NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

1550

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Rocky Butte Scenic Drive Historic District
other names/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Rocky Butte Road, NE Fremont, NE 92nd Avenue — N/A ☐ not for publication
city, town: Portland — N/A ☐ vicinity
state: Oregon code: OR county: Multnomah code: 051 zip code: 97220

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
☐ private	☐ building(s)		buildings
☒ public-local	☒ district	1	sites
☐ public-State	☐ site	10	5 structures
☐ public-Federal	☐ structure	3	objects
	☐ object	14	5 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

James H. Hamrick — August 15, 1991
Signature of certifying official — Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

~~Entered in the~~ National Register

Helen Bryen — 10/17/91
Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Transportation: aircraft beacon	Transportation: parkway
Transportation: parkway	Recreation/landscape: park
Recreation/landscape: park	

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation
walls and furniture: stone (basalt)
roof
other tunnel: concrete lining
road surface: asphalt

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

☒ See continuation sheet

Description Summary Paragraph

The historic district encompasses the viewpoint on the crest of Rocky Butte and the scenic drive approaches to the viewpoint via 92nd Street from Halsey, Fremont Avenue from 82nd Street and via Rocky Butte Road North and South, in eastern Portland. The district includes Joseph Wood Hill Park which is located on the crest and is owned by the city of Portland. The district is bounded by the 50 foot wide right of way of the approach drives and by Tax Lot 47, Section 28, Township 1 North, Range 2 East, which is the park boundary. The contributing features of the district include the roadways themselves and accompanying historic structures, the crest viewpoint structure and the historic aircraft beacon. The structures include stone railings, dry and wet masonry retaining walls, low stone walls, stone drainage structures, an automobile tunnel of unique design, a pedestrian tunnel, stone bollards and the viewpoint fortress itself. The viewpoint structure has parapet walls, bastions and viewing alcoves with light piers, a stone staircase, a ramp, a stone viewfinder and a memorial monument. All of the drive and viewpoint structures were constructed in the style and craftsmanship of the Columbia River Highway. The aircraft beacon is located in its original position in the center of the viewpoint terrace. For the most part, the district retains the integrity of its original construction, location and materials. The original feeling of experiencing a pleasant drive and wonderful views is still available. The district's original association with recreational driving and passive recreation at the viewpoint, as well as its landmark association with the beacon still exist. It is the setting that gradually has changed as more houses are constructed along the access drives. A city ordinance protects views from the crest with height restrictions for residential construction. But the original wooded setting is recently being converted to residential use.

DESCRIPTION

In order to acknowledge the historic significance of the Rocky Butte scenic drives, viewpoint and aircraft beacon as achievements of engineering, civic planning and social history and to strive for the preservation of the remaining intact structures, The Rocky Butte Preservation Society proposes the Rocky Butte Historic District for inclusion in the National Register.

General Historic District Description

The district encompasses the original alignment of Fremont Street from 82nd Street to Rocky Butte Road and of 92nd Street from Halsey Street to Rocky Butte Road and including both the North and South Loops of Rocky Butte Road which encircle the crest of the butte. Also included in the district is the 2.38 acre city park property which is circumnavigated by Rocky Butte Road at the crest. Proposed for inclusion in the district are all extant structures built on the Butte by SERA and WPA during the 1930's and the aircraft beacon. This includes all of the structures located within the right of way of the streets listed above and those portions of retaining walls which extend somewhat beyond the original right of way.

The proposed district is located in the city of Portland, in Multnomah county, in sections 21 and 28, Township 1 North, Range 2 East. The viewpoint is deliniated as Tax Lot 47, Section 28, Township 1 North, Range 2 East. The entire district is owned by the city of Portland.

All of the original approach drives are still used and have only minor alterations from their original condition. Rocky Butte continues to be one of the most popular auto touring viewpoints of the city. The aircraft beacon light tower located on the viewpoint still operates.

The district includes structures which were typical for Columbia Gorge Highway construction. All of the structures are original for the district and were constructed between 1934 and 1939. The aircraft beacon was erected on Rocky Butte in 1933.

The scenic drive portion contains approximately 19.1 acres and the viewpoint contains 2.38 acres.

The Rocky Butte site offered both an opportunity and a challenge for road building and a special hilltop opportunity for the construction of a unique viewpoint and landmark. The butte is located near Sandy Boulevard, the originally designated city street alignment of the Columbia River Highway and was seen as the first promontory along that route. The steep slopes of the

butte provided the inspiration for the design and construction of an unusual auto tunnel. The location of the butte near the mouth of the Columbia Gorge offered an opportunity for the placement of a now rare aircraft beacon.

Description of Major Features

Most of the structures are constructed of stone which was quarried from the butte itself and was roughly into rectangular and irregular pieces.

The stone retaining walls are constructed as support structures for the roadways along the butte's steep slopes. The walls are constructed of large rough-cut basalt stone. Some of the walls are laid with mortar and some are laid without. The walls range in height up to 42 feet and in length up to about 1500 feet.

Low stone walls cap the top of retaining walls in locations where the top of the wall coincides with the road. The walls protect vehicles from going over the bank. The walls have sections of a flat top interupted by low stone caps. The caps are located approximately 10 feet, on center, along the top of the wall. The walls are approximately 24 inches high with a 6 inch stone footing/base. The walls are about 21 inches wide. Each cap is about 21 inches by 21 inches across and 6 inches high. Several of the caps have a rough flat area about 1 inche wide cut around the top margin of the cap surface. The wall footing is about 6 inches high. In many locations the stone footing has been buried by later road surfacing or by a built-up of organic soil. At two locations on the south loop road, at the bottom and top the low stone wall is located adjacent to the roadway, with no retaining wall.

The drainage structures at the road edge are runnels consisting of two stone curbs and a stone bottom with drop inlets located periodically along the runnel. The drop inlet structures are also made of stone. Many thousands of linear feet of drainage structures are located adjacent to much of the access drives and around the viewpoint structure. Each structure is approximately one foot wide. Stone drain inlets are located at various intervals along the runnels. Drain inlets range from 2 feet wide by 4 feet long to 4 feet wide by 10 feet long. All of the drain inlets were originally covered with flat stone covers. Most of these covers are no longer located on site.

Cut basalt stone bollards or small pillars stand along various sections of the roadways to contain vehicles from going over steep hillsides. The bollards are single, heavy, stone pillars which were anchored in place by burying a length of the pillar in the ground. The bollards are tapered on

top to match the batter of the walls and beacon structure. The bollards are each about 24 inches high, and are squared columns about 20 inches square at the base. The bollards are generally arranged about 10 feet apart, on center. The continuous groupings of bollards range up to several hundred feet in length. Approximately 5 percent of the bollards have been removed from their original location. Most of dislodged bollards can be found adjacent to the roadway, over the bank or in neighboring yards.

The automobile tunnel is unique in its construction and roadway alignment which circles back on itself as it travels up through the butte. It was designed as a method of negotiating a very steep slope in a limited space.

The tunnel's inside dimensions are 34 feet wide and 27 feet high and about 375 linear feet long. The interior of the tunnel is concrete which was applied using a traveling or sliding concrete form. The tunnel accommodates two lanes of auto traffic and two sidewalks. Each entrance to the tunnel is framed with a cut basalt, keyed-arch, face stone. Each entrance had an accompanying squared stone column or monument approximately 10 feet tall. One of the monuments has been removed from the site. The monuments near the entrances were done in a style reminicent of those used adjacent to tunnels on the Columbia River Highway.

The pedestrian tunnel has arched stone facing of squared rubble basalt. The tunnel connects the former Military Academy with the summit area via footpaths and travels under the roadway.

The viewpoint structure at the crest of the hill was created by the construction of a retaining wall located directly above the encircling drive and an upper parapet wall and terrace area. A narrow grassy terrace is located between the top of the retaining wall and the bottom of the parapet wall.

The lower retaining wall construction is similar to other retaining walls at the Butte located along the eastern and western sections of the access drives. The retaining wall at the viewpoint wraps up to and embraces both sides of the north entrance stair as the wall angles up across the hillside.

The upper parapet wall is continous except for the north and south openings. The wall is up to 15 feet high with a continuos stone railing on top. The parapet wall is divided into 12 sections by 14 stone bastions with an 8 foot stone pier on top of each bastion. Each of the piers were originally fitted with metal conduit for electrical lines for the eventual installation of lighting. It is not known whether lighting structures were ever installed. No lighting structures currently exist on the piers.

A low stone railing tops the parapet walls and butts up against the stone piers mentioned above. The stone railings consist of mortared, cut basalt stone laid in arching forms typical for the Columbia River Highway style. Each of the arches is a basket type approximately 47 inches long and 17 inches high. The railings are approximately 32 inches high and 14 inches thick. All of the stone railings are constructed with a concrete cap. The cap is 6 inches high and 17 inches wide.

The sections of railing encircle the perimeter of the viewpoint terrace except for the north and south access openings. Several rectangular viewing alcoves are formed in the railing around the perimeter of the terrace. Each alcove is approximately 4 by 9 feet. Originally the alcoves had no seating. Several of the alcoves have had simple concrete benches formed into each of the sides. These benches are more recent additions and should not be considered to be significant.

There are two openings in the parapet wall, one on the north side and one on the south. The stone railing curves into the viewpoint space on both sides of these openings.

The north opening is accessed by an 8 foot wide stone stairway which rises from the roadway up approximately 39 feet to the large flat open space of the viewpoint area. Each step is approximately a 6 inch riser. There are 72 risers in total, including two landings. At the upper landing the stair splits into two sections which curve out around a central seating/viewing area and join up again above the seating area. This landing has an original stone bench and water fountain built into it. The water fountain is centrally located in front of the bench. The water fountain does not currently operate.

