

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Mikveh Israel and Louis Kahn: New Information

ABSTRACT: The commission that Congregation Mikveh Israel gave to the Philadelphia architect Louis Kahn in 1961 finally ended when he was fired in January 1973, before ground could be broken on the new structure to have it ready for the Bicentennial Celebration in 1976. Kahn's design would have produced one of the great interior spaces of the twentieth century, but disagreement between the architect and the congregation over functional and spiritual aspects led to the eventual sad outcome. Based on newly discovered documents, this article clarifies what is known about the end of the commission, explores the thinking of the congregation that led to Kahn's dismissal, and reveals the steps that were taken to find a replacement firm from a list of Philadelphia architects.

IN 1961 MIKVEH ISRAEL CONGREGATION of Philadelphia commissioned Louis Kahn to design a new synagogue for a site on Fifth Street abutting Independence Mall. Neither the congregation nor the architect could have foreseen the sad, contentious demise of the project in 1973. The history of the Mikveh Israel commission has been meticulously chronicled by Susan G. Solomon. Solomon, however, did not have documentation to pinpoint the precise end of the relationship between the synagogue and the architect.¹ Information unavailable to Solomon has recently come to light in the papers of Daniel C. Cohen, a Philadelphia lawyer and member of the congregation who was involved

The authors would like to thank Daniel C. Cohen for his generous cooperation. Our thanks also go to William Whitaker and Nancy Thorne at the University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Claire Pingel at the National Museum of American Jewish History, Louis Kessler at the Mikveh Israel Archives, Sarah Dine, and Michael J. Lewis.

¹ Susan G. Solomon, *Louis I. Kahn's Jewish Architecture: Mikveh Israel and the Midcentury American Synagogue* (Hanover, NH, 2009). See also the earlier account by Michelle Taylor, "Mikveh Israel Synagogue," in *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, ed. David B. Brownlee and David D. DeLong (New York, 1991), 362–65.

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in the project from beginning to end.² Cohen, whose papers are held in the archives of the National Museum of American Jewish History, is also the great uncle of Ranana Dine, one of the authors of this essay.³ His papers clarify what happened between 1970, when an urgent push to complete the project began, and January 1973, when, we now know, Kahn was officially dismissed in a letter from Meyer Klein, the president of the congregation.⁴ As the Cohen papers demonstrate, the congregation asked that Kahn modify his design to make fundraising easier and the building less expensive to construct and maintain. Kahn tried at first to work with the proposed changes. Ultimately, however, he rejected them, and the congregation fired him.

As Kahn's drawings reveal, had his synagogue been built, it would have contained one of the great interior spaces of the twentieth century (see cover image). This scheme, Kahn's fifth proposal for the synagogue, was established by October 1962.⁵ Kahn's vision for the interior of the sanctuary was featured by the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1963 on the catalogue cover of an exhibition of new synagogue architecture.⁶ The exhibition was organized by a young architect, Richard Meier, who soon achieved his own fame with such commissions as the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Kahn's plan included separate structures: a large, polygonal sanctuary with circular towers at each corner; a small chapel, also with corner towers; a sukkah with six piers to support the temporary roof; and a school building with a rather standard rectilinear form (fig. 1). The chapel would have had an oval interior, intended to recall the sanctuary of 1822 that noted Philadelphia architect William Strickland had erected for the congregation at its original location at Third and Cherry Streets.⁷

² Bernard Alpers to Daniel Cohen, Apr. 24, 1961, Daniel Cohen Papers, Archives, National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia (hereafter ANMAJH); Minutes of Board of Managers, Apr. 10, 1973, Archives, Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia (hereafter ACMI). In April 1961, at the invitation of Dr. Bernard Alpers, chair of the architectural committee—and the employer of Kahn's wife, Esther—Cohen attended a meeting of that committee. Twelve years later, at a meeting of the board of managers of the congregation, Cohen seconded a motion to hire the firm of Harbeson Hough Livingston and Larson to replace Kahn.

³ This essay comes out of a tutorial on Kahn's architecture taught by Johnson at Williams College in the fall of 2013. Dine, a student in the tutorial, recalled that Cohen was a member of the Mikveh Israel congregation and sent him an email, to which he replied on Nov. 4, "I was the man who fired him." Thus began this inquiry.

⁴ Meyer Klein to Louis Kahn, Jan. 17, 1973, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH.

⁵ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 105.

⁶ The Jewish Museum, *Recent American Synagogue Architecture*, organized by Richard Meier (New York, 1963).

⁷ Agnes Addison Gilchrist, *William Strickland, Architect and Engineer, 1788–1854* (Philadelphia, 1950), 62–63.

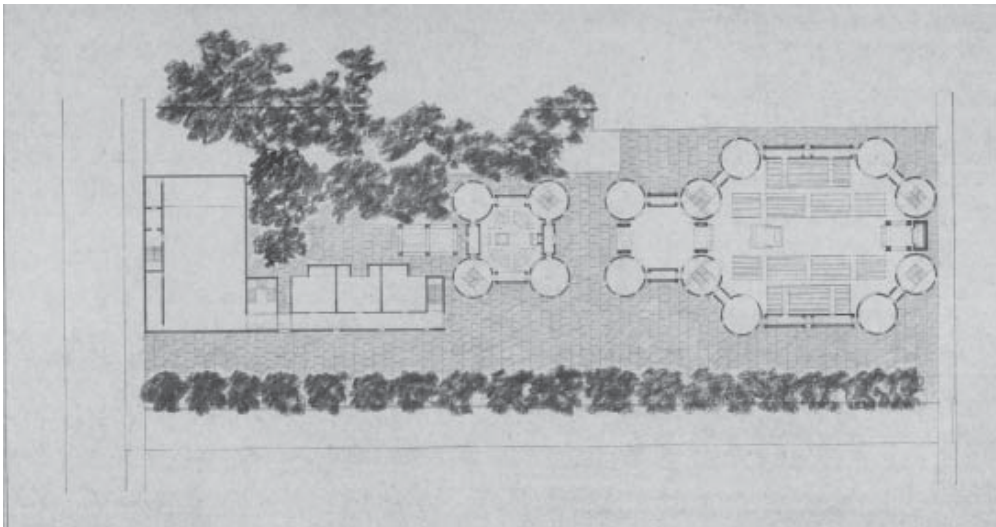


Fig. 1. Louis I. Kahn, plan of Mikveh Israel Synagogue, Oct. 31, 1962 (Kahn Collection, 030.1.C.615.2). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Founded around 1740, Mikveh Israel is the second-oldest Jewish congregation in North America. By the mid-twentieth century, the group wished to move from its current location at Broad and York Streets and return to the historic center of Philadelphia, near Independence Mall. Mikveh Israel's importance in the history of American Jewry, and the roles some of its members played in the American Revolution, stood behind this desire.⁸ Kahn used a bird's-eye perspective to demonstrate the proximity of the proposed new Mikveh Israel complex on Fifth Street to Independence Hall (fig. 2).

