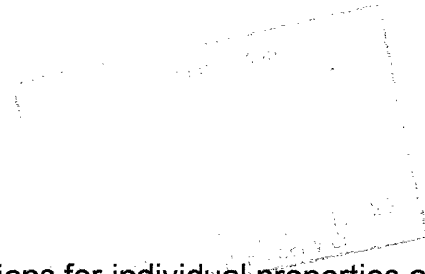


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

1496  
1491



**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office

other names/site number Oregon-American Lumber Corporation Mill Office

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 511 East Bridge Street not for publication   
city or town Vernonia vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Oregon code OR county Columbia code 009  
zip code 97064

=====

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

=====

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

James Hamrick 16 Oct 02  
Signature of certifying official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
Columbia County, Oregon

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
4. National Park Service Certification  
=====

I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper  
*Edson H. Ball*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

*12/5/02*

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):

=====  
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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  1  </u> buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
Columbia County, Oregon

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce/Trade Sub: Business

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation/Culture Sub: Museum

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Bungalow/Craftsman

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

roof asphalt shingles

walls wood

\_\_\_\_\_

other chimneys-brick

\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
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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.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Industry

Ethnic Heritage: Asian, Black, Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1924-1930

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
Columbia County, Oregon

Significant Dates 1924

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder unknown

\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository: University of Oregon, Special Collections, Judd Greenman Collection

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
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=====  
10. Geographical Data  
=====

Acreage of Property 0.61 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>10</u>	<u>486020</u>	<u>5078000</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
	<u>See continuation sheet.</u>					

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====  
11. Form Prepared By  
=====

name/title Janice Dilg

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date July 29, 2001

street & number 2603 NE 11th Avenue telephone (503) 287-0189

city or town Portland state OR zip code 97212-4135

=====  
Additional Documentation  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
Columbia County, Oregon

=====  
Property Owner  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Vernonia

street & number 1001 Bridge Street telephone (503) 429-5291

city or town Vernonia state OR zip code 97064

=====  
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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

=====  
D. Certification  
=====

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature and title of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

United States Department of the Interior  
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1 of 5 Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
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**Narrative Description of historic and current condition of the property**

The Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office building is a 1½-story wood frame building that reflects the Craftsman Bungalow architectural style, and was constructed in approximately 1924. Roughly L-shaped in plan, the building is set back 75' from the street, with a frontage of approximately 81' and a depth of 77'. The exterior walls are covered with wood shingles while the roof is finished with asphalt shingles. Its foundation and basement floors are concrete and its chimneys are built of brick. The gabled portions of the building are finished with painted, vertical boards and battens. All interior woodwork is milled Douglas fir finished with clear varnish. Several sets of cabinets and work counters remain intact, as does original hardware. The mill office sits on a wooded lot at the crest of a hill, (known locally as OA Hill), and fronts north onto East Bridge Street. The office building is separated from the street by a boxwood hedge and an expanse of lawn. Directly across the street is a residential neighborhood, consisting of sixty-six homes that were originally built as company housing. At the west end of the property is a 10-space, paved parking lot. At the east end of the lot stands the Vernonia Fire Department where Oregon-American once housed its fire-fighting equipment.<sup>1</sup> Behind the office building the thickly wooded hill slopes away to the south and what was once the 110-acre site of the Oregon-American Lumber Company mill. Also, behind the office, at the southwest corner of the lot, sits the remains of the company's concrete vault. The office building has had three additions made over the years: a sales office was added to the southern elevation of the building in 1936, an office/lounge added on the west end of the building between 1936 and 1940, and an access ramp built to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Small changes have been made to the interior since the Columbia County Historical Society Museum took control of the building in 1963; otherwise, the mill office is in remarkable condition and possesses most of its original interior and exterior architectural details and attributes.

The main body of the Oregon-American mill office's exterior walls is clad with original cedar shingles arranged in a regular course pattern and is stained dark brown. A water table, painted to match the rest of the exterior trim, encircles the entire building at the level of the main floor sill plate. Below that continues seven more courses of shingles. As the ground slopes away to the south vertical cedar boards and battens continue below the shingles, and are stained the same dark brown. The peaked sections of the larger, gable ends are finished with painted boards and battens. All the exterior wood, apart from the stained siding, is painted the same cream color. Wide bargeboards, triangular knee-braces, and exposed rafter tails contribute basic architectural features to the building's roofline and wide eaves.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Enid Parrow, 3 June 2001 and phone interview with Ken Anderson, 2 June 2001. Photograph of the mill office from 1927) included in this application), shows small building to the east of main building that held O-A's fire-fighting equipment.



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The north elevation of the office shows the front of the office building with a cross-gabled roof that is finished with medium brown asphalt shingles. The type of material used for the original roofing is unknown, as is the date of their replacement. The deep front porch exhibits the Craftsman bungalow style with its five basic square posts adorned with simple curved brackets, which add visual interest to the otherwise straightforward post-and-beam construction. A smaller enclosed section is at the west end of the front porch. Both porches offered shelter to workers as they filed through two doors, situated at either end of the enclosed porch, past the "pay-window" with its chest-high counter, all of which remain intact and in good condition. The original tongue and groove, beaded ceiling remains, as does the flooring on both porches, (complete with scars from the corked boots of the loggers). In the enclosed section, the frame and panel fir wainscot is complete. Porch ceiling light fixtures are of the correct style to be original, but conclusive documentation to this effect has not been found.

At the west end of the main section stand two of the additions to the mill office. A one-room wing was added sometime between 1936 and 1940, and an access ramp was constructed directly in front of that addition in the mid-1990s to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Both additions were sensitively constructed in the same architectural style as the original office, and typical siding materials, trim, and windows were used. Though distinct from the original building, both additions blend in well with the main section of the mill office. There is some dispute as to the historical use of the west wing addition. Some remember it being built as a sales manager's office, others as a ladies' lounge for the women office workers. Remnants of cast-iron sewage pipes remain in the crawl space just beneath the addition lending some credibility to the lounge version. Proponents of each use agree that the addition was made sometime after the mill reopened from its Depression-era slump in 1936 and before World War II.<sup>2</sup>

The east elevation offers a view of the gabled end of the main section of the office building, the side of the access ramp, and the west wing addition. A small, front gabled porch, with posts and railing matching those of the front porch, remains at the west door leading from the pay window. The steps leading down from the porch were removed with the addition of the access ramp.

