

Exhibits depict JFK's life and presidency

By Bill Glovin

His administration was sometimes called "Camelot" because of the social causes and youthful idealism associated with it during its brief span. Now, after years of planning and controversy, one of Boston's newest attractions, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, has opened as a tribute to and appropriate symbol of his life and presidency.

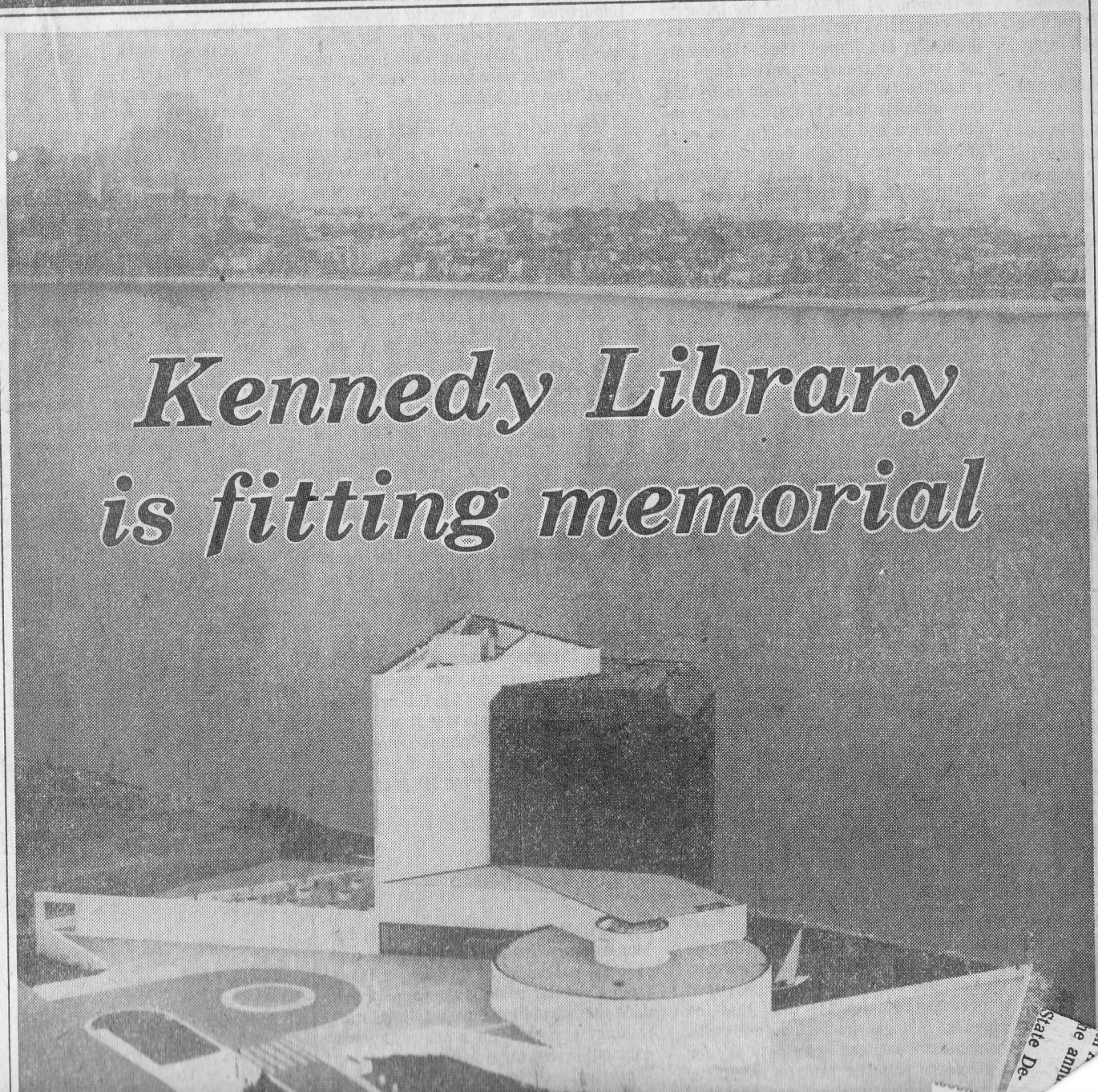
The library has come out of 15 years of fund raising and site switching. It sits on Dorchester Bay at Columbia Point on the campus of the University of Massachusetts.