Williams Strickland's synagogue of 1822 replaced a smaller structure that the congregation had erected on the site at Third and Cherry in 1782. Prior to that year members met in rented houses located in the same area. The choice of Strickland, who also designed the Second Bank of the United States, was perspicacious. It established a tradition continued for the design of the third Mikveh Israel synagogue, commissioned in 1858 from John McArthur, who produced a medievalizing, round-arched structure. Later in his career McArthur designed the towering Philadelphia City Hall. Pressures of a growing congregation, the result of the arrival of large numbers of immigrants, led to the need for the new building, dedicated in 1860 at Seventh and Arch Streets. The fourth synagogue was

⁸For a history of the congregation's sites, see Mark I. Wolfson, "The Synagogue Buildings," *Mikveh Israel History*, Mar. 3, 2013, <http://mikvehisraelhistory.com/2013/03/01/the-synagogue-buildings>.

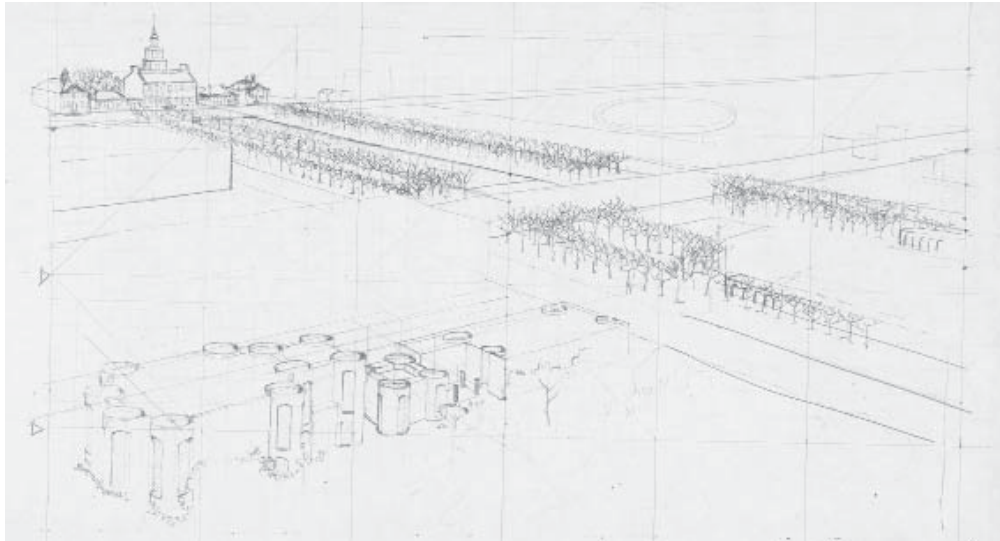


Fig. 2. Louis I. Kahn, bird's-eye view of proposed Mikveh Israel complex (foreground) and Independence Hall (background), graphite and red pencil on trace, circa 1963. (Kahn Collection, 030.1.C.615.3). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

erected in the early twentieth century. Members selected a capacious site at Broad and York Streets, north of the historic center of the city and in a newly fashionable area. Separate buildings for Gratz College and Dropsie College, educational institutions associated with Mikveh Israel, joined the new sanctuary. The New York firm of Pilcher and Tachau, well known for synagogue designs, designed all three buildings in the Beaux-Arts style. After World War II, out-migration to the suburbs led to a smaller congregation and a declining neighborhood. The Broad Street site became untenable.

To summarize Susan Solomon's account, the Mikveh Israel congregation began to think of reclaiming its roots in the historic center of Philadelphia in the mid-1950s. Kahn received the commission in 1961, largely thanks to backing from Dr. Bernard Alpers, head of the congregation's building committee. An admirer of Kahn's work, Alpers also employed Kahn's wife, Esther, at Jefferson Medical College. In 1961 Kahn was just beginning to reach the fame that he enjoyed later in the decade. Kahn helped the congregation select a new site at Fifth and Commerce Streets. Slowly (as was his wont), he worked to develop a final design, arrived at in October 1962. In November the rabbi of the congregation announced that he would leave before the next High Holy Days, in the fall of 1963. The search for a new rabbi brought the architectural project to a halt until a new appointment

was made in the summer of 1964. More obstacles remained, however. Raising the money to build Kahn's design, estimated initially to cost three million dollars, was always a problem. Not able to afford the project on its own, the congregation knew from the start that it would have to seek outside contributions. An important member of the congregation noted in 1963 that Mikveh Israel had on its hands

a historical undertaking which requires national support and \$3,000,000 is not an impossible undertaking, if nationally prominent Jews regard it obligatory to have a symbol such as is being proposed. Gifts must come from individually sponsored Foundations and men and women of substantial wealth. Their imaginations must be fired and the plan for raising the funds must be one that will appeal nationally.⁹

Lack of both funds and direction led to an almost decade-long pause in the project, with only fitful attempts to revive it. By 1970 the congregation had not yet broken ground. Members expressed an urgent desire to have the new synagogue erected by 1976, in time for the American Bicentennial. The congregation began to refer to itself as the Synagogue of the American Revolution.¹⁰ However, progress was still not forthcoming. On December 12, 1970, Daniel Cohen noted that Mikveh Israel was "in a membership, financial and existence crisis." It was losing members and operating at "a continuing deficit."¹¹

Concern about the design compounded these financial problems. Kahn was a controversial choice from the beginning. Several members wanted the new building to be a copy of the Strickland synagogue. Among those was Gustav Klein.¹² A late-joining member of the architectural committee, Klein objected not only to Kahn as a person, but also, citing functional and theological grounds, to his design. Klein argued that Kahn's design was problematic according to Jewish law (*halacha*) regarding synagogue construction. He objected in particular to the lack of large windows, quoting from rabbinic sources to argue that windows were necessary in a synagogue.¹³ In this

⁹ D. Hays Solis-Cohen to David Arons, Jan. 7, 1963, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. David Arons was then president of the congregation.

