements and concentrating briefly on each, the visitor experience at Hopewell will be lacking in interpretive insight. The following historical precis provides a storyline-summary. It also helps to identify six Key Elements which we believe to be crucial to the history of Hopewell and upon which we concentrate in the next section.

1. The American iron and steel industry is the biggest in the world and the largest centre is Pennsylvania. The great industry had its origins in plantations like Hopewell.
2. Hopewell is not unique: rather it is typical of 18th century Pennsylvanian iron sites.
3. Hopewell, with its charcoal furnace, is essentially an "iron plantation" specialising in castings.
4. Iron was made with local iron ore, limestone, and charcoal, with waterpower as the motive force.
5. Iron was produced by a close-knit community of Ironmaster and workforce.
6. The main products were castings and pig iron, supply relating to demand and method of transportation.



VISITOR CENTER (existing plan)  
 Present arrangement showing area of extension  
 (from NPS plan 16/8/57, dwg no. NHS HV 3017.A)



VISITOR CENTER (proposals)

## CIRCULATION PLAN AND INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS

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The following is our proposed route for the visitor (see Plan).

### Entrance

The visitor enters through the new lobby where he is welcomed by the Park staff. Publications and sales goods are displayed in this area, which functions as a joint entrance and exit.

### Area I

This Area is the first to be seen by the Visitor and covers Key Elements 1 and 2. From here, the visitor may turn either left, into Area II and the audio-visual theatre, or right, into Area III.

As he enters, the visitor is confronted by an unexpected and dramatic exhibit depicting miles of steelyards, furnaces and buildings of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in the Lehigh Valley of south-east Pennsylvania (a). Big steelworks from little iron-smelting furnaces grow, and the modern giant can be explained in terms of many small beginnings in the forests of 18th century Pennsylvania. Until the mid 19th century, Hopewell was one of several similar "iron plantations" scattered from the Delaware to the Ohio, representing a major share of America's primary iron-producing industry (b) (at C an opening is formed to give a glimpse - but no passage - to Area II).

Hopewell is typical not unique: it has not special eminence amongst similar works (e.g. Colebrookdale was the first furnace, Warwick had a larger capacity and a longer history, Joanna was operating after Hopewell's last blast, etc.). The significance of Hopewell is its remarkable state of preservation.

On the south wall (d), the visitor can get a "controlled" view of the site (viewing tubes or louvres) which provides him with a reference point. An illustrated chronology of the main events in Hopewell's history and some "scene-setting" pictures will quickly help to orientate the visitor.