The south elevation shows the back of the building, which includes the 1936 sales office addition. Beginning at the west end of the building is the back of the west wing. Behind this wing, down the slope, stands a flat-roofed, twenty-four foot square

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<sup>2</sup> Phone interview with Bonnie McNutt, July 9 2001. Bonnie worked in the O-A office from 1939-1944 and remembers the addition as the women's lounge, complete with restroom facilities; Phone interview with Ed Kamholz, June 26 2001. Ed has conducted extensive research on the Oregon-American Lumber Company and possesses document dated April 16, 1936 that indicates the addition was intended as a sales office.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3 of 5 Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office  
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reinforced concrete building that served as the company vault. Attempts to date its construction have been hampered by a lack of records, but it does not appear in early photographs of the building.<sup>3</sup> An eight-inch thick steel door with the lettering, "Herring-Hall-Marvin Safe Co, San-Francisco" still hangs on its original hinges. A Yale combination tumbler lock and lever-style door handle is still in place.<sup>4</sup> A shed-roofed enclosure follows the contours of wooden and concrete staircases that lead from the main building down to the vault. A simple post and beam framework supports the roof, and the structure is sheathed on the exterior side of that framework with vertical cedar boards and battens. Just to the east of the wooden stairway is a small wing that projects eight feet out from the main building with a single window facing south, and an end-gabled roof. To the east of that small wing is another board and batten door that provides access to the crawl space under the main section of the building where plumbing and heating pipes and ducts are located. At the east end of this elevation is the south wing of the mill office. As the grade slopes steeply away from the main section of the office building here, the building's basement is at eye-level and the main floor of the south wing is approximately eight feet above ground.

The west elevation shows the length of the south wing and the gabled end of the main section of the office. A five-panel frame door located at the southeast corner of the wing provides access to the basement under the south wing. Moving north, up the slope to level ground stands a small back porch built with a similar post-and-beam construction as that of the front porch; it supports a small gabled roof. Along the backside of the main section of the building are five concrete steps, surrounded by concrete walls, that descend below grade to a braced batten door allowing access to the east section of the building's basement. Both the east and south sections of the office's basement were used for storage, and the county museum continues to utilize those spaces in the same way. The east end of the main section of the office has a gabled end, and typical of the larger gables of the building, contains a wood louvered vent near its peak

Original six-over-one double-hung sash windows, many with their original glazing, are found throughout the building. They are arranged as either a single unit, or grouped in pairs, threes, or fours. Almost all of them have their original sash cords and hardware. Six-light, fixed windows are the standard for all basement windows and all appear to be original. Two single light casement windows were used in the office's main bathroom.

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<sup>3</sup> Phone interview with Bonnie McNutt, July 9 2001. Bonnie recalls using one of the interior rooms of the mill office as the vault during her tenure at O-A from 1939-44. Photos presumed to have been taken in the 1930s show no such structure.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Fulton, *Vernonia: a pocket in the woods,* ([Oregon]: A. Fulton, c1997), 68. While it is unclear what the company kept in the vault the payroll for Oregon-American reached as high as \$35,000 per pay period.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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All exterior doors of the Oregon-American Lumber Company Office are original, and in good to excellent condition. The front door is a three-foot wide, fifteen light door with its initial Harvard® brass, thumb-latch lockset, and is flanked by two sidelights, each with five panes of glass. The two doors leading to the pay-window are also fifteen-light doors with simple brass doorknobs and locksets. The back door leading out to the vault is a solid wood, single light, double panel door. The door to the sales office is a solid wood, single light, single panel door with a brass, thumb-latch lockset. What appears to be its original screen door remains, though in poor condition.

With the exception of the south elevation, the exterior architectural materials of the mill office are sound. The shingles, trim, and wood louvered gable vents on the southern exposure are in fair to poor condition; the majority of the shingles are curled and some are disintegrating along their bottom edges. Some replacement of the boards and battens below the water table has occurred along the south elevation in the past three years, and while matching the material and style of the originals, they have not yet been stained to match the rest of the building. The wood steps and hand-railing leading up to the sales office porch have been replaced in the past few years, and do not match the original style or finishes of the rest of the building's materials. Similarly, the steps leading up to the front porch have been replaced, although no date for that is available, and hand railings have been added to meet present day building codes. Photos, presumed to be from the 1930s, show three louvered eyebrow vent dormers in the side-gabled portion of the main building's roof that have since been removed.

Although the current use of the office building is as a museum, the majority of the interior remains as it was when used to house all Oregon-American Lumber Company administrative personnel. Each office and workspace remains arranged, as they were when the building was first constructed. Most doors, and a double-swinging gate, have been removed to facilitate ease of movement through the museum, and some remain stored on site. All of the counters that separated public areas from workspace in the main office are still in place. The floor plan submitted with this application indicates the original uses of the rooms of the office.

In keeping with the Craftsman tradition of using natural local materials, all woodwork in the interior of the building is Douglas fir, much of it vertical grain. All of it is finished with clear varnish that highlights the wood's beautiful grain and coloring. As a producer of high quality fir products, Oregon-American used the interior of its mill office to showcase the versatility of that wood. All floors are made from tongue and groove fir with a tough painted finish in the public and general workspaces, and a clear finish in individual offices. Every room is lined with five-foot high fir wainscoting, frame-and-panel in the majority of the rooms, tongue and groove bead board in the sales offices. All doors, woodwork, cabinetry and countertops were constructed of solid fir, and all remain in good to excellent condition. Brass-plated hinges, turn-latches, and drawer pulls were used throughout and all remain intact

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and in good condition. A set of built-in cabinets line one wall of the sales office, and still retain their original green glass doorknobs. Wall surfaces above the fir wainscoting are painted plaster. Ceilings are painted, wood panel and frame. Some basic porcelain light socket fixtures remain, but, for the most part, original lights have been replaced with fluorescent fixtures. Many push-button light switches remain, along with their brass switch plate covers. An attic exists above the main work area, and is accessed by a pull-down staircase located in the ceiling in the main work area. The Oregon-American Lumber Company traditionally used that space for storage of old records, and the museum continues that practice.

Another alteration in the work area was the removal of the door to the main restroom to accommodate current handicapped access standards. This happened in the 1960s when a salvaged door, jamb, and trim from the old Vernonia Post Office on Jefferson Street were installed for that purpose. A small text card affixed to the trim alerts the public to those facts. At the west end of the main work area is the entrance to the west wing addition. The addition is a single room and the flooring is similar to the rest of office. The walls are finished with painted wood frame and panel, similar to the ceilings throughout the rest of the office.

The other changes to the mill office have occurred in the sales office area, which temporarily became living quarters for a caretaker of the building soon after the City took possession of the mill office in 1963. One of the small offices became the kitchen and a five-foot section of cabinet, complete with sink, was installed along the east wall. In the other small sales office a bathtub/shower enclosure was installed along the west wall. While plumbing necessitated some alterations to the floor, the unit was placed in front of an existing window and its trim without modifications being made. This is also true of the toilet and sink located in a corner of the main sales room.

On the basis of the basic integrity of the Oregon-American Lumber Company mill office, and that it represents a fine example of the Craftsman bungalow architectural style, this building is offered for nomination to the National Historic Register.