¹⁰ Daniel Cohen to Louis Kahn, May 4, 1970, A.38.22, Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Philadelphia (hereafter Kahn Collection); Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 131.

¹¹ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 131. Cohen was then president of the congregation.

¹² Email from Daniel Cohen to Ranana Dine, Dec. 10, 2014.

¹³ Gustav Klein to D. Hays Solis-Cohen, May 20, 1966, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. See appendix for the full letter.

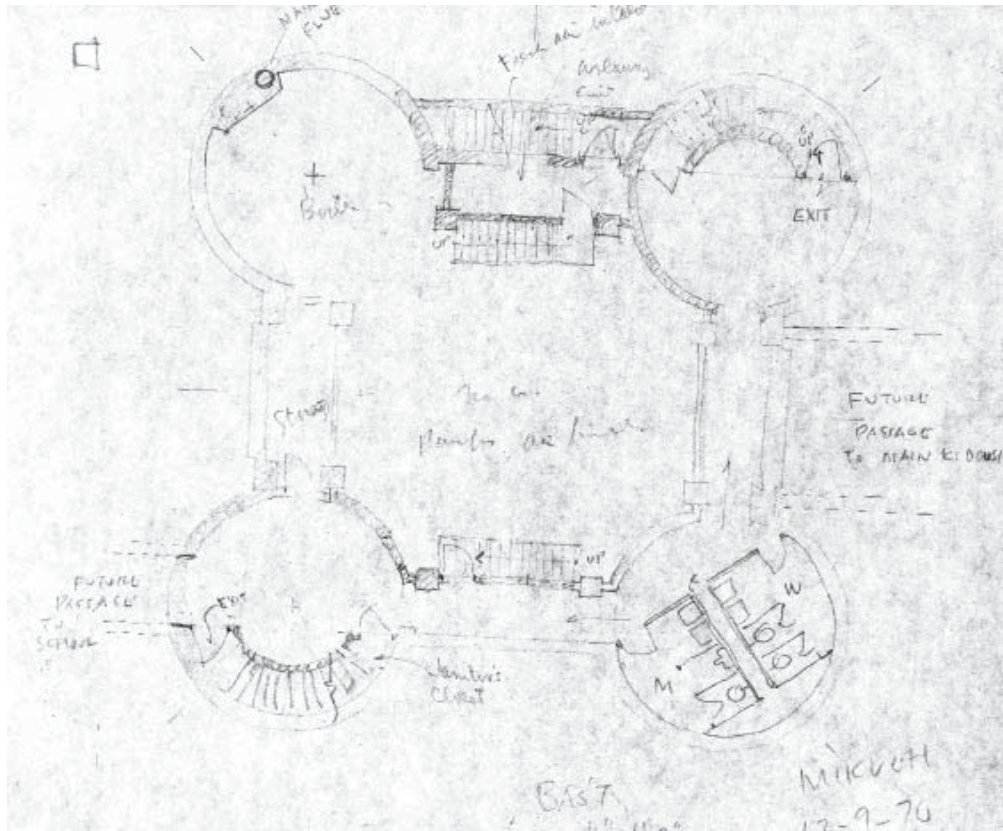


Fig. 3. Louis I. Kahn, plan of basement, Mikveh Israel chapel, Dec. 9, 1970, print (Kahn Collection, 030.11.A.38.17c). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

instance one suspects that Klein had difficulty reading architectural drawings, given the importance Kahn attached to the presence of natural light in his buildings.¹⁴

But Kahn also had strong supporters within the congregation. When a call arose in a city council committee for all new buildings near the Independence Mall to be Georgian in style, Daniel Cohen vigorously defended the Kahn design:

I felt I had to mention that Mikveh Israel was interested in moving to the Mall not as a museum but as a living example of a religious tradition and that living modern institutions did not belong in Colonial museum shells. I also mentioned the fact that Kahn's design had been approved by our Architectural Committee, approved by our Board, *in principle* . . . and critically acclaimed where it has been exhibited.¹⁵

¹⁴ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 108–12, stresses the importance of natural light to Kahn in this project.

¹⁵ Daniel Cohen to David Arons, Dec. 10, 1963, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH.

