

2 CONTRACTS LET FOR AIR MUSEUM

Preliminary Work to Begin on Smithsonian Branch

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Work is about to begin on the design of a large new museum for the space age in the nation's capital. The Government's National Air and Space Museum, a branch of the Smithsonian Institution, will be at one of the city's most conspicuous sites—on the Mall between the Capitol and the Washington Monument.

Architectural and engineering contracts have just been awarded to two firms, Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum of St. Louis and Mills, Petticord & Mills of Washington. The announcement was made by the General Services Administration, the agency in charge of Federal construction.

The new building will rank with Washington's more important institutions by virtue of its subject, size and situation. Fronting Independence Avenue from 5th to 7th Street, it will be directly across from the National Gallery of Art on the main planning axis that is the architectural heart of the city and is lined with some of its most monumental landmarks.

Large Building Planned

The new building will also be of monumental size and style; about as large as the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology just being completed diagonally across the Mall.

The museum will replace the old Aircraft Building and will incorporate exhibits of aeronautical history and space exploration now partly housed in a temporary Quonset hut on the Smithsonian grounds.

It will be the new home for such old favorites as the Lindbergh plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, the Wright brothers' early equipment, the first United States spacecraft, Freedom, and rockets that now stand outdoors in gleaming contrast to the Smithsonian's dark Victorian buildings, some of which were built more than a century ago.

Cost estimates for the museum are \$38 million, and the preliminary design, for which Congress has approved \$511,000, will take a year. After that, Congress will appropriate building funds, probably in the 1965 Federal construction budget. Total design and construction time will be two to five years.

Challenging Problem

Architects consider the design of these large structures along the Mall one of the capital's most challenging problems. Newer buildings are beginning to move toward modern solutions, retaining the spirit, if not the forms, of such classical neighbors as the National Gallery.

According to a spokesman for Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, the National Air and Space Museum will be "a building of its time," and "will be in the contemporary idiom, without a question."

The St. Louis architects were also part of the architectural team for one of Washington's newest Government office structures, the Civil Service Building No. 9, in the southwest redevelopment area.

A modern, modular design of white stone, it has been praised highly by those who like it and compared to a three-dimensional IBM card by those who don't. Among the firm's most recent buildings is the new St. Louis planetarium.