

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**USE THIS COPY
FOR DUPLICATING**

1. Name of Property

historic name Indian Steps Cabin
other names/site number Indian Steps Museum

2. Location

street & number Indian Steps Road N/A not for publication
city, town Airville N/A vicinity
state Pennsylvania code PA county York code 133 zip code 17302

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>3</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation & culture/ Museum

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation & culture/ Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Bungalow / craftsman

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Stone

Stucco

roof Asphalt

other Limestone tablets

Concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Situated on a terrace overlooking the Susquehanna River in southern York County, Pennsylvania, Indian Steps Cabin, as it was called by its builder, John Edward Vandersloot, represents an unusual combination of architectural styles. In essence the main building, erected in 1912, exhibits a kind of craftsman/bungaloid influence, yet it incorporates a variety of features which yield a very eclectic atmosphere. Masonry of various kinds of local, well-cut stones, forms the foundation and first floor walls. The second story is stucco on frame. The north side of the building is dominated by a stone tower which contains the interior stairwell and is surmounted by an observation room. An unusual feature of this structure is the inclusion of numerous cement panels containing inscriptions and embedded Indian artifacts, and which are variously placed in the masonry of the foundation, first floor and tower. The main building is situated about equidistance between Indian Steps Road and the Susquehanna River, on which it fronts. Two additional and contemporary contributing structures include the stone summer kitchen of complimentary style, located about 50 feet to the south. A likewise, complimentary picnic shed of stone and wood construction is located about 30 feet to the west of the main building. All three structures retain their original integrity, as no significant alterations have occurred in any of them.

In overall shape the Indian Steps Cabin first floor is essentially an "L", with its two arms radiating from a circular room called the "Kiva" (see Sketch). The second floor area is extended over the "L" in such a manner as to create basically a square outline at that level. The structure is covered by a hip (four-sided) roof. Three stone chimneys pierce the roof, while a fourth rises through the hip roof of the tower. The entire roof is covered with asphalt shingles.

The river side, or main facade shows a foundation of stone beneath a porch, a first floor exterior also of masonry, and a second floor exterior of stucco on frame. The dominant feature of this facade is the main doorway. A lintel of limestone, bearing the builder's inscription and date, is supported by limestone triangular jambs, on each of which is a life-size sculpted Indian figure, done by Thomas J. Carrol of York. The main door, and all other exterior doors are of vertical board and batten construction. Directly out from the front door, and over it, is a gabled hood porch roof. Beyond this, stone and cement steps and rails lead toward the river. The rest of the front porch deck is surrounded by wooden balustrade (see photographs).

Fenestration of this facade at the first floor level consists of three east-facing windows. Another entry door is toward the left side of the porch. All windows throughout the building are original one over one lights. In the first floor all windows are set in wooden frames within the masonry openings.

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The second floor contains, in essence, three bays, one on either side of a central bay which projects slightly beyond the others. Each of the side bays contain a single window. The central portion has four conjoined windows. All windows of the second story are surrounded by a simple wooden frame without backband moldings. The roof is interrupted above this facade by a large gabled dormer with three conjoined windows. The eaves of this facade, as in all others, are supported by brackets.

Also of note are the various inset panels of cement which contain embedded Indian artifacts of stone and ceramics. These are variously placed in all four exterior walls of the first floor and the tower.

The south side of the building has three windows. Joists of the second floor project through the walls. The second story has four windows, two of which are conjoined. A stone bench protrudes from the left side of the first floor wall. Cement panels flank the windows above, and are typical of the artifact panels with various designs outlined with Indian artifacts, and as seen throughout the structure. To the right a set of stone steps descends along the outside of the foundation. The handrail of this staircase also has embedded stone artifacts.

The rear, or west wall first floor has a curving projection to the left side, which is the outer wall of the "Kiva room". It is surmounted by a small porch enclosed with a wooden balustrade. The masonry of the first floor is penetrated by seven windows, and a single door to the far right. The second story features six windows. A door leads to the small porch over the "Kiva" projection. A small gabled dormer is centered in the attic roof.