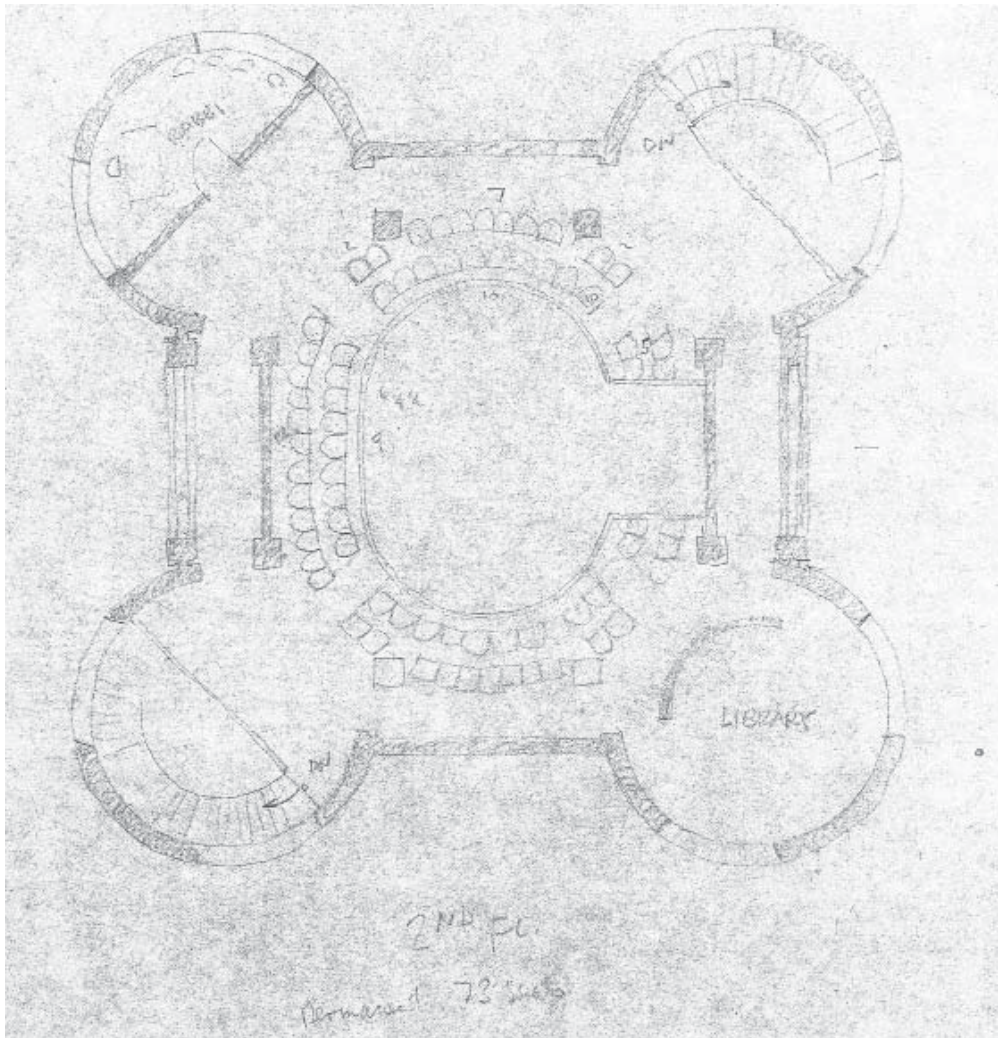


Fig. 4. Louis I. Kahn, plan of second floor, Mikveh Israel chapel, Dec. 9, 1970, print (Kahn Collection, 030.11.A.38.17b). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

A proposal to construct the chapel alone as an affordable first step surfaced. At the annual meeting of the congregation, Cohen proposed “that this part of the building program be financed from within the congregation and its close friends.”¹⁶ If there could be no sanctuary in time for the bicentennial, at least there could be a chapel that revived William Strickland’s oval plan of the second synagogue, accompanied by a promise of the grand future sanctuary.

Kahn agreed to this proposed piecemeal course of construction.¹⁷ He sent Cohen drawings, heretofore unpublished, that include careful calcula-

¹⁶ Minutes of Annual Meeting, Dec. 10, 1970, ACMI.

¹⁷ Minutes of Mall Steering Committee, Nov. 19, 1970, ACMI.

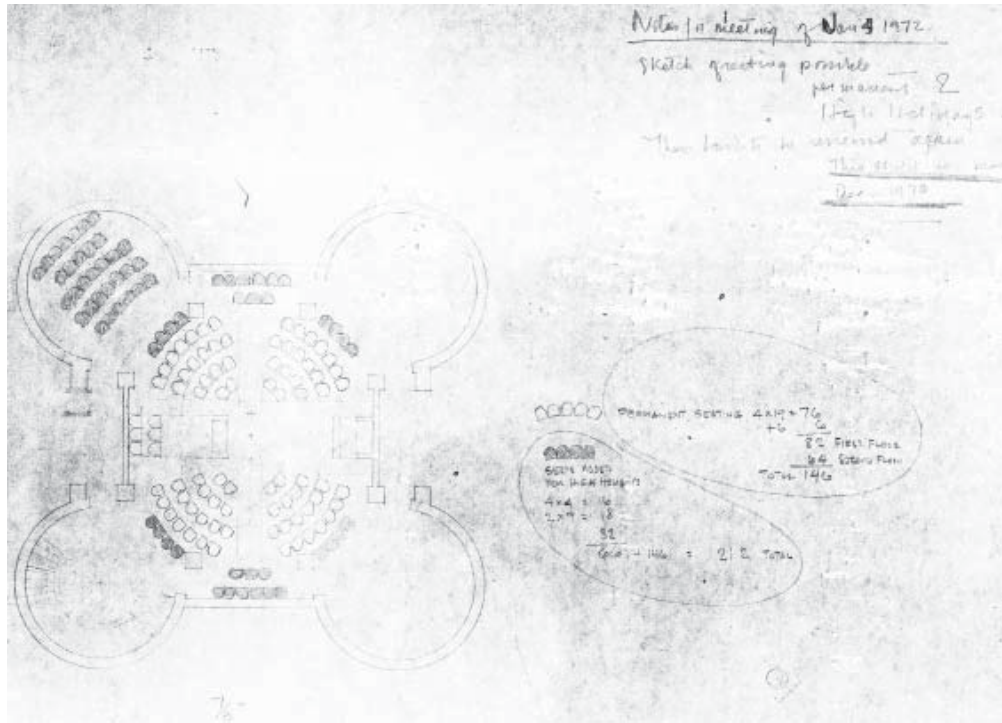


Fig. 5. Louis I. Kahn, plan of ground floor, Mikveh Israel chapel, Dec. 1970 and Jan. 1972, print (Kahn Collection, 030.11.A.38.17a). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

tions of the seating capacity of the three-story chapel (figs. 3, 4, and 5).¹⁸ Additionally, these drawings show a basement that would connect to the future sanctuary and school. Kahn depicted the outline of the plan of the sanctuary, with its circular towers at the intersections of the polygonal walls. The shape of the plan was to be laid out at full size on its intended site as a grass plot surrounded by brick pavers to make its outline clear (fig. 6). A gate with benches marks the end of the sanctuary toward the chapel.

Why this tantalizing proposal came to naught is not clear. In the fall of 1971, the congregation was examining the possibility of abandoning

¹⁸ Louis I. Kahn, Building Plans, A.38.17a, A.38.17b, A.38.17c, and A.38.5, Kahn Collection. There would have been 82 permanent seats on the first floor and 64 on the second. An additional 32 seats would increase the total to 212 for High Holy Days. A sheet of two estimated costs for the project list them at \$599,200 or \$981,750. These totals bear a date of January 4, 1971. To our knowledge, these plans have not been published.

