

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:
Nebraska
COUNTY:
Otoe
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:

Arbor Lodge State Park

AND/OR HISTORIC:

Arbor Lodge; J. Sterling Morton House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

Off Centennial Avenue about 3/4 mile west of U.S. 73/75

CITY OR TOWN:

Nebraska City

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

1

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

31

COUNTY:

Otoe

CODE

131

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	Residence of	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	park superintendent	

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:

State of Nebraska, Game and Parks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:

2200 North 33rd Street

CITY OR TOWN:

Lincoln

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE

31

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:

Office of the County Clerk, Otoe County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

1021 Central Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:

Nebraska City

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE

31

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

Nebraska Historic Preservation Plan; National Register

DATE OF SURVEY: 1971; 1969

☒ Federal☒ State☐ County☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Nebraska State Historical Society;

National Register
of Historic Places

STREET AND NUMBER:

1500 R Street; 1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN:

Lincoln; Washington

STATE:

Nebraska; D.C.

CODE

31/11

376.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Shortly after arriving in Nebraska City in 1855, J. Sterling Morton had a small frame cottage erected for himself and his bride. The 1 1/2-story, L-shaped, gable-roofed structure had fewer than five rooms, and with the passage of time, the family required more space.¹ At some point between 1865 and 1871, Morton appended several rooms to the rear of the dwelling, installed gabled dormers at the front, and added a balustraded railing and other ornamental woodwork to the front veranda. In 1879-80 he remodeled the house completely, adding a full second story, a hipped roof, and an Italianate facade that featured a two-tiered veranda across the front and part of the north side.

About a year after Morton's death in 1902, his son Joy enlarged the residence again, remodeled it in the Neo-Colonial style, and built a carriage house in the rear. For some 20 years Joy Morton utilized the dwelling, which by then had 52 rooms, as a summer home, then in 1923 he donated it and approximately 60 acres of surrounding landscaped grounds to the State of Nebraska. Currently the property is a State park, and the expertly maintained buildings are in excellent condition.

The Residence. Known commonly as Arbor Lodge, the Morton House is T-shaped today. The 2 1/2-story, hip-roofed rear stem constitutes the portion that J. Sterling Morton erected, while the 3-story, gable-roofed, approximately 90-foot-long, front transverse section is the part that Joy Morton built. The white stucco-covered frame structure rests on a brick foundation and above a full basement.

Chief among the exterior features of the mansion are three identical two-story, semicircular porticos that shelter the centrally located front entrance and the portals at the north and south ends of the transverse. Each of these massive flat-roofed porches is supported by six large fluted Corinthian columns and two pairs of fluted Corinthian pilasters. Underneath each portico there is a balustraded, semi-elliptically shaped balcony at the second-floor level and a four-foot-wide door space with semi-elliptical fanlight and broken-pedimented frontispiece at the first floor level. Only the front door has side lights.

(continued)

¹ Descriptions of the Morton House as it appeared prior to 1903 are based primarily on photographs and dates in Mary Ulbrick, Arbor Lodge, vol. 2 (Nebraska City, 1972).

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian ☐ 16th Century ☐ 18th Century ☐ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century ☐ 17th Century ☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1855-1902

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

J. Sterling Morton was the founder of Arbor Day, one of the most constructive of all American holidays. In the early 1850's Morton migrated from Michigan to Nebraska with the expectation of taking part in the political and economic development of the frontier. As a Democrat in a Republican-dominated region, he enjoyed little success in his many political campaigns, but as a hobbyist who indulged in tree planting, he left an indelible mark on American conservation and folkways. In 1872, at Morton's urging the State of Nebraska proclaimed an annual Arbor Day and awarded prizes to counties and individuals who planted properly the largest number of trees on that day. Within a few years the custom spread across the entire United States and to several foreign countries as well. Largely because of Morton's long interest and experience in agriculture and conservation, President Grover Cleveland appointed him Secretary of Agriculture in 1893. Emphasizing scientific investigation, the Nebraska tree planter introduced several important new areas of research in the Agricultural Department, among them the study of soils and crop production.