The north facade is dominated by the stone tower which carries the interior stairwell to the second floor, attic, and observation room. The tower contains two windows, one at each interior landing. The observation room at the top of the tower is surrounded by three windows in each of its four sides. The first floor of this side has three windows, exclusive of those in the tower. The second floor also has three windows. Other recesses in this facade, as seen in the photographs, contain panels with decorative arrangements of artifacts.

The general character of the interior of the first floor of Indian Steps Cabin has prompted many visitors to equate it with Rhenish castles. Exposed masonry of the walls, stone floors, vertical board doors, with massive wrought iron hardware (with Indian Motifs), and huge, exposed ceiling beams, together with the stone stairwell in the tower, do indeed, render a castle-like atmosphere. However, it was the intention of the builder to portray various American Indian themes within the structure. These efforts are best displayed in the council, or "Kiva room", which is, in fact, a reasonable facsimile of a Pueblo Indian Kiva. The room is circular in plan. Its walls and floor are stone, and a stone bench protrudes from the wall and is continuous around it except where interrupted by two doors and the fireplace. Various cement panels are set in the floor, walls, and fireplace surround, which contain embedded stone and other Indian artifacts. In all cases the artifacts were placed so as to outline various Indian scenes and designs. This arrangement is true for all panels throughout the building. In the center of the

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"Kiva room" is a large, two-and-one-half ton, oval, blue sandstone table, which is supported on two masonry columns. Seven window openings in the north and west walls of the "Kiva" are made-up of leaded, stained-glass panes. These portray various Indian scenes. These stained-glass windows, here and in the tower, were designed and executed by J. Horace Rudy of York, PA.

The entry room (see Sketch) is also characterized by exposed masonry. A fireplace opening here has an unusual inset, iron plate, tent-shaped, wood stove (see Photographs). The floors of this room are random width planks. Various inscriptions in limestone plaques in this room list the names of local Indian tribes. The plaque above the fireplace opening is also set with artifacts and an inscription.

The kitchen (see sketch) is also of exposed masonry walls and beams above. Here the floor is covered with various colored slate flagstones. Artifacts also appear in various wall panels of the kitchen.

Leading up from the entry room, and within the tower, is the stairway to the second floor, attic and observation room. The walls and steps of the stairwell are all of local micascist masonry.

The second floor of the cabin was partitioned into seven guest bedrooms. Flooring on this level is of narrow pine. On the third or attic level there are wooden stairs leading up to the observation room of the tower.

Secondary buildings of this nomination consist of a summer kitchen and a picnic shed. The former is square in outline, with masonry walls, stone flooring, and wood roof. Three huge cut stones span the side walls and serve as joists. A gabled dormer protrudes from the east side of the roof. Two single-light windows occur in the north, east, and west walls. The picnic shed is actually a rectangular gabled roof structure over three conjoined stone fireplaces, or "barbecue pits", which are built into a bank.

There have been no significant alterations to any of these structures, save re-roofing with asphalt shingles, and the removal of one plaster partition wall on the second floor of the main building. The original integrity of the buildings remains intact. The second floor bedrooms now contain free-standing exhibit cases which display the development of local American Indian cultures.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Education

Period of Significance
1912 - 1939

Significant Dates
1912

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Keyworth, Charles A., Architect

Werner, Frank, Contractor, builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

John Edward Vandersloot, a prominent York, Pennsylvania, attorney, built Indian Steps Cabin as a memorial and museum dedicated to a culture with which he had become deeply fascinated. The inscription in the front door lintel clearly bespeaks his intentions: "I entreat all who pass this way to safely guard and preserve these former possessions of, and monuments to, an ancient Indian people. John Edward Vandersloot, owner and builder INDIAN STEPS CABIN - 1912." The dedication remarks of A. F. McCollough (1941) underscore the significance of the structure and the useage intended by its builder. "Today we dedicate a plaque on Indian Steps Cabin to the memory of ...a man who saw ...that perpetuating the past for the edification and education of generations to come, was of importance and necessary." The word education best describes the significance of this place and its purpose. Vandersloot designed it literally as a museum exhibit case, with its labels and artifacts permanently embedded in the display, i.e., the plaques and panels incorporated into the masonry. He undertook this endeavor at a time when most museums in this country were in their infancy, or not yet conceived. Carnegie Museum at Pittsburgh, and the University Museum at Philadelphia, did already exist. More strictly contemporary were the State Museum at Harrisburg, and the Mercer Museum at Doylestown. (Coleman 1939:Appendix Y). Each of these other museums devoted some space to the exhibit and explanation of American Indian cultures, but only Indian Steps was totally concerned with the display of Indian artifacts. In addition, it was one of the first museums in the country to include American Indian thematic features in the architecture of the building.

