



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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Petersen Rock Garden  
other names/site number Petersen Rock Garden and Museum; Petersen Rock Gardens

### 2. Location

street & number 7930 SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street  not for publication  
city or town Redmond  vicinity  
state Oregon code OR county Deschutes code 017 zip code \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national X statewide \_\_\_ local

[Signature] 9.6.13  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 10.30.13  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only one box.)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
9	1	buildings
		district
1	0	site
2	1	structure
		object
12	2	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

- RECREATION AND CULTURE: Work of Art
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum
- LANDSCAPE: Garden
- DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

- RECREATION AND CULTURE: Work of Art
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum
- LANDSCAPE: Garden
- DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

- LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
- AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Bungalow/  
 Craftsman

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

- foundation: CONCRETE; WOOD
- walls: WOOD; ASBESTOS; STONE  
 CONCRETE
- roof: METAL
- other: N/A

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The parcel within which Petersen Rock Garden is located is a small portion of approximately 256 acres that Rasmus Christian Petersen established as an irrigated farm after homesteading an original eighty-acre parcel, beginning in 1906. Construction of the rock gardens began in the winter of 1935-36 and ended with Petersen's death in 1952. Today the property is 12.36 acres in size, with the gardens occupying approximately four acres. Buildings on the site include Petersen's own residence (1927), the museum, a restaurant building, restrooms, two additional residences, an ice house, a pump house, and a shed. Site structures include a cistern, root cellar, two stone outdoor cook stoves, and bird pens. All resources are contributing to the site, as part of Petersen's homestead and gardens, with the exception of the bird pens and the third residence, neither of which share the common features of the other buildings and structures. The gardens occupy five distinct areas, one of which is the parking lot. Landscaping is both formal and informal, but is clearly integrated with the site. The northeast and southeast corners of the site still relate to the original farm function of the property.

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### **Narrative Description**

#### **LOCATION AND SETTING**

The Petersen Rock Garden is located in what was historically a rural farming area known as Pleasant Ridge, twelve miles north of Bend and eight miles southwest of Redmond in Deschutes County, Oregon. The area is characterized by irrigated farmland with small and large farms, large suburban-type properties, and open, arid land. It is adjacent to and east of SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street, a paved roadway about one-and-one-half miles west of U.S. Highway 97, as the crow flies, between the Deschutes River and the Old Bend-Redmond Hwy. The garden occupies approximately four acres of the 12.36 acres that make up tax lot 401, which is nearly square in shape. It is surrounded by another 48 acres of open land owned by the owner of the rock gardens. The topography of the site is largely level, allowing for a panoramic view of the Cascade mountains. The closest neighbor is about one-quarter mile away.

#### **OVERVIEW**

The parcel is divided into mostly rectilinear zones, with the garden areas occupying the west one-third of the site, closest to SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street, and the east third being largely unimproved. The north half of the central zone, which is covered in red cinder, is devoted to visitor parking.

Just south of the parking area, in the center of the site, is the central lawn. This area, as well as the lawn east of the main house, is used for picnics and small group events. The central lawn is bounded on the east by a grove of trees, divided down the middle by a solid row of mature arborvitae, and bounded on the west by a slightly curved row of arborvitae that separates the lawn from the entry drive. The entrance here is framed by two piers of red cinders topped by 'cups' (bowl-like structures used as planters). The lawn is also enclosed on the south by mature trees.

The tax parcel as a whole is bounded by trees and other vegetation that, with the exception of the southeast corner, separates the site from adjacent farmland. It is vegetated with both formal and informal plantings, with a large grove of mature mixed deciduous, fir and pine trees located on the far east side of the site. The vacant areas to the north and south of the grove are used for farm equipment storage and the like. The vacant areas also accommodate informal driveways to adjacent farming areas to the east.

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Most of the visitor-oriented buildings, including the museum, are aligned with the north boundary of the parcel, on the west side. The Petersen house is located at about the center of the west zone, not far from the road. Four support buildings are located southeast of the house. The driveway into the site from SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street passes just south of the house and curves to the north beyond it, to access the parking area, and to the south, to access the farming area.

The gardens occupy four zones around the house that have different characters and correlate to different periods of development.<sup>1</sup> There are additionally three smaller built vignettes<sup>2</sup> within the parking area, which is referred to in this document as the fifth location and era of garden development. The formal rock gardens are primarily designed on north-south axes, while the vignettes within the parking areas are lozenge-shaped with an east-west orientation. The front wing of the museum extends into the garden area that fronts it, making building and garden a continuum.

### LANDSCAPE<sup>3</sup>

The landscape at Petersen Rock Garden provides the setting for the rock gardens and creates different experiences as the individual gardens and features are framed or seen in juxtaposition to each other or in relationship to the larger landscape. The sequencing of the gardens and features also manipulate the visitor's experience of the site, creating unexpected views and 'found' features. All these conditions, clearly carefully composed, contribute to the sense of delight and other-worldliness that the visitor experiences at the site.

#### Water features

The rock garden landscape includes several large areas of lawn, accented with juniper, rows of arborvitae, pine and fir trees, shrubs, Virginia creeper, sage, wild grasses, flowers and other vegetation. A miniature lake (large pond) with three concrete islands is located in the southwest corner of the site. Large trees are informally spaced along the banks. Historically a number of aquatic plants also lined the pond; it is dry at present, pending repairs to the irrigation lines. Two features on the north side of the site have moats around the rock and architectural structures within them. All of the water features are nearly covered with water lilies during the summer months, as well as water fowl, other birds, and small wildlife. The site receives water through small irrigation ditches, historically associated with the property. The water flows along the northern edge of the property, entering a lateral ditch near the center of that boundary, where it flows south across the gardens, providing water for the two moats, then crossing under the driveway and spilling into the pond. Flood irrigation from the ditch system is used for the greater portion of the lawn areas.<sup>4</sup>

### ROCK GARDENS

Petersen's rock gardens consist of a series of concrete and stone vignettes arranged among the buildings of the twelve-acre parcel occupied by his home and historic outbuildings. The gardens include the featured vignettes, paths, bridges, and smaller site and landscape features that connect the major areas. The vignettes are constructed of volcanic rock and river rock set into concrete, as well as obsidian, petrified wood, fossils, semi-precious stones, geodes, crystals, shell, and other small stones, and illustrate mountains, buildings, grottos, and other features. The following descriptions are ordered by period of construction, as determined by historian Michael A. Hall, based on construction techniques, materials, degree of complexity, distance from the house, and historical research. Five physical areas and periods of work are represented, the earliest being Area 1, which is adjacent to the house. See Figure 4, Site Plan with Areas noted, for further reference.

<sup>1</sup> These periods of development were identified and documented by historian Michael A. Hall.

<sup>2</sup> The word "vignette" is used in this document to refer to three-dimensional installations of stone, sculpture, and planting beds.

<sup>3</sup> The landscape features are discussed here in general; not all potentially historic landscape features are identified.

<sup>4</sup> The irrigation system is a remnant of the larger irrigation system once used for the entire 265-acre farm.

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### Area 1 - 1935-1938

In the first area<sup>5</sup> are works built around Petersen's residence that he began constructing in the winter of 1935-1936. This area is framed on the east by the Petersen residence and its root cellar; on the west by a wire mesh fence and vegetation along 77<sup>th</sup> Street; and on the south by the entrance driveway. To the north is open lawn with views to the north edge of the gardens, including the three large vignettes. A paved walkway extends from the residence's west entrance to the street, where it is framed by river rock-clad piers with pyramidal caps. A cinder path encircles the residence.

The most prominent materials here are gray-to-black lava and reddish cinder from golf ball-size up to football-size stones, used on the base of the formations. Obsidian, agate, and other colored stones and pebbles in light colors and earth tones, including green, white, pink, and brown, are found on the most sophisticated designs. The stones range in size from palm-sized to very small obsidian chips, which are used to highlight doorways and windows on the structures. Of all the areas in the garden, this area is the most fragile and the most exposed to inclement weather, which may account in part for its wear.

To the northwest of the residence is a complex, terraced garden feature about fifty feet in length (R18). Terraces are constructed of obsidian, cinder, river rock, and pebbles. The first terrace is a planting bed for flowers. The second terrace holds a number of cups, built to hold flowers and mosses.<sup>6</sup> The third terrace has castle towers with battlements, a school house, a church, a cabin, and other miniature structures, with a large two-story structure suspended above the center of the entire vignette on a steel support rod. Nearby are other containers for flowers. Closer to the residence are three containers of red cinder on an elevated garden consisting of three terraces with three small, pebble-clad columns on each side.

In the front yard, south of the residence, is a fountain-like structure with a raised cup in the center (R1). Mature deciduous trees are regularly spaced along the driveway and informally placed within the yard, which is also planted with mature shrubs. (Historically, the house was covered in Virginia creeper; this is no longer present.) One of Petersen's largest stones is placed on the edge of the lawn bordering the driveway, one of his massive fossilized specimens.

The entrance drive to the property is flanked by two piers clad in round cinders (R19). Across the driveway from the residence is a rock garden with four terraces, beginning with an eight-pointed star base, followed by another smaller terrace of the same, then a four-sided cross marked at each end by raised cups.

East of the residence is a round moat outlined with stones and flowers. In the center of the moat is a structure with a cubic tower with spires and finials at each corner, a bell tower and spire at the cross-axis, and sun motifs around the openings under the gables, decorated with obsidian and pebbles (R2).

Little is known about the feature along the north property boundary (R17). It is a round, four-terraced design built for growing and displaying flowers and mosses. Though not close to the residence, the design, materials and workmanship suggest it was built in the same period as the works described above.

The motifs in this area have the least integrity of any of the rock gardens. Stones are missing, some designs are incomplete, and there is some separation between walls and/or roofs of the stone structures. This may be because Petersen was just learning his craft at this time, the impacts of visitors over time, and deterioration from weather in this harsh environment.

<sup>5</sup> R18, R1, R2, R7 and R17.

<sup>6</sup> "Cup" as used in this document refers to bowl-shaped and goblet-like containers that are mounted on pedestals and encrusted with stones and other materials and used as planters for flowers and mosses or as decorative features. They are seen throughout the gardens and are often key features on a vignette, within the grounds, or mark a passageway from one area of the garden to another.

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## Area 2 - 1940-1941

Petersen's next works<sup>7</sup>, built in 1940-1941, are east of the residence and include a small mountain and grotto with architectural features to the south (R3) and the large vignette to the north (R14) that partially encircles the museum (S6). Between these major features are a large lawn and the previously discussed moat. A tree-lined boundary lies to the east between the lawn and parking lot. From the center of this space, marked by a large cup, is a view of the mountain/grotto vignette to the southeast, the moat and residence to the west, and the vignette near the museum to the north. East of the residence, where the driveway enters the parking area, is a small mountain approximately 15 feet in height with an exedra-like space and fountain in the front (west side) and a grotto or more accurately a small structure within the mountain to the north (R3). A concrete pathway with inlaid stones encircles a portion of the fountain, which consists of a concrete pool finished in round flat stones with a statue of a young peasant girl in the middle, accented by two free-standing cups to the north and south. The paths traverse the mountain with steps up either side that join on top, near the base of a large, multi-trunk tree. Along the way are peasant houses and various rock formations. The grotto or small room within the mountain, which is constructed of mortared lava rock, has a gabled opening supported by square columns covered in flat pebbles, flanked by large geological specimens. Within the grotto is a table of inlaid stones on a small pedestal. Flowers, juniper, and Virginia creeper cover the entire piece.<sup>8</sup> The builder's initials and date of construction (RP 1940) is incorporated into the path.

Though some of the pieces reflect a somewhat crude juxtaposition of dissimilar materials, the design, materials and workmanship in this piece are, overall, more refined than that of the 1935-38 period work. Black obsidian and white shell—an important part of the grotto vocabulary<sup>9</sup> - are the predominant materials used on the peasant houses, with shell highlighting the windows and doors and tiny, precise sun rays highlighting the openings under the gables. The roofs are composed of a green stone. The base is composed of shoebox-size-and-larger stones, set on end. Additional materials include petrified wood and lava casts. The mountainside is also composed of stones in a variety of types, shapes and colors, which include green, black, red, amber, tan and blue. A significantly sized stone on the south wall provides strength and stability to the work.

A large installation of stone and other features form an amphitheater in front of the main museum (R14) entrance, rising halfway to the eaves of the building. A round, sunken plaza is located directly in front of the museum's gable end, the focal point of the amphitheater. (Note that this berm around the plaza allows for the sense of an amphitheater and sunken plaza on the otherwise flat topography of the site). On axis with the front entry façade of the museum, across the plaza to the south, is a raised, two-sided vignette. The terraced design of this vignette allows visitors to explore the great variety of stone and design work here. On entering the vignette from the south, one sees an American flag and "God Bless America" spelled out in small round stones. This is topped by a classically styled building with pediment and columns and stacked monopteroi on the roof, which are structures, typically round in plan, with no walls and columns supporting the roof. It bears some resemblance to the White House.

Two concrete paths and stairs pass up and around this feature, continuing to a garden plaza to the north, which is down eight steps. Looking back, the rear of the classical building is at about head height, with a small, shell-encrusted cup and two large shells opening upward on a terrace in the foreground. The round paved plaza has at its center a small terraced garden with a shell-clad cup that serves as a central focal point.

<sup>7</sup> R3, R14 and S6.

<sup>8</sup> Note that much of the overgrown landscaping is being removed as part of an on-going maintenance project.

<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, a grotto is an underground cave, chamber or vault associated with religious or meditative contemplation and the term refers primarily to the form. A grotto such as the grotto in the mountain at Petersen Rock Garden is another common form, which is a small room within the mountain that can be seen as a retreat, but in fact held the guest book for Petersen Rock Garden. The grotto vocabulary used here refers to the materials seen in a designed (and natural) grotto, which often includes rough stone such as the volcanic rock seen here, and contrasts with smooth stones, shells, crystals, colored glass, stalactites and other materials used to embellish the gardens. The use of water or water-related imagery also often plays a role, referring to the actual water often present in caves ("Grotto" in Patrick Taylor's (Editor), *The Oxford Companion to the Garden*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 202.

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Viewing benches are built into the berm around the plaza. In the background, looking north, is the colored stone face of the museum and a central door with a diamond-shaped light. Under the gable "MUSEUM" is spelled out in small white stones. (For a description of the museum see "Museum (S6)" below).

### Area 3 - 1942-ca 1944

Beginning in 1942, two sizeable islands and one small island<sup>10</sup> were developed in a largely rectangular pond constructed in the southwest portion of the property. The larger two islands feature vignettes illustrating Norse mythological themes, according to historian Michael Hall. The lake is a significant ecosystem that includes plants along the shore, water lilies, reptiles, water fowl and other birds, and a superabundance of life invisible to the eye.<sup>11</sup>

The first island (R8) as one travels from the 'mainland' is very small and features a lighthouse on a steep mound covered with lava rock. The bridge to the island has arched trusses separated by pylons with pyramidal caps. All elements are encrusted with colored stones. Around the lighthouse is grotto work<sup>12</sup> similar to that on the mountain east of the residence, and two cups with a metallic lining. The bridge to the next island is a suspension-style bridge with four tall pylons topped with square structures with arched openings and pyramidal caps. It is decorated with black obsidian chips and outlined in white stone.

The second island (R9) is flat with a concrete base encircled with unique geological specimens from the area. Features of this island, which is roughly triangular in shape, include a mature deciduous tree and an ancient key form (in plan), terminated by a round, concrete-lined basin. The island and features are covered with quartz crystal and other white stones (a significant quantity is missing). Several small structures sit at the water's edge and one is on a small platform 'offshore.'

The bridge to the third island is similar in design to the second bridge. The third island (R10) is nearly round and also flat, encircled with a concrete walkway edged with multi-colored stones and geological specimens. It features a mature deciduous tree and a small mountain crowned with an elaborate, multi-level structure. Its design recalls Scandinavian stave churches, with their elaborate roof structures, according to historian Michael Hall. Multiple roofs that decrease in size as they rise are completed by stave roof peaks. The church also features square turrets topped by conical caps, pedimented porticos, and other architectural features. Along the south side of the island is a bench built into the stonework. Some material from the back of this bench has been lost.

### Area 4 - ca 1944-1946

In the northwest corner of the property are two large vignettes completed in 1946 that are oval in plan (R15, R16). They are sited in a large lawn enclosed on the north property line by fir, juniper, and deciduous trees and dense shrubs; on the west by a row of tall deciduous trees and dense shrubs along SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street; and on the east by a row of regularly spaced arborvitae and small shrubs that screen views of the museum to the east. The view to the south is open to the Petersen residence and the structures to its west (R18 and S1).

The first vignette (R15), to the south, is set on a high oval-shaped plinth of volcanic rock that creates the setting for a large structure, an impressive vignette of complex and varied stonework. This, the largest vignette on the site, features a classically-styled structure with columns beneath pediments and multiple monopteroi with stave peaks on the roofs. The plinth is encircled by a concrete walkway and a moat bordered by geological specimens. It is covered with stones of various sizes, types, colors, and shapes, many stacked vertically and infilled with smaller stones near the top. Four bridges located at the cardinal points cross the moat and connect the vignette to the lawn and the vignette to the north. The three bridges that lead to the lawn area are 'at grade,' while the bridge to the second vignette is about six feet above grade and is unique in

<sup>10</sup> R8, R9, R10, with associated bridges.

<sup>11</sup> The water is now turned off but the wildlife will return once the system is turned on again.

<sup>12</sup> A mound composed of volcanic rock.

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the site for its arched design. When filled with water the moat is brimming with water lilies and frogs, bird and bees. Peacocks parade amongst the stonework of the statue.

The second vignette (R16), which features a copy of the Statue of Liberty, displays similar stonework. Here, several concrete pathways with steps lead to a path that encircles the monument. It is set on a base encrusted with large multi-colored rocks, topped by an eight-sided star clad in round flat stones in shades of brown, which in turn provides the foundation for the tall base for the statue, which is four-sided and finished in round flat stones in white and pale colors. The paired vignettes are framed by red cinder paths. Trees and vegetation frame the scene and partially obscure the view to the southeast toward the small moat and grotto-mountain structures.

### Area 5 - 1946-1952

The final area, built 1946-1952, is a large parking lot that hosts three regularly spaced, symmetrically arranged, oval vignettes. Stout protective walls of lava and cinder several feet tall were built around the perimeters as bumpers, protecting the works from automobile damage. The northerly vignette (R4), which is aligned with and parallel to the restaurant,<sup>13</sup> consists of a rectangular, three-story, gabled building with classical styling, with a front colonnade, central pediment, and many windows. Monopteroi and stave church peaks are found on the roof, while cladding and openings are sharply articulated in obsidian. It is surrounded with lava and cinder. The center structure (R5) portrays the steep, craggy slopes of the Cascades in a variety of large stones. A large display of abalone shell in a bowl shape is located in the 'valley' between the peaks. The vignette at the south end of the parking area (R6) consists of two lava cinder buttes with an encircling 'roadway' to the top, where there are two structures, a small Gothic-style building and a small cabin and livestock pen.

### BUILDINGS<sup>14</sup>

A number of historic buildings located on the site are significant for their association with Rasmus Petersen himself and/or the gardens as a visitor-oriented attraction. They contribute character and enhance the feeling and association of the site. One building, the third residence, appears to be the sole building having an association only with the original farm. One building and structure, the residence (S1) and a root cellar (S13) to the north, are located in the first landscape area, as described above. Four buildings are sited south of the driveway, including the garage (S4), ice house (S2), pump house (S3), and shed (S5). Additional structures are located along the northern edge of the property, including the museum (S6), second residence (S7), restaurant (S8), third residence (S9), restrooms (S10), bird pens (S11), and cistern (S12). Most of these structures are oriented toward the visitor. Dates of construction for these buildings are largely unknown but appear, by the methods of construction, finishes, and details such as exposed rafter ends, to be constructed in the 1920s to 1930s.

The unifying characteristics seen on many of the buildings include narrow lap siding and open eaves with exposed rafter tails. These are an indication that at least several were built about the same time. Other unifying characteristics, including the turquoise color of the main body of the building or trim; the red and white aluminum shingle roof; and a mix of wood and volcanic stone cladding, could have been added later. The following is a brief description of each building.

<sup>13</sup> Tice, Paul, "Site Plan, Petersen Rock Gardens," (August 18, 2012). The Site Plan developed from laser scan data indicates the more perfect alignment of this one compared to the other two in the parking area, suggesting this was the last structure built, as it is aligned perfectly with the restaurant, while the other two are not, indicating they were designed and built before the restaurant idea had emerged or at least its location had been finalized. See Site Plan.

<sup>14</sup> Note that all the buildings on the site are individually called out as Contributing or Non-contributing to the Historic District in this section.



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### **Residence (S1), Contributing**

The primary residence (S1), which was built for Rasmus Petersen, is a wood-frame, one-and-a-half story Craftsman-style house with a partial basement constructed in 1927.<sup>15</sup> The house is 1,928 square feet in size, with the upper level consisting of 708 square feet. It sits on a raised concrete foundation near the front of the property on 77<sup>th</sup> Street, just north of the entrance driveway. The house faces south and west, with a north-south ridgeline, and a partially enclosed porch at the southwest corner.

The Petersen house has a moderately pitched, front-facing gable roof with a hip and gable roof over the porch. Stone cheek walls flank the relatively narrow south-facing porch entry, which is accessed via four concrete steps. The porch roof, which exhibits exposed rafter ends, is supported by stone piers surmounted by battered wood posts. The L-shaped covered porch also extends toward the west, facing onto SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street, with additional stone piers and battered wood posts and an enclosed rail clad in asbestos shingle siding below a bank of fixed windows. The porch is enclosed. It appears that this was done at least 70 years ago, judging by the quality of the craftsmanship and the presence of glass block sidelights flanking the new doors. The main front door, which is on the back porch wall on the south façade, is a fifteen-light wood door with beveled glass. The stonework, which includes to the exterior chimney on the west façade, displays a web design in basalt, with raised mortar.

The south-facing entry door has a three-part, wood-frame focal window to the right with a four-over-one-light window fixed window flanked by two three-over-one-light, double-hung sash. This window is typical of the five three-part windows on the structure. Paired four-over-one-light windows are located under the gable end and in the large wall dormer on the west façade. These windows are also typical of the smaller windows found on all the building's facades. Additional typical characteristics of the house are exposed rafter ends at the eaves and knee brackets in the gable ends and on the dormer. A second enclosed porch, a utility porch, with one-over-one-light, double-hung sash is located in the northeast corner of the house. The building is clad in white asbestos shingle siding with a red, aluminum shingle roof.

The building is completely intact on the interior. It displays a classic Craftsman layout, with a formal living room and dining room, separated by a partial wall consisting of cupboards with leaded glass doors topped by wood half columns that extend to the ceiling. A large fireplace, at the end of the living room, has a tile face and tapered fluted engaged columns supporting the entablature below the mantel. The kitchen is large, with a wood stove utilizing the kitchen chimney and three ice boxes, in addition to the original cabinetry, sink and counter top. In addition to these rooms, there is a study, a small bedroom, and a bath on this floor. Three bedrooms are located on the second level. Additional intact features include all windows, doors, light fixtures and floor, ceiling, and wall finishes.

The building has excellent integrity, with only minor modifications. The only changes to the building are the porch enclosures and replacement asbestos shingle siding.

### **Ice House (S2), Contributing**

An ice house (S2) is located on the right side (south) of the driveway as one enters the site. It is a long building of lava rock with mortared walls on the interior, with the exterior walls giving the appearance of dry-laid stone. The stone is laid in a random rubble pattern with stone quoins at the corners. On the south, rear side is a wood-frame extension of the building with narrow lap siding that serves as storage. The north gable end is clad in wide vertical board and has a central door. The roof on both portions of the building has narrow eaves with exposed purlins and rafters ends and is clad in red and white aluminum shingles. The building is associated with the boats that were used on the pond; still extant is the hand-turned pulley with which the boats were pulled up on land when they were not in use. The pulley is mounted in the southwest corner of the building with a hinged cover.

<sup>15</sup> Petersen's earlier farmhouse burned in November 1926 (*Morning Oregonian*, "Farm Home Burns," 24 November 1926, 7).

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### **Pump House (S3), Contributing**

The small pump house (S3), located on the east side of the pond, has a rectangular footprint and a gable roof with narrow eaves with exposed rafter tails. The door to the wood-frame building faces is on the east facade. The gable end is finished in horizontal wood and the main body of the building is clad in volcanic rock. The roof is finished in red aluminum shingles.

### **Garage (S4), Contributing**

The garage (S4) is located south of the driveway and northeast of the pond. It has a rectangular footprint, a gable roof with a chimney at the ridgeline, which is oriented east-west, and narrow eaves. The building is wood-frame and concrete construction and is clad in horizontal board and lava rock with a dry-laid appearance on three facades. Two large openings with double hinged doors of horizontal board within wide frames are located on the north façade. Three paneled pedestrian doors, two with transom windows, are located on the building. On the west façade is a bank of five, six-light wood-frame windows separated by heavy mullions. This latter room was Petersen's workshop and has excellent light. The aluminum shingle roof is red and white.