Attempts to ascertain additional information regarding the architect of the building and the placement of the vault have proved fruitless. No further information has been found to date in the nomination.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

The Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office, built c.1924, is significant as it is the only remaining building of the mill's complex that once covered more than one hundred acres at the city limits of Vernonia, Oregon. Typical of many similar Oregon municipalities in the early years of the twentieth century, Vernonia grew and prospered from its relationship to the mill and the timber industry. The historic buildings of the mill no longer exist to convey their story to present and future generations. The mill office building embodies important elements of the historical record of the local community and region and contributes to the historic qualities of present-day Vernonia.

By 1922 Oregon was considered "the most important lumber manufacturing state in the country."<sup>1</sup> Increased demand for lumber in the eastern and mid-western regions of the United States brought timber holding companies to the heavily forested lands of western Oregon in the early 1900s. Those companies, in turn, sold their vast holdings of land and standing timber to sawmill operators, such as the Oregon-American Lumber Company. That scenario signaled a shift from small, family-run logging and manufacturing operations to larger, corporate-run facilities, as only sizeable operations could handle the volume of production necessary to satiate consumer demand.<sup>2</sup> Oregon-American Lumber Company joined in the prosperous years of the lumber industry by building a mammoth, state-of-the-art mill on the east end of Vernonia.

Central Coal & Coke hired John J. Monaghan, a Kansas City architect who was considered "a peerless mill designer,"<sup>3</sup> to translate their vision into reality. Planning for the mill began in 1921, building commenced in 1922, and the first log was cut on July 10, 1924. Monaghan chose to build the mill from concrete and steel, a novel concept at the time. His choice balanced the short-term costs of using less expensive wood as his building material over the long-term potential of reducing fire hazards, a common and costly problem of sawmills. In fact, Oregon-American was the only mill in the Northwest at the time to use concrete and steel in constructing its buildings. Much of the machinery of the mill was custom made on-site, and contractors from as far away as Wisconsin came to Vernonia to assemble and install them.<sup>4</sup> The three-story mill covered 110 acres along with an additional 40-acre millpond excavated at the east end of the site, and filled with water diverted from the Nehalem River.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Fulton, PhD., Vernonia: a pocket in the woods, (Oregon: A. Fulton, 1997), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Fulton, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Kamholz, et.al. The Oregon-American Lumber Company Ain't No More, unpublished manuscript, © 2001 Edward Kamholz, p. 14 in Chapter, "The Road to Vernonia."

<sup>4</sup> "Best in United States," Vernonia Eagle, 2 November 1923, p. 1.

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The parent company of Oregon-American, Central Coal & Coke, based in Kansas City, Missouri, had years of experience in the lumber industry logging and manufacturing southern pine. That experience resulted in two decisions that made Oregon-American's operation unique; the mill would be a "rail mill, meaning all timber and lumber would be transported from woods to mill to public by rail." This differed from the practices of locating mills on major waterways, which most large sawmill operators followed. It would also kiln-dry all of its lumber products rather than allowing green lumber to season naturally. Central Coal, & Coke had a reputation "for seasoned lumber" with its pine products in the South and developed a comparable drying process for Douglas fir with the U.S. Products Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin. Kiln-drying offered two primary benefits: the loss of water from the wood made it much cheaper to transport by rail, and customers received "uniform sized lumber, less subject to shrinkage and of a higher grade than green lumber."<sup>5</sup> Other sawmill operators would subsequently follow Oregon-American's lead in the kiln drying of lumber.<sup>6</sup>

Oregon-American's innovative approach to lumber milling did not stop there. Unlike most sawmills constructed in this time period, Oregon-American's mill was powered by electricity rather than steam. Instead of having a series of, often dangerous, belts driving machines or saws, each piece of equipment was "powered directly by electric motors, each with a capacity geared precisely to the needs of a particular operation." The electricity was supplied by the company's on-site generating plant, and its output was sufficient for the mill's needs as well as all of the company housing. In fact, the mill's generating capacity was so great that it sometimes supplied surplus power to Vernonia Power and Light, which regularly fell short in providing enough electricity to its customers.<sup>7</sup>

Although Vernonia had been slowly growing and modernizing in the first decade of the new century, its growth and civic structure became inextricably linked with the needs and wishes of Oregon-American Lumber Company. From a population of 150 in 1920, Vernonia's census swelled to 1200 by mid-1923, mainly due to the influx of workers constructing the mill. The city's numbers would increase to a high of 2500 by 1928.<sup>8</sup> While Oregon-American made it clear that it had no intention of turning Vernonia into a "company town," (owning all the businesses and land in the town), company officials did seize the initiative in the area of housing. Anticipating their need for 750 workers capable of staffing two shifts at the mill by 1925, Oregon-American built its own housing complex on Spencer Hill, (ever after known as OA Hill), directly across Bridge Street from the mill office.

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<sup>5</sup> Kamholz, p. 11 in Chapter, "The Road to Vernonia."

<sup>6</sup> Kamholz, p. 15 in Chapter, "The Road to Vernonia."

<sup>7</sup> Kamholz, p. 15 in Chapter, "The Road to Vernonia."

<sup>8</sup> "1200 People In Vernonia; Growth Of Town Is Rapid," *Oregon Journal*, 6 May 1923, Section 3 p.1, and Fulton, *Vernonia: a pocket in the woods*, p. 70.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Documentation is unclear about whether or not John Monaghan was also the architect for the office and houses. Kansas City landscape architect, Herbert S. Hare, designed the neighborhood of OA Hill with winding streets, plenty of trees, and also oversaw the landscaping around the mill office.<sup>9</sup> In describing both the houses and the mill office E. E. Hayes, then company superintendent, stated they were all “carefully constructed along lines that will enhance the natural scenic beauty of the locality.” All were built in a similar rustic architectural style and in the early years of their existence, all homes were finished identically to the mill office with dark stained cedar shingle siding and cream painted trim.<sup>10</sup> Officially called “Millview” the development, which consisted of sixty-six various sized bungalows, soon became known as O-A Hill (and remains so today). Additional smaller three room cottages were built along both sides of Bridge Street, east of the mill office building.

In addition to influencing the physical surroundings of Vernonia, Oregon-American Lumber Company changed the cultural makeup of the city. Though their motivations remain obscure, Oregon-American officials brought numerous African-American workers and their families from Central Coal & Coke’s southern operations to Vernonia. They worked in various unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled positions within the company and according to Ed Kamholz, “OA paid all its minority employees the same as their white co-workers.”<sup>11</sup> The African-American’s lives outside the mill were less egalitarian.