The south opening in the wall is 16 feet wide at the base. An asphalt paved ramp lined with stone curbing on each side rises from the roadway to this viewpoint opening. Stone bollards are located at the base of the ramp. Originally a chain hung between the bollards to prevent access by cars. Currently a modern steel gate prevents vehicles from driving up onto the terace. Two western red cedars and two Engish laurels planted to flank the lower portion of the south entrance to the ramp still grow in their original locations.

The aircraft beacon, a stone memorial monument and a stone viewfinder are located on the terrace. The 10 foot square tall concrete monument is located near the north entrance to the viewpoint. The monument originally had four bronze plaques mounted on its sides. These plaques have been removed and their location is unknown. The plaques depicted persons who were

related to the construction of the viewpoint and included a bas relief of J.W. Hill. The stone viewfinder is also located in this area. The original bronze sighting arrow and identifying bronze plaque are also missing from the viewfinder.

An 1933 aircraft beacon light is located near the center of the viewpoint space. The beacon is supported by a steel truss tower approximately 54 feet tall and 12 feet wide on each of four sides at the base. The tower has a rotating light located at the top which is still operating.

Integrity

The district possesses a very high degree of integrity of location, materials, craftsmanship, feeling and association from its original state over 50 years ago. Almost all of the major structures are intact as they were built. Only some of the details and minor elements have been moved, altered or destroyed. This includes:

- Removal of some of the drain inlet covers
- Removal of the bronze plaques on the monument and fortress walls
- Removal or upturning of several of the stone bollards
- Removal of the bronze portion of the viewfinder
- Removal of a portion of one of the decorative columns at the auto tunnel entrance.

It is uncertain whether the light fixtures on the piers at the fortress viewpoint had ever been placed. Some reports state that the fixtures were in place until the 1950's when they were vandalized and never replaced. Concrete benches have been added to some of the alcoves in the fortress wall.

Non-contributing elements in the district are very few. They include modern guardrails in two locations, steel gate posts in two locations and a steel gate at the crest.

The aircraft beacon continues to function today. Changes had been made to the surrounding fence and the painted arrow no longer exists on the ground below the tower.

However, overall, along the length of the access roads and at the summit the existing condition of the historic structures within the district is quite sufficient for nomination to the Historic Register.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Landscape architecture	1934-1939	1939
Engineering	1934-1939	1939
Transportation	1933-1939	1933, 1934-1939
Recreation		1939

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Multnomah County Road Department: Paul Northrup, Engineer; Ralph Curcio, Superintendent of Masonry; A. J. Dreyer, Tunnel Engineer

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

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

☒ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 21.48 Mount Tabor, Oregon-Washington 1:24000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	534230	5044180	B	10	534230	5042100
C	10	533020	5042100	D	10	533020	5044180

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated area is located in Sections 21 and 28, Township 1N, Range 2E, Willamette Meridian in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. It is a lineal, serpentine district consisting of the entire 50-foot-wide right of way of Rocky Butte Road and approach sections of NE 92nd Avenue from Halsey Street on the south and NE Fremont Street from 82nd Avenue on the west to include all historic developed features of the scenic parkway and Joseph Wood Hill Park at the crest of Rocky Butte, encompassing in all 21.48 acres, more or less, in the corporate limits of the city of Portland.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification The total number of contributing features (14) includes the road system, its retaining walls, two tunnels, drainage structures, stone fenders, stone bollards, park, stone outlook with lamp posts, stone staircase, viewfinder, commemorative monument, and historic aircraft beacon.

☒ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David Lewis and Kathy Schutt
organization Rocky Butte Preservation Society date February 25, 1991
street & number 2555 NE 49th telephone (503) 281-4178
city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97213

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Rocky Butte Scenic Drive is a serpentine automobile roadway district that climbs with three switchbacks and a final girdling loop to the summit of Rocky Butte, a knob 400 feet in elevation in northeast Portland, Oregon. Rocky Butte, an historic basalt quarry site, is the most northerly of several buttes studding the valley floor on Portland's East Side. Including the full 50-foot road right-of-way, the northwesterly and south approaches from major arterials in the city's street grid, and a two and a quarter acre outlook at the butte's crest known as Joseph Wood Hill Park, the scenic drive encompasses just under twenty-one and a half acres. Contributing features within the district include such structural elements as the roadbed, its rock fenders, bollards, retaining walls and runnels, an automobile tunnel and a pedestrian tunnel, the fortress-like park outlook and its stone staircase, a viewfinder and commemorative monument, and an early aircraft beacon. The five non-contributing features are non-historic steel replacement guard rails and gates.

The setting of this recreational drive and viewpoint was considerably more wooded at the time of construction than it is at present. Residential development has encroached on the area adjacent to the lower roadway. The viewpoint, or outlook, however, continues to afford scenic vistas over the Columbia River plain in all directions. Local ordinance ensures the protection of vistas by height restrictions on adjacent development.

Rocky Butte Road was, in part, an outgrowth of the Columbia River Highway. The proximity of Rocky Butte to the alignment of the westerly end of the Gorge drive inspired construction of a cliff-face scenic drive as an adjunct attraction. A scenic drive on Rocky Butte had been recommended as early as 1903, however, in the study prepared for the City of Portland by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architectural firm of Brookline Massachusetts.

Agitation for the drive did not begin in earnest until nearly thirty years later, when it was spearheaded by L. M. Lepper of the East Side Commercial Club. Rocky Butte Road was constructed at the height of the Depression, in two stages, between 1934 and 1939 with work relief assistance provided under auspices, initially, of the State Emergency Relief Administration and, subsequently, the Works Progress Administration.

Land for the road and viewpoint was donated to the public domain by heirs of Joseph Wood Hill, partly as an incentive to improve access to the academy founded by Hill on the north side of the butte. Design and construction was handled by the Multnomah County Road Department, with Paul Northrup acting as engineer and Ralph Curcio as superintendent of masonry. Curcio had been one of the masons brought to Oregon to construct walls and furniture of the Columbia River Highway. The work of Rocky Butte reflected distinctly the contoured alignment and native basalt construction materials, the emphasis on viewpoint, the general integration of roadway and setting that characterized the Columbia River Highway of 1915. Some of the European-style features of the earlier road, such as the massive revetments of random range ashlar and spiraled wall terminations at Crown Point, were incorporated at Rocky Butte.

The source of building stone was the basalt quarry on the east face of the butte. The rock-faced masonry work, both dry wall and mortared, that was required to complete the project represents a quality and expenditure of hand labor that is out of reach today.

The road's retaining walls range in height from a few feet to 42 feet. The engineering feature of greatest distinction is a 375-foot, concrete-lined barrel tunnel that doubles back on itself to negotiate a steep 5 percent gradient near the beginning of the ascent. Detailing of the tunnel, by A. J. Dreyer, was to be adapted in subsequent road building by Multnomah County in the Portland suburbs. The parapet of the retaining wall for the outlook at the butte's summit is articulated with bastions in which square tapered stone lamp posts are centered. The lampposts are not functional.

In addition to a stone viewfinder and commemorative monument, the open plateau of Rocky Butte outlook contains an aircraft beacon mounted on a 54-foot steel tower. Installed in 1933, the beacon is functional still as a navigational aid for aircraft approaching or leaving Portland via the Columbia Gorge. It is one of not more than 40 beacons of the early dead-reckoning system spanning the continent that remain in service today. While its use, historically, has little relationship to the primary themes for evaluation, the beacon does illustrate the strategic location of Rocky Butte in the Columbia travel corridor and the rapidity of development of the promontory for transportation-related purposes after the butte entered the public domain.

Rocky Butte Scenic Drive was complete in 1939 at a cost of $500,000. One of innumerable Depression-era public works projects across the country, it was among the largest such projects in Oregon to be assisted by the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal, certainly the largest in the metropolitan area. Within the state, the most nearly comparable federally-aided road-building projects of the Depression era were carried out in connection with the Coast Highway, where Neahkahnie Mountain posed challenges to tunneling and rock wall construction that were equal in magnitude, if not in detail.

As an example of distinctive parkway design responding to a challenging and spectacular situation, and as an exemplar of high-quality masonry construction, Rocky Butte Scenic Drive meets National Register Criterion C in the areas of landscape architecture and engineering. As an illustration of the close relationship between parks and parkways at a time when the outdoor recreation movement was intensified by widespread use of the automobile, the district is significant under Criterion A in the areas of transportation and recreation.

Significance Summary Paragraph

The Rocky Butte Historic District symbolizes the efforts of the Works Progress Administration in trying to preserve the economic survival of many Americans as well as the American love for the automobile as a form of recreation. The style and construction of structures in the district emulate the character of the Columbia River Highway construction and its association with the landscape and with driving for pleasure. The aircraft beacon represents the early years of nationwide air travel and navigation.

Built between 1934 and 1939, following the completion of the Columbia River Highway, the Rocky Butte scenic drive and viewpoint were technical and aesthetic adaptations of the historic highway. The craftsmanship, materials and style of the Joseph Wood Hill Park and Rocky Butte approach drives are very similar to the rustic, Cascadian or European design and detailing of the Columbia River Highway. The road alignment for the auto tunnel on Rocky Butte was unique for this period throughout the country.

Unlike the Columbia River Highway the work for the drive and viewpoint was done as part of the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) and the Work Progress Administration (WPA) and represented one of the largest WPA projects in Oregon and the nation. The land for the viewpoint and access road was donated by the Hill family as a memorial to Joseph Wood Hill, a prominant Oregon educator. The park was dedicated to the public for educational, scientific and recreational purposes by the family.

The aircraft beacon on the butte's crest has operated continuously since 1933. It was used as a guide for aircraft travelling to and from Portland via the gorge as a part of a nationwide dead-reckoning system of navigation. The Rocky Butte beacon is Number 0 on the Portland to Spokane route. The beacon is one of approximately 40 such beacons still in existence in the country. A 6-21-1968 article in the Oregon Journal reported that according to Federal Aviation Administration files in the Seattle office, the Rocky Butte beacon "is the last remaining beacon of its type in Oregon and Washington. There are only 40 - 45 of them left in the United States, including those in Alaska."