### **Shed (S5), Contributing**

A small shed (S5) just east of the garage has a square footprint and a pyramidal roof with exposed rafter ends. A paneled pedestrian door is located on the west façade and paired, nearly square, fixed windows face north and south. The building is wood-frame construction, clad in narrow lap siding, with a red aluminum shingle roof, and a stone foundation.

### **Museum (S6), Contributing**

The Museum, constructed ca 1941, is a cross-shaped building with the ridgeline of the main body of the building extending east-west. A secondary cross-wing, which has a north-south orientation, projects into a garden south of the building. A smaller secondary wing extends toward the north, which is the rear of the building, and is connected to the residence next door. An interior chimney is located on the east side of the building. The gabled building is wood-frame construction (portions may be concrete), clad primarily in lava rock with a dry-laid appearance, with the exception of the south gable end, which is completely clad in a variety of types of stone, of various textures and colors. "MUSEUM" in small white stones is spelled out under the gable. The entrance on the south face, which has a flush door with a diamond-shaped light, opens onto the plaza directly south of it (R14). The east and west gable ends are clad in asbestos shingle siding. The secondary entrance is located to the immediate left (west) of the south wing. Two banks of multiple, wood-frame, six-light windows separated by heavy mullions ensure that the interior of the building is well-lit. Six-light windows are also placed individually and in pairs throughout the building.

The main portion of the museum is an open, L-shaped space and occurs on the west and south sides of the building. A central feature on the interior is a large fireplace constructed with geodes, gems, obsidian and agates. The interior of the museum is finished in simple painted wallboard. Glass exhibit cases house stones and other artifacts. Walls are covered with photographs and frames of arrowheads and other collections. The room that houses the fluorescent minerals, which exhibit various forms of luminescence, is on the east side of the building. Numerous other displays of rocks throughout the exhibit area contain unique specimens. A 500-pound quartz crystal from Arkansas, mounted on a pedestal, is centrally located within the space.

### **Second Residence (S7), Contributing**

The second residence (S7), 702 square feet in size, was built in 1944 near the northern property boundary, just east of the museum. It is a side gabled building with a rectangular footprint and an entrance centrally placed on the south, main entrance façade, accessed via two concrete steps. An interior chimney is located on the north side of the building. Windows are multi-light, steel sash, with the exception of the focal window to the left (west) of the front door, which is a fixed light. The building may be concrete construction. It is finished in stucco, with shingles under the gable ends, a concrete foundation, with a red and white aluminum shingle roof with exposed rafter ends.

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### **Restaurant (S8), Contributing**

The restaurant (S8), constructed north of the parking area ca 1952,<sup>16</sup> has a rectangular footprint and a side gable roof with narrow eaves and exposed rafter ends. Its ridgeline is oriented east-west. Entries are located on the south and east facades; the main south entry is broad, and features a wood door with full-height glass and a two-light transom window. A bank of six narrow windows, two with service openings, is seen on the south façade, which faces the interior of the parcel and the parking lot. It is wood-frame or concrete construction, finished in stucco with wood shingles under the gable, a concrete foundation, and aluminum shingle roof. The building is painted turquoise, the wood shingles are natural, and the roof is striped red and white. An open wood frame is appended to the west side of the building, covering another bank of casement windows. The interior of the building has a large, L-shaped restaurant space that displays its original ca 1950 décor. The kitchen, in the northeast corner, is separated from the main room by a curved wall whose shape is echoed by the curved diner counter.

### **Third Residence (S9), Non-contributing**

The third residence (S9) is sited along the northern property line, north of the visitor complex, with the ridgeline running north-south. It was moved onto the property in 1918 by Petersen from a property he had purchased, and is believed to have been used as a residence by hired help. It has a rectangular footprint, a front gable roof, and deep eaves with exposed rafter tails and knee brackets. The front façade has a door with a single light in the upper portion, a fixed window to the right, and a small two-over-two-light window in the gable end. It is wood-frame construction, clad in several types of horizontal board and has a wood shingle roof. The foundation material may be wood, but this has not been verified. Judging by the similarity of the front portion of the building to the other buildings on the site, it appears that the north portion is the earlier portion and the south half is an addition. The building is white with green trim.

### **Restrooms (S10), Contributing**

The public restroom (S10), built near the northern property boundary, is concrete block with a painted finish and wood shingles under the gable, a gable roof with aluminum shingles and exposed rafter ends, with doors on north and south facades for men and women, respectively. There are two small window openings on the east facade. The construction date is unknown. The building is painted a turquoise color with natural wood shingles and a red roof.

### **Bird Pens (S11), Non-contributing**

The Bird Pens (S11) is a rectangular structure with various types of framing members, from poles to two-by-fours to rectangular posts, likely salvaged lumber. It is covered with vertical wood, screen, and hog wire, with several entrance doors. The pens are located in the northeast corner of the lot.

### **Cistern (S12), Contributing**

A cistern (S12) built entirely of stone including the roof, is still used to store drinking water from a well on the property. It was presumably built by Petersen during the early homestead and farming period.

### **Cistern (S13), Contributing**

The root cellar (S13), north of the house, is a low structure of concrete with a stone face and a plywood roof. This building is no longer in use.

## **INTEGRITY**

### **Landscape**

The larger setting of the gardens appears as it has for decades, an almost natural extension of the Cascade landscape, carved out of rural farmland. The topography and the relationships between vignettes and other

<sup>16</sup> *Polk's Bend City Directory Including Redmond & Prineville*, (Detroit: R.L. Polk & Company, 1952). A restaurant, first identified in the 1952 edition, was apparently part of Petersen's plan before his death.

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structures have not changed over time. Circulation patterns are essentially the same as they were during the period of significance, though one small bridge near the northeast edge of the lake is inaccessible due to overgrowth of vegetation. Another bridge is set off-site (i.e., it was removed), although it appears to have integrity, and another suffered damage in summer 2012.<sup>17</sup> Circulation paths are covered in red cinders. They have become duller in hue over time due to wear from foot traffic and the significant amount of dust in the Central Oregon air from farming, but in general continue to frame the site.

Loss of trees in the southeast portion of the pond in spring 2012 opened previously blocked views of agricultural fields, which has some effect on the historic character of the site. Additionally, views to the pond, across the site, and within the gardens have been affected by the overgrowth of vegetation.<sup>18</sup> Historic photographs show that during construction there were open views across the entire gardens; however, future growth of the plant materials appears to have been a planned aspect of this site, judging by its placement with respect to the vignettes and site features.

Minor landscape features have suffered the most loss of integrity on the site. Historic photographs, primarily from about 1950, show that the placement of flowers, shrubs, and minor pathways was a very integral part of the site design, reinforcing major axis and cross axis, contributing to the formality of the site. The stone retaining walls for many of the vignettes also contributed a sharpness and definition to the gardens, articulating the geometric features, which is no longer present. Flowers, a character-defining feature of the site in its heyday, are sparse today and the mosses that also once characterized the site are no longer present. Weeds also permeate parts of the site, affecting the integrity of design, materials, and workmanship (note that a landscape maintenance program is currently underway for the site).

### **Rock Gardens**

The rock gardens retain very good integrity. Area 1 has sustained some damage, likely due to the fact that it was the first area constructed, while Petersen was perfecting his methods. It is the oldest garden area and has the greatest exposure to the weather. Loss of materials due to vandalism and/or theft has occurred in Area 3, which once contained an extensive array of crystals. The cinder paths have undergone wear over time, with some loss of delineation and color. As mentioned above, lack of maintenance has particularly affected the short vertical or battered retaining walls on the site. But for the most part, the gardens retain excellent integrity, particularly the more intricate built pieces.

### **Buildings**

The buildings on the site retain excellent integrity, due in large part because few, if any changes have occurred since Petersen's death. The integrity on the site is also due in part to the fact that it continues to be used as was intended since Petersen started building the site. The main residence was constructed in 1927 and the buildings that support the gardens were constructed between about 1935 and 1952, although in many cases specific dates are unknown. Other structures on the site, such as the cistern and garage, likely supported the residence and farm prior to the construction of the rock garden, but were modified where necessary to more closely suit a visitor-oriented facility. All buildings convey the reasons for their significance.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Petersen Rock Garden is an inclusive landscape composed of rock gardens, ponds and water features, formal landscaping, and all the buildings associated with Rasmus Petersen and his life as creator of the rock garden. While the garden has lost some integrity, primarily some of the formal landscape features that were historically associated with it, it retains sufficient integrity to convey the reasons for its significance. All the

<sup>17</sup> These bridges are roughly the size of a front entrance door on a residence with the 'truss' about one foot in height, made of concrete and embellished with oval stones.

<sup>18</sup> Note that much of the vegetation is currently being removed as part of an on-going maintenance program.

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buildings that are contributing to the site have excellent integrity. Overall, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ART  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1927-1952

**Significant Dates**

1927, construction date of residence  
1935, initial date of garden construction  
1952, end date of garden construction

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Petersen, Rasmus Christian

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**Period of Significance (justification)**

Rasmus Christian Petersen's homestead began to take on the appearance it has today when he built his new home in 1927. At some point, most likely after he began building the rock gardens, the outbuildings and support structures were partially clad in stone and united by color and common materials to unify the buildings' appearance and make them more suited to a visitor-oriented facility. He began building his rock garden around the home in the winter of 1935-36. Construction continued until his death on August 3, 1952.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A**

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Petersen Rock Garden, which has state-wide significance, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the areas of Art and Landscape Architecture, as a folk art environment, for its significance as an exceptional work of art that combines architecture, landscape, art, and sculpture in a unified whole. Located approximately eight miles southwest of Redmond, Oregon, the work recalls European and American grotto traditions, juxtaposed with American iconography and vernacular folk art traditions, through the creativity and artistry of Danish immigrant Rasmus Christian Petersen. Petersen, who began constructing the garden after finishing his education in Danish and American culture at Nysted Folk High School in Nebraska and three successful decades of farming, was also influenced by his homestead's setting in central Oregon, with its dramatic views of the Cascade range. Creation of the garden represents the last chapter in Petersen's life. The gardens are all the more remarkable for their unexpectedness in the desert landscape and their lack of precedent in their creator's life. The Period of Significance for the site is 1927, the date of construction of the Petersen's residence, to 1952, the date of Petersen's death. The gardens and property as a whole retain excellent integrity and easily convey the reasons for their significance.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Petersen Rock Gardens is significant as a work of art and landscape architecture, and as the work of a master craftsman, that retains excellent integrity and maintains the same extraordinary presence today that it had over 75 years ago when visitors started touring it in the thousands. Rasmus Christian Petersen, the creator of Petersen Rock Garden, immigrated to the United States in 1901 at the age of 18, after which he studied for four years at the Nysted Folk School in Nebraska, one of five Danish-American folk schools in America. This school, as well as the others, was modeled on Danish Folk Schools in Denmark and Europe as conceived by Danish philosopher, theologian, educator, composer, and poet Nicolai Frederick Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872). In the United States they were organized through the Danish-Lutheran Association in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After leaving the Nysted Folk School in 1905 Petersen homesteaded near the newly formed town of Bend, successfully farming and ranching for three decades. In this time period Petersen acquired land until his homestead was over three times its original size; experimented with a number of crops and types of livestock, for which he was recognized at the regional level and beyond; continually improved his homestead, including building a substantial and fashionable Craftsman bungalow in 1927; and became a leader in his community, co-founding the community hall and local grange and serving on a number of boards. Upon his retirement, his energy and engagement with his surroundings did not wane, but took on another dimension.

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Petersen began building his rock gardens in 1935 and began selling his farm land in the early 1940s until he was left with twelve acres. By 1941 he had built the museum and by 1942 he had completely retired from farming. In this time frame he also expanded his collecting, gathering rocks for his gardens but also obtaining and acquiring impressive specimens of rocks and minerals including lava casts, petrified wood, including a petrified palm, quartz crystals, and other semi-precious stones. At the time of his death his rock and landscaped gardens, ponds, and visitor facilities filled four acres around his home.

The Petersen Rock Garden closely fits the definition of a folk art environment as outlined by architectural historian John Beardsley in his seminal work, *Gardens of Revelation, Environments by Visionary Artists*. It is a handmade environment that expresses Petersen's personal vision; fabricated of found, mostly local, materials; built around and encompassing his homestead.<sup>19</sup> These types of environments are not constructed by those who primarily identify themselves as artists. Yet they often display extraordinary craftsmanship and artistic vision, such as seen in the Petersen Rock Garden. The garden also fits within this genre in that it fills the space to which it was allotted; incorporates fantastic motifs; and distorts scale to an advantage, creating an otherworldly experience.<sup>20</sup>

While it is clear that Petersen Rock Garden developed in an organic, incremental fashion, it is remarkably formal, with pronounced north-south axes, lesser east-west axes, as well as less formal areas, such as the design and arrangement of the islands. Historically these were reinforced by the plant materials of the gardens, from trees to flowers, as well as minor paths. Fantastic motifs are seen in garden structures that resemble castles, churches, public buildings, and peasant houses set in environments that take on the appearance of mountain villages. The vignettes appear 'life size' when viewed in juxtaposition with the desert landscape, yet many can be traversed by visitors through paths and stairs. At the same time, they appear as gardens when seen in the context of the farmstead buildings, such as Petersen's house and the museum. This distortion of scale contributes to the experience of the gardens.

The circumstances of Petersen's life fits within the definition of the artists who create gardens and environments such as these, in that he began the garden when he retired, he worked in relative isolation, and its completion took many years; in fact we do not know what it would have looked like had Petersen lived longer than the 17 years he was engaged in building the garden. Like many of these artists, Petersen did not discuss the source of inspiration for his imagery and motifs.<sup>21</sup> The two written messages within the garden, which are juxtaposed with patriotic imagery, are "God Bless America" and "Enjoy Yourself. It is Later Than You Think." While falling firmly within the folk art environment genre, it is clearly a singular, personal expression and continues to defy categorization.

Petersen created this significant art environment and museum utilizing and showcasing the geological and mineralogical materials found in his environs and beyond. When completed, the wealth of materials represented an outstanding collection of semi-precious stones, a rarity outside of an American museum. The Period of Significance is 1927, the construction date of the home that became the center of his enterprise, to 1952, when Petersen died. The Petersen Rock Garden is an excellent example of a folk art environment translated into rock gardens and plant materials that encompasses Petersen's homestead as well, resulting in a total environment that is both Petersen's home, the center of his operation, and his creation. It fits well within this genre, which is often characterized by an installation that is constructed incrementally, over a long period of time, often from found elements, by

<sup>19</sup> John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation, Environments by Visionary Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 2003),

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<sup>20</sup> Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation*, 9,



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artists that typically have no formal training, but communicate their message through the construction of a total, living, environment.

Sixty years after his death, Petersen's rock garden remains a testament to his talent and determination. It has been visited by hundreds of thousands of people from around the world and is as unexpected today in the desert landscape as it was when he began creating it in the midst of the Great Depression. The garden is singular in the state of Oregon and an excellent expression of its type, a twentieth century folk art environment, in the United States. It is renowned for the vision it embodies and the craftsmanship and materials that allowed Petersen to realize his masterpiece.

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### Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

#### PETERSEN ARRIVES IN THE MIDWEST<sup>22</sup>

Rasmus Christian Petersen<sup>23</sup> was born in Glamsbjerg, Kong parish, a farming region on the island of Fyn (Funen) in Denmark, on July 21, 1883.<sup>24</sup> He was the second son of three, and one of four children. His brothers were Lars Peder Pedersen (1881-1905) and Adolf Frederik Pedersen (1886-1907). His sister, Anna Marie Augusta Pedersen was born in 1889. Rasmus and his brother Lars left Denmark in March 1901, with a stated destination of Cedar Falls, Iowa.<sup>25</sup> At age 18 and 20 respectively, both he and his brother then traveled to Nysted, Nebraska to attend the Nysted Folk High School there.

Rasmus and Lars' names can be seen in the 1903 roster of registered students and Rasmus is pictured in a 1902-03 class photo in the first row, the fourth student from the left.<sup>26</sup> When Rasmus arrived in the United States, he had eight years of education. Boys in rural communities in Denmark at this time typically left school at 14 or 15, after which they spent three or more years working on their family farm. At 18 they entered the folk high school to obtain 'cultural training' before studying technical subjects at the local agricultural high school at 19 or 20.<sup>27</sup> This broad-based liberal arts training is what Petersen pursued at Nysted.

The Danish Folk High Schools, initially conceived by Nicolai Frederick Severin (N.F.S.) Grundtvig (1783-1872), were an integral part of Danish life and when Danish immigrants began settling in the United States, they brought their folk schools with them.<sup>28</sup> In the Midwest the growth of the folk high school concept was closely tied to the Danish Lutheran Church. By 1871 a Danish-Lutheran Association was formed, which became the foundation for the Danish-American folk high school movement in the United States. From 1878 to 1911 five Danish-American folk schools were founded in the United States: Elk Horn in Iowa, Ashland in Michigan, Nysted in Nebraska, Danebod in Minnesota, and Atterdag in Solvang, California. Nysted was one of the longest-running folk schools in

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<sup>22</sup> This section is adapted from Michael A. Hall, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form – Petersen Rock Gardens* (Draft), November 1, 2012, from a section of the same title.

<sup>23</sup> His name was spelled Pedersen in Denmark and is seen interchangeably as Petersen and Peterson in the United States.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication, Kent Asmussen, Oregon Genealogical Society, April 30, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> According to Petersen's obituary, his first destination was Reinbeck, Grundy County, Iowa, which is a short distance from Cedar Falls. Their brother Adolf left Denmark in November 1905 (Personal communication, Kent Asmussen, Oregon Genealogical Society, April 30, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Sheri Muller, Associate Librarian, Grand View University Library, e-mail to Michael Hall, 10 July 2012.

<sup>27</sup> H. W. Foght, "The Danish Folk High Schools." Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1914.

<sup>28</sup> J. I. Marals, *Bishop Grundtvig and the People's High School in Denmark* (Pretoria: Government Printer and Stationary Office, Union of South Africa, 1911) 35.

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the U.S. but closed in 1936 due to lack of attendance and financial support, another casualty of the Great Depression.<sup>29</sup>

Courses at Nysted in 1901 included English grammar, gymnastics, Danish, Nordic history, United States history and geography, reading, and Danish literature.<sup>30</sup> The following profile of the Folk High School at Nysted appeared in an issue of *Hojksolen for den Dansk-Amerikanske Ungdom* about this time:

*...Our school...is an Academy of General Culture—culture for culture's sake only and not for the sake of livelihood. Its aim is to give to students, by way of lectures in history, geography, civics, and literature and practice in the most necessary arts and sciences, a select acquaintance with what is best in life...The kind of an education sought by most people to-day, and the only kind given by most schools, is the education that will give, or pretend to give, the student, when through, a good paying position. 'It never seems to occur to parents,' says Ruskin, 'that there may be an education which does not necessarily lead to advancement in life, but in itself is advancement in life...'*<sup>31</sup>

In addition to this broad-based education, students at Nysted and the other folk high schools were exposed to the philosophy of the schools' spiritual founder, N. S. F. Grundtvig. Grundtvig was a Danish theologian, educator, poet, and composer. The son of a Lutheran pastor, Grundtvig studied theology at the University of Copenhagen and published his seminal work, *Norse Mythology*, the subject of his dissertation, in 1807. He was ordained in 1811 but later broke with the church and was forbidden to preach or teach.<sup>32</sup>

Grundtvig believed in the importance of Danes' cultural heritage as the foundation for national identity and a more genuine spiritual basis for Christianity. He also believed that the way to freedom in the modern world is to "lay the foundation of freedom in that social structure within which the individual lives, thinks and works . . ." <sup>33</sup> His goal was the establishment of an institution where mature students would acquire the knowledge and skills that would be of "spiritual elevation" not for a particular craft or trade, but rather for their roles as Danes and as citizens.<sup>34</sup> He believed that his educational philosophy would remedy the decline in positive national identity that accompanied the political, economic, and cultural losses that Denmark was experiencing at this time.

The People's High Schools, as they were called in Denmark, were actually developed by Grundtvig's followers to implement his ideas by addressing these social issues through a system of pedagogy: "The instruction was intended for young men who were already engaged in some life work, and the purpose...was not to change their vocation. They were to return to their work, but with a greater inner joy, greater desire to work, greater love for country, and greater appreciation for a higher, more ideal conception of work and life."<sup>35</sup> After about four years at the Nysted school the Petersen brothers made their way to Oregon to start the next chapter of their lives.

<sup>29</sup> Ann E. Billesbach, "The Danish Folk High School: Its History and Its Transplantation to the United States." (MA thesis, State University of New York College at Cooperstown, 1982), 33-34, 50-55, 61, 64. The school buildings still list and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>30</sup> Billesbach, "The Danish Folk High School," 48-49.

<sup>31</sup> Billesbach, "The Danish Folk High School," 49.

<sup>32</sup> Marals *Bishop Grundtvig*, 17, quoted in Michael A. Hall, *Register of Historic Places Registration Form – Petersen Rock Gardens* (Draft), Salem, OR: Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, November 1, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Nielsen, Ernest D., *N. F. S. Grundtvig: An American Study*. (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press. 1955), 130.

<sup>34</sup> Billesbach, "The Danish Folk High School," 10.

<sup>35</sup> Martin, Hegland, "The Danish Peoples' High School." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1916), 81.

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## PETERSEN COMES TO CENTRAL OREGON

Denmark saw a mass out-migration of their citizenry to the United States and other countries beginning in the 1870s and extending through the early twentieth century. Petersen was a part of this movement. Following his studies at the Nysted Folk School, Petersen and his brother Lars traveled to Junction City, Oregon, where a Danish colony existed, with another student they had met at the school, Jacob W. Petersen, arriving in 1905.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, soon after their arrival in Junction City his brother died in a logging camp south of Portland, but J. W. Petersen was to be a lifelong friend and neighbor.<sup>37</sup>

In 1901 the State of Oregon adopted the provisions of the federal Carey Act of 1894, also known as the Desert Land Act, which allowed private companies in the U.S. to erect irrigation systems on public land in the western states and profit from sales of water.<sup>38</sup> The enabling legislation in Oregon was adopted on February 28, 1901, making it State policy that Oregon's arid lands were to be reclaimed and settled.<sup>39</sup> Between 1901 and 1906 seven projects in the Upper Deschutes River Basin were approved, covering a total of 194,138 acres.<sup>40</sup> The land that Petersen was to eventually homestead was within the Deschutes Irrigation and Power Company's 200,000 acres in the Bend area, to which they had secured rights.<sup>41</sup> The Land Act was also a homestead act, implementing federal land policy to encourage settlement of the West. Settlers could receive a patent on 160 acres of Carey Act land if they lived on the land and, within ten years, converted at least twenty acres to irrigated agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

According to a reprint of a 1925 interview with Rasmus Petersen, he was prompted to visit central Oregon after an article in a Portland newspaper quoted then governor George E. Chamberlain as saying, "If I were a young man I would acquire an irrigable tract of land in Central Oregon."<sup>43</sup> Petersen visited the area and "made arrangements to get a few small tracts of land for himself and friends."<sup>44</sup> He then returned with four friends – G. W. [sic] Peterson, Antone Nelson, N. H. Nelson and Carl Peterson - and two teams of horses in December 1906.<sup>45</sup> They first camped in the snow on Petersen's brush-and-tree-covered, eighty-acre homestead, under a juniper tree.<sup>46</sup>

Homesteading in Central Oregon was arduous and additionally required that Petersen augment his income in early years.<sup>47</sup> Petersen, working with friends Jacob Petersen and Antone Nelson, pulled trees for themselves and others during the summer of 1907 to clear land for farming.<sup>48</sup> Petersen also

<sup>36</sup> No relation. *The Redmond Spokesman*, "Rock Garden Owner Dies; Rites Today," 7 August 1952, 1. See also Stephen Dow Beckham, "Nielsen (A.C.) House," *State of Oregon Inventory Historic Sites and Buildings*, August 30, 1976.

<sup>37</sup> *Junction City Times*, 20 May 1905, pg. 5, col. 2. Their third brother, Adolf, did not leave Denmark until November 1905. He also died shortly thereafter, on May 31, 1907. Both Lars and Adolf are buried in the Danish Cemetery in Junction City. (Personal communication, Kent Asmusson, Oregon Genealogical Society, May 2013).

<sup>38</sup> "Carey Act," Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carey\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carey_Act), (accessed April 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Michael A. Hall, *Irrigation Development in Oregon's Upper Deschutes River Basin, 1871-1957, A Historic Context Statement* (Deschutes County, the Cities of Bend, Redmond and Sisters and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office: Deschutes County Historical Landmarks Commission, 31 August 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Hall, *Irrigation Development in Oregon's Upper Deschutes River Basin*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Oregon State Board of Control, *Oregon End of the Trail* (Portland, OR: Binforde & Mort, Publishers, 1940), 393.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *Irrigation Development in Oregon's Upper Deschutes River Basin*, 20, 25, 9-10, 12. The State of Oregon adopted the provisions of the Carey Desert Land Act on February 28, 1901.