In the early 1920s KKK meetings were held openly in Vernonia, and plans were in the works to build a meeting hall. Exact membership rolls are not available, but stories about the KKK and its activities regularly appeared in the *Vernonia Eagle* from 1922 through 1925. African-American workers lived in company housing described as “poorly equipped shacks in the low land of town” that had “electric lights [as] the only modern utility.” The exclusion of their children from the only school in town, led twenty-eight African-American Vernonians to organize their own NAACP chapter in 1925, with the help of Portland chapter secretary, Beatrice Morrow Cannady. Cannady claimed that it was “by decrees of the boss” that black children were unable

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<sup>9</sup> R.A. Long employed Herbert S. Hare for the planning and development of Longview, Washington. Long and Charles Keith, President of Central Coal, & Coke were close personal friends and business associates.

<sup>10</sup> Fulton, p. 64, and Phone interview with Ed Kamholz, 25 July 2001. The mill office retains those original finishes.

<sup>11</sup> Kamholz, p. 27 in Chapter “The Road to Vernonia.” Kamholz conducted extensive research of the Judd Greenman papers, housed in the Special Collections at U of O. Greenman was President and General Manager of O-A for many years, and suggests that while Greenman sometimes championed African-American employees in many respects he was as prejudiced as the majority of Americans.

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to attend the white school.<sup>12</sup> By 1926, after continued pressure on the powers that be, an accommodation was reached and black children began attending school. Life in Vernonia never became easy for African-Americans, and with closure of the mill in 1957, all remaining families moved away. The homes of the African-American community were demolished after the land they sat on was deeded to the city, and Anderson Park was constructed on the site, wiping out an important historical location.

The company also hired Filipino, Japanese, and Hindu workers and each group lived in company housing that was segregated by ethnicity, and were located in the same general area as the African-American families.<sup>13</sup> Each group worked in a specific area of the mill or the surrounding woods. Filipino workers generally were "experienced timber workers" and worked in the mill. Photos on display in the Columbia County Historical Society Museum document their presence in the Oregon-American workforce. Japanese men mainly performed section gang work on the logging railroad. They lived in a separate camp, referred to as "Jap camp" by local whites, on the outskirts of Camp McGregor, the main logging camp of Oregon-American. Wives of some of the workers cooked for the work crews. The national decree that sent Japanese-Americans to internment camps during World War II engulfed Oregon-American workers as well, and while company president Judd Greenman corresponded with several longtime employees during their incarceration, none of them ever returned to the mill. Little is known of the Hindu workers and their experiences working for the mill and living in Vernonia.

After its most productive year in 1928, Oregon-American Lumber Company began a slow decline that would continue until its closure in 1957. Like most timber companies of that era, attempts to keep profits up in the face of eroding prices resulted in overproduction. When the stock market crashed in 1929 timber companies were stuck with huge overstocks of products and no buyers. By 1931, Oregon-American Lumber Company went into receivership and shut down its sawmill. By the summer of 1932, the planing mill and shipping departments closed. No part of the mill would function again until after the company had declared bankruptcy, been reorganized as Oregon-American Lumber Corporation, and received financial assistance from a federal loan program started under Herbert Hoover, called the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). During the years of the Great Depression many workers moved away to find other work, although those that stayed were allowed to remain in their company houses as long as they continued to maintain them. When the mill finally reopened in 1936 a large percentage of the workers who had moved away returned to work at the mill.

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<sup>12</sup> Fulton, p. 84. Note; Ed Kamholz, who grew up in Vernonia, recalls having black, Japanese, and Filipino classmates during the 1950s.

<sup>13</sup> Kamholz, p. 27 in Chapter "The Road to Vernonia." A 1929 payroll summary lists the breakdown as follows: Hindu-10, Japanese-35, Negro-39, Filipino-55, and White-356.



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That same year, workers at Oregon-American and many other mills throughout the region unionized. There is a long history of organizing labor in the forests of the northwest, beginning with the radical IWW in the early years of the twentieth century. By the 1930s workers could choose between joining an American Federation of Labor (AF of L) sponsored union, generally reserved for the skilled trades, or the more radical, and often considered Communist front, Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). After a protracted industry-wide strike in 1935, Oregon-American lumber workers joined the AF of L Local 2557. The following year, the CIO's Local 5-37 took control of the majority of Oregon-American's labor force, leaving the skilled workers at the mill under AF of L membership.<sup>14</sup>

In conjunction with the financial calamities that beset the company during the Depression, Oregon-American lost much of its main tract of timber in the devastating fires that swept through Oregon forests in 1933. Though much less well known than the Tillamook Burn, the Wolf Creek Fire happened at the same time. Beginning on August 24, 1933 that fire would not be extinguished until rains subdued it in September. By that time approximately twelve billion board feet of timber had been lost, and Camp McGregor had burned to the ground. It was the RFC loan that allowed repair to the damaged rail lines and the reconstruction of a new logging camp. Still the loss of materials was so great that "the fires of 1933 changed the economics of the northwest timber industry forever."<sup>15</sup> Full recovery would come only with the increased demand for lumber in connection with the onset of World War II. For the first time in years, Oregon-American ran two shifts at the mill, and worker's wages increased. With many men departing from Vernonia to join the armed forces, Oregon-American turned to women to fill jobs at the mill. By the spring of 1942, thirty-five women were working on the day shift pulling lumber, working on stackers, sorters and transfers cars. Typical of other industries that utilized women's labor during the war, Oregon-American only kept women on in the mill as long as men were unavailable. Of course, women had always held clerical positions in the mill office.

While not many historical records exist that specifically address activities of the office staff, it is clear it was the hub of the business. A small sales staff operated from three offices in the back rooms of the building, while accounting and payroll personnel occupied the main workroom at the front of the building. The offices of both President and General Manager of the company, along with an executive secretary, were also located in the office. The total number of staff remained between ten and twelve throughout the life of the business. Most employees spent their entire careers with Oregon-American Lumber Company.<sup>16</sup> One notable person is long-time President, Judd Greenman.

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<sup>14</sup> Kamholz, p. ix, and Fulton, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Kamholz, p. 1 in Chapter "From the Ashes."

<sup>16</sup> Interviews with: Ken Anderson 7/2/01, Ed Kamholz 7/1/01, and Bonnie McNutt 7/9/01. Judd Greenman was President from 1925-35 and General Manager until 1955.

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Judd Greenman's contributions to the timber industry in Oregon extend beyond his management of Oregon-American Lumber Company. Greenman was an active participant in the National Lumber Manufacturers Association (NLMA) and the West Coast Lumberman's Association (WCLA). When, in 1938, the State of Oregon passed Washington as the leading timber producer in the nation, the WCLA moved its headquarters to Portland from Seattle.<sup>17</sup> Greenman was instrumental in imposing lumber grading standards on an industry that had been rife with deceptive marketing practices for decades. As President of Oregon-American he won a negligence lawsuit filed in the wake of a 1929 fire by another logging company that established precedents for Oregon State forestry statutes.<sup>18</sup> As a result of years of activism in the timber industry, Greenman served as President of the NLMA from 1954 to 1955.