In 1855, shortly after Morton arrived in Nebraska City, he had a small frame cottage erected for himself and his bride, and he lived there until his death in 1902. Morton remodeled and enlarged the residence at least twice, and at the time of his demise, it bore an Italianate facade. About 1903 one of Morton's sons, Joy, converted the house to a 3-story, 52-room, Neo-Colonial mansion, and in 1923 he donated it to the State of Nebraska. The white stucco-covered frame structure is maintained presently as an excellent house museum.

Biography

Born in Adams, N.Y., in April 1832, J. Sterling Morton was the oldest child of Julius Dewey and Emeline Sterling Morton. When J. Sterling was about 2 years old, the family

(continued)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dictionary of American Biography, VII (New York, 1927).

Olson, James C., J. Sterling Morton (Lincoln, 1942).

Ulbrick, Mary, Arbor Lodge, 2 vols. (Nebraska City, 1972).

White, Leonard D., The Republican Era: A Study in Administrative History, 1869-1901 (New York, 1958).

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES			
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE	
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	
NW	40	40	55"	95	52	59"		
NE	40	40	55"	95	52	24"		
SE	40	40	43"	95	52	24"		
SW	40	40	43"	95	52	59"		

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **c. 60 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:

George R. Adams, Managing Editor

ORGANIZATION

American Association for State and Local History

DATE

Sept. 1, 1974

STREET AND NUMBER:

1315 Eighth Avenue South

CITY OR TOWN:

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

47

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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7. Description (cont'd.)

Other noteworthy exterior characteristics of the mansion include a large two-window shed dormer on each open side of the hip-roofed rear wing, a bracketed and denticulated cornice around that section, three gigantic interior brick chimneys, a railed widow's walk atop the roof of the front transverse portion, and 20-over-20 sash front windows on the first two stories of the transverse and 15-over-15 sash windows on the third-floor front. Most of the other windows, including those in two first-floor bays on the north side of the rear wing and in a single bay on the south side, are one-over-one sash. Also most are flanked by green louvered shutters.

The front door of the Morton House opens into a 30-foot-square reception hall that has a 10-foot ceiling supported by exposed, white-painted wood beams. Similarly painted wood paneling extends from the floor to a height of 8 feet, and blue paint covers the remaining wall space. To the right of the entrance hall is Joy Morton's library, a similar-sized room with naturally finished paneling and ceiling beams. The upper walls are painted red. To the left of the reception hall is a drawing room. Silk tapestries cover the walls, while four fluted Corinthian pilasters support two large white-painted wooden ceiling beams. Immediately behind this room is a glass-enclosed sun porch with Tiffany skylight.

From the reception hall a central corridor leads through the rear wing of the house. The front portion of the hallway has a carved oak wainscot and provides access to a music room and dining room on the right and a bedroom and J. Sterling Morton's library on the left. All these rooms feature carved oak woodwork and door facings that have monogrammed corner blocks. The library exhibits carved bookcases and beautiful parquet flooring. Beyond these rooms are four others that are used currently as living quarters for the park superintendent and his family.

Three stairways provide access to the second floor. There is a single-flight stair in the superintendent's quarters, a wainscoted and balustraded single-flight stair in the central corridor adjacent to J. Sterling's library, and a wide double-flight, balustraded stair in the main reception hall. Most of the compartments on the second story are bedrooms. The rear wing contains several along each

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7. Description (cont'd.)

side of a central hallway, while the transverse section has a large chamber at each end. Joy Morton's bedroom is at the south end, and the Cleveland Room, named in honor of President Grover Cleveland, is at the north end. Between these two rooms are a maid's chamber, a dressing room, and a small guest room. The third floor contains 10 additional bedrooms that are reached by a continuation of the front and rear stairways. The upper level also houses three storage tanks that originally collected rainwater for use in flushing toilets.

Much of the furniture presently in the Morton residence belonged to the family, but there are numerous period pieces also. Several of the second- and third-floor bedrooms house exhibits of family china, cookware, clothing, and toys. Especially interesting is the basement bowling alley, which was installed by Joy Morton.

The Carriage House. A large, 1 1/2-story, T-shaped building, the carriage house was erected about 1900. The transverse portion measures approximately 90 by 20 feet, and the rear wing about 40 by 30 feet. Green-painted wooden shingles cover the exterior walls, and 12 variously placed, hip-roofed dormers adorn the roof. An open passageway runs through the structure immediately to the right of the rear wing and thereby separates the servants' quarters in the north end from the hayloft, first-floor work and storage areas, and basement stables in the southernmost section. Currently the building houses 10 Morton family carriages and service facilities for the park.