<sup>43</sup> *Deschutes Country Yesteryear*, "Came to Bend Using Wagon, Early Hardships Gone for Rasmus Peterson," No. 12, Fall 1991. Reprinted from the *Bend Bulletin*, 26 May 1925.

<sup>44</sup> *Deschutes Country Yesteryear*, 381.

<sup>45</sup> Antone Nelson and J. W. Peterson stayed to settle the area with Rasmus Petersen.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, 2012. *The Bend Bulletin*, "Famed Rockery Lures Tourists; Story Is Traced," 16 August 1950, 7; *The Redmond Spokesman*, "Cheap Land Gives Start to Redmond," 21 August 1952, 2; Brogan, Phil F., "Petersen Rock Garden Called Memorial to Man Who Saw Beauty in Aged Stones," *The Bend Bulletin*, 20 August, 1952, sec. 4, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Allen, *Homesteading the High Desert* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 116-129.

<sup>48</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "News from White Rock District," 2 August 1907, 1.

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worked for a time for the irrigation company as a "slip holder," which entailed removing vegetation by a primitive, horse-drawn scraper. He left Central Oregon in spring 1908, apparently to find another source of income.<sup>49</sup> He came home the following summer from Washington's logging camps to harvest his crop.<sup>50</sup> In April 1909, after two-and-a-half years of hard work, he received title to his eighty-acre homestead.<sup>51</sup>

The following illustrates Petersen's early successes in farming and ranching, as well as his industrious nature. Over time Petersen continued to buy land until he had acquired 256 acres, of which 208 acres were under irrigation.<sup>52</sup> In early years he focused on raising livestock, including a flock of 1,500 purebred sheep at one point, cattle, including dairy cows, and hogs. He also grew wheat, evidenced by a letter published in the June 6, 1915 issue of *The Pacific Scandinavian* that stated that he had harvested seventy bushels of wheat per acre that year.<sup>53</sup> A September 30, 1915 article on local farms and ranches in the *Redmond Spokesman* described Petersen's farm as follows: "Rasmus Petersen ranch: Fine corn and oats and 200-ton crop of alfalfa from 85 acres; very pretty home, well-kept lawn, shade trees, graded walks, and hop vine on porch."<sup>54</sup>

In the 1920 census Petersen still referred to himself as a hay farmer. By the time of a 1925 interview in the *Bend Bulletin*, however, his farm had become more diversified. He had 120 acres of alfalfa and 50 acres in wheat and oats. He was additionally planning on experimenting with 28 acres of potatoes, part of a group of farmers who, in cooperation with Oregon Extension Service, were planting new strains of Deschutes Netted Gem potatoes. These experiments were undertaken in advance of finding new markets for potatoes grown in central Oregon, once the extension of the railroad was completed.<sup>55</sup> These accounts show Petersen to be progressive as a farmer, experimenting with new crops, seeking new markets, and as will be seen, participating in new methods of management.

Newspaper stories from the era that probably represent the height of Rasmus Petersen's farming years show that he was an active member of the community and even a community leader, a successful farmer, and although single, not alone. Nearly 150 newspaper items (typically in the news from Pleasant Ridge column of the *Bend Bulletin*) mention Rasmus Petersen over a six-and-one-half-year period, from August 1917 to December 1922.<sup>56</sup> These 'mentions' show that Petersen was particularly successful in the 1919-to-1920 time frame, when he purchased a new Ford truck and a new Ford sedan, built a new implement shed and a stock cistern, installed a new set of scales, and painted his barn and silo.<sup>57</sup> His major sources of income in these years were from growing alfalfa and raising sheep, which he raised as stock and for their wool. These he pastured elsewhere, as most of his own land was under irrigation.

In the 1925 article on Petersen's farm the author stated that, ". . . it is the opinion of virtually every person who visits the Peterson property that the place is one of the most attractive in the Deschutes

<sup>49</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Pleasant Ridge Items," 17 April 1908, 2. Quote: "Rasmus Peterson has left the country indefinitely, northward bound toward the Columbia River, with expectations of finding work."

<sup>50</sup> "Redmond Notes," (*The Bend Bulletin*, June 16, 1909), 1; Beardsley, 133.

<sup>51</sup> Deed, no. 9879, State of Oregon to Rasmus Petersen, April 27, 1911, (Deschutes County Book, vol. 9, 424-25, Bend: Deschutes County Clerk's Office). *The Bend Bulletin*, June 16, 1909.

<sup>52</sup> *Deschutes Country Yesteryear*, "Came to Bend Using Wagon."

<sup>53</sup> *The Pacific Scandinavian* [sic], 6 June 1915. Reprinted in Ingeborg Nielsen MacHaffie's *Danish in Portland, Past and Present* (Tigard OR: Skibent Press, 1982). He showed his purebred sheep and profited from both raising the stock and from the sale of wool. His husbandry merited an article in *The National Wool Grower* in March 1921. The American Sheep Breeders & Wool Growers listed him as one of about 150 people chosen for membership in 1922.

<sup>54</sup> Leslie Pugmire Hole and Trish Pinkerton, *Images of America, Redmond* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 47.

<sup>55</sup> Hole, *Redmond*, 40. Potatoes would sustain Redmond-area farmers during the Great Depression.

<sup>56</sup> Issues from the *Bend Bulletin* from these years have been scanned and appear online.

<sup>57</sup> *The Bend Bulletin* from August 14, 1919 to January 20, 1921.

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country."<sup>58</sup> In 1927, after the destruction of his former house by fire, he built the large, handsome Craftsman bungalow that can be seen on the property today.<sup>59</sup> There was such a demand to see the new home that he held two separate house-warming parties in spring of 1927. It was described as "modern in every respect and...one of the finest homes in Central Oregon."<sup>60</sup> The property also included a number of farm buildings constructed to care for and house a large number of livestock: "The great red silo can be seen from the highway, as well as the large barn."<sup>61</sup>

In addition to being a very successful farmer and rancher in these years, Petersen was an active member and even established leader in his community of Pleasant Ridge. Newspaper articles show him attending a "patriotic demonstration" in 1918. He was appointed a committee head in charge of "Community Shipments" (buying and selling) in an organization designed to cooperate with the Deschutes County Farm Bureau in 1919.<sup>62</sup> About this time he was also involved in discussions of whether to sell bonds for the irrigation district; he later served on the board of directors for the Deschutes Reclamation and Irrigation Company.<sup>63</sup> He served on an election board in this time frame. He was instrumental in planning the new Community Hall in 1921; on November 8, 1921 Petersen and two others filed the articles of incorporation for "Pleasant Ridge Community Hall Association."<sup>64</sup> And he was part of the Oregon Cooperative Hay Growers for the Deschutes Valley.<sup>65</sup> Finally, he was elected to the Pleasant Ridge Grange's highest position of Master in spring 1924.<sup>66</sup> Articles in the newspaper also portray him as regularly helping neighbors with projects and chores, as they him.<sup>67</sup>

Newspaper stories from these years also show that he was in the constant company of Mrs. Catharine Johansen (1873-1927), his sister-in-law.<sup>68</sup> The 1920 census shows that Mrs. Johansen lived with Mr. Petersen in that year and was employed by him as a housekeeper.<sup>69</sup> They were very social, entertaining at the Petersen home, visiting friends, shopping, and traveling often together and with friends, primarily to Bend and Redmond, in the late 1910s and early 1920s.<sup>70</sup> She was in ill health in later years, however. The November 23, 1926, article on the Petersen house fire noted that Mrs. Johansen was paralyzed and had to be carried from the burning building. She died on July 28, 1927, at the age of 54, of a cerebral hemorrhage, which she had endured a week earlier.<sup>71</sup> At the time of

<sup>58</sup> *Deschutes Country Yesteryear*, "Came to Bend Using Wagon," 383.

<sup>59</sup> *The Morning Oregonian*, "Farm Home Burns," 24 November 1926, 7; *The Redmond Spokesman*, "It was a gay day in 1927 . . .," 1927.

<sup>60</sup> *The Redmond Spokesman*, 7 April 1927, n.p.: "About 35 attended the second house warming party at Rasmus Petersen's new home... The party being the Saturday before for other of his friends, the crowd being too large, so two evenings were chosen"; *The Bend Bulletin*, "Pleasant Ridge Folk Hold House Warming," 22 March 1927, 6; *The Bend Bulletin*, "Resident of Deschutes Holds House Warming," 5 April 1927, 4. The previous house burned in fall 1926 (*Morning Oregonian*, "Farm Home Burns," 24 November, 1926, 7)

<sup>61</sup> *Deschutes Country Yesteryear*, "Came to Bend Using Wagon," 383.

<sup>62</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Farm Meeting Held at Pleasant Ridge," 27 February 1919.

<sup>63</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, section 8, pg. 17, quoting from Ward, Elizabeth B., *Redmond: Rose of the Desert* (Redmond, OR: Midstate Printing, 1975) 83, and Deschutes County Historical Society. *A History of Deschutes Country in Oregon* (Bend: Deschutes County Historical Society, 1986).

<sup>64</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Community Hall to be Opened Friday," 6 April 1922, 2. The meeting to plan the opening dance was held at his home.

<sup>65</sup> Hall, Michael A., "Petersen Comes to Central Oregon," *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form – Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, November 1, 2012, Section 8, Page 16.

<sup>66</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, .Section 8, Page 16, quoting from *The Bend Bulletin* "Grange Organized at Pleasant Ridge," 13 March 1924,4.

<sup>67</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, 1907 through 1922, researched by Michael A. Hall.

<sup>68</sup> Also seen as Catherine, Cathrine, Cathrina and Katherine.

<sup>69</sup> Census records show that she immigrated to the United States in 1912, so she may have lived with him as early as that year. Her obituary also stated that she had been living with Petersen for 15 years (*Bend Bulletin*, "Pleasant Ridge . . .," 7 August 1927, 7).

<sup>70</sup> See also *Morning Oregonian*, "Farm Home Burns," 24 November, 1926, 7. The 1926 newspaper article notes that Mrs. Johansen was paralyzed and had to be carried to escape the fire.

<sup>71</sup> The death certificate also noted that she had suffered from hypertension for several years and the November 1926 article

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her death she was still married to her husband, Jens R. Johansen, but still employed as a housewife [sic] by Rasmus Petersen.<sup>72</sup> Petersen was 44 at the time of her death.<sup>73</sup> Petersen signed her death certificate and apparently provided her handsome gravestone in the Redmond Cemetery.<sup>74</sup> The year 1927 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Petersen's life. That year he built a new home, was established and successful after 20 years of farming, and was by all accounts a well-liked and respected member of the community. Just two months after the housewarming he lost his companion of 15 years. This was followed by the stock market crash on October 29, 1929, which marked the beginning of the Great Depression. However, Petersen had again made good business decisions about his crops. Although nationally farm prices were at an all-time low in 1933, he and fellow potato farmers in Redmond were sustained by potato crops during the Depression.<sup>75</sup> Beginning in the spring of 1934 he was selling wheat and oat seed<sup>76</sup> and that fall he grew a "'Huge Lettuce Head'...weighing three and one-half pounds," as announced on *The Bend Bulletin's* front page.<sup>77</sup> Two years later a grain and hay committee on which he served for the Country Agricultural Conference reported that alfalfa "does not offer much hope as a crop to be sold outside of the region."<sup>78</sup> In 1935, at the age of 52, Petersen began building his rock garden.

## BUILDING PETERSEN ROCK GARDEN<sup>79</sup>

### Developmental History

Petersen began developing his first stone garden in 1935, which gained notoriety in relatively short order. The following explains the different periods of development for the rock gardens, as conceived by historian Michael Hall, who surmised that Petersen first started constructing the gardens around his house and moved away from the residence as portions of the gardens were completed. He also made his judgments based on observations of Petersen's construction techniques and subjects. Additional dates were identified from the work itself, as Petersen dated some of his gardens in concrete or stone, and other were derived from knowledge of the buildings with which they are associated. For example, the museum was constructed ca 1941 to, in part, house the Guy Compton collection of minerals, which Petersen had purchased about this time. The parking lot and associated vignettes was the last area developed, and the restaurant was built shortly before Petersen's death in 1952.

### Area 1 - 1935-1938

Area 1 in Petersen Rock Garden included the area to the immediate west and east of the house, as well as a small vignette to the far north on the west side. Petersen began modestly with simple forms and indigenous materials. Working winters while the weather was inclement, from 1935 to 1938, his first works were located around the residence and visitors soon came to see his creations. He had begun collecting semi-precious rocks from around Central Oregon, and these were incorporated in his earliest gardens. Agates and jasper, obsidian and thunder eggs, chalcedony and iridescent lava would become the most common materials seen in his work.<sup>80</sup> As early as 1938 more than 7,000 people from around the United States had visited.<sup>81</sup>

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shows that she had been paralyzed at least since that time.

<sup>72</sup> Oregon State Board of Health, *Certificate of Death*, "Catherine Johansen," 31 July 1927.

<sup>73</sup> The 1920 census show them as being four years apart in age, but there was actually ten years difference between them.

<sup>74</sup> "Cathrine Johansen," *Find A Grave*, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=28823150>, accessed April 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Hole, *Redmond*, 90.

<sup>76</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Seed Grain for Sale," (Classified Advertisement)," 10 April 1934, 6.

<sup>77</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Huge Lettuce Head Grown Near Bend," 15 August 1934.

<sup>78</sup> Oregon Agricultural College, *Report of the Deschutes County Agricultural Outlook Conference* (Redmond: OAC, February 28, 1936), 24.

<sup>79</sup> This section was developed by historian Michael A. Hall.

<sup>80</sup> Brogan, Phil F., "Rockery Left As Monument," *The Bend Bulletin*, 9 August 1952, n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Langtry, Virgil H., "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock to Build Beauty in Gardens Surrounding His Pleasant Ridge Home," *The*

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A cup form on a pedestal or pier was and is the most common feature in the garden. Cups of varying sizes and shapes appear in various shapes, in terraces and throughout the gardens. Historically they were planted with a profusion of over sixty varieties of flowers and mosses. They were among his first creations, but seen as late as 1942.

In one of his first works (R18) he created a beautiful, complex, four-terraced design in a cross shape, each axis about fifty feet long, using black and red obsidian, likely obtained from Glass Butte.<sup>82</sup> This is described here in some detail to show the richness of the stones selected, with their varying colors and textures, in Petersen's first large vignette. The first terrace was embellished with small pieces of black obsidian, the second of river rock, the third of red obsidian and the fourth of small river pebbles. The first terrace was filled with flowers and moss. At the edge of the second terrace, at the ends of the cross and halfway between, were eight large cups. At the ends of the cross on the third terrace were cylindrical towers with battlements of black cinder, contrasting with the red of the walls.

On the third terrace were four miniature structures decorated in brilliant obsidian settings. On the east axis point was built a miniature cabin with '1906' on the roof outlined in pebbles, illustrating his homestead. On the north axis point was a red school house, set with small red lava, together with pebbles and obsidian, with an obsidian bell tower. On the west axis point was a windmill, about two-and-one-half feet tall, made of obsidian and lava. On the south axis point was a church with a tall steeple, set with red and black obsidian and trimmed with pebbles. On the top terrace was probably the most impressive example of Peterson's intricate artistry at the time. Obsidian steps lead to a solid dome of shining black obsidian on which rested a center support rod for a glistening two-story, cross-gabled structure with a multi-faceted tower at each corner with steeply pitched, multi-faceted spires, a square bell-tower with a four steeply pitched spires at the cross-axis, and sun "rays" surrounding the openings below the gables, all covered in small obsidian chips and pebbles. Below was a miniature moat with tiny bridges.<sup>83</sup>

Additional works included a fountain-like structure in the front yard with a raised cup in the center (R1). Across the driveway to the south was built a rock garden with four terraces, beginning with an eight-point star base, followed above by another smaller one of the same, then above a cross design and, finally, a square with a cup at each point and on top and three others just steps west, one significantly larger than the other two (R7).<sup>84</sup>

Directly east of the residence was built a cross-gable structure with a square tower at each corner with steep spires topped by a large finial, and a bell tower at the cross-axis with a steeply pitched spire and finial; also openings with sun symbols under the gables, all embellished in black obsidian and pebbles, located in the center of a large round pond, appearing very much like a "built" fountain (R2). Directly north of this feature is the property's largest cup, which in the future would mark a cross axis between this north-south axis and the gardens to the west, revealing the increasing sophistication of Petersen's planning.

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*Redmond Spokesman*, 14 July 1938, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Kelly, Mary B., *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands* (Hilton Head Island: Studiobooks, 2007), 205. Author notes use of color red in Norse culture was considered both protective and healing.

<sup>83</sup> Langtry, "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock . . .," 7. Representations of structures as stated in article. Langtry became chief deputy attorney for the City of Portland and its municipal judge and, later, served as a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals (1969-1976).

<sup>84</sup> Langtry, "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock . . .," 7.

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### Area 2 - 1940 - 1941

There are three large installations in the pre-war work undertaken by Petersen. They illustrate that, five years after he began building the gardens, he had achieved a finesse with his materials and construction techniques and had mastered installations of an impressive scale that simultaneously conveyed his ability to manipulate with his environment in three dimensions.

Area 2 includes the piece where the driveway turns from an easterly direction toward the north, and the garden in front of (south of) the museum (R2). Here Petersen began to express what historian Michael Hall has called a "grotto vocabulary." It is also the only true grotto on the property. It is a complex piece, simultaneously representing a traversable mountain landscape, a formal exedra-like space complete with a small fountain, and a gabled structure, the grotto, which is inside the mountain. This structure, which greets visitors as they enter the site from the east, is a small gabled structure, with pebble-clad pilasters, flanked by large stacked geological specimens, hidden beneath the mountain and its profusion of flowers, juniper and Virginia creeper.<sup>85</sup> Inside the space, sunlight sheds across a polished table on a pedestal displaying the zodiac in agates.

South of this piece the American flag embellished with "God Bless America" is the base for a large building that bears some resemblance to the White House, with its Classical form and symmetry (R14). The entire vignette leads the visitor from the large round pond described earlier over (R2), around, and down into the sunken small round plaza that fronts the museum.

The museum and its accompanying garden that encircles and enfolds the front of the building and visually extends the gardens to the museum exterior was built during this period as well. In addition to his own growing collection and the Guy Compton collection of rare minerals, the museum included a special dark room with miniature structures constructed of the minerals, which a black light "transforms [] into shades of deep green, fiery red, yellows and blues all in harmony to reveal flowers, an American flag, and buildings in a terraced garden."<sup>86</sup> Completed in early 1941,<sup>87</sup> the Guy Compton collection, composed of rare minerals gathered in the early days of the Antelope area, was its centerpiece.<sup>88</sup>

At this point Petersen's planning and design is increasingly symmetrical and formal, as well as displaying an increasing mastery in creating a three-dimensional landscape within the level topography of his site. For additional description of the pieces above see Section 7, Narrative Description.

### Area 3 - 1942-ca 1944

The islands within the large pond on the site, in the southwest corner, were the third area constructed. They were apparently under construction by the summer of 1942. In September 1941, the space contained only the miniature lake or pond.<sup>89</sup> Soon thereafter, the first small island with its lighthouse and bridge were built.<sup>90</sup> Around the lighthouse is found grotto work similar to that on the mountain east of the residence. The three islands that were eventually built within the lake show Petersen's

<sup>85</sup> Note that the vegetation has recently been removed.

<sup>86</sup> Ellis Lucia, "Rock-Beset Rancher Found Hidden Beauty, Rasmus Petersen couldn't get rid of the countless rocks on his land, so he made a fabulous garden of them," *The Oregonian Magazine*, 9 August 9, 1953, 4.

<sup>87</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Pleasant Ridge," 18 March 1941,, 2; *The Bend Bulletin*, "Hobby of Rancher Developed Into Oregon Show Place," 14 May 1949, 6. Article states: "Petersen purchased the Guy Compton mineral collection, and around this collection has been constructed the Petersen museum."

<sup>88</sup> *The Oregonian*, "Agate Finds Run Large," 2 May 1954, 19.

<sup>89</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Petersen's Rock Garden One of County's Famous Spots," 24 September 1941, 2. Statement based on mention of swans and boats for rowing on lake, but no mention of any works. Thus, the major vignette (two islands) was not built before the date of the article. Construction presumably began in 1942 before construction of the two vignettes across the properties that were completed in 1946; Petersen Rock Gardens File, (Bend: Deschutes County Historical Society, n.d.), n.p. Early photographs show a wood bridge to the lighthouse with a picket-fence-like enclosure.



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fascination with bridge forms at this time. The large key motif, which was once completely encrusted with quartz, is a major feature on the largest island. For additional description of these pieces, see Section 7, Narrative Description.

#### **Area 4 - 1944-1946**

The fourth garden area contains two of Petersen's crowning achievements, one of which is a large, building that is symmetrical in form and classical in its detailing, set within a narrow moat and accessed by four bridges. From here the visitor can walk around the base of the building and across a high bridge to the Statue of Liberty, at whose base is a plaque mounted on petrified wood that reads, "Enjoy Yourself. It Is Later Than You Think," the line from a song published in 1949 and made popular by Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians.<sup>91</sup> Historian Michael Hall describes Petersen's achievements to date as represented in these vignettes as follows:

*Impressive in design, materials and workmanship, he was able to articulate a more confident, more dramatic interpretation, using greater variance in size, shape, color and type of boulder. A large number of imposing vertically placed boulders are intricately ornamented by smaller ones. Limited by the material in its ability for curved, spiraling and interlacing forms, he chose rock more differentiated—in texture, grain, angle, shade, and contrast, taking embellishment to the highest realm possible in his medium. The compositions are complex though intricate and detailed, contrastingly though perfectly scaled, decorated with discernment, and visually stunning. With free and forceful expression, he had created a monument for perpetuity and, in doing so, had mastered his craft.<sup>92</sup>*

#### **Area 5 - 1946-1952**

The vignettes in the parking lot were Petersen's last contributions to the site. For these he used familiar, indigenous materials, but in ways that nonetheless exhibited his mastery of them and his techniques. He built three formations with elongated oval shapes, primarily of lava and cinders. Stout protective walls of lava rock, several feet tall were built around the perimeters as bumpers providing protection from automobile collisions. The vignettes are evenly spaced in the cinder-covered lot and the redness and roughness of the lava stone used for the bases blends with the cinders of the lot with a nearly mirage-like effect.

The north vignette is similar in size to the vignette south of the Statue of Liberty. Here he mixed classical pediments and columns on a three-story, rectangular, side gabled structure whose details are sharply articulated with obsidian, surrounding it all with lava and cinder. In the center vignette he represented the steep craggy slopes of 'old fire mountains' with a variety of large-scaled stones. The southern vignette referenced local cinder cones, employing the "Tree of Life" iconography, with an encircling roadway to each one's top. Here another cross-gabled structure sits in opposition to a brief reference to his homesteading and husbandry days with a small cabin and animal pen. For additional description of these pieces, see Section 7, Narrative Description.

#### **The Process**

The development of Petersen Rock Garden is all the more impressive when considering the effort it took to gather some of the geological and mineralogical specimens on display in the garden and museum. Author Phil Brogan, who called the gardens "the outstanding collection of semi-precious stones outside of an American museum," explained Petersen's evolution as a collector in 1952:

<sup>91</sup> The made the Billboard chart in early 1950 and stayed on the chart for 19 weeks.

<sup>92</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, 2012.

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*In his earlier years of gathering rocks for his expansive gardens, Mr. Petersen's interest was confined to Oregon. Wave-rounded stones from the Oregon coast had a place with desert-varnished agates from the Harney highlands. Black obsidian from Glass Butte was set in statuary beside representatives of the quartz family of minerals removed from aged cliffs of the John Day basin.*

*Occasionally, Mr. Petersen found it necessary to use block and tackle and a heavy truck to move huge specimens into his museum from distant rhyolitic cliffs. This occurred when he found a gigantic 'nodule,' weighing tons in the Clarno formation west of the John Day River. Because the specimen was strangely shaped and huge, Mr. Petersen gave the huge rock a place of prominence. Several years [later], a scientist interested in the world's ancient plants visited...and determined it was the fossilized roots of an Oregon palm tree of long millions of years ago.*

*In recent years, the Oregon field became too limited for [him]...From Arkansas he obtained giant crystals [one estimated to weigh 500 lbs.]. Beautiful amethyst geodes were received from Brazil. Through exchange, semi-precious stones of Europe and India, Asia and Australia were added to the ever growing collection.<sup>93</sup>*

The following is just one example of Petersen's persistence in collecting rare specimens. In 1949, he hauled a 3.5 ton slab of petrified wood from the Antelope country for exhibit in the gardens:

*The huge slab of agatized and partly opalized wood is believed to represent a species of sequoia that grew in Oregon millions of years ago before the rising Cascades rolled eastward from the Pacific. Curvature of the slab indicates that the tree was 12 or 14 feet in diameter. Petersen first heard of the massive chunk...following its discovery by Sam Glover, an old-time rancher of the Antelope country...[who] found the specimen in the Indian creek area. Only about a foot of the surface was exposed. Extensive excavation revealed the rest and the weight was estimated at 3½ tons.*

*A tractor was used in hauling the slab from its age-old resting place and block and tackle were required to load it on a truck. It was then hauled some 90 miles to its resting place under a poplar tree at the far-famed rock garden.<sup>94</sup>*

Evidence of Petersen's process of creating the buildings exists on the site. He built wood forms for casting building walls and features within the walls, with molds to preserve spaces for windows and doors. Cinders, pebbles and obsidian were pressed into the concrete, creating the encrusted surfaces and outlining features. And the walls and other features were assembled. Little is known at this point about his other building processes, although it is known that most of the lava stones, both on the vignettes and the buildings, were placed in concrete but have a dry laid appearance.