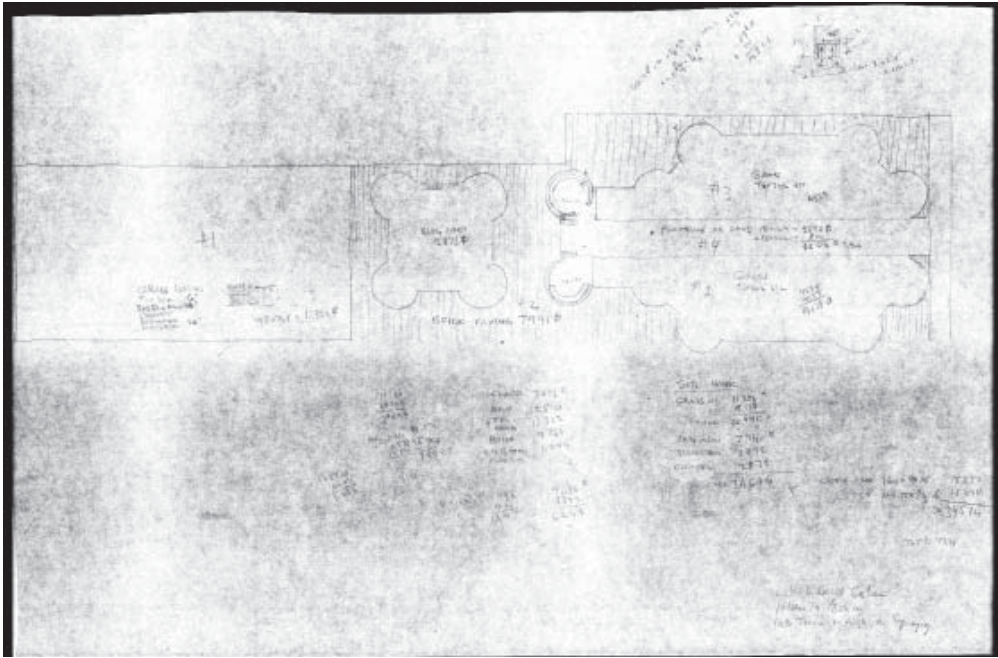


Fig. 6. Louis I. Kahn, plan of project to erect Mikveh Israel chapel and mark footprint of future sanctuary in grass outlined by brick pavers, Dec. 1970 (Kahn Collection, 030.11.A.38.17d). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

the Kahn plan and moving existing buildings, either the old Friends Meeting House or its current synagogue, to the site on Fifth Street abutting the Mall. The synagogue had purchased this site from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. Both of these possibilities were rejected.¹⁹

On December 28, 1971, the board of managers of Mikveh Israel brought in a new head of the building committee, Ruth B. Sarner, who created an action committee to move the project forward. Immediately she called a meeting, at which Kahn apparently planned to present once again the December 1970 scheme to build only the chapel. An inscription in Kahn's own hand notes that the drawing will be presented at the meeting of January 1972 and that the sketch dates from December 1970 (fig. 5).

¹⁹ Meeting of Board of Managers, Nov. 10, 1971. See also Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 203n103.

Notes for meeting of Jan 4 (?) 1972

Sketch of seating possible permanent & High Holidays

These have to be reviewed again

*This sketch was made Dec. 1970*²⁰

The revived lone chapel proposal gained no traction, and during 1972 the relations between Kahn and the congregation deteriorated.²¹ Sarner's effort to get the project moving led to major changes in the plan, which she described in a letter of February 17, 1972, to Kahn: "the amended project . . . shall consist of two units, a synagogue reminiscent of the Synagogue of the American Revolution [i.e., the Strickland building] and a Museum of American Jewish History."²² For Sarner the move to the mall was urgent:

The imminence of the Bicentennial makes it imperative that Mikveh Israel relocate on the Mall. It was invited to do so by the Redevelopment Authority so that it might rejoin the other religious institutions in that area, give representation to the Jewish faith and thereby dramatize the significance of religious liberty in the United States.²³

Sarner hoped that the creation of a museum of Jewish history would attract donations from outside the congregation, and even outside Philadelphia, as the proposal for the synagogue alone had not. Further, a museum would be eligible for government funding, whereas the sanctuary would not.²⁴ On May 2 Kahn presented a preliminary plan for the new scheme, and on May 23 he showed a model of it to the action committee.²⁵ The committee asked Kahn to reduce the cost of the building by almost 50 percent, a request that must have included eliminating the towers. On September 6 Kahn composed a handwritten statement entitled "Window Room."

²⁰ Louis I. Kahn, plan of ground floor, Mikveh Israel chapel, Dec. 1970 and Jan. 1972, A.38.17a, Kahn Collection.

²¹ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 131–35.

²² Ruth Sarner to Louis Kahn, Feb. 17, 1972, A.38.11, Kahn Collection.

²³ Ruth Sarner to Morris Kravitz, Federation of Jewish Agencies, Feb. 15, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH.

²⁴ Email from Daniel Cohen to Ranana Dine, Dec. 10, 2014.

²⁵ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 133.

The Basic Idea from the very beginning
and
What makes this plan unique
is

The “Window Room”
Primary [*sic*] the Window Room or Area
is a device to give shield to glare (and)
(Note entrance to large areas with
windows in remote corner which
momentarily blinds the eye
before getting adjusted)

Can be made useful
as a room at the
same time.

($\$$)

↓

(The window is expensive
but the room cost
[*sic*] nothing)
This is it's [*sic*] initial
architectural quality
and uniqueness

Because we [*sic*] now we need more rooms
the use of the stairs in the “window room”
had to be abandoned and a new place be found for stairs.

The Entrance Lobby of the Synagogue is
given broadness and grace by making
the accommodations [*sic*] of entrance (cloakroom etc)
in the window room.