Other Structures. There are two other buildings on the Arbor Lodge grounds. One is a 1900-vintage greenhouse located south of the carriage house, and the other is a replica of a log cabin situated near Centennial Avenue east of the main house. The cabin was constructed about 1890 as a memorial to early Nebraska City settlers.

Boundary (as indicated in red on the accompanying sketch map). Beginning at the intersection of Arbor Drive and Centennial Avenue, a line running due east approximately 1400 feet along a wire fence to a cross fence; thence due south about 400 feet to another cross fence; thence due east approximately 1400 feet to still another cross fence; thence due south to Centennial Avenue; thence westward and northwestward about 3,000 feet and northward approximately 900 feet along curving Centennial Avenue to the starting point.

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7. Description (cont'd)

ADDENDUM (December 31, 1974)

Immediately west and southwest of Arbor Lodge State Park are 230 acres that comprised part of the Morton family farm at the turn of the century. Apparently a sizeable orchard occupied part of the land, while the rest served multiple uses. Several Morton barns and other outbuildings are extant on the property. The nonprofit National Arbor Day Foundation is working toward acquisition of the area and has obtained an option to purchase it. The foundation plans to use the tract as a buffer for Arbor Lodge State Park and is considering developing the area into a living Morton-period farm. The present owner of the land is Grove Porter (Porter Orchard, Nebraska City, Nebraska, 68416).

Except for a concrete masonry building and the Porter House, which will not be transferred to the National Arbor Day Foundation, all the structures were built sometime prior to 1903. The relative positions of these edifices are indicated in yellow on the attached photocopied map furnished by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The apple barns are rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, frame structures that were once part of a larger complex that included a huge barn and two sets of double silos. Situated between the remaining barns is a concrete masonry structure that somewhat impairs the historical integrity of this site.

The so-called connected barn group is slightly altered but remains much like it was when the Mortons owned the property. Dominating the group are two large, rectangular-shaped, gambrel-roofed barns that have enclosed sheds extending along each side. These barns are situated parallel to each other and are connected along their northern edge by a series of smaller structures and along their southern edge by an open-air corral.

Particularly noteworthy is the large corncrib situated near the southwestern corner of the property. It is a rectangular-shaped, frame structure with a shed roof and partially open sides, and it adds considerable visual interest to the landscape.

Standing near the corncrib is the so-called Churchill House. The exact relationship between this small, hip-roofed, frame structure and the Morton family is unknown, but the

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7. Description (cont'd)

the dwelling is believed to have been erected on the Morton property prior to 1900.

The small, rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, frame schoolhouse was moved from a nearby site to the present location sometime before 1900. Officials of the Nebraska State Historical Society are still researching the background of the structure, but they believe that it is closely related to Morton family history.

Should this 230-acre tract be designated part of the protected area, the boundary of the whole would be as follows (and as indicated in red on the accompanying supplementary U.S.G.S. maps that show the compass coordinates for both the park and the appended tract).

Boundary (see above paragraph and maps). Beginning at the intersection of Arbor Drive and Centennial Avenue, a line running due east approximately 1,400 feet along a wire fence to a cross fence; thence due south about 400 feet to another cross fence; thence due east approximately 1,400 feet to still another cross fence; thence due south to Centennial Avenue; thence westward and northwestward approximately 2,250 feet to a point immediately northeast of the Porter House; thence due south about 700 feet to an unmarked point; thence due southeast about 1,000 feet to the nearest street; thence due south about 600 feet to an unmarked point; thence due west about 5,300 feet to an unmarked point; thence due north about 1,325 feet to an unmarked point; thence due east about 1,300 feet to an unmarked point; thence due north about 1,300 feet to Wagon Road; thence due east about 2,600 feet along Wagon to the starting point where Wagon becomes Arbor Drive.

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

moved to Monroe, Mich., where young Morton spent most of his youth. His father prospered from a variety of banking and business interests, so the family lived comfortably, and J. Sterling received excellent educational opportunities.