Petersen began selling his land in the early 1940s, which presumably helped fund his collecting and the development of his garden. This was a clear indication that his focus was shifting from farming to collecting and building the rock garden.

## PROMOTING PETERSEN ROCK GARDEN

Although by most accounts fame of Petersen Rock Garden spread by word of mouth in early days,<sup>95</sup> Rasmus Petersen also showed a talent for promoting the garden himself. In the late 1940s or early 1950s he arranged for an extensive series of high quality photographic postcards (there were at least

<sup>93</sup> Phil F. Brogan, "Rockery Left As Monument," *The Oregonian*, 10 August 10, 1952, 33.

<sup>94</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Giant Sequoia exhibited in Rock Garden," 13 May 1949, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Langtry, "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock to Build Beauty. . ."

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30 different postcards), to be developed for the Rock Garden by Sawyer's Photo Services of Portland.<sup>96</sup> These postcards, which can still be collected today, provide overviews of the garden, illustrate specific features such as the islands and certain vignettes, and include portraits of Petersen on the front porch of his home and in front of the Statue of Liberty.

Petersen also promoted the gardens with the 'high tech' method of the day. He had View-Master slides made with views of the gardens. View-Masters were "three-dimensional pictures in full-color Kodachrome" on a round reel that could be viewed on a hand-held stereoscopic slide viewer to produce a three-dimensional view.<sup>97</sup> The View-Master technology was developed by German immigrant William Gruber, who lived in Portland. In the late 1930s, he sold the rights to Sawyer's Inc., which exhibited the device at the 1940 New York World's Fair. The View-Master's popularity grew so rapidly in the 1940s and 1950s that Sawyer's developed a manufacturing plant and warehouse to produce, store and distribute the viewers and postcards in their Beaverton, Oregon, headquarters.<sup>98</sup> In addition to producing three reels for Petersen Rock Garden, Sawyer's produced slides of travel destinations, the Disney characters and later Disneyland, many popular television shows and movies, advertisements for private companies, and for the U.S. military.

Rasmus Petersen advertised the rock garden in city directories, describing it as follows. As can be seen, his focus was clearly on the rock collection and related features at the site:

*"A Scenic Wonder of Agates, Obsidian, Petrified Wood, Thundereggs and Hundreds of Specimens Formed in the Lava Flow of Old Oregon, Nothing Like It in the West, 7 Miles South of Redmond on The Old Dalles-California Highway."<sup>99</sup>*

Petersen also made at least one radio appearance to talk about the gardens. He appeared in a series on KOIN radio in Portland entitled "Northwest Neighbors," with a talk entitled, "40,000 A Year Visit My Rocks," produced in 1942.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to Petersen's efforts, others promoted the site as well. A portfolio of twelve professional photographs of the garden was also developed in the 1940s/1950s by photographer Myron Symons.<sup>101</sup> Symons, who was a jeweler, gained experience in scenic photography when he apprenticed to a jeweler in Dawson, British Columbia, and photographed the Yukon. He moved to Bend in 1915, establishing a jewelry store (later in partnership with his brother) in the O'Kane Hotel building. Symons became known as a local photographer, photographing businesses, sawmills, the Cascade Mountains, and other sites of interest in central Oregon, selling them in booklets in his jewelry store. He is credited with publicizing many scenic areas in Deschutes County. The photographs of Petersen Rock Garden are a valuable record because, in addition to showing the rock garden, they provide excellent photographs of the context of the site, including the rock garden in the west yard with Petersen's residence in the background and a view of the gardens against the backdrop of the Cascade range.

<sup>96</sup> This date derives from the fact that he had a photograph produced of himself in front of the plaque stating, "Enjoy yourself. It is later than you think," which is based on a song first performed in 1949 that became widely popular in 1950.

<sup>97</sup> Views included the gardens landscape, "the lily pond, the wishing well, castle and Statue of Liberty, agates, crystals and petrified wood, flag of lava cinders and obsidian, and fluorescent display" [from the museum].

<sup>98</sup> Sawyer's Photo Services was founded in 1911. After record sales in 1965, Sawyer's Inc. was purchased by General Online and Film Corp. Eventually the company was purchased by Mattel, who closed the Beaverton plant after it was investigated by the EPA and moved operations to Mexico in 2000. They stopped production of View-Master slides for tourist attractions in 2009 (Oregon Historical Society Vertical File, "Oregon – Industries – Sawyer's Inc.," accessed March 2013; "View-Master," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/View-Master>, accessed April 2013).

<sup>99</sup> *Bend, Oregon City Directory*, F. L. Polk & Co., 1942, 1946, 1948.

<sup>100</sup> *The Oregonian*, (Advertisement), 1 July 1942, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Symons, Myron, "Farm Home of Rasmus Petersen, Redmond, Oregon," (album of 12 photographic prints). On file, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division.

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Like many visitors to the Petersen Rock Gardens, the photographer appears to have been mesmerized by the site and shared Petersen's passion for rocks and minerals:

*Miniature castles, picturesque fountains and beautiful terraces within the grounds picture here, on the Rasmus Peterson [sic] place between Bend and Redmond, Oregon, tell their own stories, but unless the visitor inspects the grounds carefully, and with a questing heart, he will fail to read the strange stories told by the ancient stones used in the construction . . . Look twice at that bit of petrified wood, for it is a remnant of a great redwood forest that once flourished in Central Oregon . . . Examine that banded rock carefully: It is a bit of a thunderegg hatched in the lavas of old Oregon . . . Feel the cool surface of those glass-like rocks: They are volcanic glasses melted in plutonic fires . . . Trace the growth rings on that bit of petrified sequoia: They tell a story of weather born of oceans that swept over beaches now elevated into Oregon mountains. Enjoy the blooms of these rock gardens, but do not overlook the stories of the rocks.<sup>102</sup>*

Virgil Langtry, who later became a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals, was also so enamored of the gardens he could hardly find the words to describe them: ". . .we cannot keep our eyes from the monument of beauty just behind us as we look at this smaller garden. It would take study to write of it, for there were too many things to look at and see, unless hours were spent in looking." In this 1938 account he writes of the many rose bushes, fruit trees, "a riotous mass of flowers in full bloom," and rock terraces covered by 60-to-70 varieties of mosses. He describes one four-tiered garden (vignette) that is 18 feet tall, with wings extending 50 feet to each side, which he describes as "a monument of beauty." Like later writers, he was impressed by the different colors and textures of the rocks, the sun on the white and black obsidian, and the variety of buildings portrayed. What he called "the crowning glory of Petersen's intricate artistry" was "a glistening two-story hospital, complete with windows, columns, steeples, covered over all in the same obsidian that lends such loveliness to the entire spectacle. In the windows stand nurses who appear happy in their surroundings."<sup>103</sup> This is a theme that would be repeated many times by visitors to the gardens over the years.

### The Growth of Auto Tourism

Development of the Petersen Rock Garden coincided with growing auto tourism in Oregon. By the end of the Depression, about the time Petersen began creating his rock garden, more and more people were able to buy automobiles. At the same time, more navigable roads were being constructed and improved, and the state park system was expanding, creating destinations for vacationing families: "Car touring became a popular and increasingly affordable way to spend a family vacation. By the end of the 1930s, Oregon had dozens of state parks comprising thirty-two thousand acres and attracting 2 million visitors a year."<sup>104</sup> The closest highway to Petersen Rock Garden is US 97, the Dalles-California Highway.<sup>105</sup> This highway was designated in 1917, the route established in 1926, and the actual road paved by 1940.<sup>106</sup> At the same time the cities of Bend and Redmond, as well as central Oregon in general, were becoming keenly aware of the value of tourism and its relationship to good roads. US 97 extended from The Dalles on the north end to Klamath Falls on the south end, with such sights as "The Cave" of the Deschutes, Crooked River Canyon, Lava Butte, Lava River Cave, and

<sup>102</sup> Symons, "Farm Home of Rasmus Peterson . . ."

<sup>103</sup> Langtry, "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock to Build Beauty. . ." 7.

<sup>104</sup> Gail Wells, "Tourists Discover the Oregon Coast," *The Oregon History Project*,

[http://ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/narratives/subtopiccfm?subtopic\\_ID=570](http://ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/narratives/subtopiccfm?subtopic_ID=570), accessed April 2013. Article written in 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Petersen Rock Garden is located about one-and-one-half miles from US 97 as the crow flies, twelve miles from Bend via US 97, and eight miles from Redmond via US 97.

<sup>106</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*.

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Crater Lake along the way.<sup>107</sup> Petersen Rock Garden was centrally placed between Redmond and Bend along this route.

The Bend Chamber of Commerce took a leadership role in promoting tourism in the area in the 1930s and beyond, and the *Bend Bulletin* reported regularly on tourism, tourist sites, tourism benefits, and the contribution of good roads.<sup>108</sup> In 1940 a guide developed by writers in the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration actively promoted Bend (which had been platted as recently as 1904 by the Pilot Butte Development Company) and the surrounding area as follows:

*Bend is the center of an extensive recreational territory. More than 100 lakes and 300 miles of fishing streams lie within 50 miles of the city. There are swimming and boating on clear mountain lakes, horseback rides along forest trails, camping in primitive areas, golf on a mile-high course; there are lava cones, lava tunnels, lava forests; ice caves and subterranean rivers; canyon depths and mountain heights.*<sup>109</sup>

Petersen Rock Garden as a central Oregon destination remained in the public eye throughout this time. Virgil Langtry, writing for the *Redmond Spokesman* and the *Bend Bulletin*, reported that in the spring and summer of 1938, 7,000 people visited Petersen Rock Garden.<sup>110</sup> The *Bend Bulletin* also followed visitation gains for the site: "Petersen's Rock Garden One of County's Famous Spots," (1941); "Rock Gardens Attract 60,000 Persons in One Year," (1946); and "Famed Rockery Lures Tourists; Story Is Traced," (1950). In 1952, the year of Petersen's death, visitation was reported at 120,000.<sup>111</sup>

Rasmus Christian Petersen died unexpectedly on August 3, 1952 at the age of 69, sitting in his museum next to his stone fireplace. Many tributes were written about Petersen and his gardens after his death. The death notice in *The Oregonian* called his rock garden "world famous" and "a veritable park."<sup>112</sup> Extensive articles were published in *The Oregonian* on August 10, 1952 – "Rockery Left As Monument" – and in the *Bend Bulletin* on August 4, 1952 – "Builder of Famed Petersen Rock Gardens Dies Sunday." The article in *The Oregonian* recounted how Petersen began the rock garden, "arranging his agates and jasper, obsidian and thunder eggs, chalcedony and iridescent lavas into miniature castles, with turrets, spires and moats" from rocks he had collected in the area, to pass the time in the winter when he wasn't farming.<sup>113</sup> The writer recalled how Petersen ranged further and further afield, gathering his rocks and minerals which the writer called "the outstanding collection of semi-precious stones outside of an American museum," until he was trading with collectors from around the world. One of the most memorable pieces in the rock garden, Brogan wrote, is the large fossilized roots of an Oregon palm tree, which Petersen found west of the John Day River. He eulogized that the rock garden "remains as a memorial to a man who found more than sermons in stones."<sup>114</sup>

In Petersen's obituary in the *Bend Bulletin* the garden was called "one of the state's major man-made attractions." The article profiled how Petersen came to homestead in central Oregon and how he began building the garden: "Facing some idle time in the winter months 15 years ago Mr. Petersen built a small rockery in the form of turreted castles, for his own enjoyment. Out of that small rockery,

<sup>107</sup> Oregon State Board of Control, *Oregon End of the Trail*, 407.

<sup>108</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Oregon State Board of Control, *Oregon End of the Trail*, 393.

<sup>110</sup> Langtry, Virgil H., "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock to Build Beauty in Gardens Surrounding His Pleasant Ridge Home," *The Redmond Spokesman*, July 14, 1938.

<sup>111</sup> Brogan, "Rockery Left As Monument."

<sup>112</sup> *The Oregonian*, "Ramus Petersen," (death notice), 5 August 1952, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Brogan, "Rockery Left As Monument," 33.

<sup>114</sup> Brogan, "Rockery Left As Monument," 33.

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which on the following spring was profusely covered with flowers that just about hid the rocks, grew the show place that is now gaining nation-wide attention."<sup>115</sup>

At the time of his death, in addition to the attractions of the rock garden, the site hosted a museum, a restaurant (which was just getting underway), swan-shaped paddle boats, and a large picnic area. The museum was built to house the Guy Compton collection, a collection of semi-precious stones and minerals purchased by Petersen about 1941. Toward the end of his life Petersen hired help with the grounds, leased a concession, and left responsibility for the museum to a Mr. and Mrs. N. O. Anderson.<sup>116</sup> The article noted that, "Seasonally, the Petersen rockeries attract tourists from every state in the United States, despite the fact that the place is not on a major highway." Also commonly remarked upon was the fact that Petersen never charged admission to the site, but left it open to donations.

### **Petersen Rock Garden as a Roadside Attraction**

After Mr. Petersen's death in 1952 the rock garden continued as an attraction, operated by his widow Nyleta Petersen. She actively promoted the site with ads, articles, and souvenirs. A quarter-page advertisement was placed in the Golden Jubilee Edition of the June 15, 1953 edition of the *Bend Bulletin* entitled, "Colorful Spectacle of Man's Handiwork" with lively exclamations. The advertisements that she placed in city directories in 1952, 1954, 1957, and 1959 put less emphasis on the stones and minerals (which Petersen had promoted) and more on visitor amenities, including souvenirs and gifts:

#### **PETERSEN ROCK GARDEN AND MUSEUM**

MRS. NYLETA PETERSEN, Owner  
WONDERLAND OF BEAUTIFUL ROCK CREATIONS  
CASTLES, FOUNTAINS, TERRACES  
CORAL ROCKERIES  
FISH PONDS AND STATUES  
ALL MADE OF ROCK  
SOUVENIRS – GIFTS  
RESTAURANT  
Old Redwood Highway.<sup>117</sup>

Almost exactly a year after Petersen's death a profile of Petersen with many photos appeared in *The Oregonian* magazine entitled, "Rock-Beset Rancher Found Hidden Beauty."<sup>118</sup> This article portrayed Petersen as a self-effacing "spud farmer" who didn't know what to do with all the rocks on his farm and so started making things out of them. Nonetheless, the writer was captivated by the gardens, as had been every visitor since Langtry wrote about the site fifteen years earlier: "Visitors are overwhelmed by the beauty of this awesome project set against the backdrop of towering snowcapped peaks of the Cascade range. Millions of stones from dime to derrick size were carefully placed to create delicate shading and sharp contrasts, all to form indescribably scenes in miniature. About quiet lagoons, choked with lily pads, are castles of ancient vintage, tiny mansions built to scale, lighthouses, cottages, terraced gardens, and sweeping bridges."<sup>119</sup>

In the mid-1950s ads for Petersen Rock Garden appeared regularly in the *Central Oregon Rancher*, alongside ads for farm implements, farm vehicles, and irrigation supplies, proving that it was still considered a local attraction, as well as appealing to visitors from around the country and the world.

<sup>115</sup> *The Bend Bulletin*, "Builder of Famed Petersen Rock Gardens Dies Sunday," 4 August 1952, 1.

<sup>116</sup> The article states that Mr. Anderson was formerly chief clerk with the Bureau of Reclamation in Bend.

<sup>117</sup> Bend City Directories, 1952, 1954, 1957, 1959. In 1960 Mrs. Petersen also placed an ad in the yellow pages.

<sup>118</sup> Lucia, "Rock-Beset Rancher Found Hidden Beauty," 4.

<sup>119</sup> Lucia, "Rock-Beset Rancher Found Hidden Beauty," 4.

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Promotions appeared to take a more commercial slant after Mr. Petersen's death. In 1960 Mrs. Petersen placed a box ad in the city directory which included a tribute to Mr. Petersen, but also noted the "Restaurant – Museum – Gift Shop and Relics," and that "peacocks and jungle birds roamed the gardens." It also appears that the many souvenirs embellished with the Petersen Rock Garden name were produced after Petersen's death.<sup>120</sup> Items that were sold at the museum included pennants, glasses, spoons, bottle openers, ashtrays, cedar wood souvenirs, including wood boxes, desk pen holders, pen clips, pocket knives, plaques, platters, and plates. After Petersen's death "Petersen Rock Gardens" produced a postcard set that displayed a profile of Petersen with a portrait, entitled, "The Saga of the Petersen Rock Gardens." These cards, unlike the earlier postcards produced for Petersen, were in full color. Many other companies sold postcards of Petersen Rock Gardens as well.<sup>121</sup> The garden was also featured on commercial products, including plates and platters, which featured various popular tourist spots in Oregon.<sup>122</sup>

Another experiment in attracting visitors to Petersen Rock Garden was undertaken in 1955. Frank "Doc" Barto and William Thrall of Junction City built a miniature railroad in 1952 and at first tried to rent it out.<sup>123</sup> Thrall, a theater owner and operator in Junction City, financed the project while Barto, who was a machinist and ran a repair shop, provided the know-how.<sup>124</sup> The railroad – which had five cars and held 50 children or 36 adults – was an exact quarter-scale replica of the Southern Pacific type 4.6.2 steam locomotive, specifically the Shasta Daylight luxury train that ran between San Francisco and Portland.<sup>125</sup> They built the train from plans and specifications that were furnished by the Southern Pacific and other sources to make it as authentic as possible. In 1955 they installed the railroad on 1,700 feet of track just east of the parking lot on Petersen's land. It operated at the rock garden for three years, until 1958, and was thereafter re-located (with Barto) to Tempe, Arizona.<sup>126</sup>

Newspaper articles on Petersen Rock Garden, typically with a focus on travel, have appeared in publications regularly since Petersen's death over 60 years ago. It continues to be promoted in numerous guides to travel in Oregon, including such well-known travel publishers as Fodors and AAA magazine. It also appears in regional guides such as *The Long And Winding Road: Discovering the Pleasures And Treasures of Highway 97* and specialty guides such as *Weird U.S., Your Travel Guide to America's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets* and *Northwest Treasure Hunter's Gem & Mineral Guide*. While not typical of the type of attractions seen in "Oregon Attractions and Oddities," it is one of nearly 200 sites mentioned in this online resource, the largest web-based source for roadside attractions in the United States, which includes museums and other points of interest as well. On a more scholarly note, Petersen Rock Garden warranted a two-page entry in Congdon and Hallmark's *American Folk Art, A Regional Reference*.<sup>127</sup>

### Postscript

Research revealed little of Petersen's life between the time of Mrs. Johansen's death in 1927 and when he began building his rock garden in 1935, whereas before that time he was regularly mentioned in farming-related and regional news. At the time of the stock market crash in October 1929, which marked the beginning of the Great Depression, Petersen was 46 and had had a long, successful

<sup>120</sup> This view is based on the dates that many of these items were popular, as well as the emphasis in the ads.

<sup>121</sup> Note that Petersen Rock Garden is also seen as Petersen's Rock Garden and Petersen Rock Gardens.

<sup>122</sup> Petersen Rock Gardens was featured on a plate (n.d.) that includes illustrations of Portland and Mt. Hood, the Pacific Coast, Three Sisters, the Oregon Caves Chateau, Wallowa Lake, the McKenzie Rover, Crater Lake, and the Rogue River Gorge, and a Myrtle wood Tree.

<sup>123</sup> "For Rent: Quarter-Scale Model Railroad Complete With Engine (That Runs), .Cars," 1952, 25.

<sup>124</sup> Laura Wittkop, "JC railroad history – the micro version," *Tri-County News*, 22 February 2007, 24.

<sup>125</sup> Stranaham, 1055:1.

<sup>126</sup> It was sold after Barto's death to buyers in Washington and California.

<sup>127</sup> Kristin G. Congdon and Kara Kelley Hallmark, *American Folk Art, A Regional Reference, Volume Two*. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC\_CLIO, 2002), 628. Note that a significant amount of information in this entry appears to be incorrect.

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career as a farmer and rancher, beginning as he did at age 22. He had done well in the years from 1919 to 1920 when many other farmers were suffering from drought and low farm prices.<sup>128</sup> By the mid-1920s he had also diversified his farm, continuing to experiment with new crops and markets. He'd also had an active social life and was involved as a leader in the community. Although he had lost both his brothers and his long-time companion, he lived among friends, including his friend from the Nysted Folk School, J. W. Petersen, and as well as many other Danes that had settled in the area.<sup>129</sup> Farm prices hit a low point nationally in 1933. Petersen and his fellow Redmond-area farmers, however, appeared to be sustained at this time by their success in growing and marketing Deschutes Netted Gem russet potatoes.<sup>130</sup>

Petersen married late in life, just a few years before his death in 1952, but prior to this he was not alone.<sup>131</sup> Research has shown that Mrs. Catharine Johansen lived with him from 1912 to 1927, employed as his housekeeper, and clearly his companion as well.<sup>132</sup> According to the 1940 census Minnie Burson was living with him at this time, employed as his housekeeper.<sup>133</sup> Two boarders lived on the property in 1940 as well, Carl D. Corbett, who appears to have been his long-time hired hand, and James Alex Ashton.<sup>134</sup> And he had many visitors to the rock garden, as many as 7,000 by 1938, according to author Virgil Langtry, a figure which grew exponentially over time.<sup>135</sup>

About 1950 Petersen married Frankie Nyleta Harris (1902-1987), who had two children by a previous marriage. After Mr. Petersen's death Mrs. Petersen is portrayed in the advertisements and articles as operating Petersen Rock Garden. In 1958 Petersen Rock Gardens became a corporation with Mrs. Petersen, her daughter Adele Hegardt, and Garthe Brown, an attorney, on the board, and in 1959 Nyleta Petersen and Carl Corbett transferred the property to Petersen Rock Gardens, Inc.<sup>136</sup> Mrs. Petersen and Carl Corbett died within a year of one another in the late 1980s and on-going operation of the rock garden was taken over by Mrs. Petersen's daughter Adele Henne Hegardt (1923-2010) and her husband Harry Newton Hegardt (1917-1990). Since Mrs. Hegardt's death in 2010 the property has been owned by her daughter Susan Caward, who continues to operate it to this day.

## INTERPRETING PETERSEN ROCK GARDEN

### Design Context

The development chronology of the Petersen Rock Garden prepared by historian Michael Hall supports the concept of increasing sophistication in the design and construction of the gardens. His early pieces, to the west of the house, were simple installations that invited contemplation of a central focal point within a field that was often the base for the piece. Figures were containers for flowers and mosses ("cups" as they are called here) or, in the case of the piece just northwest of the residence, a house placed on a slender pedestal. Bases were one-to-four tiers which provided beds for plantings of

<sup>128</sup> Carlos A. Schwantes, Carlos A., *The Pacific Northwest, An Interpretive History*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 288-289. The price of wheat in the Pacific Northwest dropped from \$2.06 a bushel in 1919 to \$.84 a bushel in 1921. In Idaho, the price of potatoes was \$1.51 a bushel in 1919 and \$.31 a bushel in 1922.

<sup>129</sup> US Census, 1910, 1920.

<sup>130</sup> Hole, *Redmond*, 90.

<sup>131</sup> According to historian Michael A. Hall, he married two years before his death, but this has not been verified. Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, 40.

<sup>132</sup> *The Bend Bulletin* articles 1919 to 1922.

<sup>133</sup> She was also listed on his 1942 draft registration as the person most likely to know where he could be contacted.

<sup>134</sup> In the 1920 census Corbett lived with another household down the road as a boarder and "worked out" as a farm laborer.

<sup>135</sup> Langtry, "Rasmus Peterson Uses Rock to Build Beauty . . ."

<sup>136</sup> Hall, *National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Gardens (Draft)*, Section 8, Page 40. Source: *The Oregonian*, "Corporations File Articles," 11 November 1958, 19; Nyleta Petersen and Carl Corbett to Petersen Rock Gardens, Inc., April 18, 1959. Deschutes County Book, vol. 123, 255 (Deschutes County Clerk's Office, Bend, Oregon). The corporation was made up of Nyleta Petersen, Adele Cook (Adele Hegardt's previous name), and \_\_\_\_\_. Some time after Petersen died Nyleta married his hired hand, Carl. D. Corbett.



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flowers and mosses and the display of different types of rocks, stones, with corresponding colors and textures, and figures. The large round moat to the east of the house allowed Pedersen to explore water as an element in the landscape, which provided another kind of 'ground' for the central figure of a miniature building.