## Area II

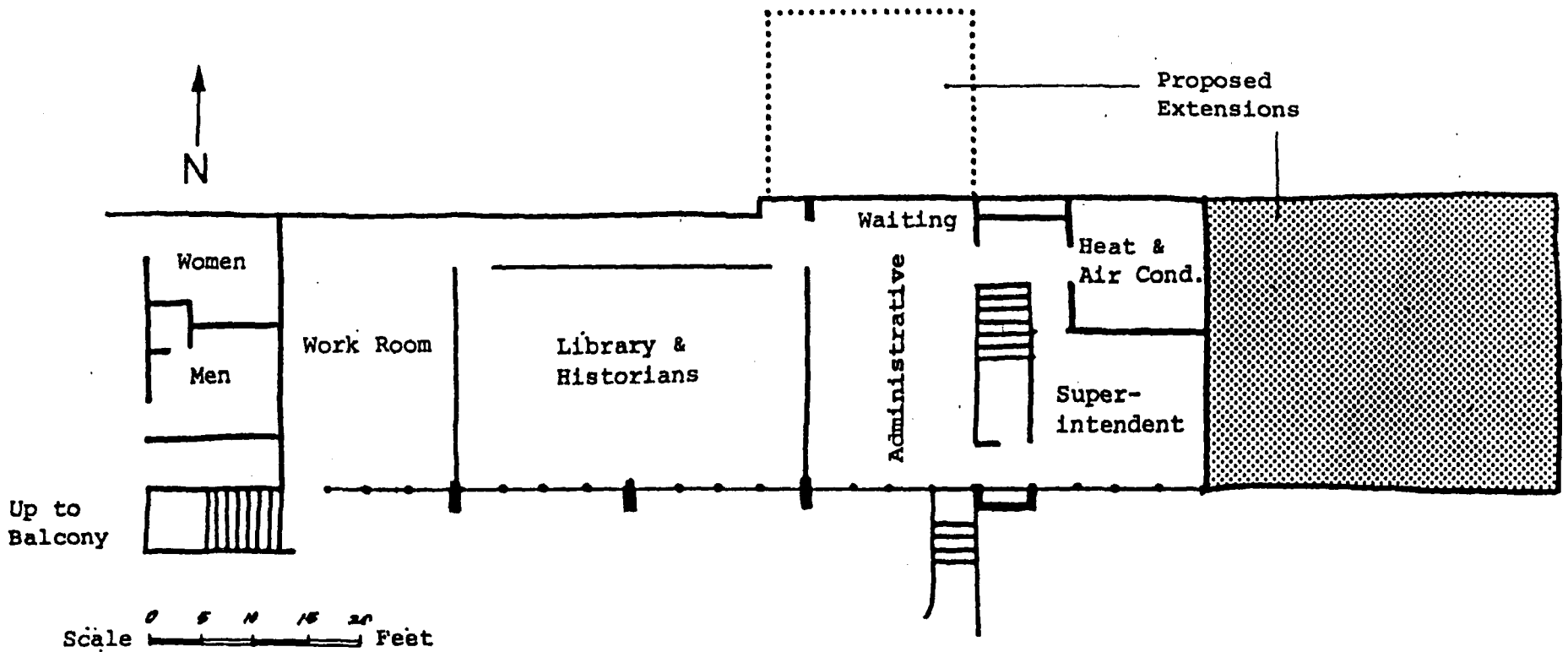
Turning to his left, the visitor enters Area II which features the people of Hopewell and their lifestyles (Key Element 5). The ironmasters were the general managers of the Hopewell enterprise, almost solely responsible for its success in business and welfare terms. They lived in the Big House which the visitor can see through another "controlled" viewing window (e). This functioned as a residence, the seat of authority and the centre of social life where visitors were entertained. The ironmaster had to be a technical and marketing expert. "There has been no employment in this State that has met with so many revulsions, ruined so many fortunes, impoverished so many families, and in which so few fortunes have been made ... as in the Manufacture of Pig Iron ... " We would hope to put over the unique character of individuals such as Mark Bird, the Founder, who died a ruined man in North Carolina, and Clement Brooke, who successfully conducted operations at Hopewell during its heyday.

Of the workers, the Founder was the highly skilled manager of the furnace operation on whom depended the success of the whole process. Then there were fillers, and skilled artisans, who earned more than the woodcutters, miners and teamsters. Coloured workers augmented the unskilled workforce and integrated totally into the community. People lived in their own homes though single men often went to boarding houses. Furnishings were simple, food was plentiful and reasonably varied, and people enjoyed themselves at fairs and elections, house raisings and "frolics".

We suggest that all these aspects of life can be illustrated by means of actual objects, props and set pieces which provide a useful run-up to the audio-visual programme. In short, the whole of Area II is devoted to people.

## The Audio-Visual Theatre

The new theatre will seat 80 and will show a programme of approximately 15 minutes duration. We feel that this should focus on life at Hopewell and then touch upon the ironmaking process which will link with displays in the next exhibition area.



EXISTING LOWER GROUND FLOOR

In physical terms, the theatre should be designed to a reasonable degree of comfort and be capable of multi-use, e.g. meetings, seminars, etc.