In 1853 Julius moved the family again, this time to Detroit, and about that same time, J. Sterling entered the University of Michigan. After spending approximately 2 years there, he was expelled for disobeying school regulations. Eventually he managed to obtain an A.B. degree from Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., although he was never a resident student at that institution.

On October 30, 1854, J. Sterling exchanged marriage vows with Caroline Joy French. The couple had met 7 years earlier while attending Wesleyan Seminary at Albion, Mich. Almost immediately after their wedding, the Mortons set out for Nebraska Territory, where he expected to participate in the political and economic growth of the frontier. Believing that Bellevue would become the territorial capital, they resided in that town for a short time then settled in Nebraska City.

J. Sterling took a position as editor of the Nebraska City News and accepted several city lots as part of his remuneration. This marked the beginning of both a business career and a lifetime of participation in public affairs. In 1855-56 and again in 1857-58, Morton served as a member of the territorial legislature, and in 1858 President James Buchanan appointed him secretary of the territory. A Democrat, Morton lost the secretaryship with the inauguration of Republican President Abraham Lincoln in 1861.

During subsequent years, Morton sought elective office on numerous occasions, but each time he met defeat in Republican-dominated Nebraska. Twice he ran for territorial delegate to Congress, and four times he represented his party in unsuccessful races for Governor. As a campaigner he expressed his opinions freely and earned a reputation as a low-tariff, hard-money man.

When not attending to business matters or running for public office, Morton was a student of agriculture. On his quarter section of land on the northwestern edge of Nebraska City, he planted hundreds of trees and urged other Nebraskans

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

to do the same. At a meeting of the state horticultural society in 1871, Morton asserted that if every farmer in Nebraska would plant and cultivate a flower garden, an orchard, and a few forest trees, eventually Nebraska would lead the Nation in agricultural production. The following year he persuaded the horticultural society and the Nebraska Board of Agriculture to sponsor an annual tree-planting day, known as Arbor Day, and to award prizes to counties and individuals who planted properly the largest number of trees on that occasion.

Because the State needed additional trees for windbreaks, fuel, lumber, and shade, Morton's fellow citizens responded enthusiastically to Arbor Day. They planted millions of trees. In 1874 the Nebraska Legislature adopted a resolution setting aside the second Wednesday of April each year for Arbor Day, and 11 years later, the solons declared it a legal holiday. From Nebraska the idea spread throughout the United States and ultimately to such foreign countries as Canada, Mexico, England, France, Russia, Japan, and China.

As the popularity of Arbor Day increased, Morton continued his interest in politics. He campaigned widely for Democratic Presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden in 1876 but remained without public office until 1893. In that year President Grover Cleveland appointed Morton Secretary of Agriculture.

Immediately upon taking office Morton set out to streamline the Agricultural Department and promote additional scientific research. Within a few months he reduced the Department's payroll by 500 employees and clashed with Congress over the free distribution of seeds by Members, an age-old practice that cost the Government approximately \$160,000 annually. Morton refused at one point to purchase seeds for distribution, but Congress passed a joint resolution ordering him to buy them. He had better luck when he called for greater supervision of State expenditures in the federally funded agricultural experiment station program. Congress authorized the Secretary to prescribe the form of annual report required from the States and to ascertain whether expenditures were properly made.

Believing that scientific investigation ought to be the central purpose of the Department of Agriculture, Morton increased bureau expenditures in that area by more than 6