All other areas of the gardens show a sophistication of organization and design that is impressive in its scope and impact. An exception is the parking lot. The parking lot is characterized by simple vignettes that have a dual purpose of building a sense of anticipation for the gardens as a whole, and organizing the parking area. They have the same simple focus as the earlier garden areas. The northerly vignette, however, is impressive in its sheer scale and architectural expression, while the southerly vignette is another feature where the viewer can imagine traversing a miniature built landscape in a mountain setting. The central vignette evokes scenes of a Cascade mountain landscape.<sup>137</sup>

Taken as a whole, the grounds, the individual vignettes, and the craftsmanship of the individual pieces and elements within the pieces show a mastery of design, use of scale, incorporation of color and texture, narrative, and additionally impart a sense of delight. The individual 'rooms' within the site are separated in many instances by trees and other vegetation, irrigation ditches, or in the case of the pond and islands to the south, the driveway. But they are connected by paths and sufficiently visible one-to-the-other to create intrigue as to what the next feature holds. The vegetation, typically arborvitae, often marks transitions or creates a backdrop that intensifies the experience of the vignettes or sculptures. Travel from piece to piece is directed by the paths; small stone piers and arborvitae that mark the transition from one vignette to another; and/or bridges over ditches or ponds. Movement is also directed, however, by the axial relationships of the pieces, where one piece is seen in juxtaposition to the next, which also builds anticipation for the viewer.

Scale relationships between the viewer and the pieces change depending on one's vantage point. Some vignettes, when viewed in relationship to the larger desert landscape and the mountains in the distance, could be full-scale buildings at an undefined distance. Many pieces can be explored on foot, through sets of stairs and paths that lead up, over and around the vignettes. Others are approached through the bridges, whose scale also varies, from an arched truss that reaches knee-height to the larger bridges with pylons over five feet in height. Travel through the pieces such as the mountain in the southerly parking lot vignette must be imagined by visually following the small paths and bridges that lead past houses and other buildings, a corral, and other miniature features. At the same time, the mountain houses a small gabled structure that serves as an entry post and can be entered. This was where the guest book was kept, on the embellished stone table that is built into the structure. The most substantial individual building, which is on the northerly island within the parking lot, is deceptively large, over twelve feet in height, and can only be viewed from ground level. Again, this contrasts with the southerly island, which displays another miniature world with buildings about one-and-one-half feet in height arranged along mountain pathways.

The mastery demonstrated on the site continues with an amazing array of stones, whose texture and color are used to enhance the experience of the vignettes and features. The craftsmanship in sizing and placing the stones is very fine. Stones, from the large rugged volcanic rock to small round stones to obsidian chips, are sized and placed with precision, while large fossils and petrified wood pieces are displays in themselves. All stonework is laid in concrete. The larger stones, such as the volcanic rock that typically makes up the bases for the vignettes, has a dry-laid appearance; in other words, the concrete is not visible and there is no mortar. The plinths and bases for other features, including the base for the Statue of Liberty, which is set with small, round stones, also has a dry-laid appearance, which enhances the regular texture of the stonework. Features such as the walls of the buildings are

<sup>137</sup> Petersen had talked of building an operating volcano at one point, which may have been planned for this vignette.

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made up of small stones or obsidian chips laid into the concrete with forms specially constructed for that purpose. Other concrete surfaces, such as some of the stairs, are also carefully inset with colored stones in a grid pattern. The volcanic rock and large specimen rocks (in the case of the museum) that clad the buildings are also laid in such a way that the concrete is not visible (note that the basalt on the residence' porch was not laid by Petersen and differs from all other stone work on the property).<sup>138</sup>

There are limited overt messages within the site. The reward for traversing the vignette at the far northwest corner of the site is a view of the base of the Statue of Liberty, which displays the message "Enjoy Yourself. It is Later Than You Think" on a plaque mounted on a piece of petrified wood. On the base of the building that resembles the White House, located on the vignette south of the museum, is an American flag inlaid with the phrase "God Bless America" spelled out in very precise stonework above it. These are the only written messages on the site.

Historically the color and texture of the stones contrasted with the water and abundance of flowers and mosses in the summer months. The water is currently turned off (it is supplied by the irrigation system) and there are few plantings. At present some of the landscaping, including selected trees and shrubs, are being removed, as the site has not been maintained for some time and is much overgrown.

The iconography of the rock garden has been explored extensively by historian Michael Hall, who attributes the forms and figures of the rock garden to Petersen's Danish heritage and training in Norse mythology and Danish culture. Many writers describing Petersen Rock Garden over the years have been nearly at a loss for words. Viewers over time have interpreted the buildings and other features in ways that made sense to them. The one emotion that all visitors seem to have in common is a sense of delight in the gardens, and for older visitors who knew the gardens as children, a feeling of nostalgia.

### Folk Art Environments

Environments such as Petersen Rock Garden are not easily described or classified, but considerable scholarship on sites such as this has been undertaken over the last fifty years. Some sites are classified as folk art environments. These are often created by individuals with no formal art training and who are not self-described as artists.<sup>139</sup> Some sites are more accurately described as visionary landscapes that embody and convey the religious or philosophical beliefs of their creators.<sup>140</sup> These environments are also sometimes classified as "outsider art." Other sites are considered roadside architecture, which are specifically created as roadside attractions or to be enjoyed by the public, and may or may not have a commercial purpose. Note also that roadside attractions are often quirky sites with an entertainment value that differs fundamentally from folk art environments or visionary landscapes.

Petersen Rock Garden is most accurately described as a folk art environment, although it displays aspects of known visionary environments, specifically several visionary landscapes created by followers of the Catholic Church in the upper Midwest and elsewhere that have their roots in European grotto traditions.<sup>141</sup> After Rasmus Petersen's death in 1952 the gardens were promoted as a roadside

<sup>138</sup> According to owner Susan Caward, the house was not built by Petersen but was built to his specifications.

<sup>139</sup> They may also be categorized as self-taught, which is more a reflection of their circumstances than a reflection on their skill or talent. See John Michael Vlach, "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 15, No. 4 Winter, 1980, 345-355.

<sup>140</sup> John Beardsley in *Gardens of Revelation, Environments by Visionary Artists* and Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi in *Sacred Spaces and Other Places, A Guide to Grottos and Sculptural Environments in the Upper Midwest*, have written extensively about this topic.

<sup>141</sup> Lisa Stone and Jim Zani. *Sacred Spaces and Other Places: A Guide to Grottos and Sculptural Environments in the Upper Midwest*. (Chicago: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press, 1993).

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attraction by later family members, particularly once they started selling commercial souvenirs. However, by all accounts, Petersen Rock Garden began as a personal expression by Petersen, for his own enjoyment, by someone who was not formally trained in the arts or geology or mineralogy, and in this respect may be most appropriately considered a folk art environment.<sup>142</sup>

Petersen Rock Garden is also part of a genre in art history scholarship that has grown in recognition over the last forty-to-fifty years. Beginning in the 1960s, many areas of academic study broadened to encompass traditionally under-recognized groups, including ethnic groups and minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and the mentally ill. Non-traditional art subjects also came to the fore, including vernacular environments, such as The Orange Show in Houston, Texas (and Petersen Rock Garden); assemblage art, such as Simon Rodia's Watts Towers in Los Angeles;<sup>143</sup> and events ("happenings"), such as those created by artist Alan Kaprow in the 1960s.<sup>144</sup> As early as 1961 the Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted an exhibit entitled "The Art of Assemblage," which included a photograph of Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, a folk art environment that was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Parallel to this growing recognition of traditionally overlooked artists and areas of art historical research was regard for the artists who created vernacular environments such as folk art environments.

These environments, which encompass a broad range of expressions from gardens to installations to assemblages to sites, were first recognized by the National Park Service as subjects worthy of listing and preservation with the nomination of Simon Rodia's Watts Towers in Los Angeles; Fresteire Underground Gardens in Fresno, California; the Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas; and the Lemmon Petrified Park in Lemmon, South Dakota in 1977; and Rancho Bonito, Mountainair, New Mexico in 1978. These resources were first treated in a thematic way with a National Register nomination of twentieth century folk art environments, entitled "Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California," prepared by staff of the California Office of Historic Preservation in 1980. While the nomination was not successful, this submittal helped pave the way for the greater recognition that these non-traditional environments and resources enjoy today.<sup>145</sup> Multiple Property Submissions for the sculpture of Dionicio Rodrigues in Arkansas and Texas were accepted in 1986 and 2004, respectively, and today over twenty folk art environments across the country are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>146</sup>

### Significance

Two themes are seen in many visionary landscapes and folk art environments, religious themes and patriotic themes. Religious themes may represent the teachings of an established religion, such as the Catholic Church, as seen in the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa,<sup>147</sup> or a personal spiritual vision, such as seen in Paradise Gardens in Pennville, Georgia.<sup>148</sup> Another example is the Gilgal

<sup>142</sup> Note that the art historian John Michael Vlach has successfully argued that the term folk art environment is misleading, in that the artists that create environments such as this are not folk artists. They do not share a common tradition, such as a craft common to a certain area or people. However, the term folk art environment will continue to be used here because it is the most widely understood term in historic preservation for environments such as this (see *Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California* and *Ave Maria Grotto* National Register Nominations).

<sup>143</sup> Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

<sup>144</sup> Artist Allan Kaprow authored a book called *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings* in 1966 in which he memorialized these genres (see Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation*, 2003, 30).

<sup>145</sup> The nomination was not accepted by the National Park Service, however, for several reasons. Most of the environments were relatively recent, and would have had to make an argument for "exceptional importance" under Criterion Consideration G, and it was felt at the time that that scholarship was not sufficiently established to make a judgment on the value of such resources, which were called "personal visions of reality and fantasy" in the responding letter. The Keeper also felt that the fact that many of the artists associated with the sites were still living was also problematic.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Lusignan, "National Register of Historic Places Folk Art Environments," n.d.

<sup>147</sup> The Grotto of the Redemption was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

<sup>148</sup> Paradise Gardens was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2012.

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Sculpture Garden in Salt Lake City, built by Latter-day Saints bishop Thomas Battersby Child Jr. from 1947 to 1963. In contrast to the gardens built by members of the Catholic church, this garden contains symbols associated with the Mormon religion, and scriptures, poems and other texts carved into the stones. Like the gardens associated with the Catholic Church, however, the Gilgal Garden was intended to be a place of contemplation.<sup>149</sup>

Religious themes may parallel patriotic themes in visionary landscapes and folk art environments, such as seen in the Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas.<sup>150</sup> Alternatively, patriotic themes may appear on their own, as seen in the Patriotism Shrine in Dickeyville, Wisconsin.<sup>151</sup> Environments whose primary emphasis is on conveying the message of their creator are most appropriately considered visionary environments.

Environments that do not appear to have an overt message beyond the design(s) itself are more appropriately considered folk art environments. This is the category that Petersen Rock Garden falls within. We know little about Petersen's motivation for building the garden, as he was not interviewed about the garden to any extent during his lifetime (to our knowledge) and did not write or speak about himself and his motivations. Limited references to him in publications treat him as self-effacing at best, and naïve at worst.<sup>152</sup> Advertisements placed by Petersen in city directories emphasized his rock collection: "A Scenic Wonder of Agates, Obsidian, Petrified Wood, Thundereggs and Hundreds of Specimens Formed in the Lava Flow of Old Oregon, Nothing Like It in the West." The museum was constructed ca 1941 to showcase his collection, specifically, the Guy Compton collection of minerals that he purchased about this time. Judging from the support facilities that he constructed on the site, such as the lake and paddle boats and picnic area, it would appear that in addition to showcasing his collection, he hoped that visitors would enjoy themselves.

It is not known whether Petersen saw any other rock gardens as he planned his own. Petersen Rock Garden shares some characteristics with similar environments found throughout the United States.<sup>153</sup> Petersen rarely spoke about himself, however, and personal belongings such as postcards and books that might have revealed design sources have not been found.<sup>154</sup> An exception is a guide to The Grotto at the Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother in Portland, which was recently found in Petersen's attic. Authors Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi suggest a reason for these artists to not credit or discuss other folk art environments they've studied, which is: "This adherence to a kind of 'grotto autonomy,'<sup>155</sup> . . . might stem from the intensity of personal sacrifice and creative expression that the grotto builders shared. In devoting one's life to the creation of something monumental and unique similar projects simply had no relevance."<sup>156</sup>

While rock gardens and folk art environments occur throughout the United States, several very well known gardens exist in the Midwest.<sup>157</sup> In particular, the Grotto of the Redemption by Father Paul

<sup>149</sup> "Gilgal Sculpture Garden," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgal\\_Sculpture\\_Garden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgal_Sculpture_Garden), accessed August 2013.

<sup>150</sup> The Garden of Eden was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

<sup>151</sup> For further discussion of these themes as they appear in visionary environments, see "For God and Country" in John Beardsley's *Gardens of Revelation, Environments by Visionary Artists*. Note that the Patriotism Shrine is part of the larger Sacred Heart Grotto but is physically separate from it.

<sup>152</sup> See for example Ellis Lucia's article entitled, "Rock-Beset Rancher Found Hidden Beauty, Rasmus Petersen couldn't get rid of the countless rocks on his land, so he made a fabulous garden of them." *The Oregonian Magazine*, 9 August, 1953, 4.

<sup>153</sup> Examples include the John Medica gardens in Santa Rosa, California (California Historic Landmark #939) and the Ave Maria Grotto, listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>154</sup> Note that the property is still owned by Susan Caward, a descendent of Nyleta Petersen.

<sup>155</sup> Meaning that creators do not credit design innovations or construction techniques they learned from other grotto or garden creators.

<sup>156</sup> Lisa Stone, *Sacred Spaces and Other Places*.

<sup>157</sup> See *Sacred Spaces and Other Places* by Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi for further documentation of these environments in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois.

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Dobberstein, begun in 1912, was highly regarded (it was considered by some the "Eighth Wonder of the World") and exhibits certain design characteristics seen in Petersen's Rock Garden. Petersen may have seen this grotto as Catharine Johansen, with whom he lived, had several family members in Iowa and they may have visited. His stated home was Reinbeck, Iowa when he attended the Nysted Folk School. However, no evidence has been found that he saw these other environments.<sup>158</sup>

### Comparative sites

Petersen Rock Garden has been described by historian Michael Hall as being designed using a "grotto vocabulary." The contrast between the rugged volcanic rock and the smooth surfaces of other stones, as well as the shiny or reflective surfaces of obsidian and glass, can be seen in built grottos, whose stone work is often fashioned to look like caves or natural grottoes. Note that many of these visionary landscapes, however, are built by members of the Catholic Church, which has a tradition of building grottos as places of contemplation and reflection and often feature statuary in niches consistent with this purpose. In the case of The Grotto in Portland, built features and statuary complement the natural landscape.<sup>159</sup> While these uses of texture and color are established in grotto vocabularies, it is also true that materials with contrasting textures and colors were readily available to Petersen within short drives from his home. The red, black, and white colors, not to mention the contrast between rugged volcanic rock and shiny obsidian, are visually striking and would therefore also be appealing. We do not, however, know what drove his selection or the arrangement of his materials.

Petersen Rock Garden is unique in the state of Oregon. The only comparable site is the Newberg Bottle Sculpture Garden in Newberg, Oregon, approximately 25 miles southwest of Portland. This is a private garden in back of a 1950 residence built by and belonging to the Mahaney family. The showpiece of the garden is a 20-foot-tall bottle structure made out of colored bottles set in concrete. Also included in the garden are flower beds, benches, a fountain, a barbecue pit, a bridge over a moat and many walkways, all encrusted with stones from eastern Oregon and enclosed within a six-foot-tall wall. A sculpture on the site made of 220,000-volt electrical insulators has been compared to Watts Towers, although of a lesser scale. The family has been working on the garden about 25 years. Formerly open to the public, it has now reverted to a private garden.<sup>160</sup>

The garden, while very artistic, does not compare to Petersen Rock Garden in scale, themes, or public access. Petersen Rock Garden has long been an important tourist destination in the state and beyond, despite being in a remote location. While numbers vary, it was consistently reported that Petersen Rock Gardens was visited by tourists numbering over a hundred-thousand annually in the 1940s and beyond. It was also developed parallel to the growth of auto tourism in the state, which enhanced access. It appears in numerous guides and is illustrated with other renowned sites in Oregon, such as Crater Lake and the Oregon Caves, on commercial tourist products. And has been the subject of many products produced by Petersen Rock Gardens and others, and appears in numerous postcards.

Due to the number of years that Petersen Rock Garden has been open to the public (approximately 75 years), the number of people who visited the Rock Garden every year in its heyday, and the amount of publicity the Garden generated, it has a strong public presence and many hundreds of people have very fond memories of the site. It remains unique in the state of Oregon. While it compares favorably with other nationally known folk art environments and visionary landscapes, its importance is to the state as a whole and its singular appearance within the high desert landscape of central Oregon, from which it was literally constructed.

<sup>158</sup> "Grotto of the Redemption," <http://www.westbendgrotto.com/>, accessed May 2013.

<sup>159</sup> A brochure for the Portland Grotto was found in Petersen's papers in May 2013.

<sup>160</sup> Fran Gardner, "Newberg Bottle Sculpture Points Way to Unique Garden," *The Oregonian*, November 12, 1991.

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## CONCLUSION

Nothing in Rasmus Petersen's past prepares one for the visually stunning landscape that he created in the high desert of central Oregon. He and his brothers were among thousands of immigrants who left Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seeking opportunity in the United States, particularly in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>161</sup> It is not unusual that Danish immigrants would first stop in Iowa, as the Petersens did, because there were established Danish communities in Iowa, as well as elsewhere in the Midwest.<sup>162</sup> And it is not unusual that, in the Pacific Northwest, they would first gravitate to Junction City, Oregon, where there was an established Danish community that actively solicited new members and settlers.<sup>163</sup>

Where Rasmus and Lars' personal experience begins to depart from the typical immigrant is that they both pursued higher education once they arrived in the United States. Specifically, they attended four years of the Danish Folk High School in Nysted, Nebraska, before traveling to the Pacific Northwest at ages 22 and 24, respectively. As has been seen, the purpose of this type of education was not to prepare students for a specific profession or trade. Rather, it was an education steeped in Danish and American culture and tied to the Lutheran Church, which was the first Scandinavian (and Danish) institution established in the United States and provided religious, social, and educational support.<sup>164</sup> It is unusual that newly arrived young immigrants would postpone seeking their fortunes and instead pursue additional education.

Tragically, Petersen lost both of his brothers shortly after immigrating. His brother Lars died in a logging camp accident at the age of 24, just after he finished his education and before Petersen left for central Oregon. Petersen lost his second brother Adolf, who arrived in the United States in 1905, to unknown causes in 1907, at the age of 21.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, like many before him, Petersen set out with friends, seeking land and opportunity in the newly opened-to-irrigation lands of central Oregon. Petersen homesteaded 80 acres and eventually established a farm of 256 acres. Through perseverance, hard work, and some luck, he was successful. The crops and animals he raised were not unusual for that time and place. He first focused on hay, grain and sheep, later experimenting with potatoes. He was astute in many of his business decisions and successfully endured economic downturns in farming, which began in the post-World War I era and continued through the early years of the Depression. Many accounts reveal that his farm was a showplace, that he was progressive and innovative, and a leader in the remote community of Pleasant Ridge and beyond.

Redmond was established at this time, but was a community of just a few wood buildings, and Bend had been platted just two years before Petersen and his friends arrived.<sup>166</sup> Pleasant Ridge did not exist. From these sparse beginnings Petersen and his friends built a community. While admirable, however, this was not remarkable or by any means unique. In many ways it is the story of the rural west, and specifically the story of settling the newly irrigated lands of central Oregon and Washington. People had to depend on one another if a community was to develop and be sustainable.

<sup>161</sup> Gordon B. Dodds, *The American Northwest: A History of Oregon and Washington*. (Arlington Heights: The Forum Press, 1986) 125. "In 1910 the Nordic [Scandinavian] population of the Pacific Northwest was the largest of all the groups for foreign extraction in the region."

<sup>162</sup> Dodds, *The American Northwest* . . . , 125.

<sup>163</sup> Beckham, Stephen Dow, "Neilsen (A.C.) House," *State of Oregon Inventory of Historic Sites and Buildings*, 30 August 1976.

<sup>164</sup> Dodds, *The American Northwest* . . . , 126..

<sup>165</sup> One source said that both brothers died in logging accidents.

<sup>166</sup> See Hole, *Redmond*.

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Organizations such as the Grange, in which many participated, supported these emerging communities.

Where Petersen's story departs from the norm, and where his personal experience and qualities, including intelligence, perseverance, and an aptitude for hard work, comes to the forefront, however, is when he begins to create his gardens. Nothing in his past prepares one for the artistry of his creation.

Petersen had the time, resources, and vision to create this environment. He was retired by 1942; he was single; he had money from the sale of his land; and the materials he used were at hand, including lava rock, obsidian, and rare gems and stones.<sup>167</sup> Most of all he had a fascination with rocks and a vision of what his site could become. Petersen shares these conditions, especially his facility with his materials, with many other folk artists over time and throughout the United States.<sup>168</sup>

And like many environments such as these, Petersen Rock Garden is not part of a shared folk tradition, although there is precedent in the United States and Europe for similar types of artistic expressions. The scholar John Michael Vlach, who writes about American folk art, makes the point that environments like these are not folk art, despite the fact that this name has been attached to these environments through scholarship, and their creators are not folk artists. Watts Towers by Simon Rodia, for example, is classified as a folk art environment.<sup>169</sup> "The Watts Towers are not folk art but, rather, an outstanding piece of twentieth-century sculpture," writes Vlach. "They speak not for Watts of Los Angeles but for Simon Rodia, for his vivid imagination, and for his will to leave behind a monument to his existence."<sup>170</sup>

The same can be said of Petersen. Petersen Rock Garden is a singular, four-acre environment that came from the vision of one person, using first indigenous and later precious materials, that is totally unexpected in this desert landscape. Rasmus Petersen created an artistically complex, fully realized, three-dimensional environment that has astounded and delighted visitors for seven decades. It is significant for its artistry, unique qualities, and its construction materials and methods, and as the work of a master. Despite some loss of material integrity, the gardens are no less impressive today than when Langtry first visited and wrote about the site in 1938. And in spite of the relative 'sophistication' of our entertainments today, this site continues to inspire the same awe as visitors must have experienced over 75 years ago when touring the garden. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its design, materials, and methods of construction, and as the work of a master, and is significant at the state level as an important tourist attraction in Oregon for the last 75 years.

<sup>167</sup> See for example Weldon F. Heald, "A Farmer Turns To Stone," *The Lapidary Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1952 in Appendix A.

<sup>168</sup> See for example, the National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for Ave Maria Grotto, Section 8, Page 1.

<sup>169</sup> The Towers are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are a National Historic Landmark, a State of California Historic Monument, a State of California Historic Park, and Historic-Cultural Monument No. 15, designated by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission. "Watts Towers Arts Center and Watts Towers Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center," [http://www.wattstowers.org/Watts\\_Towers\\_Arts\\_Center.php](http://www.wattstowers.org/Watts_Towers_Arts_Center.php), accessed May 2013.

<sup>170</sup> John Michael Vlach, "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 1980, p. 347.

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#### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): None

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 12.36 acres  
 (Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates WGS84**  
 (Provide a digital location map on a continuation sheet in the appendixes)  
 (Place additional Latitude/Longitude coordinates on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>44.2039878</u>	<u>121.2635429</u>	3	<u>44.2021959</u>	<u>121.2608610</u>
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2	<u>44.2039517</u>	<u>121.2608719</u>	4	<u>44.2022138</u>	<u>121.2635137</u>
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

**UTM References WGS84**  
 (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>10N</u>	<u>638741</u>	<u>4895994</u>	3	<u>10N</u>	<u>638961</u>	<u>4895800</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>10N</u>	<u>638955</u>	<u>4895994</u>	4	<u>10N</u>	<u>638747</u>	<u>4895800</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)  
 In section 11, Township 16 South, Range east of the Willamette Meridian, as follows:  
 Beginning at the Northwest corner of the North Half of the Southwest Quarter (N ½ SW ¼) of Section 11; thence East along the North line thereof a distance of 700 feet; thence South at right angles to said North line a distance of 538 feet; thence West in a direct line to a point which is 538 feet South to the point of the beginning; thence North to the point of beginning; containing 8.6 acres.