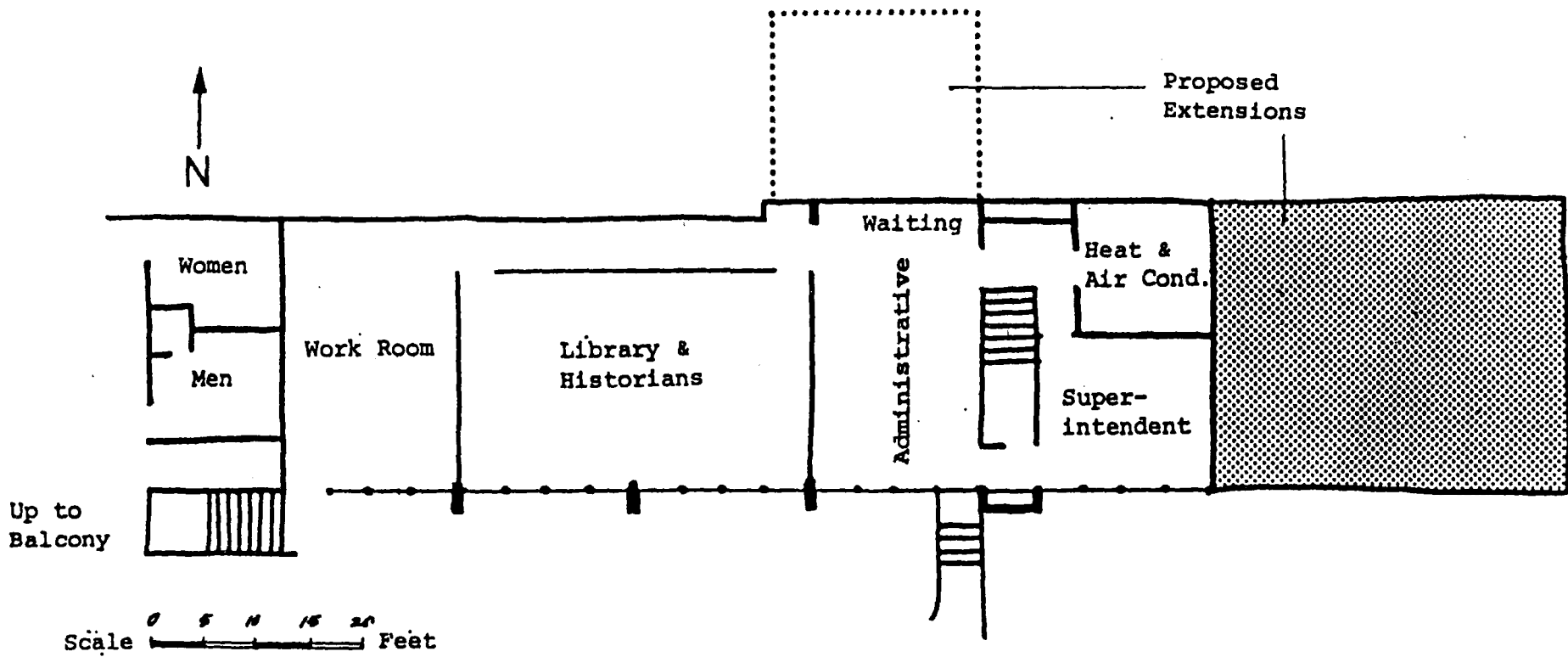
### Area III

Leaving Area II, the visitor walks through the south end of Area I once again, and has the opportunity of refreshing his memory with the Hopewell chronology. He moves into Area III, which covers Key Elements 3, 4 and 6. If the weather is fine, or he has the inclination, he can pass along the Viewing Balcony on the south side and enjoy the overview of the restoration. In this way, he can bypass Area III \* or he may re-enter at the west end. Openings to the balcony can be re-positioned to suit the display.

