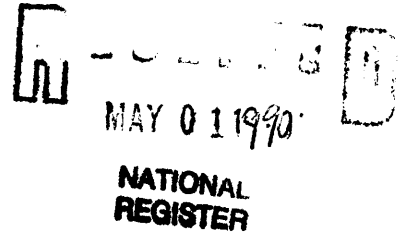


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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.

1. Name of Property

historic name Webster Auditorium  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 1201 North Galvin Parkway (Papago Park) NA not for publication  
city, town Phoenix NA vicinity  
state Arizona code AZ county Maricopa code 013 zip code 85008

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>1</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.

Shreen Deiner 4/25/90  
Signature of certifying official Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Amy Federman 6/14/90  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture/auditorium

Education/research facility

Other/administrative facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture/auditorium

Education/research facility

Other/administrative facility

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Pueblo Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Adobe

Stucco

roof Asphalt

other Log Vigas

Sandstone entry terrace

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**SUMMARY**

Located in the desert of east Phoenix, the Webster Auditorium of the Desert Botanical Garden is a single story Pueblo Revival style building. Regularly spaced wood vigas punctuate the stuccoed adobe walls. A stepped parapet detail is repeated at each corner. A flagstone terrace and lush native desert landscaping surround the building. Additions to the rear of the auditorium in 1968, 1972 and 1989 are located so as to maintain the integrity of the original building to a great degree. The additions are of the same architectural style as Webster Auditorium and thus do not distract from the auditorium's original appearance. Webster Auditorium is a significant example of its building type and style.

**SETTING**

Located in the Salt River Valley of the Sonoran Desert, the Desert Botanical Garden lies in the eastern portion of the city of Phoenix. At the time of its founding, the Garden was five miles from the developed area of Phoenix and seven miles from downtown. Papago Park, which surrounds the Garden, protects the unique desert environment from the development of east Phoenix.

Webster Auditorium is located near the center of the Desert Botanical Garden, south of and adjacent to the core garden area. The approximately one half acre portion of the core garden surrounding the Auditorium (of the total of 123.75 Garden acres) consists of mature plantings of cacti and other native vegetation. Some of the plants in this area were part of the original plantings of the late 1930's. Similar vegetation surrounds the immediate area of Webster Auditorium. Among the more prominent species are *Stenocereus stellatus*, *Stenocereus marginatus*, *Pachycereus pringlei* (Cordon), *Lophocereus schottii* (Senita) and *Opuntia fulgida* (Jumping Cholla).

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South of the Webster Auditorium rises a rocky butte, one of the Papago Buttes. Historically, a parking lot was located between the Auditorium and the butte. This parking lot has been abandoned and is currently being planted in desert vegetation. Another parking lot to the east of the Auditorium has also been relocated to allow for additional desert plantings.

DESCRIPTION

Exterior

Webster Auditorium consists of a single story irregularly shaped floor plan. At one end of the rectangular auditorium are the former guest quarters, now occupied by the director's offices. At the other end, business offices are placed at a forty-five degree angle to the auditorium.

Exterior walls are constructed of adobe with an irregular stucco texture finish. Battered adobe buttresses anchor two exterior corners and the parapet repeats a step-up pattern at each building corner. Non-structural wood vigas penetrate walls at roof height. A single chimney is located between the auditorium and the guest wing. Steel casement windows are topped with exposed wood headers. The exterior doors are of two styles, vertical plank and French.

The flat roof is constructed of exposed wood beams overlaid with planking and topped with asphalt roofing. The tile veranda roof is in a shed configuration.

A sandstone entry terrace with stuccoed walls and steps down to the ground level borders the east end of the building.

Interior

The appearance of the interior of Webster Auditorium is very much the same as when it was constructed. The adobe walls are plastered and the viga and plank ceiling is exposed above. Original murals painted in an Aztec motif by Oscar Strobel decorate the walls over the windows and doors and the arched door openings. The floors are polished concrete. Recessed bookshelves line two walls of the auditorium. Some of the original furnishings acquired in Nogales are still intact, including the tin chandeliers, table and chairs, and candlesticks. The desert landscape painting located over the auditorium fireplace is also original.