Also, beginning at the Southwest corner of the Southwest quarter of the Northwest Quarter (SW ¼ NW ¼); thence East along the South line thereof a distance of 700 feet; thence North at right angles to said South line a distance of 212 feet; thence in a westerly direction to a point on the West line of said Southwest Quarter of said Northwest Quarter which point is 212 feet North of the point of beginning; thence South 212 feet to the point of beginning; containing 4 acres more or less. [Source: Deed, Deschutes County Book 123, p 255. April 18, 1959]

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property, entire tax lot 401, was designated as a protected historic site by Deschutes County, identified in its Comprehensive Plan, as amended. It is that parcel that was carved out of the farm property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Oregon State Historic Preservation Office staff, with Michael Hall  
organization Oregon State Historic Preservation Office date May 15, 2013  
street & number 725 Summer Street NE, Suite C telephone 503-986-0668  
city or town Salem state OR zip code 97301-1266  
e-mail

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** Petersen Rock Garden  
**City or Vicinity:** Redmond  
**County:** Deschutes **State:** Oregon  
**Photographer:** Tim Park  
**Date Photographed:** April 22, 2012

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- Photo 1 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0001  
South side of museum (S6), camera facing north
- Photo 2 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0002  
South side of north rock structure (R4) in parking lot, camera facing north
- Photo 3 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0003  
South side of middle rock structure (R5) in parking lot, camera facing north
- Photo 4 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0004  
South side of south rock structure (R6) in parking lot, camera facing north
- Photo 5 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0005  
North side of rock structure (R7), camera facing south

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- Photo 6 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0006  
North side of rock structure on island (R8), camera facing south
- Photo 7 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0007  
South side of "key" in center of island (R9), camera facing north
- Photo 8 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0008  
Northeast side of castle on the south side of island (R10), camera facing southwest
- Photo 9 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0009  
Southwest side of island (R10), camera facing east
- Photo 10 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0010  
Northwest side of island (R10), camera facing east
- Photo 11 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0011  
Southeast corner of rock structure (R18), camera facing northwest
- Photo 12 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0012  
South side of rock structure (R15), camera facing north
- Photo 13 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0013  
West side of the south bridge of rock structure (R15), camera facing east
- Photo 14 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0014  
South side of the west bridge of rock structure (R15), camera facing north
- Photo 15 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0015  
East side of rock structure (R15), camera facing west
- Photo 16 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0016  
Southeast side of rock structure (R15), camera facing northwest
- Photo 17 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0017  
Southwest side of Statue of Liberty rock structure (R16), camera facing northeast
- Photo 18 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0018  
Southeast side of berm (R14) around museum (S6), camera facing northwest
- Photo 19 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0019  
Close-up of "God Bless America" rock structure on south side of berm (R14), camera facing north
- Photo 20 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0020  
North side of center rock feature (R2), camera facing south
- Photo 21 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0021  
West side of rock structure (R3), camera facing east
- Photo 22 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0022  
North side of alcove in north side of rock structure (R3), camera facing south
- Photo 23 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0023  
North side of bridge (BR1), camera facing south
- Photo 24 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0024  
Northwest side of bridge (BR1), camera facing southeast

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**Photo 25 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0025  
Northwest side of bridge (BR3), camera facing southeast

**Photo 26 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0026  
South façade of residence (S1), camera facing north

**Photo 27 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0027  
West façade of residence (S1), camera facing east

**Photo 28 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0028  
Northeast corner of garage (S4), camera facing southwest

**Photo 29 of 29** OR\_DeschutesCounty\_PetersenRockGardens\_0029  
Southeast corner of ice house (S2), camera facing northwest

---

**Property Owner:** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

---

name Petersen Rock Gardens, Inc. (Contact: Susan Caward)  
street & number 7930 SW 77<sup>th</sup> Street telephone 541-382-5574  
city or town Redmond state OR zip code 97756

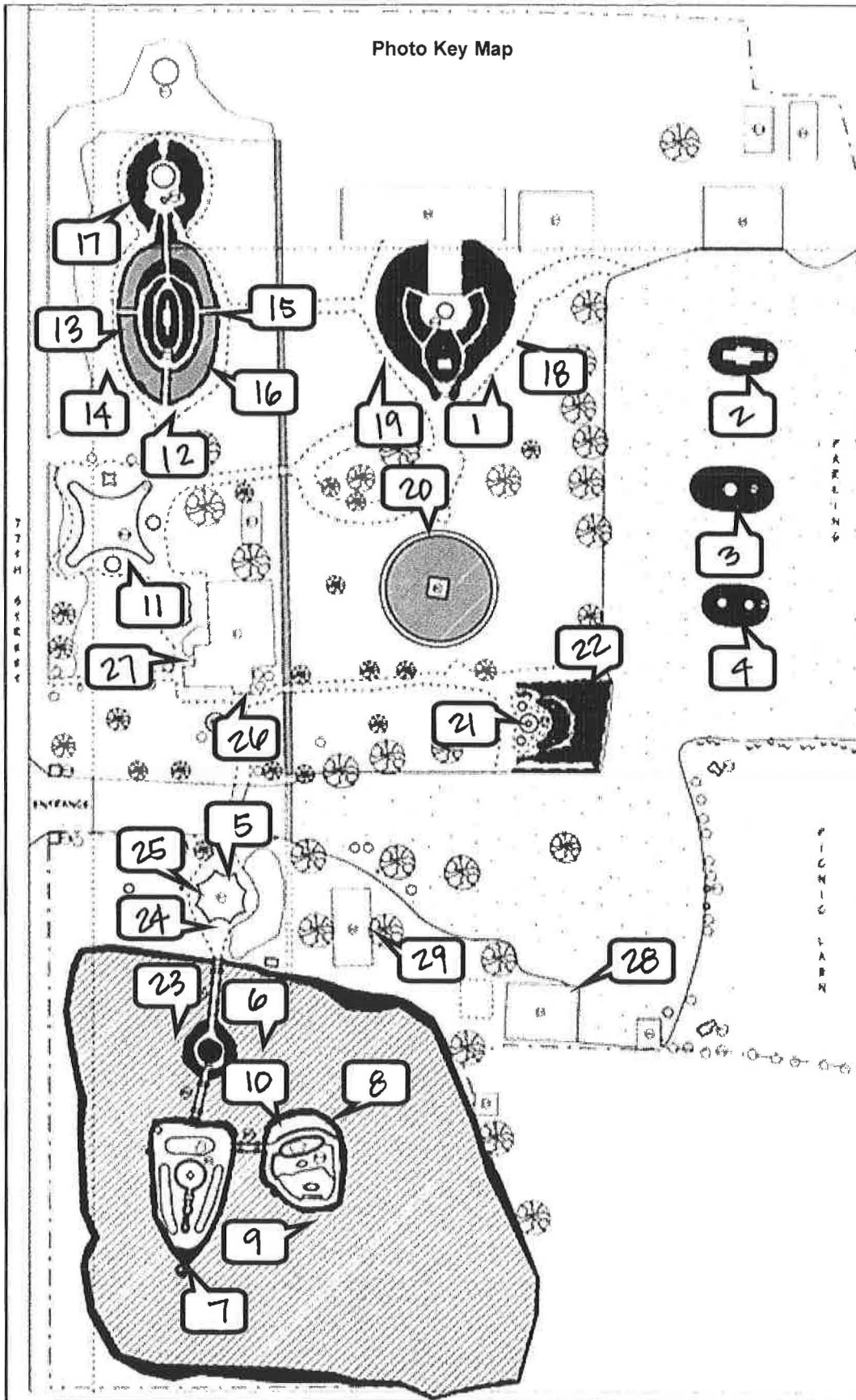
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



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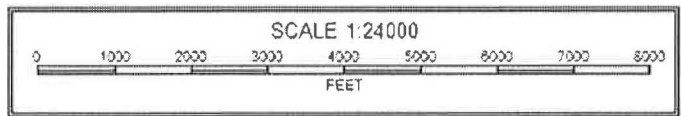
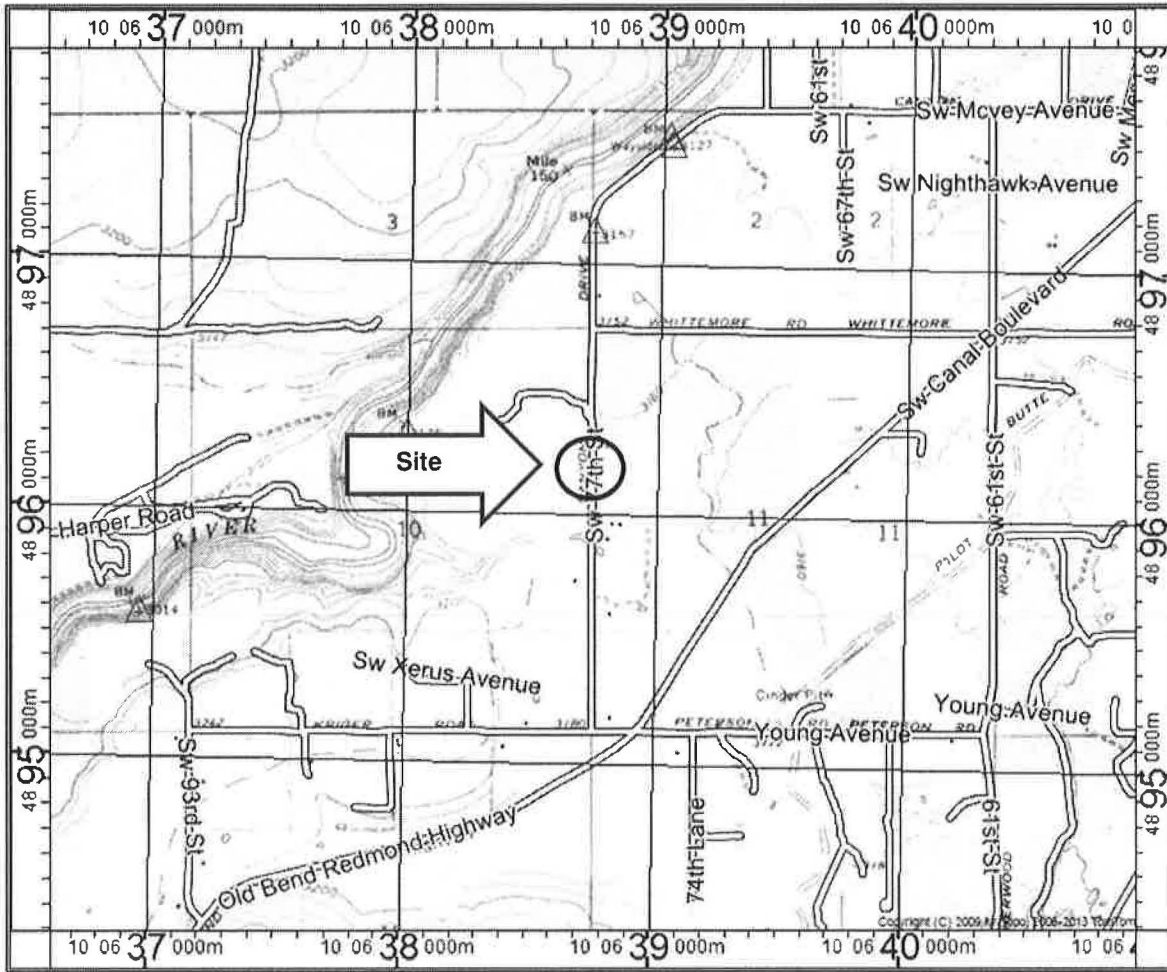
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Figure 1: Regional location map



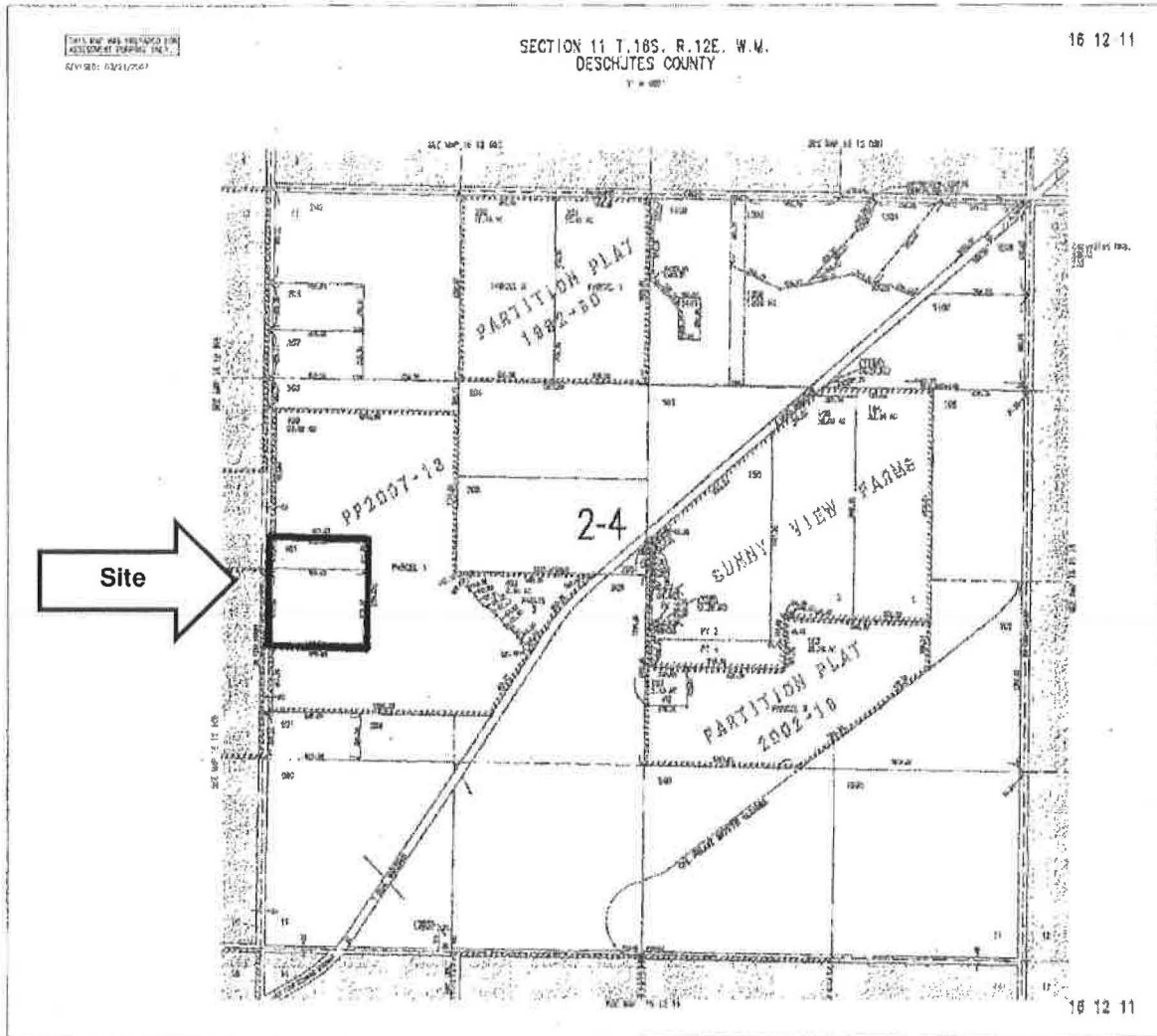
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Figure 2: Tax lot map, Lot 401



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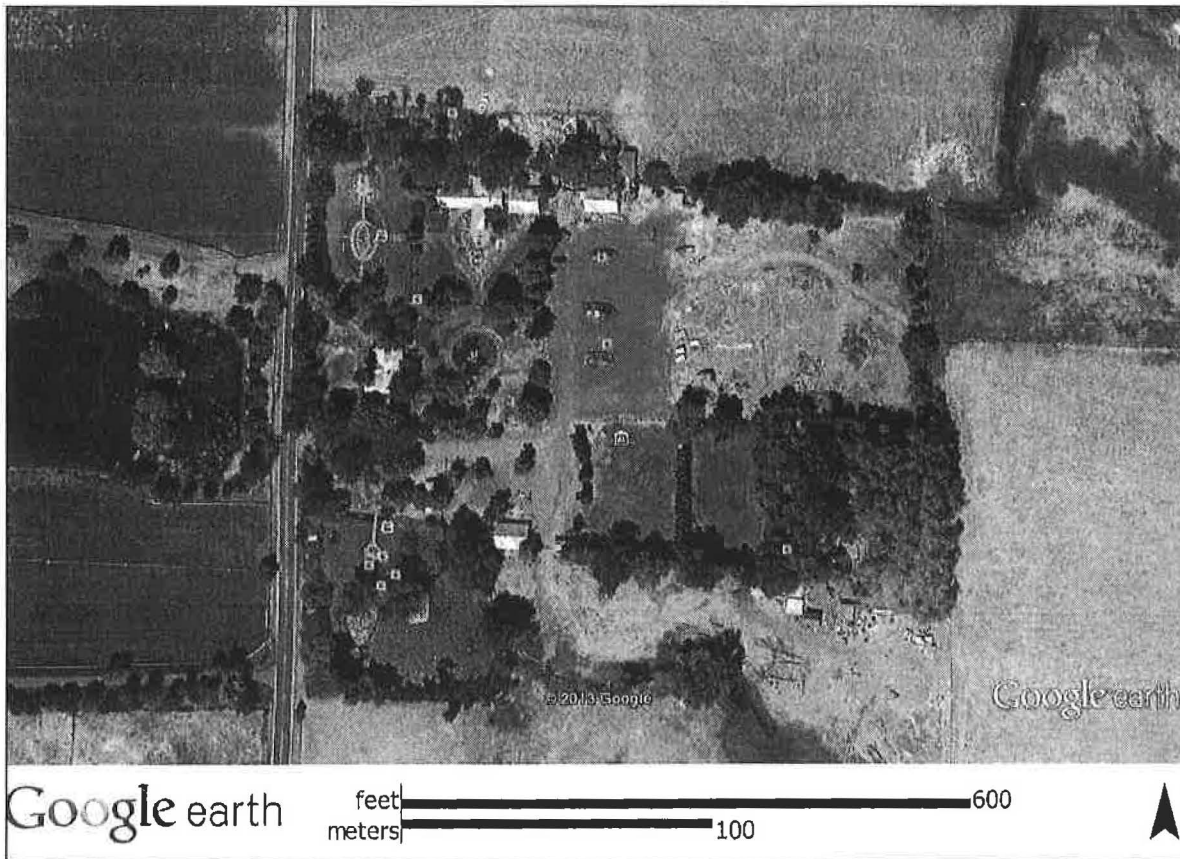
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Figure 3: Aerial view of site



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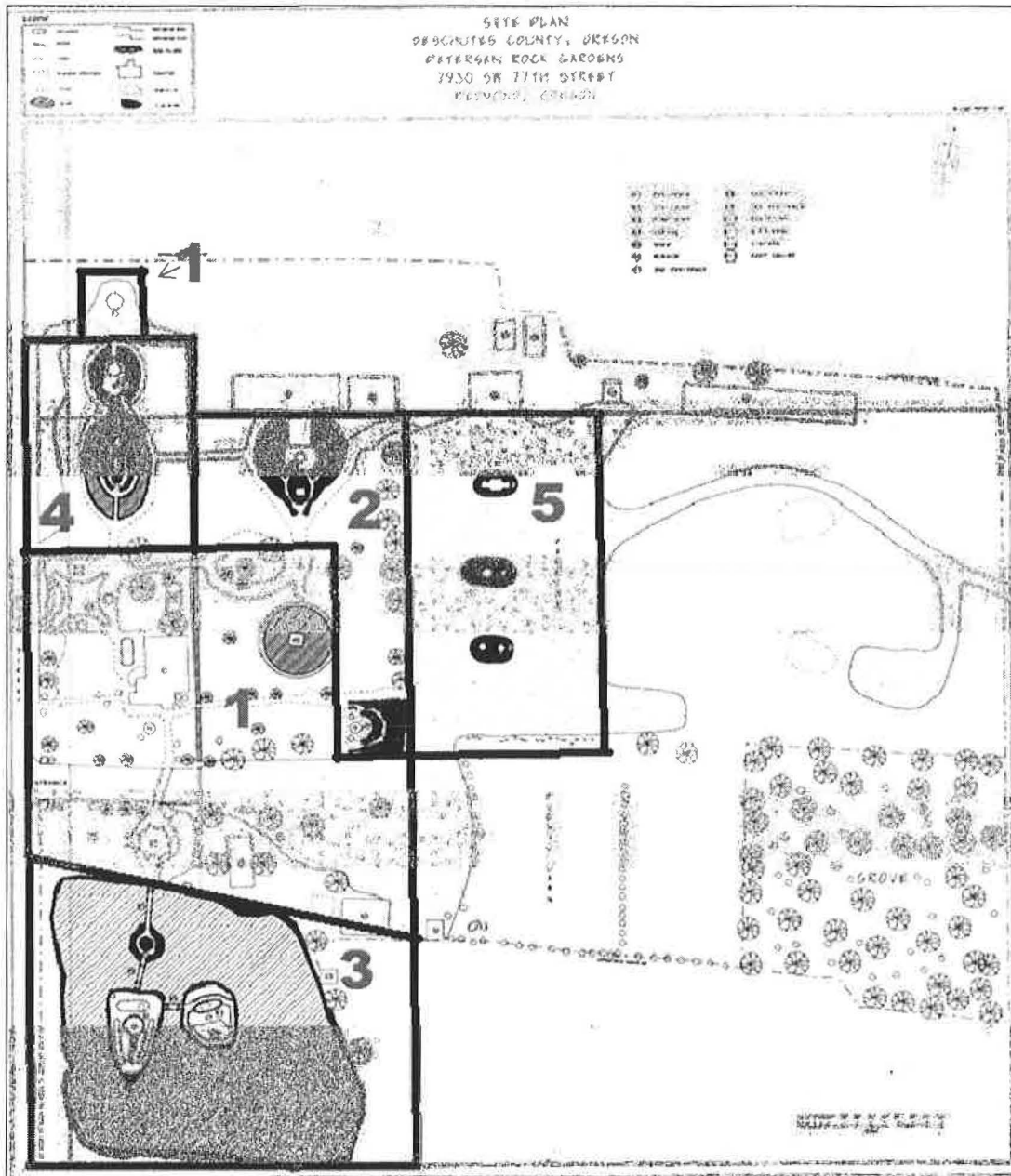
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Figure 4: Site plan with Areas noted





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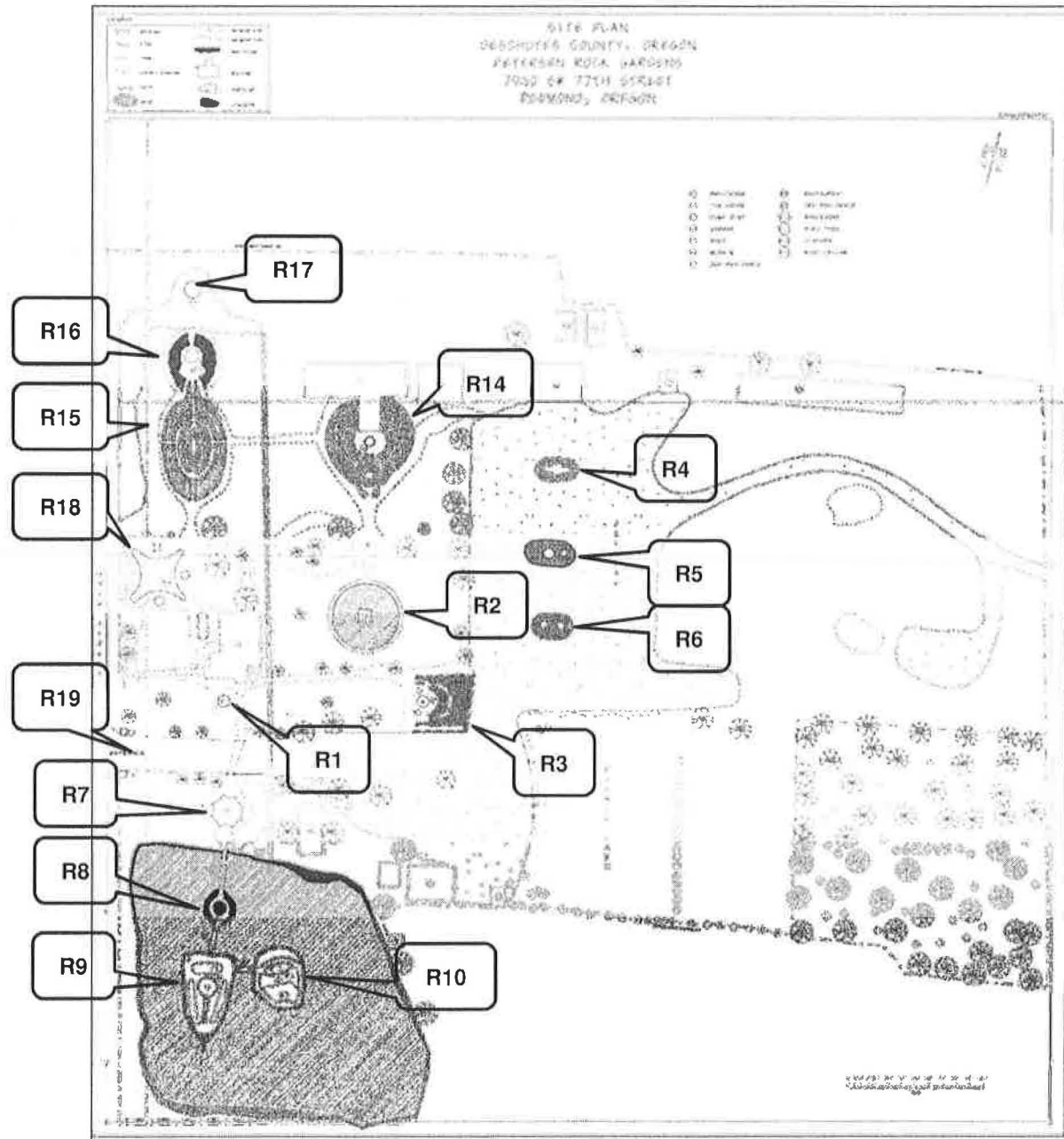
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Figure 6: Annotated site plan showing gardens