The cabin, as Vandersloot called it, was built on a narrow terrace along the Susquehanna River, in a then, very remote portion of southern York County, Pennsylvania. The terrace and especially adjacent islands in the river, were formerly inhabited by numerous Indians as is evident from their frequently encountered artifactual remains. The term Indian Steps refers to some niches, which according to local tradition, were cut into the rock at the edge of the river as a convenience for fishing and descending to the water. The steps, whatever their origin, are now submerged beneath the backwater of Holtwood Dam.

Vandersloot found and acquired thousands of local Indian relics. Like most antiquarians of his day, he was anxious to have others view his collections. However, it was the manner of his display, the number of people he encouraged to see them, and especially his efforts to build a monument to preserve the memory of these

See continuation sheet

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former cultures, which set John Edward Vandersloot apart from the ordinary antiquarian. The stair rails, and stone walls of the first floor exterior of the cabin are inset with numerous cement panels in which he secured thousands of stone and ceramic Indian artifacts. Other stone plaques bear the inscribed names of various Indian tribes and events in their local history. Similar plaques and panels occur in the interior of the building and especially in the floors and walls of the "Kiva" or conference room.

From the time the building was completed and until 1936, Judge Vandersloot, as he was affectionately called, hosted numerous visitors, including many Indians, whom he invited to his unusual museum, with its guest bedrooms, summer kitchen and picnic facilities. For many years the York Bar Association held its summer outing at the site. Thousands of boys from nearby Camp Minqua, of the York YMCA, have visited the museum since 1924. Various conferences were also held there over the years, including the 1940 annual meeting of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology.

Upon the death of the builder in 1936, the Pennsylvania Water and Power Company (subsequently known as the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company) purchased the building and grounds. Three years later the structure was leased to the Conservation Society of York County, with the understanding that it would be maintained by the Society as a public museum. In 1956, the Pennsylvania Power and Light Co. sold the building to the Society for one dollar. Over the past 50 years the Conservation Society has added and improved exhibits on the second floor of the museum. In 1988 it reported 13,050 visitors to what McElhinny and Sturgeon (1930) called Vandersloot's "... repository of former possessions of ... an ancient Indian people who once lived upon the romantic and picturesque Susquehanna River."

Judging from the founding dates given in the American Museum's Directory (1988), Vandersloot's Indian Steps Museum is among the oldest in the country entirely devoted to American Indian cultures. The fact that his original displays are literally incorporated into the fabric of the building, renders it a most unique museum.

It would be difficult to document any architectural or museological influence which Indian Steps Cabin may have had upon other museums. Indeed, it would appear that there are no other museums exactly like it. Clearly the entreaty of its builder to preserve the remains of former American Indian cultures is a philosophy whose time has subsequently arrived.

9. Major Bibliographical References

McElhinny, Charles M., & R M. Sturgeon, Indian Steps Cabin, York, PA, 1930. (brochure at at the Indian Steps Museum).

McCullough, A. E. & William Kurtz, The story of Indian Steps: Addresses delivered on the occasion of the dedication of a Tablet to John Edward Vandersloot, York, Pa 1941

The Official Museum Directory, The American Association of Museums, MacMillan, Inc., N.Y., 1988.

Coleman, Lawrence V., The Museum in America, The American Association of Museums, Washington, 1939.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 9.6 acres

UTM References

A 18 382320 4413280
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a metal pipe along Indian Steps road, northward along said road approximately 807 feet to a granite monument, thence northerly, 81 feet to a large poplar tree, thence northeasterly 61 feet to a double poplar tree, thence northerly 237 feet to a large buttonwood tree on the west bank of the Susquehanna River, thence southeasterly along the shoreline of the river 934 feet to a point, thence

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary description given above reflects the legally recorded boundary lines for the single lot upon which the resource is situated. The lot described contains the nominated building and other structures, together with all historically associated land.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Barry C. Kent Ph.D.