A final boom for the lumber companies came from residential demands in the post-war years, but the end was in sight. Just as the first superintendent of the mill had predicted in 1923, "The timber supply will carry operations from thirty to forty years."<sup>19</sup> Typical of most northwest timber companies, Oregon-American had virtually cut down, or lost to fire, all of its cheaply acquired trees, and by 1952 Central Coal & Coke decided to sell its subsidiary. Purchased by Long-Bell Lumber Company the following year, whose plans were to establish a tree farm on the cutover lands, Oregon-American began to log the last of its trees. The sawmill cut the last of the company's logs in August of 1957, and the planing mill followed suit in December of that year.<sup>20</sup> With the last blow of the mill whistle the sustaining economic force of Vernonia faded away as well.

The International Paper Company took over the Vernonia operation from Long-Bell in January 1958, establishing the twenty thousand-acre, Vernonia Tree Farm. With no further use for the mill or its accompanying buildings, International Paper deeded a thirty-seven acre tract of land, which included the office building and sixty-six company houses, plus some additional acreage dedicated to become a park, to the City of Vernonia in 1958. It also allowed a movie company to burn a large portion of the mill for the movie, "Ring of Fire" in 1958. As the rest of the buildings fell into disrepair they were demolished. The millpond was turned into Lake Vernonia, stocked with fish, and ringed with a walking path that passes the last remaining shell of a mill building on its west edge. In 1963, the Columbia County Historical Society established a museum in the company office where it remains today offering visitors a glimpse into the history of Vernonia, Columbia County, and of course, the Oregon-American Lumber Company.

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<sup>17</sup> Dodds, p. 210.

<sup>18</sup> Kamholz, p. 5 in Chapter "From the Ashes" and phone interview with Ed Kamholz 7/24/01.

<sup>19</sup> Untitled article, *Vernonia Eagle*, 14 December 1923, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Judd Greenman died the day the last train of logs headed to Vernonia.

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*Vernonia Eagle*

***Personal interviews***

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Ken Anderson  
Bonnie McNutt  
Enid Parrow  
Faye Sword

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National Park Service

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is located in Section 4, Township 4 North, Range 4 West of the Willamette Meridian, in Columbia County, Oregon. It is otherwise identified as Tax Lot 4404-000-0600.

**Boundary Justification**

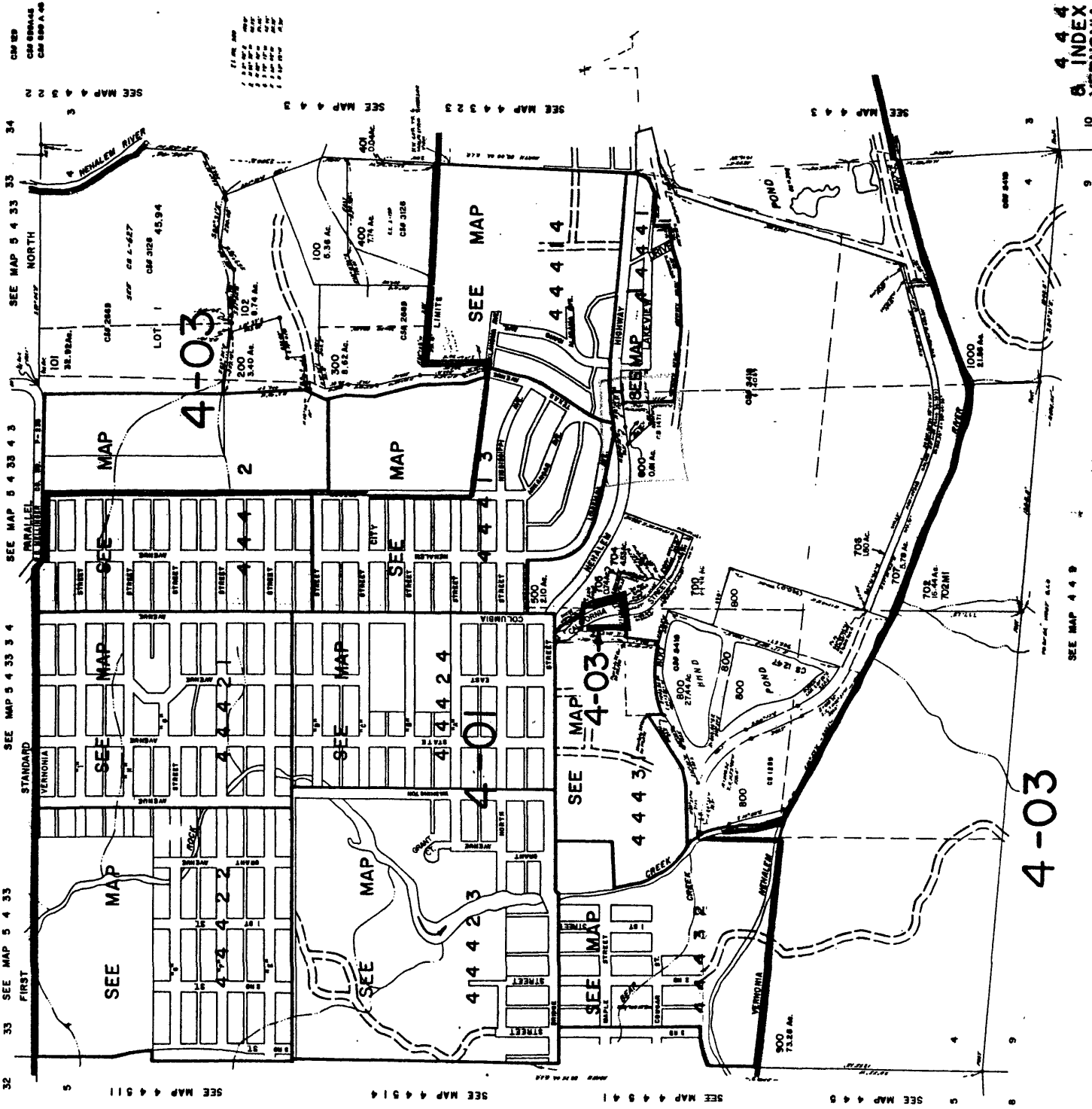
The nominated property includes the entire tax lot (0.61 acres) occupied by the Oregon-American Lumber Company Mill Office since its construction in c.1924.

SECTION 4 T.4N. R.4W. W.M.