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ALTERATIONS AND INTEGRITY

Several additions have been made to Webster Auditorium since its construction in 1939. In 1968, the Richter Library was added to the rear of the building. This addition is constructed of concrete block walls with a stucco finish and a flat precast concrete tee roof. Also in 1968 the tile veranda roof and the wrought iron gates and window grilles were added. The Earle Herbarium was added to the complex in 1972. The Herbarium is located adjacent to the Richter Library and is constructed of similar materials. The veranda roof was extended to connect the Herbarium with the Library and brick pavers were installed in the courtyard. In 1989, a kitchen addition was attached to the Richter Library.

The additions to Webster Auditorium have not compromised the integrity of the building. All additions are located to the rear of the building. When viewed from the front and sides the appearance of the Auditorium has changed very little. Although constructed of modern materials, the design of the additions is highly compatible with the Auditorium, each having incorporated a similar massing, a flat roof with parapets and a stucco finish.

In 1989, Webster Auditorium was restored to its original condition by the architectural firm of Vernon Swaback Associates. On the exterior, rotted wood vigas were replaced with new wood to match the original vigas, the stucco finish was stabilized, original exterior openings were restored with French doors and the sandstone steps from the terrace were reconstructed to match the original design. On the interior, the viga and plank ceiling was re-exposed. Additional lighting was added in the auditorium. Mechanical and electrical systems were updated, allowing the removal of exposed conduit and mechanical units on both the exterior and the interior of the building. The Desert Botanical Garden has sensitively maintained the original character of the Auditorium while necessarily accommodating the needs of a growing institution.

**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  
Conservation  
Science

Period of Significance

1939-1940

Significant Dates

1939

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Gilmore and Ekman Architects  
Broman and Chapman Builders

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

SUMMARY

The Desert Botanical Garden Webster Auditorium was constructed in 1939 following a period of rapid growth in the Phoenix area. In an attempt to protect, appreciate and understand the natural desert habitat of the area, the Arizona Cactus and Native Flora Society founded the Garden in 1937. Webster Auditorium played a singular and indispensable role in serving the functions of the Garden. The building, constructed of materials and in a style appropriate to the desert environment, was used not only as a location for lectures and classes, but also served as a site for establishing a seed collection and studying the uses of desert plants. Thus, Webster Auditorium is nominated under Criterion A for its association with education, research and the conservation of desert plant life. It has been found to be significant in the areas of education, conservation and science. The Period of Significance for Webster Auditorium dated 1939-1940, from its construction to the end of the historic period as defined by the National Register of Historic Places.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Arizona Cactus and Native Flora Society was established on April 18, 1934, organized from an informal group headed by Gustav Starck. The group regularly met at Starck's ranch in Scottsdale to discuss cacti and succulents. Gustav Starck, an engineer with the Salt River Valley Water User's Association, was born in Sweden. In 1919, he moved from Wisconsin to Arizona for his wife's health. With a state permit, he collected native plants and began an extensive research garden on his ranch.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

"Boyce Thompson's Curious Garden in the Desert," Arizona Highways, April, 1978.

Fritz, Elizabeth. "A Garden Chronicle, Fifty Years of Planting and Growing," Agave, Volume 1, Number 2, Spring, 1985.

Platt, Rod. "Golden Bloom," Phoenix Gazette, February 17, 1989.

Young, John V. The State Parks of Arizona. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.