organization _____ date June 30, 1989

street & number 485 Roxbury Rd. telephone 717-938-4737

city or town York Haven, state PA zip code 17379

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Indian Steps Cabin

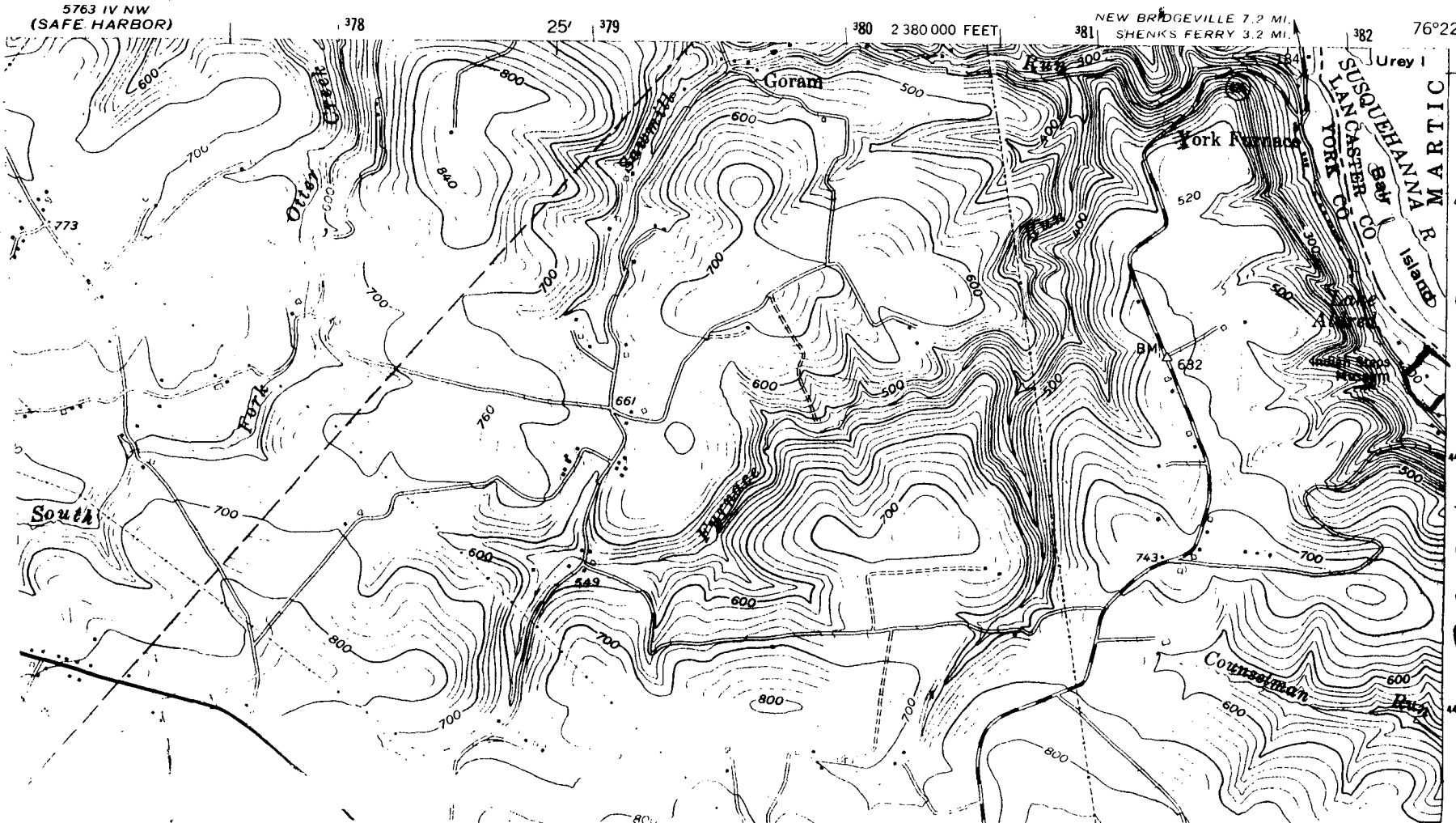
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Verbal Boundary Description continued:

southwesterly 386 feet to a point, thence southwesterly following a small stream
240 feet to a 24 inch metal drain pipe, the point of beginning.