We cannot at any time (though there was expressed the promise of trying)
to substitute the characteristic
window room for another type
of window for the sake of
Architectural consistency

Louis I. Kahn,
Architect—Sept 6 72²⁶

²⁶ Copy of Louis Kahn, “Window Room,” Sept. 6, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. In the text we have preserved Kahn’s arrangement of words on the page to reproduce the visual effect he intended his statement to have.



Fig. 7. Louis I. Kahn, project for Mikveh Israel Synagogue with museum (left) and sanctuary joined, elevation, circa Oct. 9, 1972, charcoal on yellow trace (Kahn Collection, 030.I.A.615.67). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

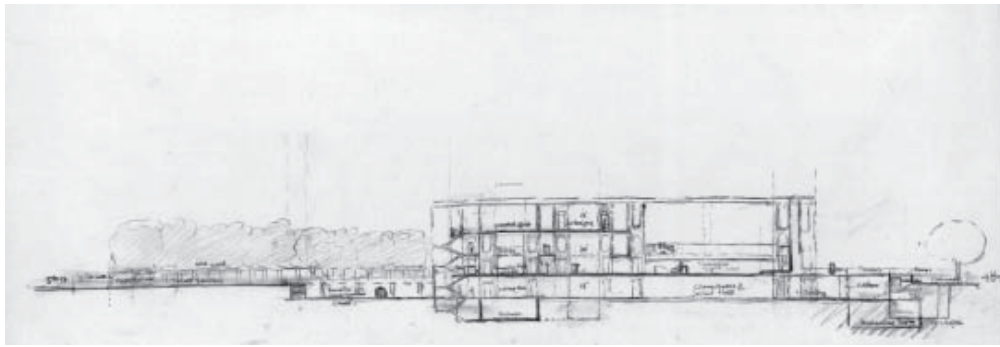


Fig. 8. Louis I. Kahn, project for Mikveh Israel Synagogue, longitudinal section with museum (left) and sanctuary joined, Oct. 9, 1972, charcoal/pastel on yellow trace (Kahn Collection, 030.I.A.615.48). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

In September a dispute that predated Kahn's hiring re-emerged. Sarner and the building committee wished for the two buildings to "share a common foyer."²⁷ Kahn's assistant, David Wisdom, had told Sarner on September 22, "You'll never have that." Shocked, Sarner ordered Kahn's office to stop work on the project until the issue was resolved.²⁸ At a meeting on October 9, Kahn showed the committee two very large drawings—an elevation and a longitudinal section—that represented his attempt to

²⁷ In an undated letter written prior to May 1961, the president of the congregation indicates that the museum and synagogue "may be joined by a central and spacious exhibit hall and lobby." Quoted in Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 92.

²⁸ Ruth Sarner to Louis Kahn, Sept. 25, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. Solomon did not have access to the actual date of the letter and hypothesized, correctly, that it was written before December 19 (Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 124). In the letter Sarner outlined the rationale for the common entrance space, which included the money-saving notion of having only one employee at a sales desk serving as salesperson and receptionist/guard.

fuse the museum and the synagogue, a step he was not happy to make (figs. 7 and 8).²⁹ He believed strongly that the sacred sanctuary should be separated from the secular museum. As far as the congregation was concerned, however, traditional synagogue architecture did not require such a strict separation of functions.

The first of Kahn's two drawings, the elevation, presents a clumsy junction of the two parts. The length to height proportion is ungainly, and the two doors, designed so at least the entrances would be separate, are awkwardly mismatched. Did Kahn deliberately make the architecture look bad in the hope that the committee might reject it? We will never know for sure. On October 10 Sarner wrote that the committee had appreciated the opportunity "to observe the manner in which you have apparently resolved the problem of a foyer linking the synagogue and the museum."³⁰ Her sentence hardly showed enthusiasm for the design. Sarner reiterated her expectation that Kahn would soon bring in a proposal to reduce the cost, estimated at this point to come to perhaps five million dollars, to the desired, drastically lower level.³¹

At the annual meeting of the congregation on December 10, Kahn presented another set of large drawings that returned to his preferred solution of two separate buildings. In the elevation the museum is on the left, and the sanctuary on the right. The two are joined below grade, but not at ground level (fig. 9). Kahn drew the elevation from a slightly lower position than he chose for the elevation of the joined buildings. In the latter he needed to have the point of view at a greater height in order to make clear that the two parts were fused. He did not need to do so in the December drawing, in which the separation of the buildings is clear. In the section drawing he indicated the location of all the functions that the building was to serve, as he had done two months earlier (fig. 10). Apparently Kahn; his attorney; Daniel Cohen; and another lawyer, Martin Spector, also met to discuss the new contract that Kahn had requested several months earlier. The meeting was unsuccessful, as they failed to reach an agreement on the contract.³²

²⁹ Figs. 7–10 appear in *The Louis I. Kahn Archive: Personal Drawings: The Completely Illustrated Catalogue of the Drawings in the Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*, 7 vols. (New York, 1988), 2:409, 398, 410, and 397, respectively.

³⁰ Copy of Ruth Sarner to Louis Kahn, Oct. 10, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. On October 19 Sarner reported on the meeting of October 9 to the Board of Managers. Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 134.

³¹ Minutes of the Board of Managers, July 7, 1972, ACMI.

³² Ruth Sarner to Daniel Cohen, Aug. 8, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH.

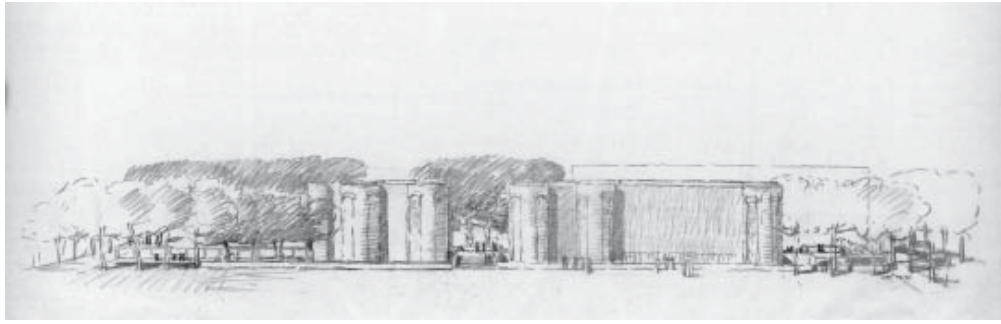


Fig. 9. Louis I. Kahn, project for Mikveh Israel Synagogue with museum (left) and sanctuary separate, elevation, Dec. 1972, charcoal on yellow trace (Kahn Collection, 030.I.A.615.68). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