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:

Desert Botanical Garden Archives

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 0.5 acre

UTM References

A 12 41125010 37102460  
 Zone Easting Northing

C         

B           
 Zone Easting Northing

D         

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A 12 41220m E 3702475m N, B 12 41280m E 3702475m N, C 12 41280m E 3702410m N, D 12 41220m E 3702410m N.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes Webster Auditorium and that portion of the core garden which most directly contributes to the building's significance and which has historically been associated with it. The boundary excludes those portions of the Garden which have modern parking lots and newer facilities. This boundary is part of the Historic Preservation Overlay Zoning as determined by the Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Carol Russell, Architect

organization Otwell Associates Architects date December 20, 1989

street & number 121 East Goodwin Street telephone (602) 445-4951

city or town Prescott state Arizona zip code 86303

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By 1934, Phoenix was experiencing a period of expansive growth and the population swelled to over 50,000. Development in the form of farming, mining and construction was destroying the native desert habitat at a rapid rate. Most new citizens failed to appreciate the desert plants, preferring instead the lawns, flowers and trees of their former mid-western and eastern homes.

The goal of the Arizona Cactus and Native Flora Society was to preserve the desert through the creation of a botanical garden. Through the display of native plants, the society sought to develop a public appreciation of native plant species. Starck believed a botanical garden of international importance would attract tourists and notoriety to Phoenix and would be "a valuable gem" in the city's crown.

Gertrude Webster was elected president of the Society in May of 1936. A native of Vermont, she had inherited a large family fortune from a lumber business. Through her leadership, the idea of a botanical garden began to take shape. On January 2, 1937, the Society was incorporated as a non-profit corporation. On May 30, 1937, it became a member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America and adopted a slogan, "Not to destroy, but to glorify." Lectures were held at Gertrude Webster's home on Camelback Mountain. Speakers included Jack Whitehead of the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Dr. Forrest Shreve of the Carnegie Desert Laboratory in Tucson, and Professor John J. Thornber of the Botany Department of the University of Arizona.

The site of the Desert Botanical Garden was once an Indian townsite. In 1916, the land was part of a several thousand acre tract owned by the United States Government and was made available to Phoenix as a city park. The land was later established as Papago Saguaro National Monument, but on April 7, 1930 the national monument status was abolished by an amendment to the act. On July 7, 1932, the act allowed the state to allocate land to various groups. By the time the site was proposed for the Garden, the property was part of Papago Park. It was an ideal location for a desert garden, featuring both gently rolling hills and flat areas where plants from desert climates around the world could flourish. On July 1, 1938 a permit was granted by the State Land

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Department and the Department of Game and Fish for the Society to occupy "certain lands in the former Papago Saguaro National Monument for an indefinite period." The permit stipulated that the propagation and culture of cacti and native flora begin within six months.

The preliminary layout for the Garden was designed by Charles Gibbs Adams, the Los Angeles landscape architect who designed the estates of William Randolph Hearst and Cecil B. DeMille. Webster assisted with the design and helped raise \$40,000, one-fourth of which she donated. The first plantings of donated and salvaged cacti occurred on December 12, 1938. On February 12, 1939, the Desert Botanical Garden was officially dedicated in a ceremony attended by Governor Robert T. Jones, Mayor Walter Thalheimer, and two hundred dignitaries and local citizens.

Scott Haselton, editor and publisher of the Cactus and Succulent Journal, recommended George Lindsay for the Desert Botanical Garden's first director. Lindsay had just completed his junior year at San Diego State College. After serving as director for one year, he returned to college. Lindsay is now Director Emeritus of the California Academy of Science.

Webster Auditorium was constructed in 1939 and dedicated on January 21, 1940. Fifteen hundred persons attended the ceremony. The Auditorium "promoted the Garden from a mere planting ground to an institution of scientific study" by providing a lecture hall as well as an office and apartment for the director and guest rooms for visiting scientists.

Webster Auditorium was designed by architects Gilmore and Ekman and constructed by Broman and Chapman, low bidders at \$13,000. The Society had only \$8,000 in its treasury, but Gertrude Webster loaned the balance. Charles Gibbs Adams had recommended the Auditorium have "an Indian feeling with a Mexican touch." Thus, the building was designed in the Pueblo Revival style and constructed in adobe. The flat roof, stepped parapets, and buttressed walls mimic the surrounding mountains while maintaining a low profile appropriate to the flat site. Mexican chairs, table, and chandeliers were purchased in Nogales. The main hall was decorated with murals in an Aztec motif by Oscar Strobel. Finally, a bell from the Webster ranch was placed at the entrance.