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Figure 7: Nysted Folk School, Nysted, NE, 1902-03 (Source: Grand View University Library, Des Moines)



Figure 8: Nysted Folk School today (Source: Wikipedia.org)



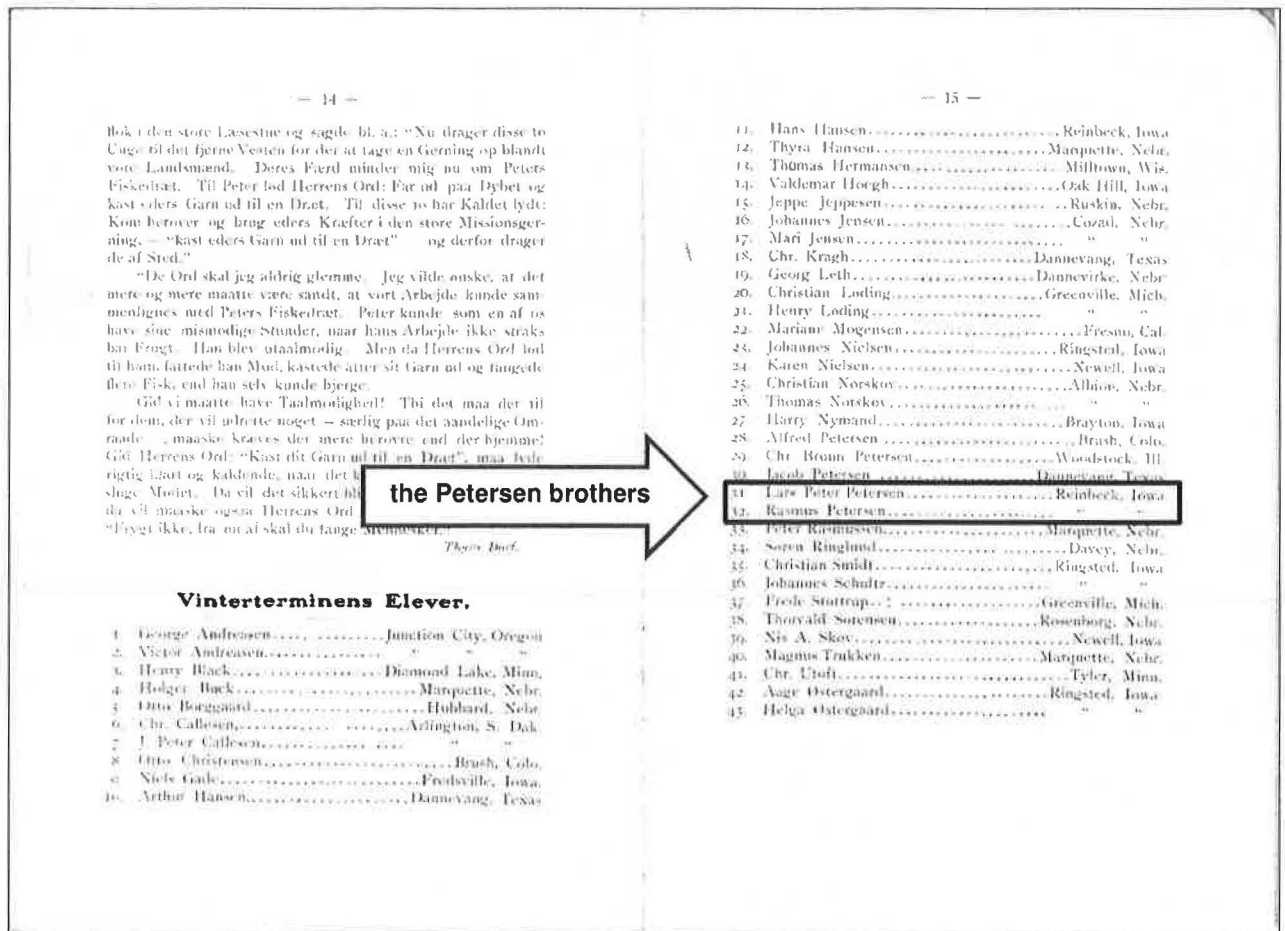
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Figure 9: Nysted Folk School Class Roster, 1902-03 (Source: Grand View University Library, Des Moines)



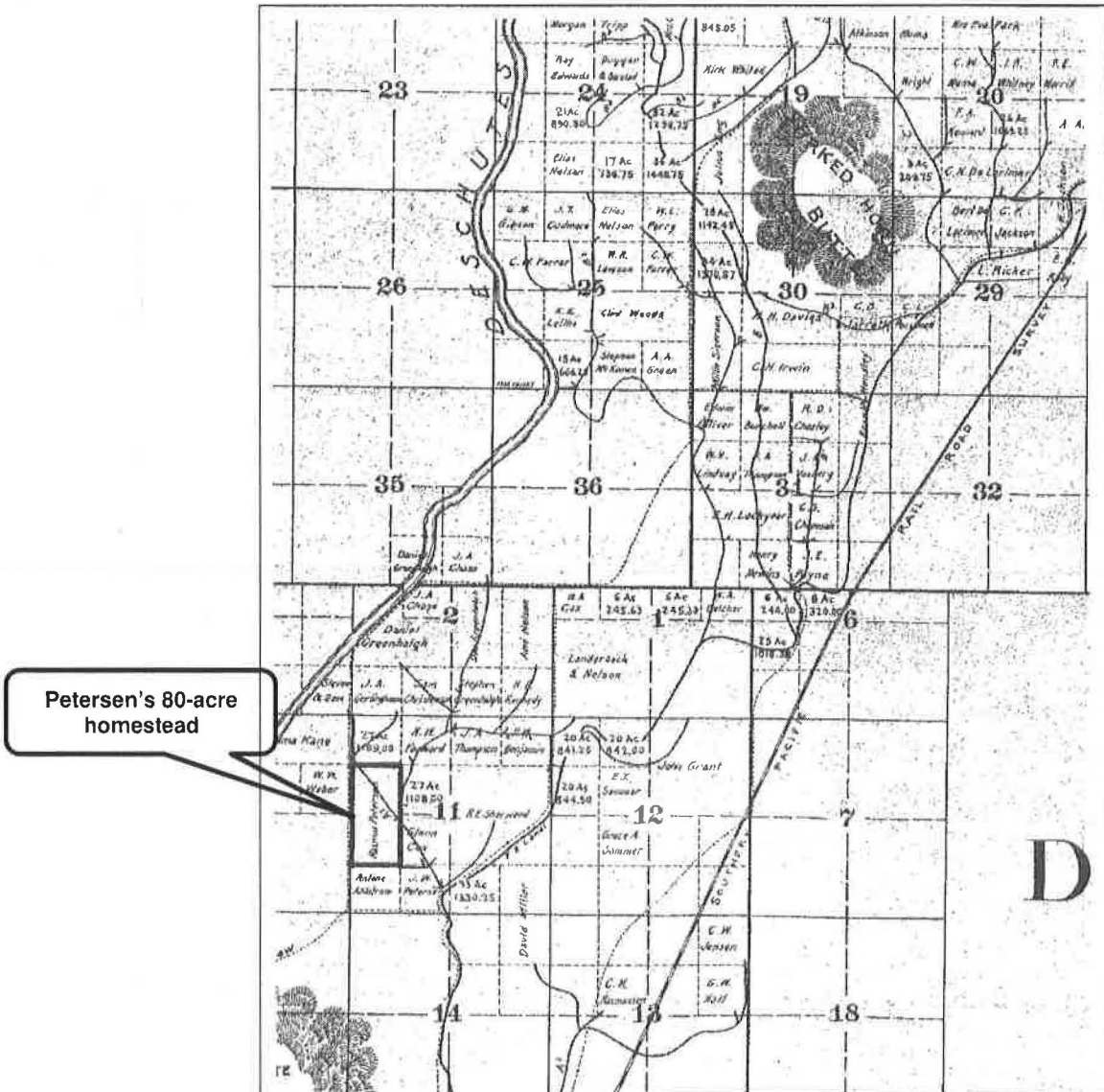
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Figure 10: Petersen's 80-acre homestead (Source: Irrigated Lands, Redmond District, 1909, The Deschutes Irrigation & Power Company)



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**Figure 11: Coverage of Rasmus Petersen's 1927 housewarming (Source: Redmond Spokesman)**



It was a gay day in 1927 when a Deschutes County farm tour included an inspection of new rural homes, including the now renowned Rasmus Petersen residence.

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**Figure 12: Cathrine Johansen’s gravestone, Redmond Cemetery (Source: Find A Grave)**



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**Figure 13: Rasmus Petersen with the Statue of Liberty and his plaque, "Enjoy Yourself. It is Later Than You Think," ca 1950 (Source: Sawyers)**



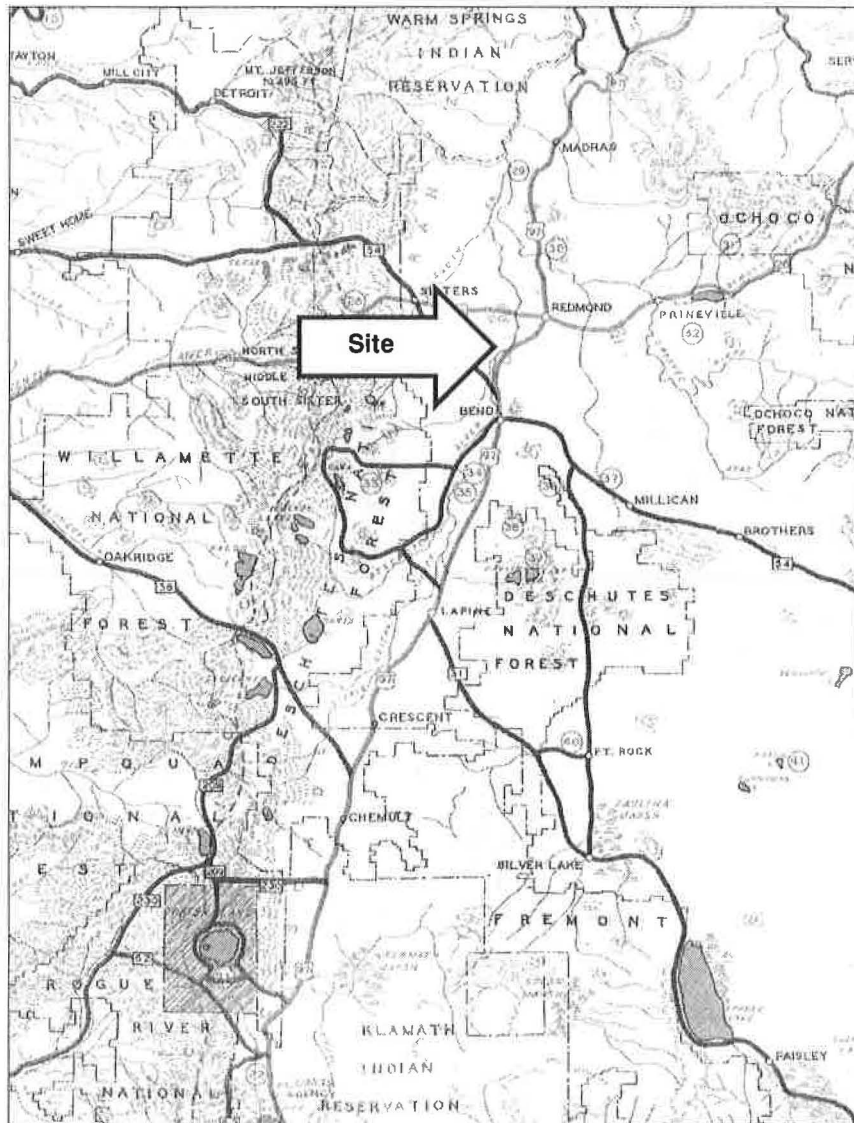
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**Figure 14: Map of major highways and tourism sites in Oregon in 1940 (Source: Oregon The American Guide Series)**



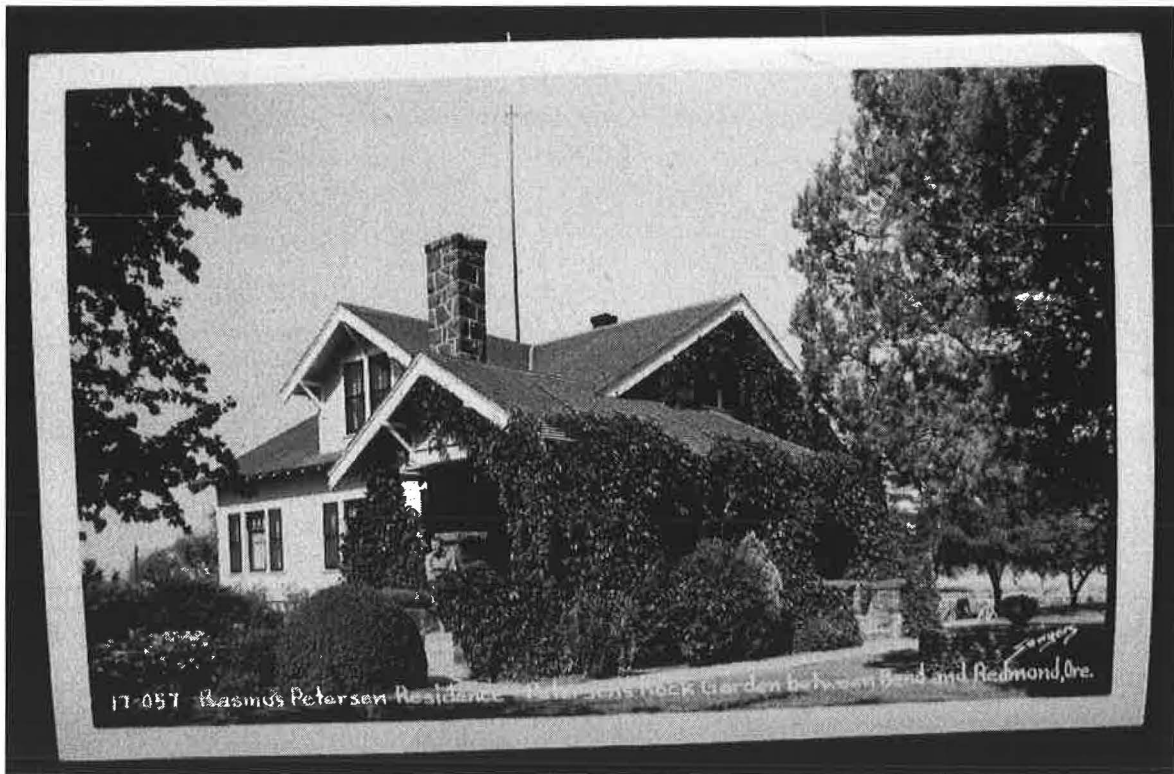
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Figure 15: Rasmus Petersen Residence promotional postcard, ca 1950 (Source: Sawyers)





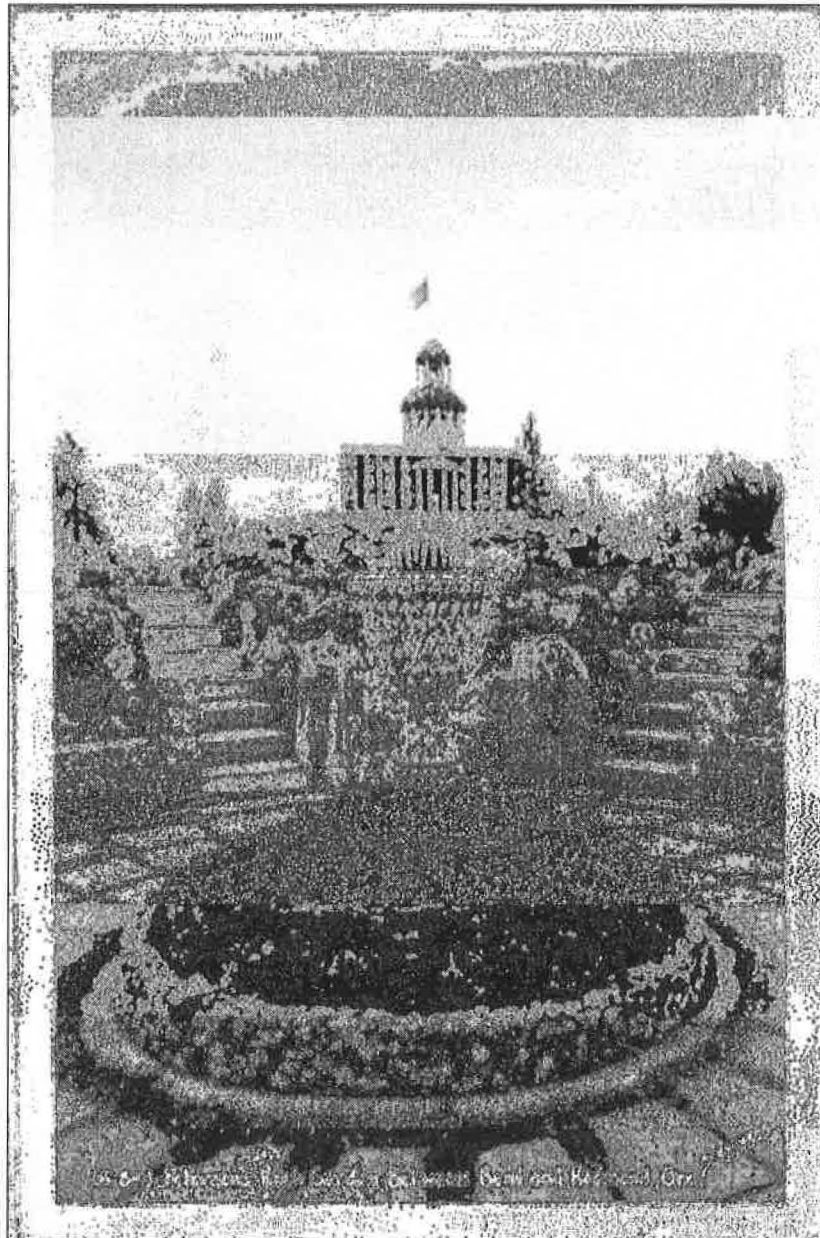
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**Figure 16: Round plaza in front of museum, promotional postcard, ca 1950, shows the cup topped by cacti (Source: Sawyers)**



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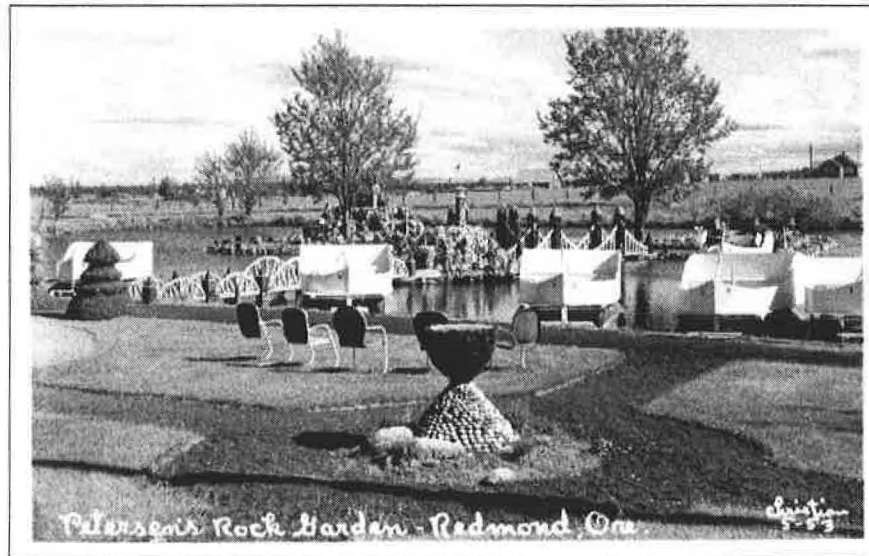
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**Figure 17: Rasmus Petersen on first island, before construction of the other islands, looking north, ca 1950**



**Figure 18: View of completed islands with swan boats, looking south, 1953 (Source: Christian)**



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**Figure 19: Overview of gardens south of the museum shows how the landscaping once integrated the site, ca 1950 (Source: Sawyers)**



**Figure 20: Overview of pond showing relationship of site to Cascade range, ca 1950 (Source: Sawyers)**



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**Figure 21:** Petersen residence with first terraced garden, ca 1950 (Source: University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division)



**Figure 22:** Petersen residence with first terraced garden, 2013 (Diana Painter, Photographer, May 15, 2013)



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**Figure 23: Vintage postcard showing first terraced garden with flowers (n.d.)**



**Figure 24: Colored photograph showing flowers in summer months (n.d.)**



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**Figure 25:** Viewmaster reel for Petersen Rock Gardens, promotional material, ca 1950  
(Source: Sawyers)



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Figure 26: Stave church in Norway, possible inspiration for the rock gardens (Source: Judith Dupré, *Churches*)

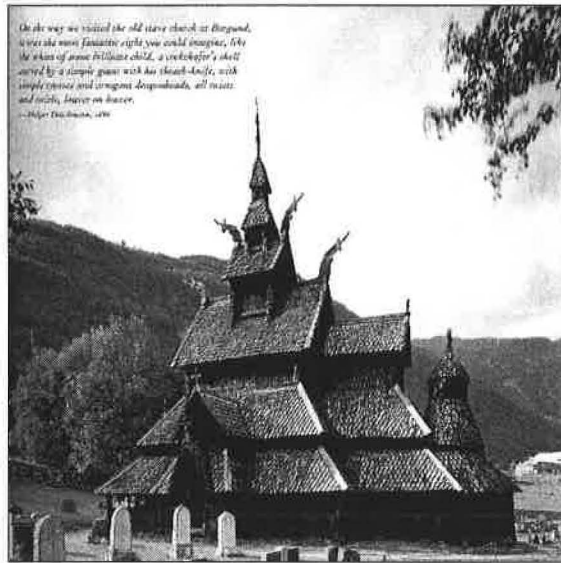


Figure 27: Stave church motif illustrated at Petersen Rock Gardens (Michael A. Hall, Photographer, April 9, 2012)



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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**Figure 28: Yggdrasil / Tree of Life, possible inspiration for Petersen Rock Garden  
(Source: The Ash Yggdrasil, Wikipedia.org)**





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**Figure 29; Rock garden at Ave Maria Grotto showing shared features with Petersen Rock Garden, Cullman, Alabama, 1932-34 (Source: John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation*)**



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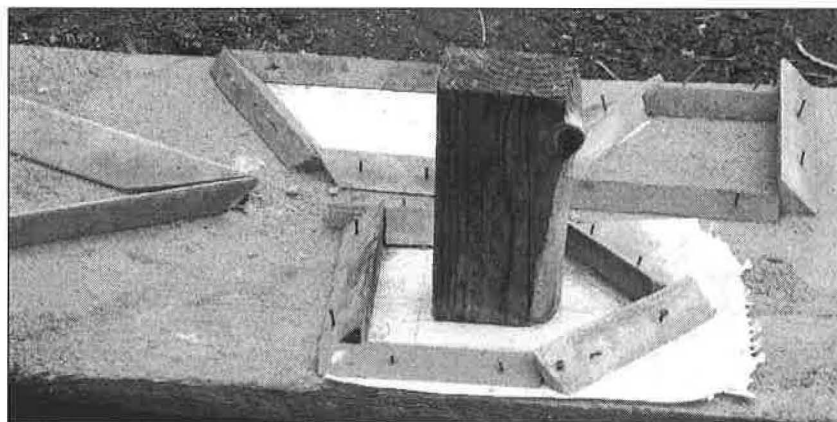
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**Figure 30: The building process - two prefabricated panels, unfinished, and façade mold base, (Michael A. Hall, Photographer, August 18, 2012)**



**Figure 31: The building process - façade molds, window block (Michael A. Hall, Photographer, April 26, 2012)**



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Figure 32: Ads for Petersen Rock Garden in the Central Oregon Rancher in the mid-1950s

**Central Oregon's Wonderland of  
Beautiful Rock Creations**



**"Take a Break"—take time off soon to visit Central Oregon's foremost attraction. Bring Aunt Min and her family along when they visit this summer. You'll all enjoy seeing the handiwork of the late Rasmus Petersen.**

**Petersen Rock Gardens**  
Between Bend and Redmond

**Bring the Family . . . let's all go . . .**



**. . . to Central Oregon's Wonderland of Beautiful Rock Creations**

**Petersen's Rock Garden**  
Between Bend and Redmond

17

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Figure 33: Ad for Petersen Rock Garden in the 1960 Bend City Directory

**MUSEUMS** 21

# PETERSEN ROCK GARDENS

*A Colorful Spectacle of  
One Man's Handiwork*

**RASMUS CHRISTIAN PETERSEN**  
1887—1962

NEVER HAS SO MANY BEAUTIFUL  
CREATIONS OF ROCKS, COLLECTED  
FROM ALL OVER OREGON, AND FLOW-  
ERS WITH THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF  
WATER, BEEN ASSEMBLED IN ONE  
PLACE FOR THE PLEASURE OF CHILD-  
REN AS WELL AS GROWN-UPS. PEOPLE  
FROM ALL OVER THE EARTH COME  
TO SEE THIS HANDIWORK OF ART  
AND BEAUTY MR. PETERSEN SPENT  
YEARS OF HEAVY TOIL AND LOVE TO  
CREATE.