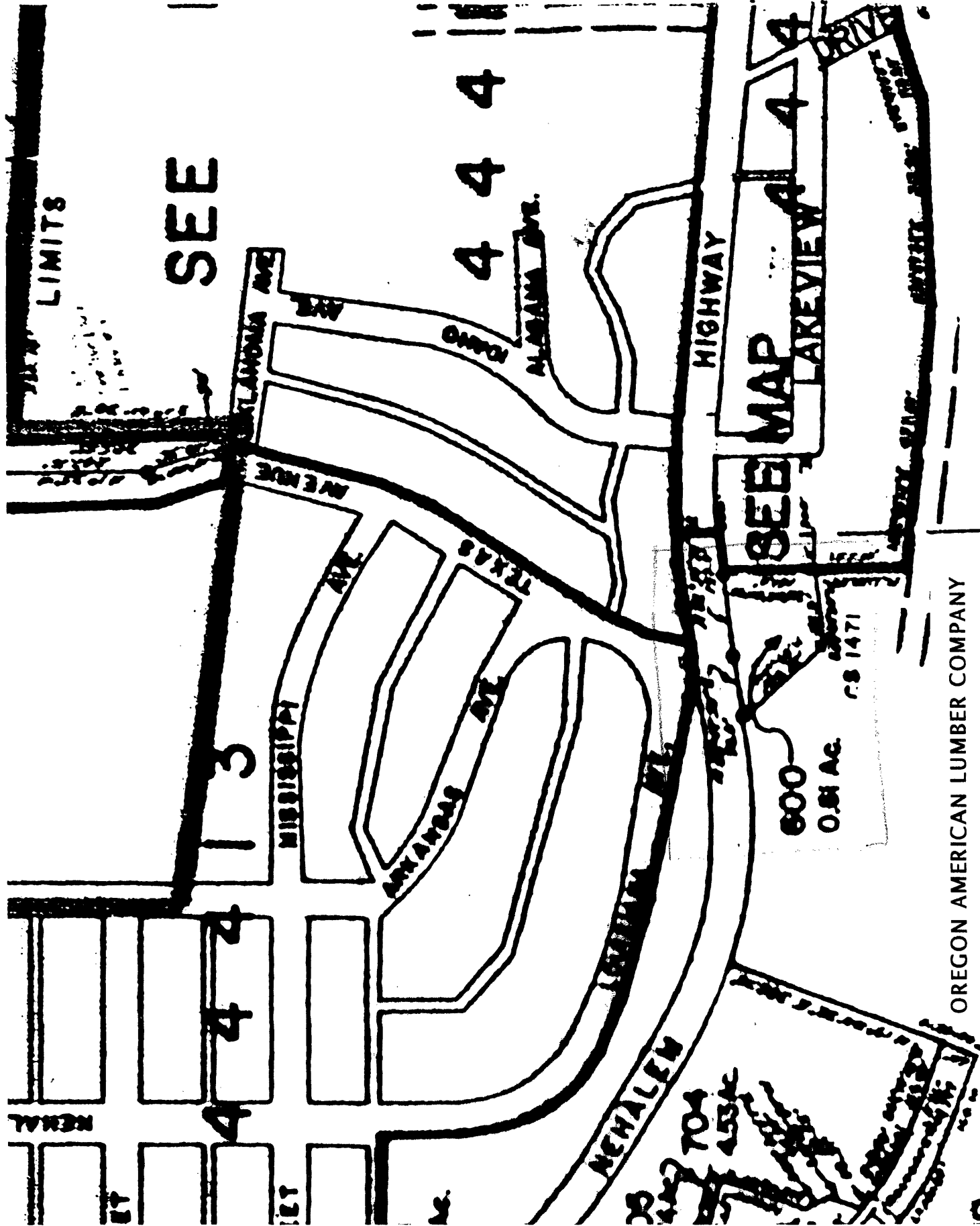
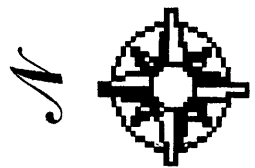
COLUMBIA COUNTY

THIS MAP HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR ASSESSMENT PURPOSES ONLY