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Describing the Desert Botanical Garden, the Society states that it is "a living museum dedicated to education, conservation and research. The Garden encourages and promotes understanding of our unique desert habitats and the use of arid-land plants and water saving techniques in landscaping." As a part of the Desert Botanical Garden, Webster Auditorium has played an indispensable part in the fulfillment of those goals. Webster Auditorium was the center of activity of the Garden. The day-to-day operation of the Garden was administered from the office in the Auditorium. Educationally, lectures and weekly classes for adults and children were held in the Auditorium. Gertrude Webster hosted tea parties in the main hall. Conservation efforts included initiating a seed collection, advocating the saving of desert habitat, and encouraging the use of desert plants in landscaping. Scientific research included the beginning of an international seed exchange program and the study of the medicinal uses of desert plants.

Additions to Webster Auditorium in 1968, 1972, and 1989 have enhanced the ability of the Auditorium to serve the needs of the Desert Botanical Garden. The Richter Library (1969) and the Earle Herbarium (1972) have allowed the expansion of the educational and scientific functions of the Garden. Although constructed of modern materials, the additions are appropriate in form and are compatible with the Auditorium. The location of the additions at the rear of the building changes the appearance of the Auditorium very little, and, in fact, the exterior space is enhanced by the creation of a sheltered courtyard.

As a "living museum" dedicated to preserving and understanding desert plant species, the Desert Botanical Garden shares a similar goal and history with but one other facility in Arizona, the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum. Located sixty miles east of Phoenix, the Arboretum was dedicated on April 6, 1930. It was established by William Boyce Thompson, a wealthy philanthropist who made his fortune in mining. He was founder and first president of Inspiration Copper Company at Globe-Miami and Magma Copper Company. An avid conservationist, he sought to preserve a portion of the desert for future generations. Like the Desert Botanical Garden, the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum serves as a public education and research facility, promoting an understanding of the growth and uses of native plant species.

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The collection of desert plants housed at the Desert Botanical Garden is nationally significant. Only one other desert plant collection, the Huntington Botanical Gardens, rivals the Desert Botanical Garden in its scale, variety and presentation of desert plants. The Huntington is located in San Marino, California and was founded in 1907. Its gardens consist of a variety of plant collections of which the desert group is only one. The Desert Botanical Garden and the Huntington Botanical Garden are considered to be the two most important collections of desert plants in the United States.

Webster Auditorium, as a part of the Desert Botanical Garden, has played a unique role in the history of the Phoenix area. At a time when the desert was viewed primarily as an obstacle to development, or at the very least, as unsightly, the Desert Botanical Garden sought to enhance the public understanding and appreciation of desert habitat. Webster Auditorium, appropriate to the desert in its materials and form and functioning as an education and research facility, served the Desert Botanical Garden in its purpose.

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Section number Photo- Page 1  
graphs

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Photograph No. 1  
Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Photographer Unknown  
Date: 1954  
Negative at Desert Botanical Garden  
1201 North Galvin Parkway  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
View looking north

Photograph No. 2  
Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
R.C. Proctor Photographer  
Date: Unknown  
Negative at Desert Botanical Garden  
1201 North Galvin Parkway  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
View looking northwest

Photograph No. 3  
Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Photographer Unknown  
Date: Unknown  
Negative at Desert Botanical Garden  
1201 North Galvin Parkway  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
View looking south - southwest

Photograph No. 4  
Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Photographer Unknown  
Date: Unknown  
Negative at Desert Botanical Garden  
1201 North Galvin Parkway  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
View looking southwest

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Section number Photo- Page 2  
graphs

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Photograph No. 5

Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Photographer Unknown.  
Date: Unknown  
Negative at Desert Botanical Garden  
1201 North Galvin Parkway  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
View looking southwest