The chief characteristics of the early iron plantations were that they resembled mediaeval, feudal manors and Southern tobacco or cotton plantations, and that they were essentially self-sufficient (g). A charcoal furnace was not the centre of an urban community. Rather, people lived a rural way of life, obtaining what they could not produce themselves from the store.

Hopewell Furnace was a single stack producing 1000 tons of iron per annum by the efforts of 100 men. We would like to show what was required to make one ton of pig iron, namely, 2 tons of iron ore, 1-2 tons of charcoal and a few shovelfuls of limestone (h). Ideally, we would like to show the process at the furnace itself. Maps would be used to indicate the localities of iron mines, limestone quarries and charcoal forests. Charcoal was produced from hickory, oak, ash, chestnut and pine, and this point would be reinforced on site. The furnace cut down about 4000 cords per annum from its own land and bought 3000 cords from woodland owners within a 4-5 mile radius. The motive power for ironmaking was derived originally from springs on the mountain side and later on, the waters of French Creek.

\* Consideration should be given to the formation of another opening with barrier (f) to "force" visitors back into Area III.



EXISTING LOWER GROUND FLOOR

Hopewell's claim to fame was its production of stove plates, cast until 1844 (i). We suggest an impressive display of stoves, and stove patterns, plus a list of their poetic names. We would also want to display pig iron, and other products of the Furnace - hollow ware, cannon, cannon balls, gate metal, etc. with the best specimens at (j). Good maps would be used to indicate the vital significance of communications - turnpikes, railroad and canal - in relation to customers.

Finally, the visitor should leave through Area I having passed an exhibit relating to the decline of Hopewell (k). This gives us an opportunity of using some of the fine late Victorian photographs taken after shutdown, e.g. picnicking in the ruins, etc.

#### The Site

Whilst we realise that this is a management problem, we feel that the site is too "clean", especially in the area immediately adjacent to the blast furnace. The furnace, cranes and ropes, in their pristine restored state, fail to convey any impression of the heat, dirt and danger of the iron smelting process. It would be possible to give some idea of the atmosphere of a working furnace by the imaginative use of light, sound and heat. The Furnace and its surrounding area should be made "dirty".

We feel that on-site interpretive panels need updating and improving, especially in the charcoal workers' area.

## OVERALL INTERPRETATION

At the time of preparing this report, another study has been submitted to the N.P.S. for the Saugus Iron Works near Boston. If the two schemes were to be developed concurrently, then it is essential that, in interpretive terms, they are complementary. There are profound differences between the two sites - lifestyle, product, uniqueness/typicality, etc. - but the central core of both, the blast furnace, remains strikingly constant. Together, the two sites span two and a half centuries of ironmaking in the New World. Neither site will "depend" upon the other for its historical continuity, but certain aspects of the interpretation - mainly publications - should provide an overall picture.

As mentioned in the Saugus report, a special publication taking the form of a folding wallchart is planned as a joint venture by the National Park Service and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust in the U.K. The writing and research will be undertaken by Neil Cossons, and Robin Wade Design Associates will produce two sets of camera ready artwork for printing in the U.S.A. and the U.K. They will be identical except for a section in each relating to special differences in the two countries. The wallcharts will cover the importance of iron to man, and the history, nature and technical aspects of ironmaking.

In addition, we would like to see a good range of other back-up material portraying early colonial life, e.g. the excellent series from Old Sturbridge Village. Interpretation should continue long after the visitor leaves.

## TIMETABLE

We are not in a position to make informed comments on timetabling until the Regional Office is able to make a programme for the proposed extensions. Furthermore (and as mentioned earlier), a programme of conservation of exhibits is needed. The only definite point that can be made here is that the Stage II Concept Plan could be available for discussion during May 1978, if approval of the broad terms of this Study could be given by the middle of March 1978.

## NOTES ON COSTING

No figures have been given to us for this project. We would assume that the cost of the building work was not our concern. The design stage will suggest (based on recent U.K. experience) probable costs for the display and the on-site interpretation.