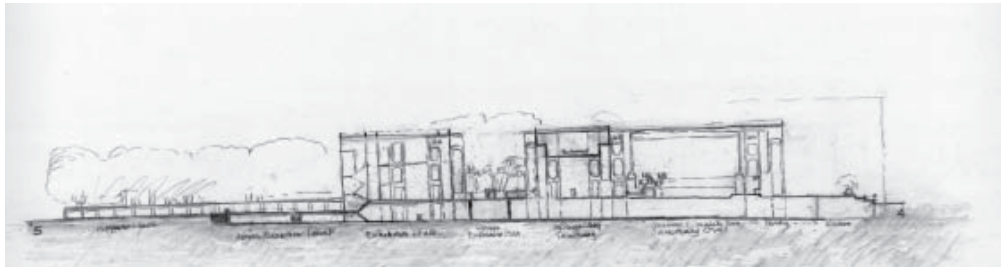


Fig. 10. Louis I. Kahn, project for Mikveh Israel Synagogue, longitudinal section with museum (left) and sanctuary separate, early Dec. 1972, charcoal on yellow trace (Kahn Collection, 030.I.A.615.47). Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Kahn's decision to present a design that defied the committee's specification of a single building was a disastrous move. As Sarner put it in a report to the congregation,

the architect brought to that meeting, without our prior knowledge or consent, yet another design incompatible with our specifications (requirements). He later advised that this, in essence a retrogression to already rejected concepts, represented only a partial step toward completion of the *initial* design phase.³³

On December 19 the building committee voted to fire Kahn. Sarner sent a copy of the committee's decision to William Fishman, a successful Philadelphia businessman who was not a member of Mikveh Israel but who was helping the action committee raise the funds to build the new

³³ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 134.

synagogue and museum.³⁴ Sarner's letter is telling, as it characterizes the mood of the meeting and the problems the congregation felt they faced with Kahn.

Dear Bill:

The enclosed memorandum of tonight's Building Committee meeting is the product of serious consideration of recent events beginning with the annual meeting and including the reviews given me by telephone by both Martin Spector and Daniel Cohen of the meeting with Kahn and his attorney. The year-long delay in reaching this 75% of completion point in the Schematic Development Phase was also taken into consideration, plus the protracted timetable suggested by Mr. Kahn. The additional factors which produced the two resolutions were Kahn's proven unreliability as to timing

unresponsiveness to our needs
financial irresponsibility
intractability

There was an enormous sense of relief which accompanied the decision. It was generally agreed, too, that this decision will be more beneficial than otherwise; we trust it will meet with your approval.

Your suggestions or response to the list of architects will be appreciated and an early meeting to discuss procedure might be in order.³⁵

The enclosed memorandum formally outlined the building committee's determination:

At a regular meeting of the Building Committee held Tuesday, December 19, 1972, the following resolutions were adopted:

That, in view of the difficulty in effecting a viable contractual relationship which will insure timely and satisfactory completion of the Mikveh Israel project, it is hereby resolved that counsel be instructed to terminate the relationship with Louis I. Kahn, Architect.

That, immediately upon termination of the present architectural agreement with Louis I. Kahn, the Building Committee shall promptly communicate with a list of suggested Architects to determine their availability and interest in assuming the project.

Both of the above passed unanimously. Present were Leonard Leventhal, Chairman, Henry Cohen, Hirsch Segal, Rabbi E. H. (?) Musleah, Meyer Klein, President of M. I., Cliff B and Ruth B. Sarner. Absent: Florence Finkel and Kate Solis-Cohen. Telephone proxy of consent from Jay Aster.

³⁴ Ruth Sarner to William Fishman, Dec. 19, 1972, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH.

³⁵ Ibid.

It was agreed that the above proceedings will be held in confidence until a new architect is appointed, and that it will then be Mrs. Sarner's responsibility to advise the Redevelopment Authority and OPDC, as well as any other official bodies necessary.

The following Architects will be reviewed as to philosophy, completed projects and reputations at the next meeting scheduled January 2, 1972 [*sic*]:

Mitchell Giurgolo [*sic*]

Venturi and Rauch

Bower and Bradley

Suer, Livingston and Demas

Norman Rice

Roy Larson of Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson

Cope and Lippincott

Moshe Safdi [*sic*] (Israeli)

Geddes, Brecher, Quales [*sic*] and Cunningham

Demchick, Berger and Dash

David Zuckerkandel

Copies to William S. Fishman, Ruth Sarner, Martin Spector, Esq., Daniel C. Cohen, Esq., Peter Lehrer³⁶

Ignorant of the synagogue's decision to fire Kahn, his office continued to work on the project. Indeed, there are drawings for the project dated as late as December 28.³⁷ Even as late as January 16, 1973, a representative of Kahn's office presented another proposal to Daniel Cohen.³⁸ The next day a letter from the president of the congregation, Meyer Klein, officially terminated the relationship with the architect.³⁹ On February 11 the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Solomon, *Kahn's Jewish Architecture*, 134.

³⁸ Memo to Daniel Cohen, Jan. 16, 1973, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. The congregation was not pleased to receive this latest set of plans. As Sarner wrote Cohen in a letter containing a litany of complaints against Kahn, "I completely empathize with your position yesterday, when Vince Rivera presented you with ANOTHER set of plans." Ruth Sarner to Daniel Cohen, Jan. 17, 1973, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. Cohen does not recall the precise day he went to Kahn's office to tell Kahn that he had been fired. It may have been after the visit of Vince Rivera to Cohen's office on January 16, or, possibly, after he had received the draft of the letter firing Kahn. Daniel Cohen, telephone conversation with Dine and Johnson, March 14, 2014. On January 16 Sarner telephoned a draft of that letter to Cohen's office, asking for his comments: "Mrs. Sarner called and dictated the following letter which she said that Mr. Klein has approved—should you want to make any changes, she has the authority to send out the letter over Mr. Klein's signature."