RESTROOMS MAY BE REACHED FROM MAIN,  
RESTROOM, MAINTENANCE OFFICES  
BY CENTRAL ENTRANCE

**Restaurant — Museum — Gift Shop and Book  
Store and Jungle Walk Near the Gardens**

**R. R. 1, Box 423                      Bend, Oregon**  
**Phone, Bend, Oregon, EVERETT 2-3574**

United States Department of the Interior  
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Figure 34: The Saga of Petersen Rock Gardens, postcard set produced for Petersen Rock Garden, n.d.

*The Saga of the Petersen Rock Gardens*

PETERSEN ROCK GARDENS stands as a monument to one man's industry, perseverance, and above all, his love of natural beauty. It was not conceived as a tourist attraction. Even after it became one of the most popular stops for visitors to the Pacific Northwest, Mr. Petersen considered the thousands who annually visited the Garden as kindred souls, who, like himself, had a deep appreciation for the beauties and wonders of nature.

There is no charge for admission. Instead, the Garden is supported through contributions from visitors. Mr. Petersen wanted it this way so no one would be denied an opportunity to see this magnificent and unique achievement.

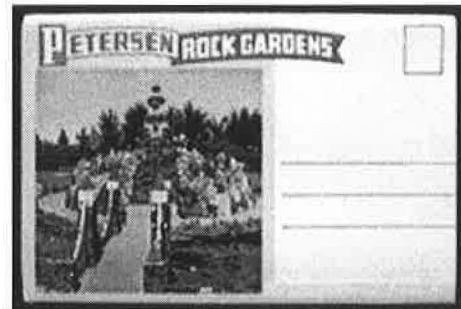
When Rasmus Petersen first came to Central Oregon in 1906, he was just an immigrant farmer, but he early discovered that the rugged volcanic country was a geologist's, paleontologist's and rock collector's paradise, and became interested in rock collecting as a leisure time activity.

Within a short while his collection included thousands of specimens of every type and kind — agate, jasper, obsidian, quartz, opal, weird specimens of lava and volcanic cinders. Mr. Petersen began constructing replicas of historic structures, bridges, towers, and terraces as a means of displaying his rapidly growing collection. People came to see the obsidian castles and agate mansions. He built more, and the number of visitors increased rapidly.

A museum of native rock was built to house the most valuable of Mr. Petersen's collection. Picnic grounds were provided for visitors who came to spend the day and there is a restaurant in the Garden where excellent meals are available.

This is now one of the world's largest collection of gems, rare stones, minerals, ores, rocks, petrified wood, thunder-eggs, geodes, and lava casts, in a glittering rain-hued rockery which resembles nothing else in earth.

At night the Garden assumes a different personality, like a miniature world. Each of the exhibits is carefully lighted and castles, bridges, and towers glow with added realism.



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**Figure 35: Oregon tourism sites illustrated on platter, ca 1960 (Source: Historic Preservation League of Oregon)**



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Figure 36: Petersens' gravestone, Redmond Cemetery (Source: Billion Graves)



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Figure 37: Post-1952 newspaper clipping found in Petersen's attic, May 2013

### HE GAVE HAPPINESS.

Not many persons have ever given more happiness to more people than did Rasmus Petersen.

Some of us can remember when he started his first small rock garden as a project to beautify his home. It has been a source of delight ever since to watch the growth of the fairy-land park that has attracted visitors from all over the world.

Everyone who knew Rasmus Peterson can recognize everywhere in the gardens the gentle kindness of his personality. This quality so clearly expressed in the artistry of the gardens is perhaps the most charming thing of all about them.

Last year 125,000 visitors signed the register at the rock gardens. That such a pilgrimage would ever take place was of course completely unpredictable back in 1935 when this modest, unassuming rancher fashioned the first rock design.

In only a few years, however, people by the tens of thousands began seeking out this wonderful yard. It meant nothing to them that the house wasn't even on a main road.

During these early years the thought never occurred to Petersen that the gardens would ever become a major enterprise. He kept improving them and expanding them for one purpose only, to make people happy. Those of us who have made many visits to the gardens can understand how that was. The best part of the visit is the experience of watching the enjoyment on people's faces as they move about.

Rasmus Petersen is gone now, but his gardens are going to continue to flourish and expand. Quite probably they will remain as much a part of the central Oregon scene as the pine rocks or the juniper forests. The gardens will always be there to remind us how much a man can accomplish when the thing he does is primarily for others.

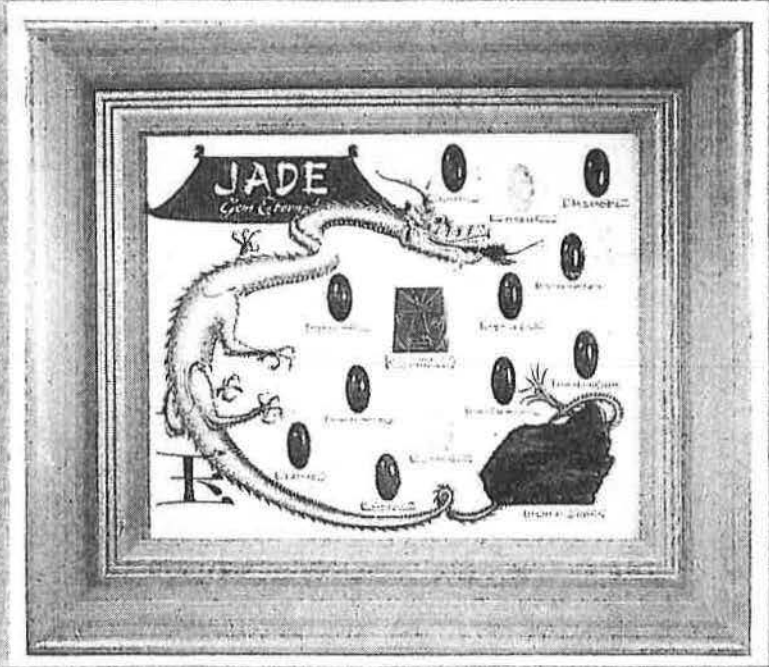


APRIL, 1952

The  
*Lapidary*  
Journal

ANNUAL  
TRAVEL  
ISSUE

*W. F. Wood*



PORTRAIT IN JADE  
By J. L. CUNNINGHAM

*A National Magazine for*

GEM CUTTERS \* COLLECTORS \* JEWELRY CRAFTSMEN

VOLUME 6

50c PER COPY

NUMBER 1

# ◆ *A Farmer Turns To Stone*

By WELDON F. HEALD

Painted Canyon Ranch, Portal, Arizona

*Oregonian's hobby transforms his farm into nationally-known tourist mecca.*

In 1906 farmer Rasmus Petersen bought 256 acres of land in eastern Oregon, eleven miles north of Bend. For thirty years he planted crops in the spring, harvested them in the fall, then twiddled his thumbs by the stove through the long, cold winters. But doing nothing six months of the year can get tiresome. Mr. Petersen felt that he needed something to occupy his mind. So sixteen years ago he looked around for some kind of a hobby, and found one—*rocks*. And since then the old farm has never been the same.

That first winter farmer Petersen built a modest rock garden on his place. It wasn't much, but it kept him busy. The neighbors became interested and brought him a varied and colorful assortment of stones, minerals and ores from the surrounding countryside. Each succeeding year Mr. Petersen added another unit, and it wasn't long before his rock garden became locally famous. In five years

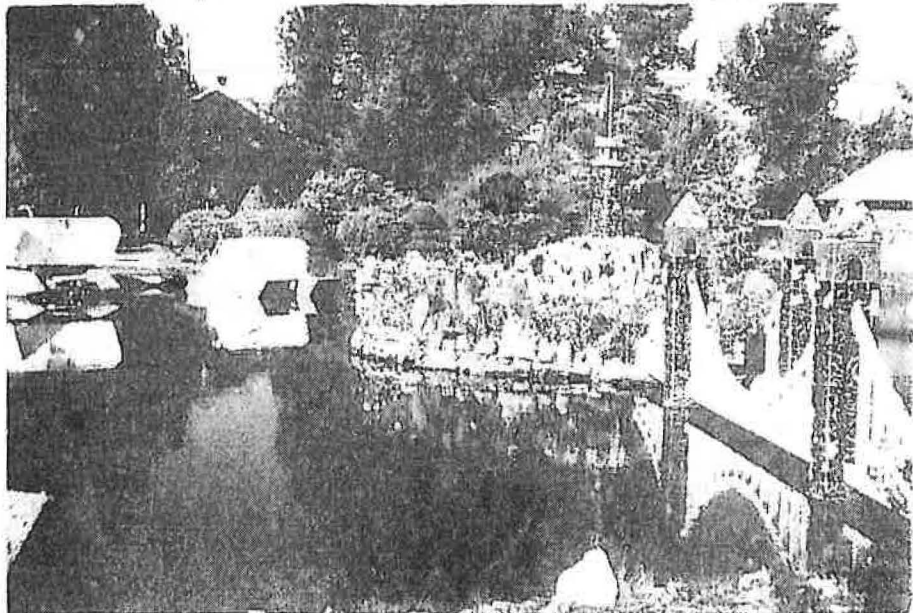
his hobby was known throughout the state and finally, in 1944, Mr. Petersen decided he liked stones better than crops and sold all but twelve acres of his land.

"Most farmers try to get rid of their rocks," he explained, "but I just put them to work."

Today, the Petersen Rock Garden is nationally famous. Last year 120,000 visitors—almost as many people as live in Savannah, Georgia—came from every part of the country to see this amazing man-made fantasy in stone.

And no wonder! In the space of five acres Mr. Petersen has gathered together one of the world's largest collections of gems, rare stones, minerals, ores, rocks, petrified wood, thundereggs, geodes, and lava casts. With them he has built a glittering, rainbow-hued rockery which resembles nothing else on earth.

Entering the garden, the incredulous visitor is led by winding paths of fiery red volcanic cinders past lagoons outlined with colored rocks, Brooklyn bridges constructed of black, white, green and orange minerals cross to



*The Petersen Rock Gardens at Redmond, Ore., on Highway 97; 16 miles north of Bend.*

islands crowned by miniature villages of rock, soaring, pinnacled stone castles, domed capital buildings and, topping everything else, a reduced replica of the Statue of Liberty. Even the American Flag is there in red, white and blue rocks, surmounted by the pebbled benediction, *God Bless America*. In the garden's center is a bronze plaque on a huge petrified tree stump with the lugubrious admonition. "Enjoy Yourself. It is later than you think." Most visitors follow the first part without trouble and simply check their watches on the latter.

Everywhere you look in the Petersen Rock Garden are fountains and statues, towers, terraces, steps, walls and grottoes—all in the kaleidoscopic colors of variegated stone. Dwarfs and gnomes sit in stony immobility beside the water, holding fishing poles, and big white swanboats take visitors on chimeric voyages around the lagoons. Flower beds, blossoming shrubs, lawns and trees among the rocks add to the bewildering riot of color. By day soft music plays from a public address system and each night the entire garden glows with colored lights.

In Mr. Petersen's guest book you can read visitors' reactions to this astonishing dream-world in stone.

"Amazing!"

"Worth traveling 3000 miles to see."

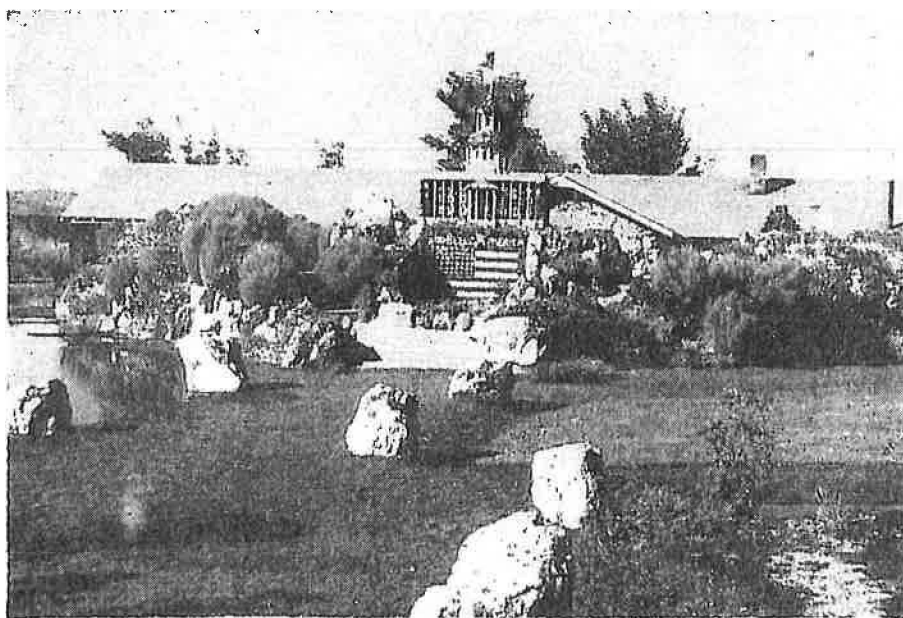
"We'll be back."

"Can't get enough of it."

But even if you don't agree with the entranced lady tourist who wrote: "This is the most beautiful spot in America," you can't help being impressed by Mr. Petersen's herculean labors in creating this unique place.

For a winter-time hobby which becomes a country-wide tourist attraction in fifteen years is no pastime for the faint-hearted or the weak-backed. The job of moving some of the huge specimens required block and tackle, and a heavy truck. Assembling material, matching stones, and building the various rock towers, minarets and bridges consumed months of painstaking work each year. During the summer tourist season Mr. Petersen now has a crew of six to help him, but in winter two extra men can handle the job.

Some of the rocks weigh several tons. Mr. Petersen has brought in petrified logs of giant redwoods, oaks and palms which once grew in eastern Oregon millions of years ago. He has collected massive chunks of stony volcanic ash that still hold the impressions of leaves from long-vanished forests. Some of the most spectacular specimens set up in the garden in recent years are large lava



*Another view of the Petersen Rock Gardens. All photos in this article by the author.*

casts, formed centuries ago when a red hot, molten lava flow engulfed a living forest to a depth of twenty feet. The trees burned out, leaving perfect casts of their trunks in the hardened black lava. In some cases pine bark and annual growth rings are clearly shown, and charcoal has formed in the stone.

Eastern Oregon is a geologist's, paleontologist's, and rock collector's paradise, and Mr. Petersen has gathered literally thousands of specimens of every type and kind. To house his valuable gem and mineral collection he has built a museum at the north end of the garden. Here, besides the main exhibit room, is a fluorescent mineral display which includes rocks from almost every state in the Union. When the lights are switched off, ultra-violet and infra-red lamps cause the rocks to glow in breathtaking beauty with every color of the spectrum. Small fluorescent-painted animal figures too, have been placed about the room and shine brightly in surprisingly gaudy hues.

The most recent development on the grounds was the construction of much needed additional parking space. But, as usual, Mr. Petersen plans to transform this utilitarian necessity into another unique feature. Turf from the cleared lot has been heaped into mounds which he intends to veneer with quartz, obsidian, jasper, agate, opal, and other semi-precious stones.

But even more ambitious projects are afoot. Mr. Petersen at present is toying with the idea of converting one of the mounds into a miniature volcano, complete with lava flows, scoria, steaming gas vents and smoking crater. At night red illumination would give the pygmy Vesuvius the appearance of being in violent and fiery eruption.

And so it goes. Developments are so rapid at Petersen's rock garden that it is a little difficult to keep posted on the latest news. For instance, last year the peacock family was increased by the arrival of five fluffy baby birds.

The garden is never closed in the daytime and people begin arriving before Mr. Petersen arises in the morning, which is usually around 6:00 a.m. The last reluctant visitors leave at 11:00 p.m. and Mr. Petersen retires after having put in a strenuous eighteen hour day. And this has been going on year after year. However, the creator of the Petersen Rock Garden is still a trifle

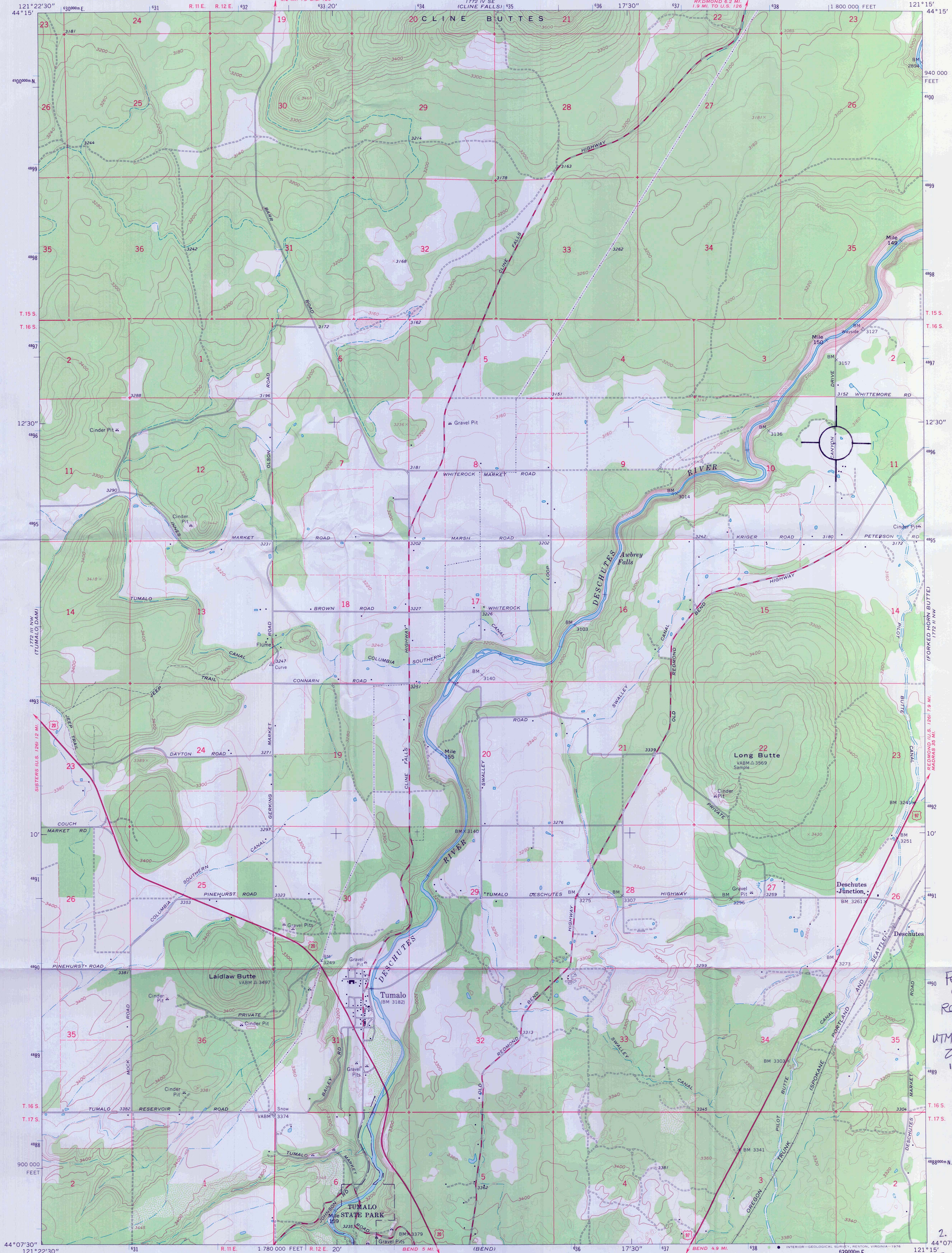
dazed. He has never gotten over his surprise at the interest people show in his hobby.

"Visitors are still increasing," says farmer Petersen, "But I am running out of rocks."



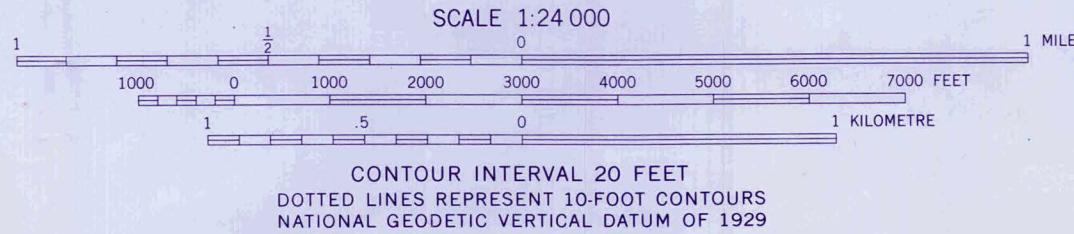
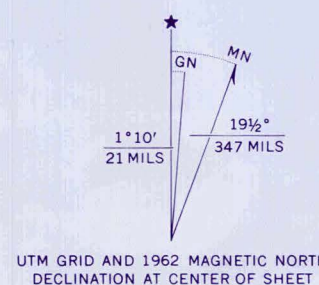
*The Statue of Liberty (above) and a castle (below) at the Petersen Rock Gardens.*





Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1957 and 1959. Field checked 1962  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Oregon coordinate system, south zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 10, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines

Map photoinspected 1971  
No major culture or drainage changes observed



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———  
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———

Lat/long coordinates  
1. 44.203978 lat  
121.263542 lon  
2. 44.2039517 lat  
121.2608119 lon

Petersen Rock  
garden  
Roadmond, Deschutes  
CO, Oregon  
UTM references:  
Zone 10 (WGS84)  
1. 638741 E  
4895994 H

Anderson's Sporting Goods  
Harvey Falls  
442 W. 1st St.  
Albany, Oregon 97321  
(503) 928-2244

2. 638955 E  
44\*07'30" 4895994 H  
3. 638961 E  
4895800 H  
4. 638747 E  
4895800 H  
3. 44.2021969 lat  
121.2608610 lon  
4. 44.2022138 lat  
121.2635137 lon

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



































































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Petersen Rock Garden  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: OREGON, Deschutes

DATE RECEIVED: 9/13/13                      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/26/13  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/11/13                  DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/30/13  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000859

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT       RETURN       REJECT      10.30.13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

**Parks and Recreation Department**

725 Summer St NE, Ste C

Salem, OR 97301-1266

(503) 986-0707

Fax (503) 986-0794

[www.oregonstateparks.org](http://www.oregonstateparks.org)



September 6, 2013

Ms. Carol Shull  
National Register of Historic Places  
USDOI National Park Service - Cultural Resources  
1201 "Eye" Street NW, 8th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005

**Re: National Register Nomination for Petersen Rock Garden**

Dear Ms. Shull:

At the recommendation of the Oregon State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation, I hereby nominate the following historic property to the National Register of Historic Places:

**PETERSEN ROCK GARDEN**  
7930 SW 77TH ST  
REDMOND VCTY, DESCHUTES COUNTY

We appreciate your consideration of this nomination. If questions arise, please contact Diana Painter, Architectural Historian, at (503) 986-0668.

Sincerely,

Roger Roper  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Encl.





**CITY OF REDMOND**  
**Office of the Mayor**

716 SW Evergreen Avenue  
Redmond OR 97756  
(541) 948-3219  
Fax (541) 548-0706  
george.endicott@ci.redmond.or.us  
www.ci.redmond.or.us

June 3, 2013

Diane Painter  
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department  
State Historic Preservation Office  
725 Summer Street, Northeast; Suite C  
Salem, OR 97301-1226

Subject: Peterson Rock Garden, Letter of Support for seeking National Historic Register status

To Whom It May Concern:

The City of Redmond, Oregon strongly supports establishing Peterson Rock Garden, at 7930 SW 77<sup>th</sup> St., Redmond, OR 97756, as a having a National Historic Register status.

Peterson Rock Garden has been an icon for the Redmond community and all of Central Oregon for many, many years. Since its establishment in 1935, a visit to the garden has almost been considered a "rite of passage" for children in the area.

In the past several years the garden has had some deterioration due to the loss of family members. Ms. Sue Caward, the granddaughter of the original developer has taken a renewed interest in seeing the park returned to its previous glory. Imagine wondering around a garden where unbelievable edifices have been erected out of concrete and natural stone, where the sound of water flowing creates a peaceful environment, and where peacocks freely roam and put on their magnificent displays.

Hundreds of community volunteers are working tirelessly to return the garden to its original condition. The establishment of the park as a nationally recognized landmark would greatly enhance this effort.



George Endicott

Mayor



Jack Nelson

Chair, Redmond Historic Landmarks Commission