Designed by I.M. Pei and Partners of New York, the building is highly impressive as it overlooks the city where John F. Kennedy first gained political prominence. The

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bayside site gives the library the solitude it deserves, as well as a symbolic rightness

Kennedy Library is fitting memorial



The architecture of the \$20.8-million building appears slightly abstract and disjointed as its geometric forms fail to mesh gracefully. The unusual style creates a feeling of space and tense energy, much like the Smithsonian's Hirshorn Museum in Washington, D.C. From within, it gives a sense of technology turned into monumentality with a grand, formal, triangular hall of white concrete 70 feet long and 125 feet high that cuts into a rectangular glass building 80 feet long, 80 feet wide, and 115 feet high. This glass pavilion is the library's most impressive architectural feature.

Among I.M. Pei's other projects are the National Airlines Terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport in Queens, the Spelman Hall Dormitory at Princeton University, One Wall Street Plaza in New York, and the National Gallery of Art East Building in Washington, D.C.

The John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library in Boston.

Memorable view

When you are inside the library's main entrance and out of the long lines and windy sea air that face visitors to this five-month-old attraction, the mezzanine level provides a glorious view of Boston Harbor and the spectacular pavilion above and below. From there, the visitor is ushered down a ramp into one of two 250-seat theaters located in the building's rounded wing. The spacious theaters and an underground exhibition area contain the tourist attraction of the library.

Upstaged by the museum is an impres-

sive archives with official and personal papers of the president; records of agencies under his charge; and books, audio tapes, and film for researchers and historians. All this is tucked neatly into the top of the nine-story triangular tower in two tightly compressed floors. Only one of the nonmuseum floors in the triangular building is open to the public. The rest contain offices.

The museum tour begins with a captivating half-hour movie tracing Kennedy's path to the presidency. Visitors are then brought to the exhibit area, which is meticulously laid out and presented in a kind of theatrical drama. Chermayeff and Geisner Asso-

ciates of New York designed the displays with the help of historian-advisers, and it was all closely reviewed by the Kennedy family. Visitors are left in the exhibit area to spend as much time as they need to take it all in.

A look at the family

Although the president's career dominates most of the exhibits, special attention is paid to brother Robert and the rest of the Kennedy family. The first of many sentimental wall-size photographs is a wide See KENNEDY, Page D-4

Kennedy Library is a fitting tribute

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group shot of the family. A history line runs around the top of the exhibits. It traces world events in parallel order to Kennedy family events that date back to the meeting of John F. Kennedy's great-grandparents in Ireland.

There are also familiar objects like the torn flag and Navy jacket from the heroic PT 109 rescue, the original draft of the inauguration address, and the famous rocker that Kennedy used to soothe his back. And then there are the more subtly interesting items like scraps of paper with Kennedy's doodles all over them and a letter from Lillian Carter telling Kennedy that working in the Peace Corps after her husband's death gave renewed purpose to her life.

The impact of most of the documents and memorabilia is reinforced by effective audio and video tracks, slide projections, and moving photo montages of the 1960 presidential campaign. It is also fascinating to witness highlights of press conferences with the Ken-

edy wit on display, audio clips of the Nixon-Kennedy debate, and a slide show of a typical day for Kennedy in the White House. All the visual effects are especially entertaining and educational for children.

At the end of the museum, there is a substantial but condensed section exclusively for Robert Kennedy. It starts with a short film that traces his passion for working toward racial equality and depicts the close working relationship between the president and his brother while he served as JFK's attorney-general. There are also a number of effective displays and handsome wall-size photos in this section.

Although the museum is filled with sentiment, details of the assassinations have been avoided. Life, rather than death, is accented. As the visitor exits into the great hall, an 18-foot photograph of the president walking through a grassy field in Cape Cod sunlight appears. This final photograph, set to reflect the light through the opening of the hall, represents the end of life and evokes a sense of great personal loss.

The library succeeds magnificently in presenting and promoting an image of the man and his office. The combination of politics, patriotism, history, and emotion make the long lines and 75-cent admission fee seem easily bearable. It is a building worth visiting and a tour that will stay in the heart for years to come.

Bill Glovin is a staff writer for The Record.