SIGNIFICANCE

Rocky Butte is significant nationally as an adaptation of the cliff-face road building style and engineering typical of the Columbia River Highway. The road and other structures on Rocky Butte share a close similarity with Columbia River Highway construction. These similarities include a sympathy for natural materials, a curvilinear fit to the topography, unique engineering and construction practices and European-style rubble masonry guardrails and retaining walls, piers, arches and spiraled end walls. This closely shared history links the Butte drive to an important regional predecessor and establishes a continuity of scenic drives within the area. It represents a truly recreational adaptation of that style applied to an urban environment.

The engineering of the Rocky Butte tunnel is unique among all of the features built in Oregon in the Columbia River Highway style due to its spiraling road layout within the butte.

The construction of the Rocky Butte scenic drive and viewpoint is significant to the social history of Oregon as it was a major WPA work program project. The Rocky Butte project cost $500,000 and is reported to have been one of the largest work program projects to be constructed in the state, including Timberline Lodge. The roadway and viewpoint were begun in 1935 under the SERA program and continued under the WPA program until its completion in 1939. This project was typical nationally of other "parkway" projects of that era which sought to combine the pleasure of recreational driving with the transportation need to get from here to there. The concept of recreational driving was the inspiration for both the scenic highway and Rocky Butte and represents an important era in the history of both transportation and recreation. The construction of the scenic drive and viewpoint also represents one of the few urban examples of W.P.A. road construction in the state.

Rocky Butte is also significant for Oregon as an expression of early park and parkway building projects in the Portland metropolitan area. It represents an era in the evolution of the Portland park system which set the standard for the rest of the state. Rocky Butte had been mentioned in prominent park plans for the metropolitan area of the city of Portland including the 1903 Olmsted plan and the 1921 Cheney Plan. In 1921, with Sandy Boulevard the east entrance to the city, the Portland Planning Commission identified Rocky Butte as the beginning/ending point of a permanent scenic boulevard leading to Troutdale, the Columbia Gorge and the newly completed Mount Hood Loop to the east. The butte offers views to Crown Point, visually connecting it to the Columbia River Highway.

Also, the aircraft beacon is a rare surviving example of dead-reckoning navigational equipment which was once prevalent throughout the nation. The beacon on top of Rocky Butte is reportedly the last surviving structure of its kind on Oregon and Washington. It represents a period in aviation history which predates modern navigational equipment. The beacon represents the beginning point for the Portland to Spokane route. Although the beacon was decommissioned by the FAA in 19 it has been maintained and operated by Multnomah County since 1973 as a local warning device for low flying aircraft and as a local landmark.

Historic Context

When President Franklin Roosevelt took office, in 1932, 25% of the work force, nation-wide, were without jobs. Portland's emergency funds were exhausted by the summer of 1930. Over 40,000 people were on relief and 24,000 householders were registered with the Portland Public Employment Bureau. The Works Progress Administration was created May 6, 1935.

During the Depression, road construction of all kinds and road related recreational construction became a high priority. Automobile sales continued to boom despite the economy. Because this kind of construction could absorb large numbers of the unskilled and unemployed, the federal government helped fund road construction from expressways to parkways to minor arteries. Also, recreation acreage in most U.S. cities grew considerably during the Depression, if for no other reason than to provide areas in which to receive federal aid. The automobile was prominantly featured in recreational developments as driving continued to be done extensively for pleasure and recreation.

Being labor intensive, the work on Rocky Butte was suited to the abilities of the WPA. The project fulfilled a useful public demand, provided recreational opportunities and resulted in the economical acquistion and development of a public monument. The work provided employment and a degree of economic relief and personal pride for many hundreds of local craftsmen and unskilled laborers from varied backgrounds and circumstances. Its location near Portland was convenient for unemployed men who preferred to stay with their families rather than live in federal work camps. The butte became Portland's single largest WPA project and Oregon's second largest in dollars spent in construction. Well over $500,000 Depression era dollars were spent by the WPA alone on construction of the facility for the public's benefit. (Timberline Lodge and the seven miles leading up to it were reported to have cost approximately $1,000,000.) The activities of the WPA and local community on this public project were of significant importance in Oregon's history and represent a unique cultural resource for the state. The

structures remain as evidence of one New Deal response to the Depression in a more urban context than the Columbia River Highway. The Rocky Butte project illustrates a significant contribution to relief, recovery and reform. The project demonstrates the skills and sheer effort of the WPA workers.

Developments Prior to the Construction of the Rocky Butte Project

Rocky Butte has been a significant neighborhood and Portland landmark, seen for many miles around, for many years.

The butte has been used by Native Americans and early settlers as a viewpoint from which both the Willamette River valley in the Portland area and the west end of the Columbia Gorge could be seen. The butte rises approximately 400 feet above the surrounding valley floor. Early local access was for hiking and nature study via dirt trails. The majority of the butte was owned by the Hill family. The Hill Military Academy was constructed on the butte several years before the viewpoint and scenic drives. The air beacon also predates the scenic drive and viewpoint and was accessed via an unimproved road.

The butte was recognized in the 1903 Olmsted Plan as having potential for inclusion in an overall park plan for the Portland area. Later plans also recommended the site as a future park, including the Cheney Plan of 1921 which linked the butte with the Columbia River Gorge. However, for various reasons related to citywide priorities detailed planning for butte access and park development did not become a reality until the early 1930's.

In 1915, a bird's eye view map promoting the "Columbia Highway - America's Premier Scenic Asset" was published in the Oregonian. The route shown led out from Portland along Sandy Road, past "Stony Butte" to Troutdale and the Columbia Gorge.

Prior to construction, The Portland Spectator, January 28, 1933, praised and promoted this project by describing the proposed drive in this way.

> "As the road winds to the top there will be unobstructed views of the mighty Columbia River, with Crown Point and other landmarks clearly outlined. Planes can be seen just after taking off at Swan Island Airport as they pass near the Butte, roaming along the pathway of the air, up the Gorge which gives them access to eastern Oregon and Washinton. And there where at the topmost point flashes the beacon light of Rocky Butte."

The north road was nearly finished when The Spectator again wrote of the drive.

> "An outstanding achievement in the art of road building is the new scenic highway which extends from Eight-second Avenue out northeast Fremont Street, winding around the cliffs of Rocky Butte until it reaches the crest of that famous eminence." The road "adds one more to the delectable drives about town ... and affords variation of the evening drive selection. ... The new roadway circles the crest with frequent turn-outs, to enable the motorist to stop for enjoyment of vistas in all directions."

In 1921, with Sandy Boulevard the east entrance to the city, the Portland Planning Commission under Cheney published a plan which identified Rocky Butte as the beginning and ending point of a permanent scenic boulevard leading to Troutdale, the Columbia Gorge and the newly completed Mount Hood Loop to the east. The goal was to link the city and the Gorge. The butte was briefly called "Highway Butte" as a result and was called one of the scenic wonders of the Columbia Highway.

Rocky Butte Planning

By mid 1932, a large number of citizens including L.M. Lepper began to promote the construction of a road to the summit of Rocky Butte. L.M. Lepper, an attorney and member of the East Side Commercial Club, was an early and constant supporter of the project. The club had been promoting a scenic drive development on Rocky Butte for five years and saw the project as a benefit to the public. The club felt that such a drive would provide recreational opportunities and would draw tourists from throughout the region as stimulus for local business. A petition campaign gathered the support of over 40 civic clubs from throughout the city. The petition called for a north access drive to be built first with a southern access to follow.

In response to a desire to create a memorial to their father and to a growing public interest in Rocky Butte becoming a park Joseph and Benjamin Hill decided to set aside some of their land on the butte for the development of a park and scenic drive. The Hills' gift was contingent on the County agreeing to construct the drive which would run from 82nd Avenue to the Academy and then to the summit. At that time, the only road to the military academy was a rough access road. The county saw the construction project as an opportunity for bringing Federal funds into the local area.

The land for the new park and a newly improved gravel road were formally turned over by the Hill family, as a gift to the public, at a dedication ceremony held on June 12, 1935. Photographs of the event show a large crowd gathered around a stone monument, at the south edge of the park site. A curving stone-lined path leads to the rounded bare summit and the beacon. The park was officially christened Joseph Wood Hill Park, honoring the Hill's father as an early Portland educator and was dedicated to the public for educational, scientific, and recreational purposes. Commissioner Frank Shull as spokesman for the county, accepted the park and said, "There is no more fitting spot in Portland to honor permanently Dr. Joseph Wood Hill. He devoted his entire life to the advance of education. He was an outstanding citizen in every way, just as this park is the outstanding eminence for miles around."

In February of 1933, the City Planning Commission Board gave its unanimous approval of the project and the use of Emergency Relief Funds for construction. Construction funds originally came from the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), which was later succeeded by the formation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935.

Work on the butte did not cease with the completion of the North Loop Drive and viewpoint. The local community continued to pressure for starting construction on the South Loop. In December of 1936 the WPA had given informal approval of part of the South Loop Road. By 1938 congestion on the North Loop Road necessitated the additional south loop. In April of 1938 the Board of County Commissioners resolved to establish Rocky Butte Road, South Loop, to form an important connection to 92nd Avenue and Halsey Street to improve the road system of Multnomah County.

On December 6, 1936, in a driving rainstorm, a dedication ceremony was held atop the butte to commemorate the completion of the north drive and viewpoint and to turn the road and park over to the public. Promoters of the scenic drive effort were honored and six plaques were unveiled. The plaques reportedly beared the names of officials from President Roosevelt on down, with one being a bas relief of Dr. Joseph Wood Hill and one commemorating the Hill brothers. The plaques were mounted on a four-sided stone and concrete monument. L.M. Lepper was honored for his pioneering support of public improvement and highway projects for the City of Portland. Lepper was honored with a special plaque along with unnamed WPA workers. Also praised for their cooperation were E.J. Griffith of the WPA, representatives of the stone masonry art, truck drivers, the engineer, Paul Northrup and the project superintendent, Ralph Curcio. None of the bronze plaques survive today.