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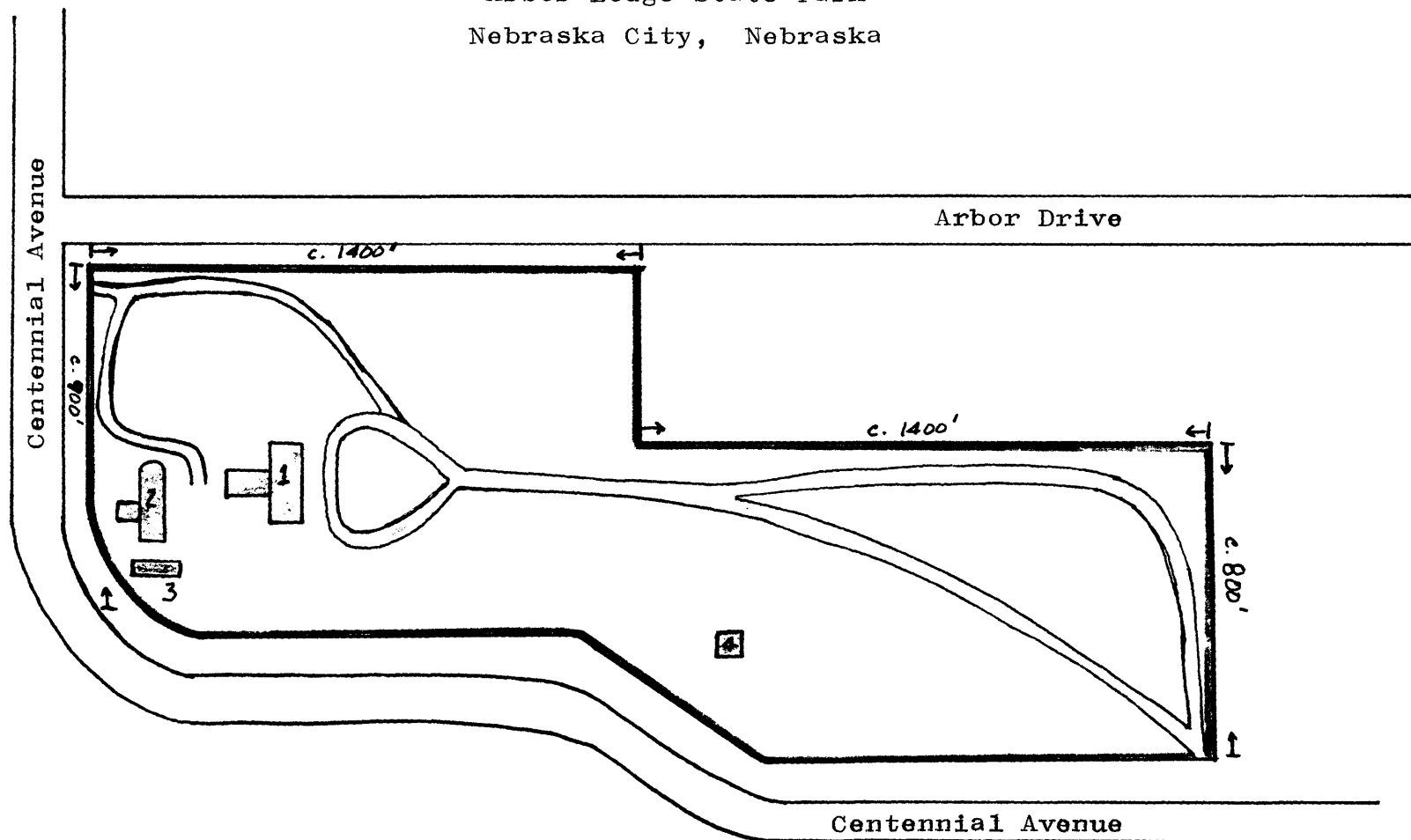
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8. Significance (cont'd.)

percent, despite his economy program, and he introduced three new avenues of research. These were the development of agrostology, the study of soils and crop production, and the investigation of methods of road improvement. In addition Morton argued for congressional authorization of a permanent Under Secretary who would be technically trained and capable of overseeing the Department's scientific work. The Nebraska tree planter failed to attain this goal, but by the end of his tenure in 1897, he had left a lasting influence upon departmental affairs.

After leaving Washington, Morton remained active. In 1897 he began work on The Illustrated History of Nebraska, which was completed later by another editor, and in 1898 he started publishing the Conservative, a political and economic journal. He took great pleasure also in following the careers of his sons. One of them, Joy, became the Father of Morton Salt Company, and another, Paul, served briefly as Secretary of the Navy under President Theodore Roosevelt. In the winter of 1901-02 the founder of Arbor Day suffered from a severe, lingering cold, and in April 1902 he died from a blood clot in his brain.

Arbor Lodge State Park
Nebraska City, Nebraska



1. J. Sterling Morton House
2. Carriage House
3. Greenhouse
4. Log Cabin

Prepared by George R. Adams
AASLH
September 1, 1974