³⁹ Meyer Klein to Louis I. Kahn, Jan. 17, 1973, Daniel Cohen Papers, ANMAJH. The text has only minor adjustments in that suggested in the draft dictated over the phone to Daniel Cohen by Ruth Sarner (see above). The burden of the letter is as follows: "It is with deep regret that I must advise you of the decision to terminate our relationship with regard to the Mikveh Israel Mall project. We

building committee interviewed five architectural firms.⁴⁰ Minutes of a board of managers meeting held on April 10, 1973, document that “Mrs. Sarner moved, Daniel Cohen seconded the motion that the Congregation employ the architectural firm of Harbeson Hough Livingston and Larson (H2L2) to design the Mall Project. There was brief discussion as material demonstrating the firm’s capability was circulated. The motion carried unanimously.”⁴¹

We do not have a record of Kahn’s side of the story, but Daniel Cohen recalls that, by the time he visited Kahn’s office to deliver the news, Kahn had already intuited that his role in the Mikveh Israel project was finished. Cohen remembers walking to Kahn’s office, wondering how he would break the news. Seeing him enter, Kahn asked, “You’ve come to fire me, haven’t you?” Cohen, his burden instantly eased, replied, “Yes.”⁴²

Appendix

Gustav Klein to D. Hays Solis-Cohen, May 20, 1966, ANMAJH

Dear Hays:

As per conversation we had last Sabbath, I will endeavor to herewith give you in detail as briefly as possible, the many valid reasons for my objections to the present “set up” of building the mall Synagogue.

When the present Architectural Committee was appointed, I was not one of its chosen members, I was however asked by the Chairman to join the Committee, which I did; which was sometime after it was functioning.

The first meeting I attended, I was introduced to Mr. Kahn, and during various discussions, I made a couple of suggestions which he rejected with the comment, “No one tells me what to do, I tell them what to do.” I then asked, “Let me understand you; Does that mean, if I consulted you to design a three story house and you felt that it should be a two story, you would refuse to design the one I wanted?” He answered, “That is exactly right.” I mention this for you to draw your own conclusion.

appreciate your great personal commitment to the project since its inception and had hoped that we could work through with you to its successful completion. Time and cost factors, however, press heavily upon us and force this painful conclusion.”

⁴⁰ Minutes, Meeting of Board of Managers, Feb. 13, 1973, ACMI. The names of the interviewed firms are not noted.

⁴¹ According to Daniel Cohen’s recollection, the design H2L2 submitted, ironically, came in at five million dollars and was eventually reduced to three million. Email from Daniel Cohen to Ranana Dine, Dec. 10, 2014.

⁴² Email and telephone exchanges between Ranana Dine and Daniel Cohen, 2013.

His first model of the Synagogue was one with out any windows, all light he advised was to be artificial. I strenuously objected to this, he changed the model to the present one, using the towers or silos that are 21 feet from the Synagogue proper.

This design is a “take off” of the French bastile [*sic*], a model of which is on display at the Washington exhibit Mount Vernon Va. [a] photo of which I have in my files.

The present design has one narrow window in each of the towers which are 21 feet in diameter and not part of the Synagogue proper, therefor [*sic*] the only light for the Synagogue [*sic*] would be what daylight that trickles thru the arch openings separating the towers from the Synagogue.

I refer you to a booklet entitled “Recent American Synagogue Architecture” by the Jewish Museum, New York City, which features all the modern Synagogues that were displayed at their recent exhibit, including Mr. Kahn’s version of M.I.’s. It also contains various Rabbis, [*sic*] remarks.

I refer you to page 14 of the above book and take the liberty of quoting Rabbi Raphael Posner. Remarks pertaining to Synagogue windows.

A Synagogue should have windows facing towards Jerusalem (Babylonian Talmud) [(]Berachot 34b) (Rashi ad locum in order to be able to see the sky and achieve a suitable frame of mind for prayer) codified in the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer, Ch. 5 (Orach Chaim 90:4) The Zohar Pikudei, rules that there should be 12 windows, symbolic, perhaps, of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

On page 16 there is a lengthy article by Rabbi Seymour Siegel, Jewish Theological Seminary, which corroborates the above.

Mr. Kahn is an Artist and his designs are out of the ordinary yet each occupant of the various buildings he designed, all seem to voice the same complaints, “Not designed for its intended use.”

To bear out the above I take the liberty of refering [*sic*] you to an article in Horizon Magazine Sept. 1962 which carefully and quite eloquently describes his talents as well as his short comings, I am enclosing herewith pertinent copy of this article.

I also refer you to an article that appeared in the Evening Bulletin 3/12/1966 which describes Mr. Kahn’s Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building at the University of Penna. (The article is too lengthy for me to transcribe so will get a copy made next week and mail it to you.) I refer you to one comment,

“No other new building has such a reputation for being a failure as these Labs. do.) The article makes interesting reading on the many short comings.

In the Mikveh Israel Record (Nov 1963) it mentions the article that appeared in the New York Times, and I quote one sentence “Kahn’s buildings move the spectator tremendously even when they work less than well.”

I refer you to the American Federation of Labor Medical Center on Race St. Philadelphia. A personal call there, will give you an "Ear Full." The reply to my inquiry when I asked how they liked the building was, "There is so much wrong with this building, Its [*sic*] a mess.

No one on the Committee seems interested enough to make inquiries as to the practicability of this Man's finished product, and I cannot find any one of the ultimate users that have a good word to say about their adaptability.

I have no personal grievances against Mr. Kahn, but I think that we are entitled to a building that is practical and within our price, and this is neither.

Sincerely yours
Gus

P.S. Regarding the Towers, besides being of very little or no value they are quite an item of the cost of the building. Each one is 21 ft. in dia. each having an area of 346.36 sq. ft. a total for the 10—3463.6 sq. ft., based on Mr. Kahn's estimated cost of the building of \$30.00 per sq. ft. the total for the 10 silos would be \$103,908, which to my mind could be eliminated.

Copy to Philip Margolis.

Williams College

EUGENE J. JOHNSON and RANANA DINE