On September 19, 1939 a group of "faithfuls" including the East Side Commercial Club, Multnomah County, and WPA officials, gathered on top of the Butte, in warm fall sunshine, to dedicate the tunnel and new south loop with speeches and music. L.M. Lepper was master of ceremonies. The chief speaker was E.J. Griffith, State WPA Administrator, who said the project was one WPA's finest and proved a training school for many stone masons now employed elsewhere in the state. Ralph Curcio, masonry superintendent, was given special recognition. The WPA band furnished the music. The dedication marked the completion of the development which had been under construction since the winter of 1934, and which had given employment to thousands of laborers.

Architectural Style

The rustic architecture of Depression era structures was a function of its time and represents a uniquely American design philosophy and expression of twentieth century architectural thought. Structures of this type embody the achievements of a direct aid work relief program as a Federal response to the Depression. The Rocky Butte construction represents an example of that distinctive style of architecture which is particular to the region and period and are the artifacts of hard times and the auto touring age. The drive exemplifies the pattern and theme of labor intensive, handcrafted construction, durability, attention to detail, quality of workmanship and use of natural and native building materials common of Federal land-managing agencies of the period.

The design of the scenic drives and other stone work on Rocky Butte, is nearly very similar to parts of the distinctive Columbia River Highway, which was conceived of by Sam Hill and designed and engineered by Samuel Lancaster. The County's plans for the Butte road were clearly influenced by this highly successful highway design. The similarities are numerous. Particularly evident are a curvilinear fit to the landscape, use of native materials, and the European-style stone guard rails and retaining walls. The detailing of the piers, walls, arches and end walls is also very similar. This closely shared history links the butte drives to an important regional predecessor and establishes a continuity to scenic drives of the area.

The design elements of both the highway and the butte associates them with two closely related styles, the Rustic or Cascadian and the Arts and Crafts styles. Both styles espouse the virtues of a romantic relationship to nature, attention to the total environment encompassing all scales and fields of design, designs based on the vernacular, on locally available materials and on a simple elegence of construction and detailing. The rustic style was then further defined and brought into wide usage through the public works

projects of the WPA and CCC in the 1930s. Preferable sites were to provide, among other concerns, places of great scenic value, pleasant and beautiful surroundings, scenic wonderlands, views, and opportunities for vista-making. Improvements were to capitalize on and enhance the natural features of the landscape. Orientation of structures and roads in relation to scenic vistas and the beauties of the natural environment was encouraged. Native materials were held to be the most responsive and appropriate to blend with the environment, relating harmoniously to it. Craftsmanship executed with limited hand tools became characteristic of the style. Design was ruled by simplicity, clarity, utility, economy of effort, durability and beauty.

Stone was the predominant material. At Rocky Butte the stone was quarried from the butte itself. The fortress's stone footings, growing from rock outcrops, look as though they've sprung from the crest itself. Stone walls were done of refined basalt fitted carefully into place and enhanced by a repetitious pattern of stone and joinery characteristic of the Gorge Highway. Balustrades were capped in concrete and walls were arched in the same fashion as in the Gorge. Walls, bastions and piers were battered throughout.

As is typical for rustic projects, guard rails or balustrades were built for safety where steep slopes or narrow paths were a hazard. A single stone railing detail is repeated throughout the Rocky Butte project. The type of arch used is known as a "basket" arch because of the compound curve which resembles the handle of a basket. It is also known as a "three centered" arch since it is formed by a segment of a large circle continued left and right by two segments of much smaller circles. The stones forming the arch were placed in symmetrical fashion radiating from a keystone.

The viewpoint, while following principles of the "rustic" style, also used styles typical of sacred and military fortress architecture, which lend an expressive quality and form to the viewpoint. The dominant fortress-like form of the viewpoint actually contrasts with the harmonizing principle of the rustic style. The butte top was an ideal fortress site, providing both height and impregnable building material. The steep slopes and cliffs of the butte increase its fortress-like character. The military style responds to the donor's relationship with the Military Academy as well.

Rocky Butte Construction

Multnomah County produced the detailed survey and design for the road. Construction began in the late fall of 1934.

When the WPA joined the Butte project foremen were hired as supervisors to train the largely unskilled workmen in road building and stonework. Ralph

Curcio, an Italian immigrant who learned his masonry craft from his father in Europe was the superintendent of masonry work on the butte. He had begun his career in Oregon by working on the Columbia River Highway, Vista House and Multnomah Lodge. Over the following twenty years he worked on the The Grotto, which is also located on the butte, and many other public and private projects in the Portland area. After completion of the Rocky Butte project Ralph Curcio and the men were put to work by the County on the Barnes Road and Cornell Road tunnels.

The masonry crew consisted of about twenty men, working in pairs. Each new enrollee worked with a skilled mason. The men made their own hand tools for the job. Masons worked a regular eight hour day and were paid 50 cents per hour, a little more than the other workers at the Butte. The pay was considered good money for that time. There was no income tax.

Most of the work was done by hand with the help of low grade explosives. The rock was loaded with a large pole boom and was hauled to the top in a model "A" truck. The majority of the workers on the Butte were laborers who cut and loaded and unloaded rock, drove trucks or hauled soil.

A WPA bulletin of May 1937 stated that during the first fifteen months of work, there had been an average of 200 men employed on site, approximately 45,000 cubic yards of rock had been excavated, and 10,000 cubic yards of masonry rock had been quarried and built. A tremendous esprit de corps developed among the workers based on an enthusiasm for the job and pride in new found skills.

Engineering techniques typical for the Columbia River Highway were also used at Rocky Butte. This included the use of cut stone road beds and large, retained cut or fill areas along and below the roadbeds. Also tunnels were used to accommodate unusually challenging topography.

The Rocky Butte tunnel was a truly innovative solution to building a road on an excessively steep grade. The design allowed a 5% grade on the road as it doubles back on itself within the butte. The tunnel entered and exited from the same side of the butte. The descending roadway crosses over the lower portal forming a parapet wall before entering the butte, turns upon itself within the butte and emerges below.

Tunnel details were drawn by A.J. Dreyer, of the Multnomah County Highway Department, during the summer of 1938. The 375 foot long barrel tunnel was hand dug through solid lava. Workers carved out the semicircular shape with a clearance of 27 feet from floor to ceiling and wide enough to accommodate two lanes of traffic and two sidewalks. The interior of the tunnel was

finished with a continuous 20 inch thick layer of reinforced concrete applied with a travelling slip form mounted on wheels. In a tour de force of the mason's craft, the roadway near both entrances to the tunnel is supported by massive retaining walls eight feet thick at the base and four feet thick at the top. The tunnel was completed August 24, 1939.

The general design of the tunnel proved so successful that other tunnels in Oregon were later patterned after it although the curving road alignment was not repeated elsewhere. Ralph Curcio and crew later worked on the Cornell Road and Barnes Road tunnels which closely resemble the Rocky Butte facades and interior finishes.

Associated Recreational Use

Once completed, the scenic drives and viewpoint fortress were well received, heavily visited and held public meaning for many years. Thousands of visitors journeyed to the Butte on a daily basis. On most Sundays and holidays the facilities were taxed to the limit. After the opening day the Journal reported that approximately 20,000 persons using 5204 automobiles had ascended the Butte to enjoy the view. Over a thirty day period in 1938, a WPA survey found that an average of 4000-4500 people visited the site daily.

Even though the Depression was characterized by economic difficulties for the majority of Americans, it was an era that saw a continuing increase in the number of automobiles sold. The car had become both a convenient and personal form of transportation and an affordable form of social and family recreation.

The Aircraft Beacon

The aircraft beacon on Rocky Butte and several others in the gorge were constructed by William Schmitt and the Consolidated Railway Equipment Company of Portland under contract from the Bureau of Lighthouses in Washington D.C. for $29,00 in 1930. The beacon predates the scenic drive and viewpoint construction. Because of its location, it has become an integral part of the viewpoint structure. The beacon is significant in its own right because of its connection with a now archaic navigation system, and because of its rarity. The beacon has become a symbol of Rocky Butte during the dark hours. Portland residents look to the beacon when they pass even today. The light is maintained by the city to operate as a warning device and popular landmark for that park of Portland. When the beacon was constructed there was little more than a dirt track winding up the butte from the west and north. The beacon site was originally a rounded point which was later filled to be the level surface of the fortress terrace for the scenic viewpoint. Access for construction was done with pack horses.

The Rocky Butte beacon was the first revolving beacon along a 200 mile air travel route between Portland and Pasco. The beacon was an important part of a revolutionary night time navigation system for its time. This system predated radio beam based navigation systems and was the first safe alternative for guiding flights during the night time hours. This navigation system was called the dead-reckoning system and included 17 revolving beacons, four code beacons and eight emergency landing fields. The towers were reportedly placed on the center of an arrow 60 feet long and 12 feet wide, painted a brilliant yellow, with direction indicators on the top of the tower. The towers were located approximately 10 miles apart and were located atop high points in the Gorge, for the most part. An aircraft would fly from one lighted beacon to another as it travelled from Portland to Pasco. If the plane developed problems there were the eight lighted emergency landing fields along the way.

The beacon at Rocky Butte is one of less than 40 such beacons reported to still be in existence around the country, according to Federal Aviation Records of about 10 years ago. It is one of only a handful which may still be in existence along the west coast and Alaska. The majority of the others are not in working order.

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Geographical Data - Boundary Justification

The district is located in Township 1 North, Range 2 East, Sections 21 and 28. The district is bounded by the 50'wide right of way as measured from the center lines of Rocky Butte Road, and of 92nd Avenue from Halsey Street to Rocky Butte Road South, and along Fremont Street from 82nd Avenue to Rocky Butte Road North. Tax Lot 47 of Section 28 is located withing the confines of Rocky Butte Road as it circumnavigates the crest of the butte. The district comprises an approximate total of 21.48 acres. This includes 2.38 acres which is the Joseph Wood Hill portion of the district, Tax Lot 47.