Scale: 1" = 400' Current Revision Date: 10/20/00



4-03



SEE

LIMITS

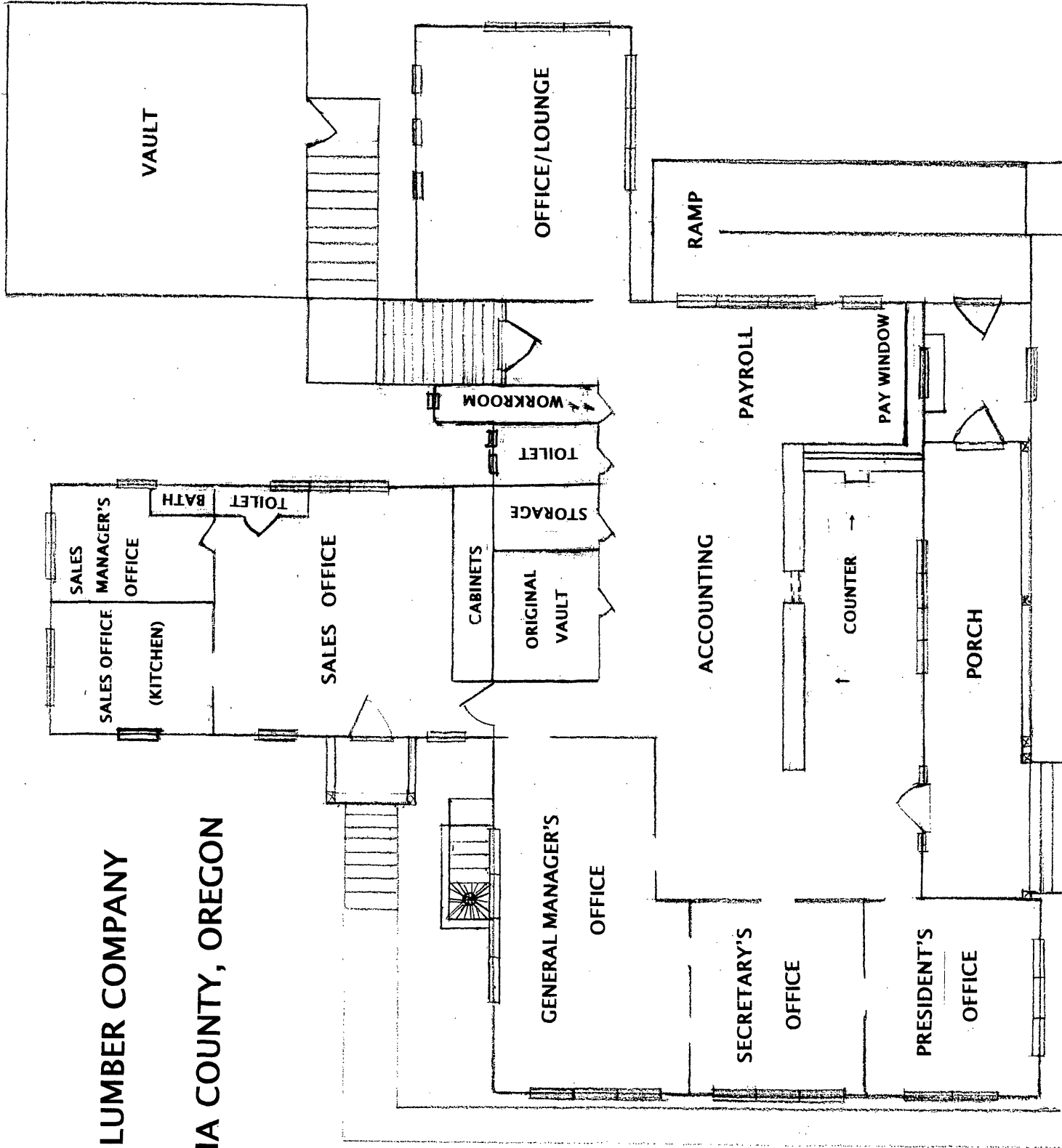
SEE MAP LAKEVIEW

OREGON AMERICAN LUMBER COMPANY  
MILL OFFICE  
VERNONIA COLIIMRIA COUNTY. OREGON

SCALE: 1" = 200'

OREGON AMERICAN LUMBER COMPANY  
MILL OFFICE  
VERNONIA, COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

MAIN FLOOR PLAN



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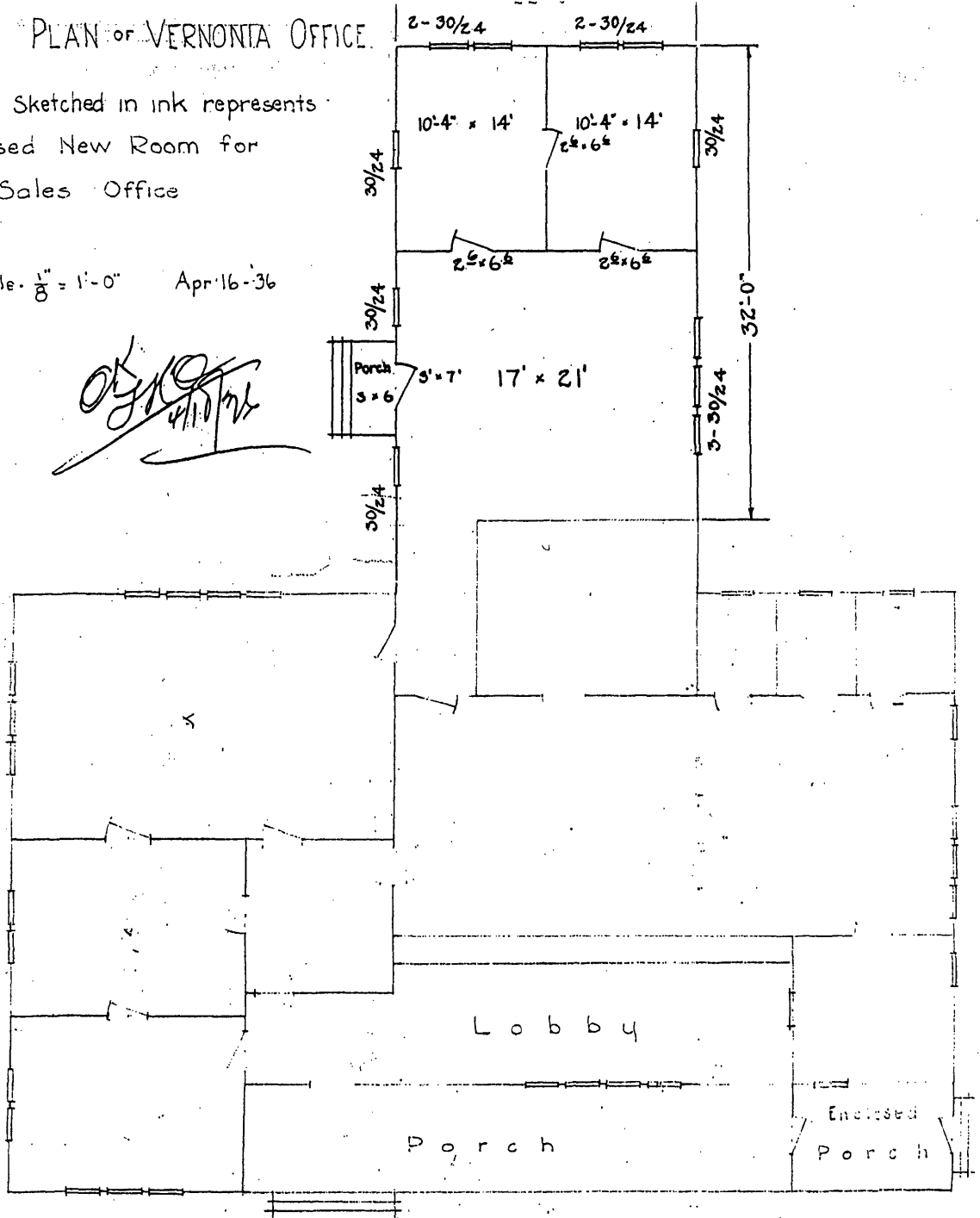
SCALE 3/32" = 1'