The following information is the same for photographs six (6) through twenty-three (23):

Webster Auditorium  
Phoenix, Arizona  
William Otwell, Photographer  
Date: November 21, 1989  
Negative at Otwell Associates  
121 East Goodwin Street  
Prescott, Arizona 86303

Photograph No. 6

View looking north

Photograph No. 7

View looking east

Photograph No. 8

View looking east

Photograph No. 9

View looking southwest

Photograph No. 10

View looking southwest

Photograph No. 11

View looking west - northwest

Photograph No. 12

View looking northwest

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Section number            Photo- Page   3    
                           graphs

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Photograph No. 13  
View looking north

Photograph No. 14  
View looking northwest

Photograph No. 15  
View looking north

Photograph No. 16  
View looking north - northwest

Photograph No. 17  
View looking south - southwest

Photograph No. 18  
View looking north

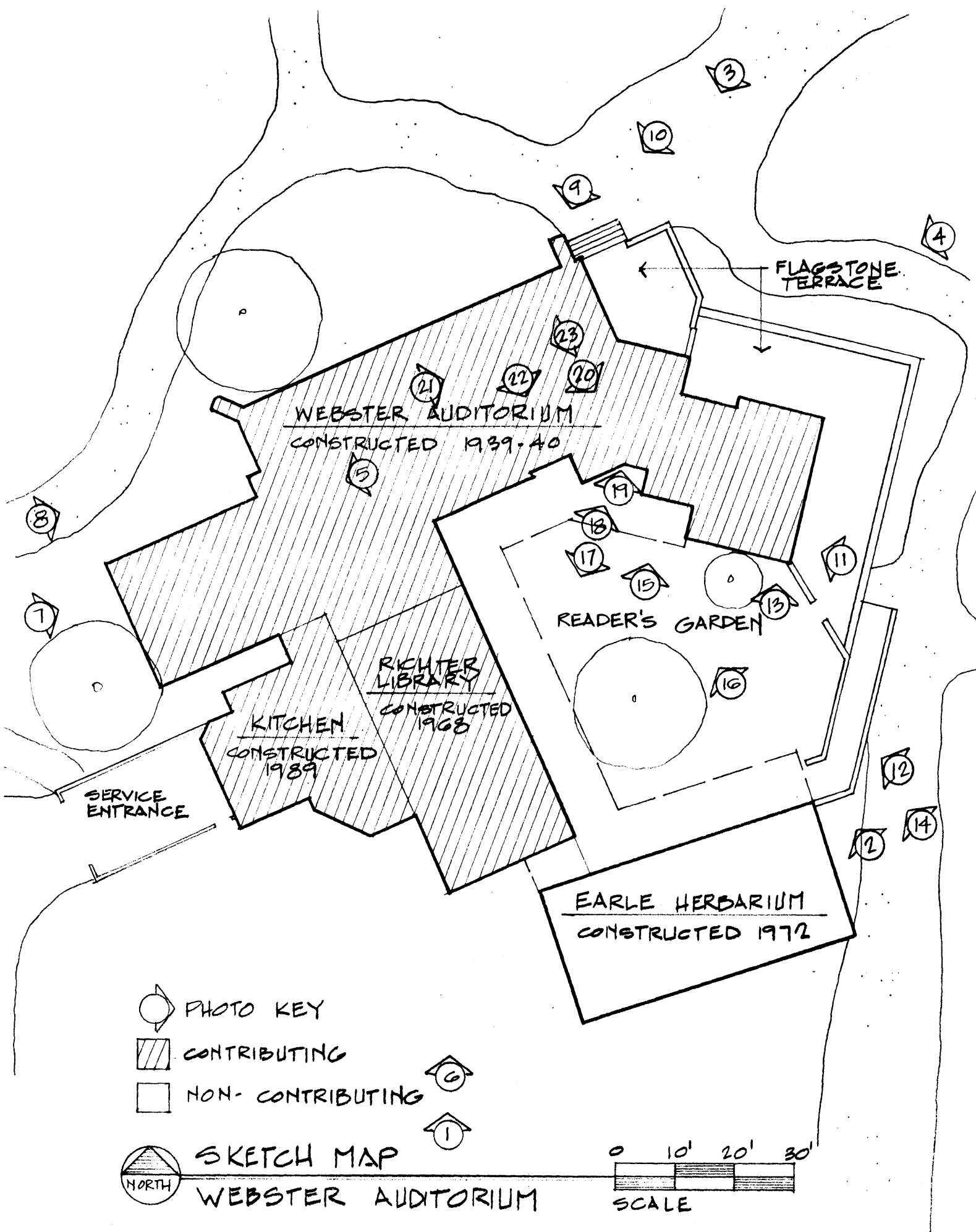
Photograph No. 19  
View looking north

Photograph No. 20  
Interior view looking south

Photograph No. 21  
Interior view looking east - northeast

Photograph No. 22  
Interior view looking south - southeast

Photograph No. 23  
Interior view looking west - southwest



WEBSTER AUDITORIUM  
CONSTRUCTED 1939-40

RICHTER  
LIBRARY  
CONSTRUCTED  
1968






KITCHEN  
CONSTRUCTED  
1989

READER'S GARDEN

EARLE HERBARIUM  
CONSTRUCTED 1972

FLAGSTONE  
TERRACE

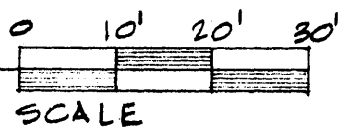
SERVICE  
ENTRANCE

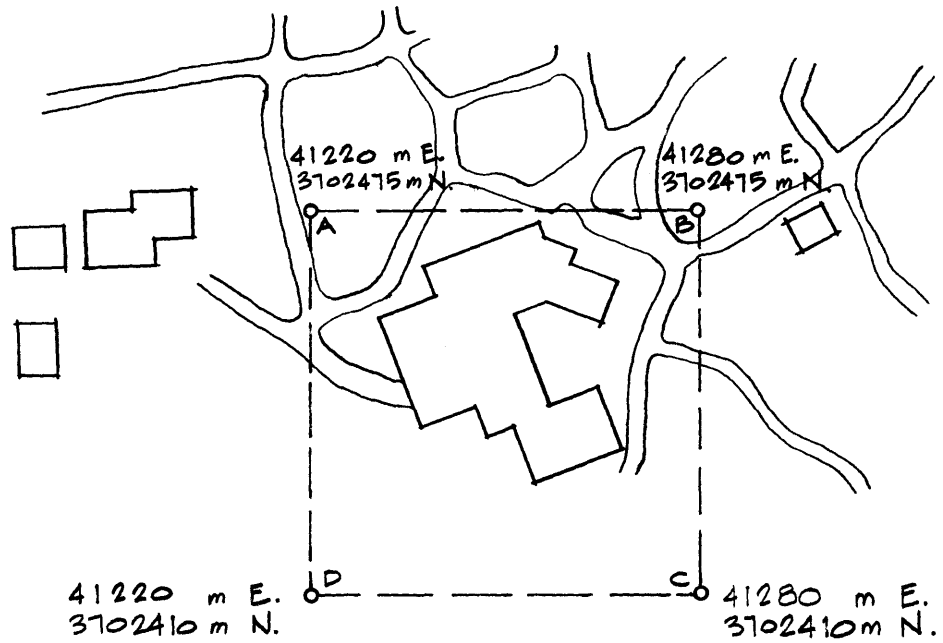
-  PHOTO KEY
-  CONTRIBUTING
-  NON-CONTRIBUTING
-  6
-  1



SKETCH MAP

WEBSTER AUDITORIUM





APPROX. CENTROID  
 WEBSTER AUDITORIUM AREA  
 41250 m. EASTING  
 3702460 m. NORTHING



BOUNDARY MAP  
 WEBSTER AUDITORIUM