Because the district comprises approach drives and a viewpoint located within the confines of the approach drives it was felt that the road right of ways would appropriately bound the district.

The approach drives pass through residential areas at the butte's foot and then wind through newer residential areas as they climb the butte. Portions of the roads on the butte have clusters of houses along the road. Other portions of the roads are still in natural woodland. The north loop road passes by the original military academy which is now used by a church group.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number PHOTOS Page 1

Continuation Sheet: Photographic information
All photographs are of Rocky Butte, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. Photographs were taken by David Lewis on 8 February 1991 unless noted otherwise. All negatives are stored with David Lewis at 2555 N.E. Forty Ninth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97213 unless noted otherwise. Archival printing by David Lutz, Image Works, Portland Oregon, 282-9966.

1/21 North Rocky Butte Road, cut slope and low stone wall. Camera facing southeast.

2/21 Retaining wall with low stone wall along North Rocky Butte Road. Camera facing north.

3/21 Pedestrian tunnel under North Rocky Butte Road. Camera facing east.

4/21 Catch basin drainage detail on North Rocky Butte Road. Camera facing west.

5/21 Fortress viewpoint atop Rocky Butte. Crowds are surveying the flood of Vanport City. June 1948, day unknown. Historic Oregon Journal oblique airphoto by Herb Alden. Camera facing south. Negative stored at Oregon Historical Society #007556.

6/21 Fortress and staircase with beacon in background. Camera facing south. Taken 17 February 1991.

7/21 Fortress viewpoint staircase, seen from bastion above. Entirely constructed of stone. Camera facing north. Taken 17 February 1991.

8/21 Stone drinking fountain and stone bench on staircase. Camera facing south.

9/21 Stone viewfinder and monument bases within fortress viewpoint. Camera facing southeast.

10/21 Deleted.

11/21 Typical bastion vista point. Stone light pier at center and view to Mt. Hood in distance. Camera facing east.

12/21 Ramp entry to viewpoint and typical stone railing of fortress. Camera facing east.

13/21 Aircraft beacon centered within ramp. Camera facing north. Taken by Chris Ford in spring of 1984.

14/21 West bastions of fortress viewpoint, drainage detail at toe of wall. Camera facing south.

15/21 South Rocky Butte Road, near summit loop. Camera facing northeast.

16/21 South Rocky Butte Road, tunnel, residential development, and fortress viewpoint. Airphoto facing northeast. 17 February 1991.

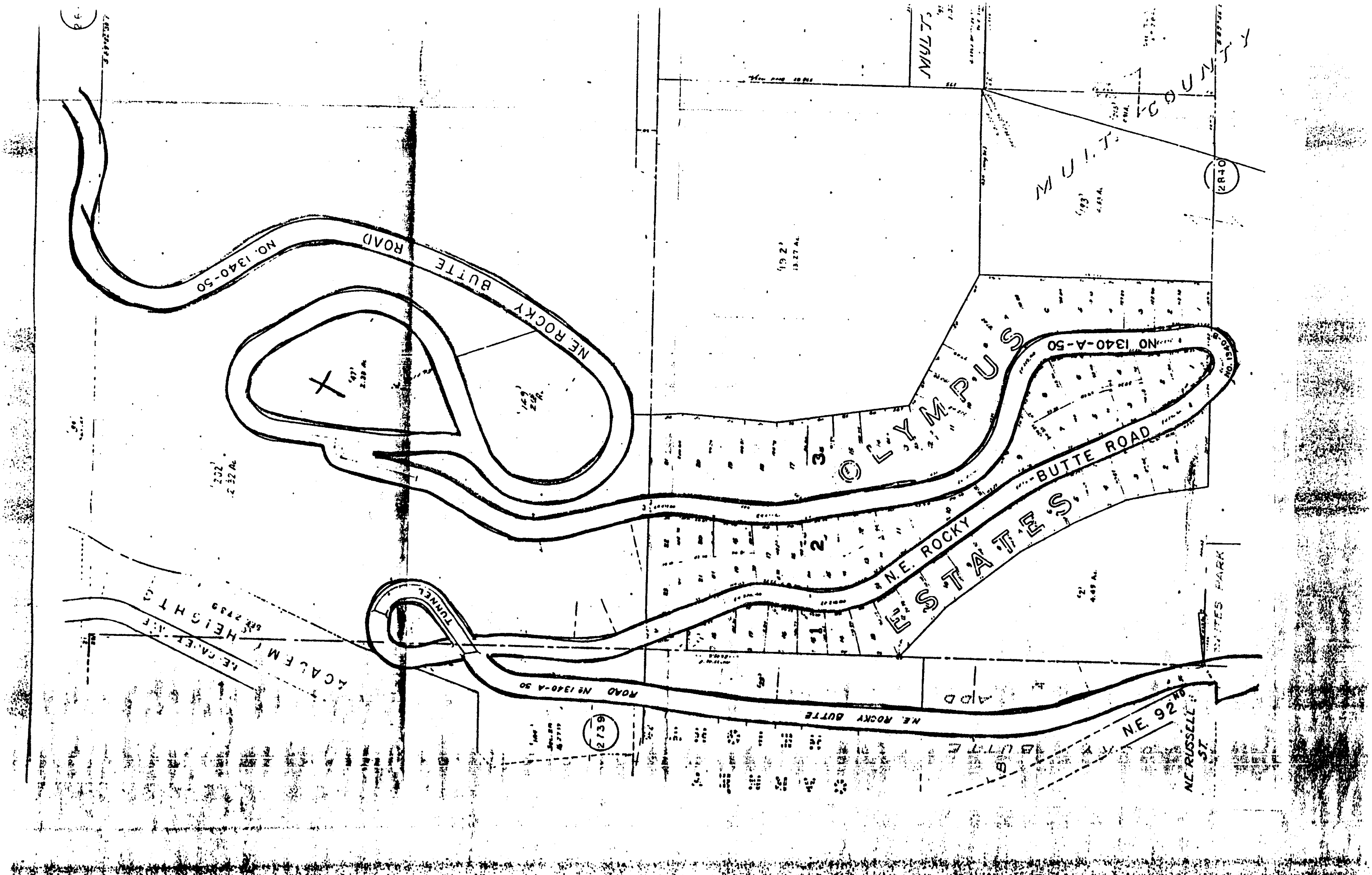
17/21 Tunnel portals and South Rocky Butte Road. Airphoto facing east. Taken 17 February 1991.

18/21 Auto tunnel South Rocky Butte Road. Lower portal shown with road crossing above. Camera facing northeast.

19/21 Low stone wall atop 40' high retaining wall on South Rocky Butte Road near upper tunnel portal. Camera facing southwest.

20/21 Stone bollards on South Rocky Butte Road. Camera facing south.

21/21 Low stone walls at South Rocky Butte Road and 92nd Avenue. Camera facing east.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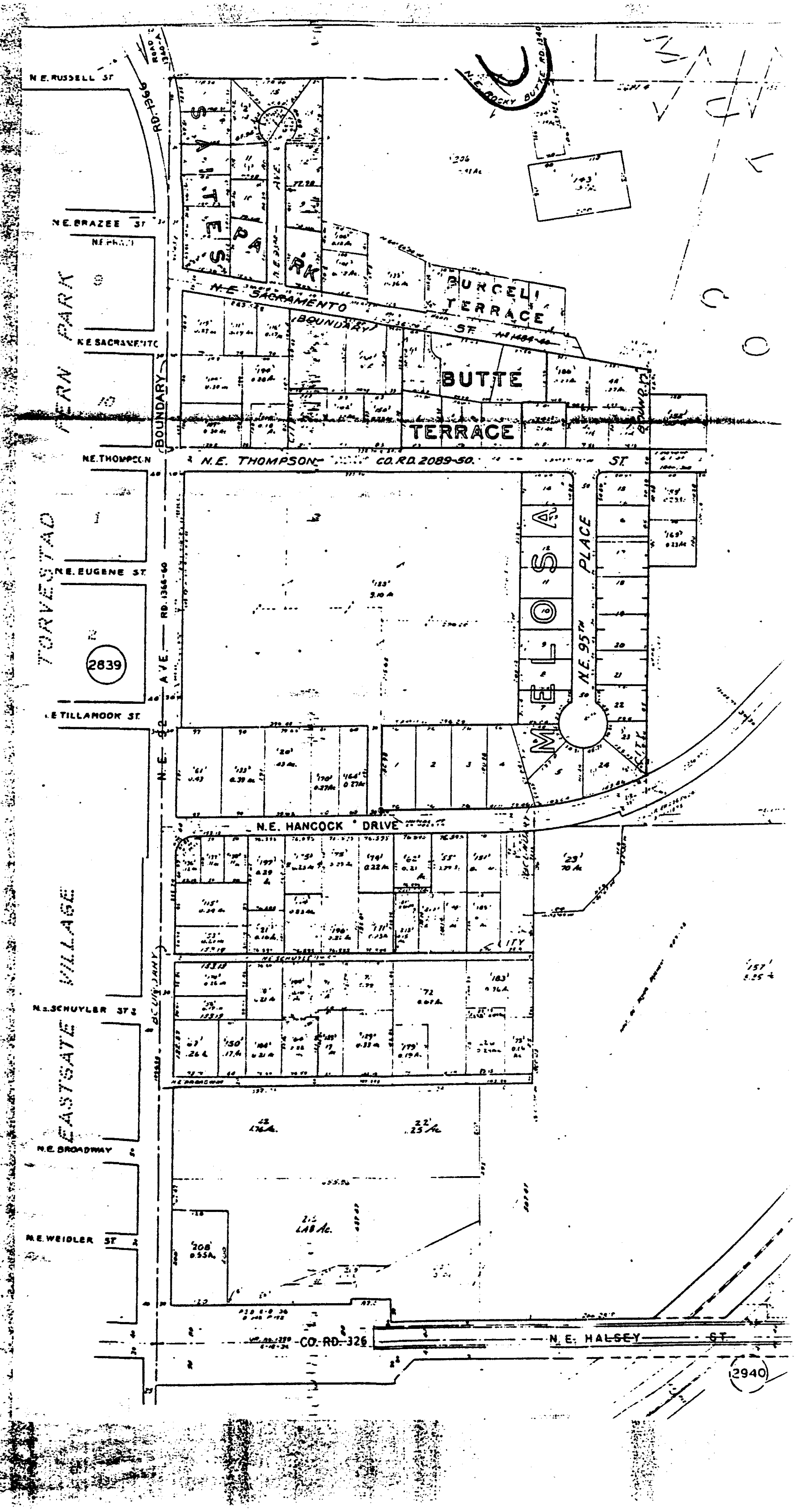
TUNNEL
ACADEMY HEIGHTS
MULT. COUNTY
MULT.
NE 92ND
NE RUSSELL ST.
2739
2840