AIRVILLE QUADRANGLE
 PENNSYLVANIA
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5763 IV
 CONESTOGA

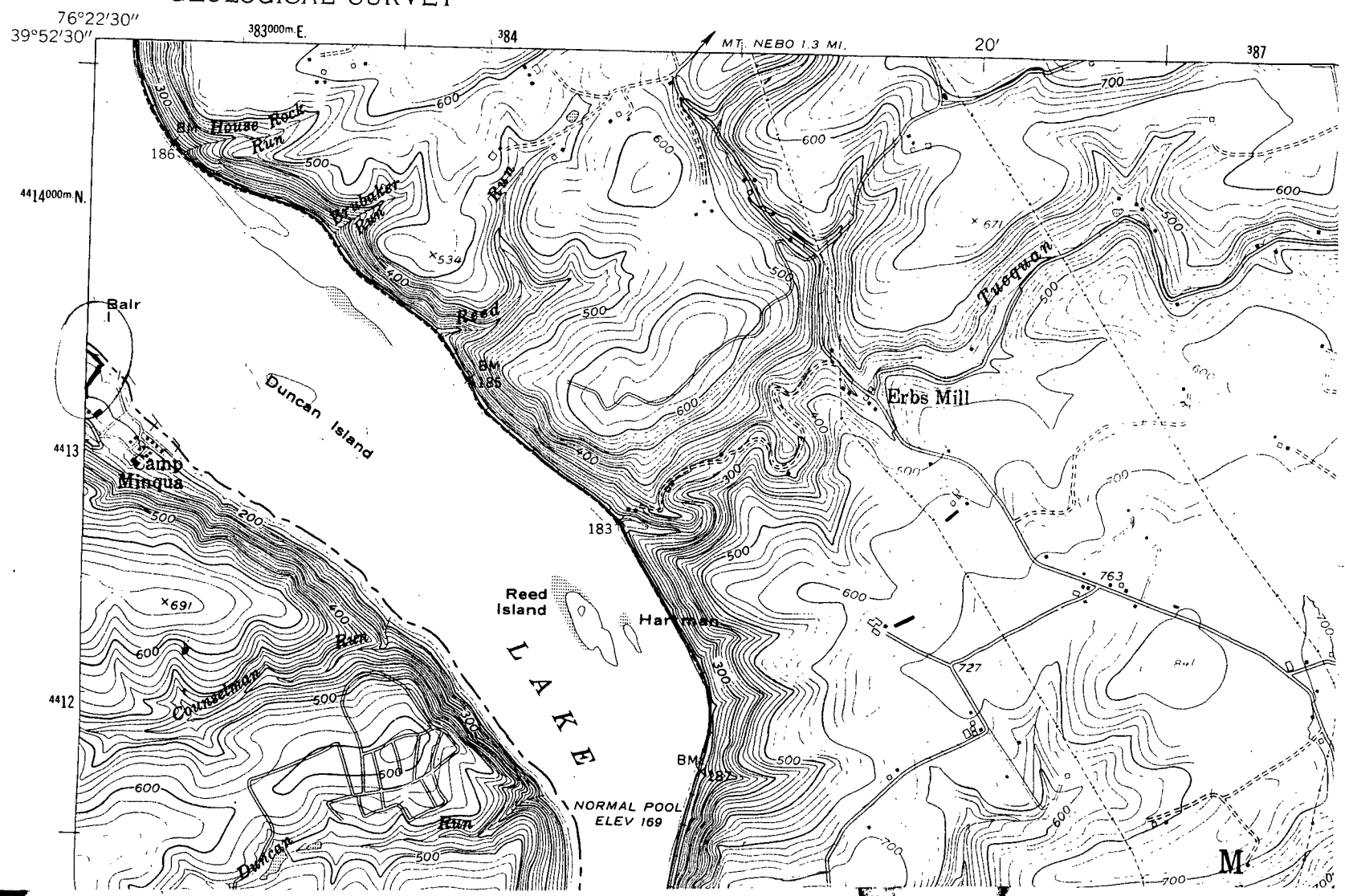


*Indian Springs Museum
 York Co. - Airville Road
 Zone 18
 E 382320 N 4413250*

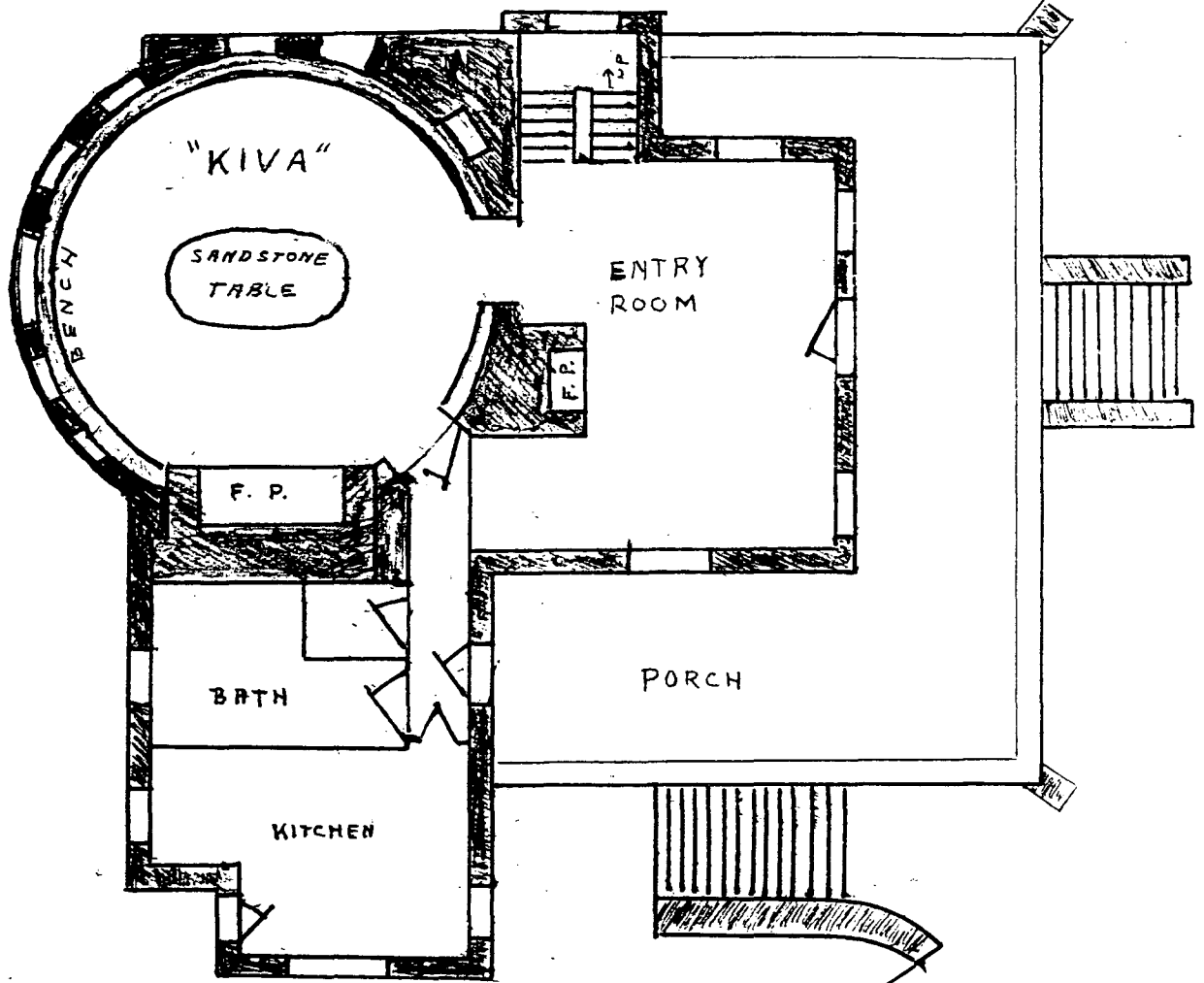
Indian Steps Mine in
York Co.
Zone F. Holwood Quad
E 382320 N 443280

573 IV NW
(SAFE HARBOR)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



SKETCH
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
INDIAN STEPS CABIN
YORK COUNTY



SUN ☐

SCALE
10 FEET
BCK 1989