# FLOOR PLAN of VERNONTA OFFICE.

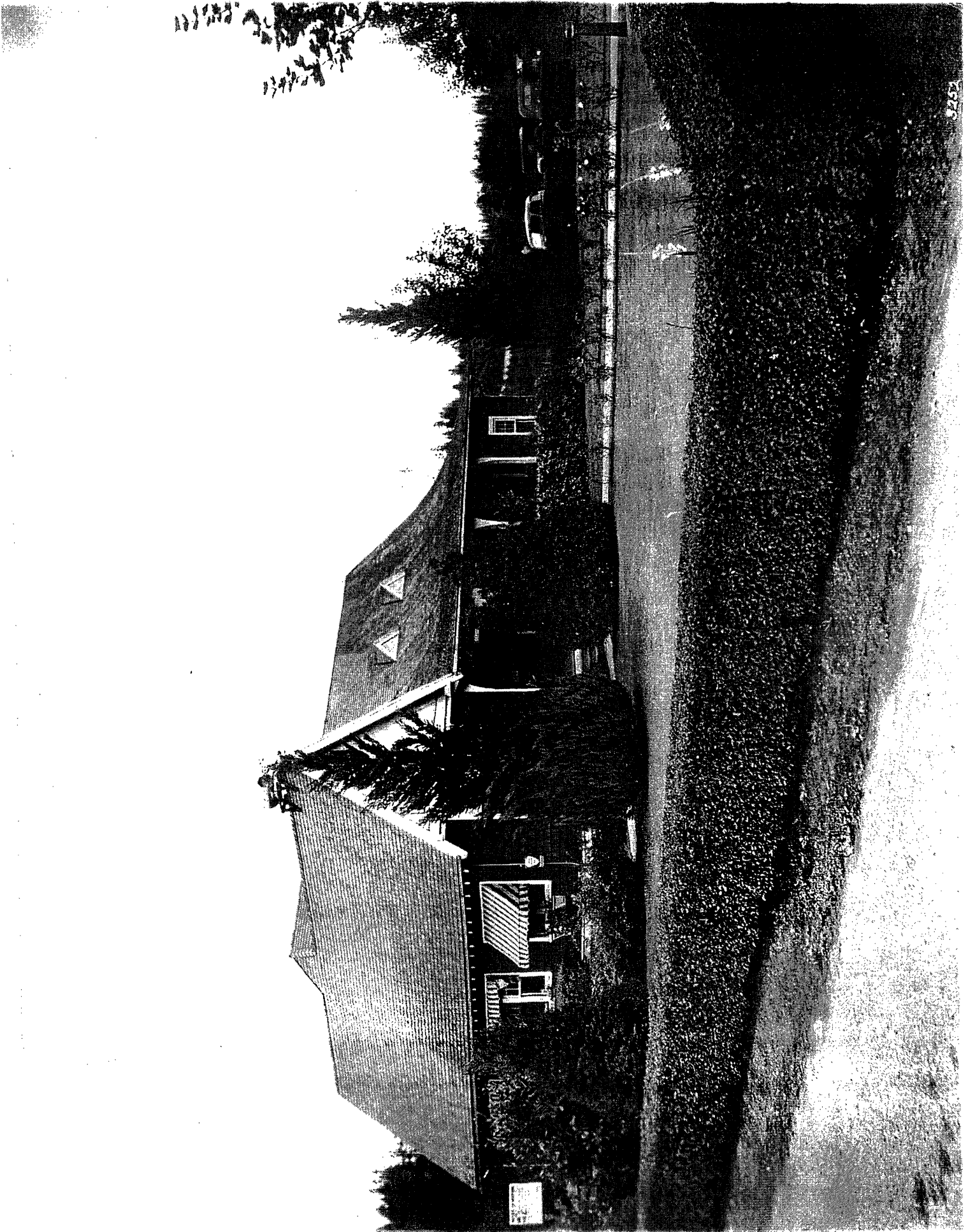
Portion Sketched in ink represents  
Proposed New Room for  
Sales Office

Scale.  $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'-0''$  Apr 16-36

*Handwritten signature and date:*  
O.S. 10  
4/16/36

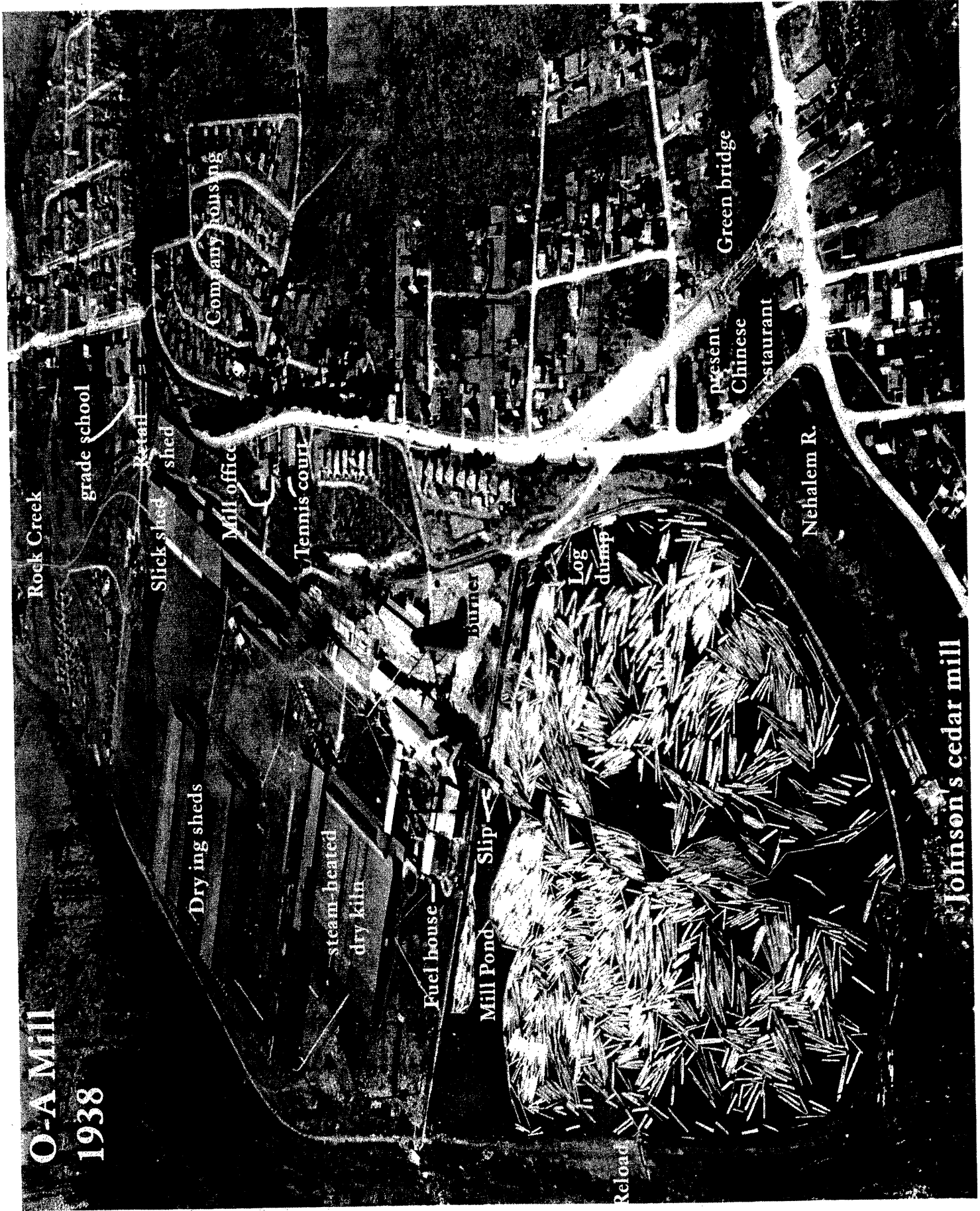






# O-A Mill

1938



Rock Creek

grade school

Retail

Slick shed

Drying sheds

Company housing

Mill office

Tennis court

steam-beated  
dry kiln

Fuel house

Mill Pond

Slip

Burner

Log  
dump

Green bridge

present  
Chinese  
restaurant

Nehalem R.

Johnson's cedar mill