1 OF 6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BUTTE TERRACE
FERN PARK
BOUNDARY
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TORVESTAD
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N.E. TILLAMOOK ST
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MELOSA
N.E. 95TH PLACE
N.E. HANCOCK DRIVE
EASTGATE VILLAGE
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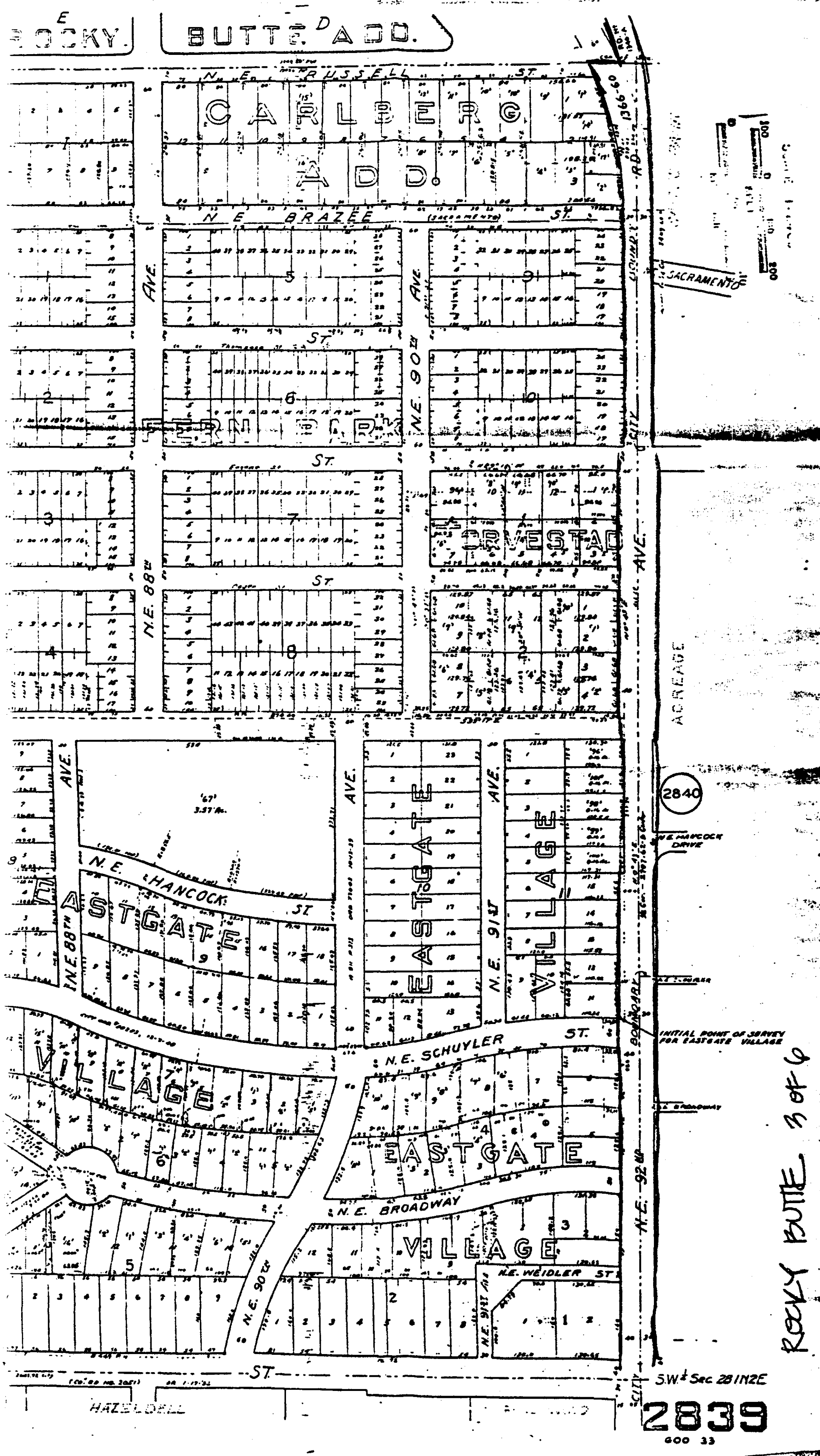
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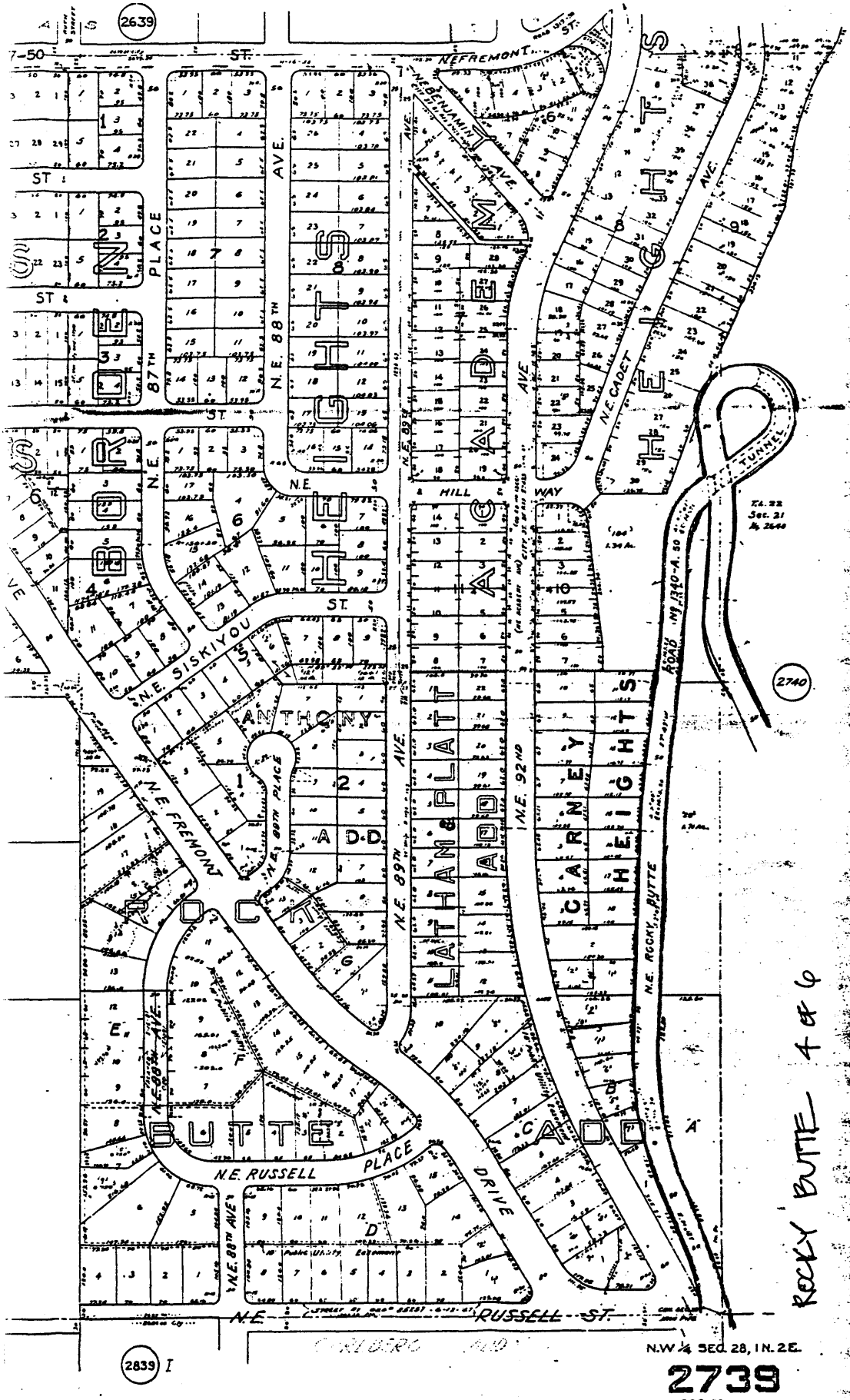

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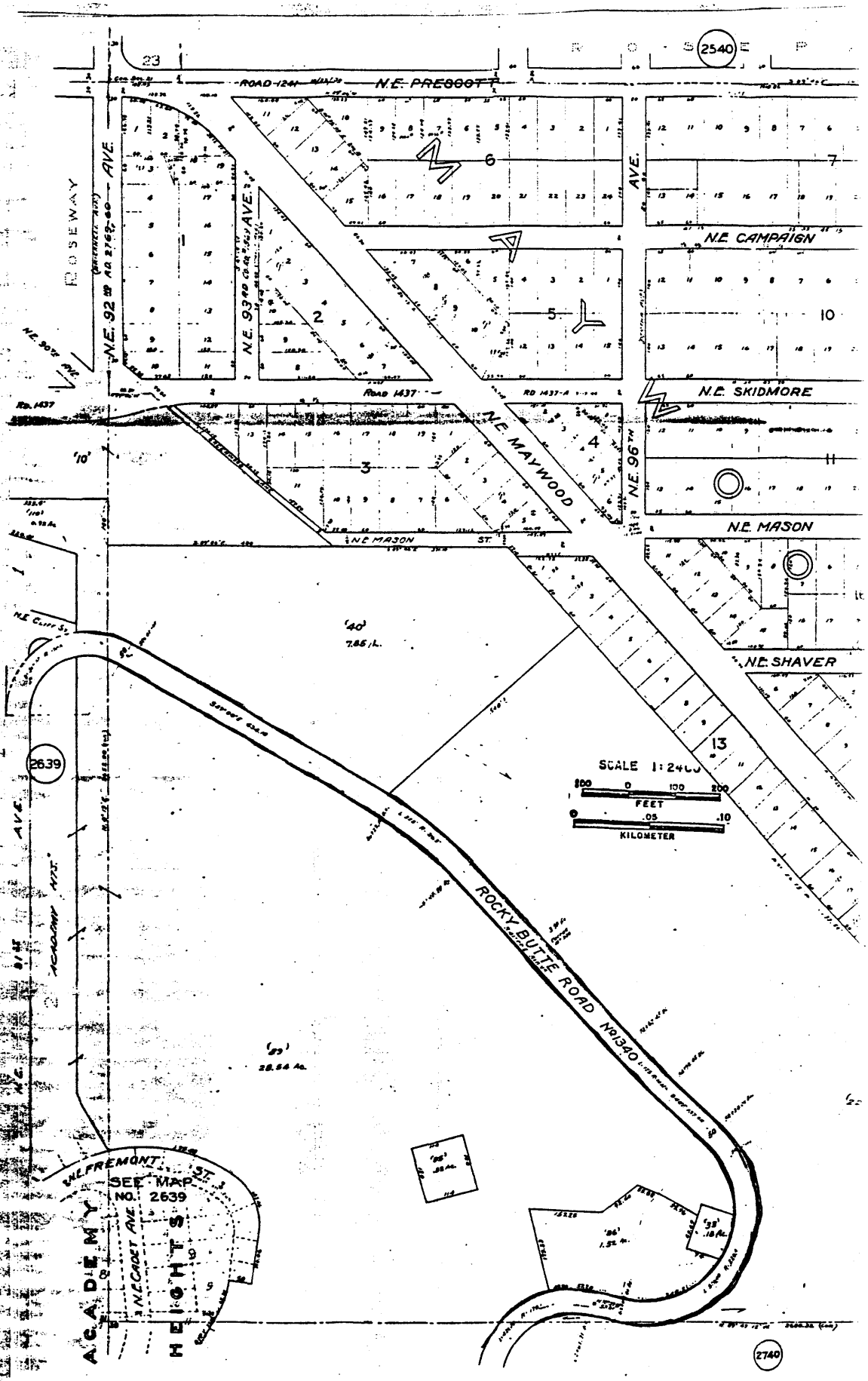
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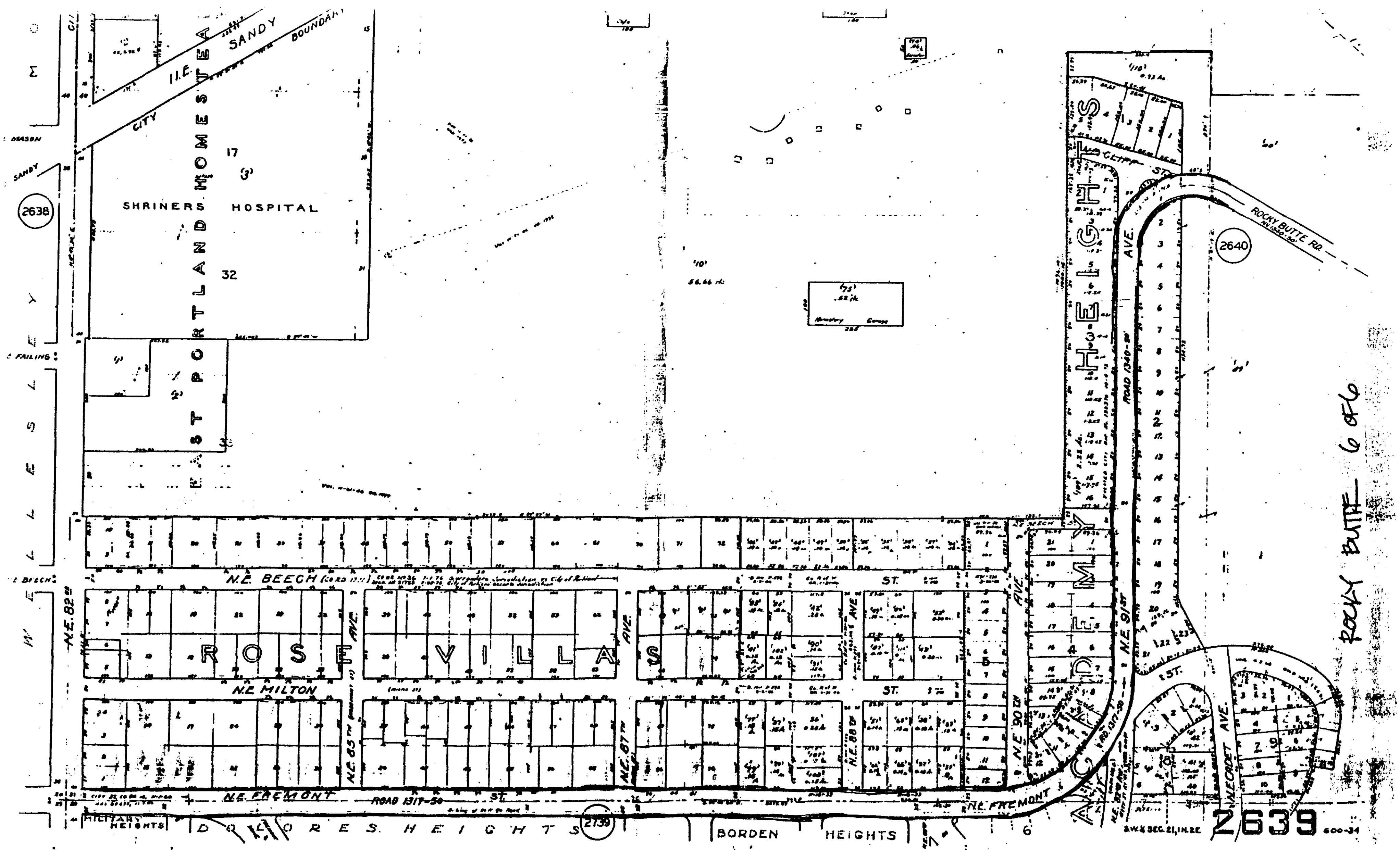
5 of 6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ROSE VILLAS
MOUNT CARMEL HEIGHTS
DOLORES HEIGHTS
BORDEN HEIGHTS
MILITARY HEIGHTS
CITY BOUNDARY
N.E. SANDY
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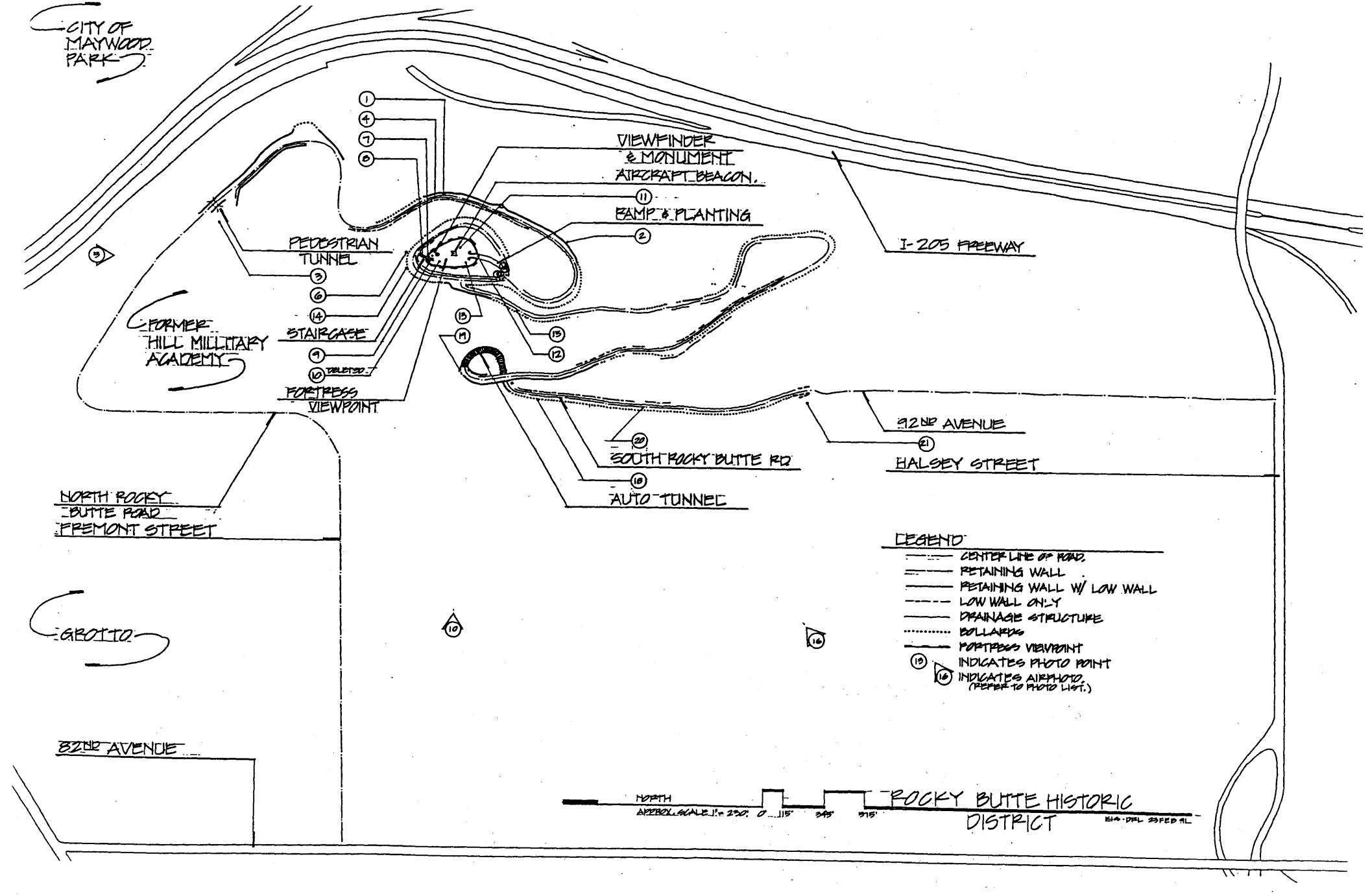
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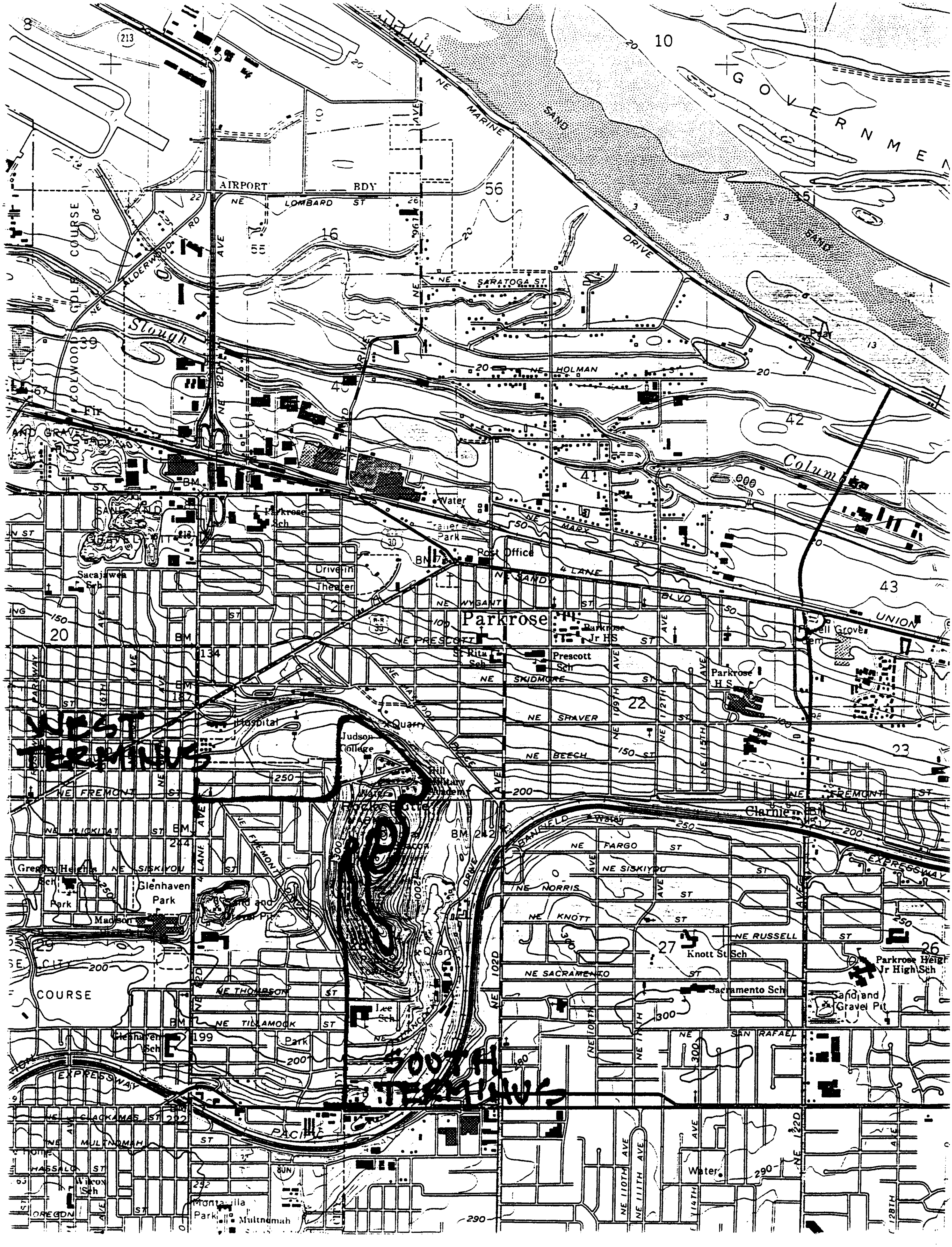

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Parkrose Sch
Sacajawea Sch
Water
Trailer Park
Post Office
Drive-in Theater
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NE MARX ST
Parkrose
Parkrose Jr HS
NE PRESCOTT ST
St. Rita Sch
Prescott Sch
NE SKIDMORE
Parkrose H S
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NE BEECH ST
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Quarry
Judson College
Hill Military Academy
Rocky Butte
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Clarnie
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EXPRESSWAY
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NE SISKIYOU ST
Gregory Heights Sch
Glenhaven Park
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PACIFIC
NE HASSALO ST
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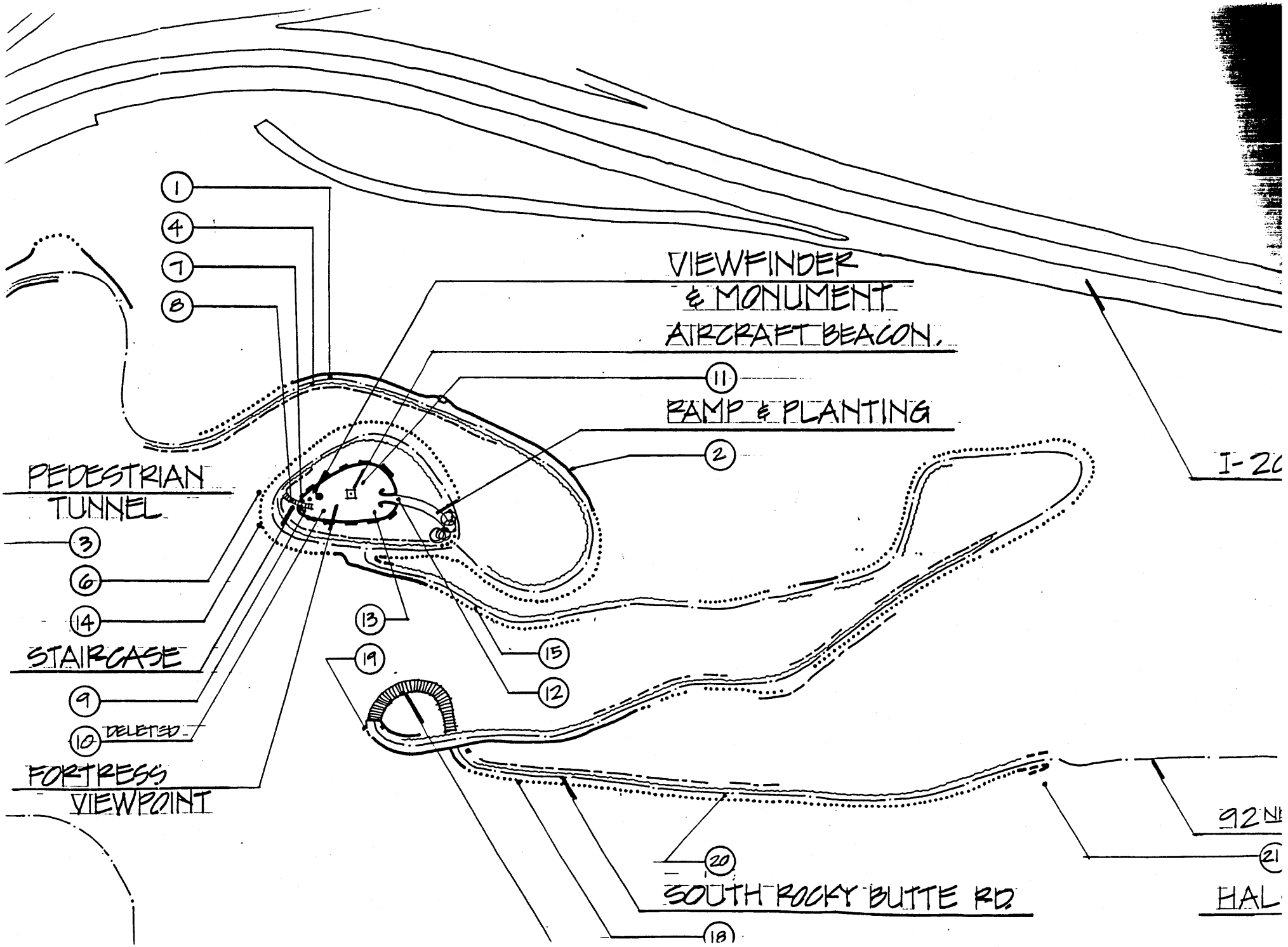
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HALSEY STREET

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ROCKY BUTTE HISTORIC DISTRICT

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CITY OF MAYWOOD PARK

VIEWFINDER & MONUMENT

AIRCRAFT BEACON.

RAMP & PLANTING

PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL

STAIRCASE

FORMER HILL MILITARY ACADEMY

DELETED

FORTRESS VIEWPOINT

I-205 FREEWAY

92ND AVENUE

SOUTH ROCKY BUTTE RD.

AUTO TUNNEL

HALSEY STREET

NORTH ROCKY BUTTE ROAD

FREMONT STREET

GROTTO

82ND AVENUE

LEGEND

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APPROX. SCALE 1" = 230' 0 115' 345' 575'

ROCKY BUTTE HISTORIC DISTRICT

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