

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 95000313 Date Listed: 4/9/92

Alvarado Park
Property Name

Contra Costa CA
County State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

fr *Antonietta Albee* 4/9/92
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Statement of Significance: Under Criteria Considerations, G is removed.

This information was confirmed with Marilyn Lortie of the California State historic preservation office.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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MAR 04 1992

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 Alvarado Park

other names/site number Grand Canyon Park; CA-CCO-553H

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2. Location

street & number Marin and Park Avenues

city, town Richmond

state California

code CA

county Contra Costa

code 013

zip code 94806

not for publication

vicinity

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register none

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.

Signature of certifying official

California Office of Historic Preservation

Date 2/27/92

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.
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action 4/9/92

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Outdoor Recreation

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Outdoor Recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: NPS-type Rustic Architecture

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

walls _____

roof _____

other ConcreteStone/schist

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Introduction

Alvarado Park consists of 42 acres of sloping land, together with the canyon of Wildcat Creek, on the west side of the Richmond Hills. The park location was chosen for the lushness of the damp, tree-lined canyon, and the rock prominence that marks the entrance. The park's original developer, Bernard Shapiro, envisioned his "Grand Canyon Park"--the name was changed to Alvarado Park in 1923--as a showpiece of nature within the patchwork of residential lots that his company had subdivided on two sides of the park. Although touted as a "natural wonder" in early accounts, Alvarado Park was, from its earliest inception, an urban park whose natural features were enhanced by the liberal use of concrete. Park features include thousands of feet of freestanding and retaining walls and barbecue stoves of cast concrete, rock and broken concrete slabs, respectively; a stone bridge; stone light poles; and mature landscaping.

Phase I (Private Development, 1909 to 1922)

As the first phase in the history of the park is poorly documented, it is not possible to inventory reliably all improvements from this era. During this period, development focused on the area near the park entrance. The terraced flat, now a parking lot, was leveled at this time, and a fenced baseball field was constructed (Richmond Independent 25 July 1911). An open-air pavilion and dancing platform were built to the northeast of the baseball diamond, toward the edge of the flat (Richmond City Engineer 1923). The pavilion was extensively repaired and remodeled in 1924 (Richmond City Council Minutes 9:110), and later converted into a skating rink; this, however, was gutted by fire and the second floor demolished (Cole 1980: 75,76). Although the first floor of the pavilion is extant, its integrity has been severely compromised.

A 220-foot slide was constructed on the hillside northwest of the flat. Visitors would sit on pieces of canvas and slide down the slope, which had been waxed (Gavello interview, February 1989). The slide was demolished, together with the dancing platform, in 1924, having become delapidated, and some of the lumber used to "box in the south side of the pavilion" (Richmond City Council Minutes 9:110, 113).

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On a rocky prominence above and outside the park, a restaurant was constructed in 1911. Known as the "Chateau," this two-story frame building still stands, although its exterior has been much altered. In 1912, the sides of the eminence were stabilized with concrete retaining walls (Richmond Daily Independent 25 July 1911, 2 March 1912). Some of these walls are still present immediately downstream from the bridge. Other sections have collapsed into the creek. A concrete dam was built slightly downstream from the Chateau to create a boating lake that reportedly extended well above the present bridge site. The dam was washed out in the late 1920s and nothing remains to mark its location.

The original entrance to the park was at its present location, below and to the west of the Chateau. Historically, however, the entrance was marked by a gate flanked by ticket booths. At the foot of the entrance drive, a wooden bridge allowed automobile traffic to cross Wildcat Creek (Richmond City Engineer 1923). The bridge was replaced by the present stone structure in 1935-36. Access to all parts of the canyon was facilitated by footpaths and graded roads for automobiles (Richmond Daily Independent 25 July 1911). Although the original locations of the roads and paths cannot be independently verified, the sloping local topography makes it probable that the present trails follow the pattern established at this time.

Contemporary photographs and oral accounts show that the hillside above Wildcat Creek was almost bare of mature trees at this time, although the creekside was wooded. In about 1909-1910, soon after the park was established, the Richmond Land Company hired Mr. Gavello, Louis Gavello's father, to plant trees in the park. The grove of eucalyptus trees above the central flat were planted in about 1920, on the instructions of Bernard Shapiro, by Louis Gavello and his father. Hay was harvested from the hillside for animal feed at this time, as the eucalyptus trees were still very young (Gavello interview, 2/89).

Although most of these early features are either gone or were incorporated into later construction, the basic form of the park was shaped during this era, as were the types of materials that would be used in the future. With the establishment of the entrance drive and bridge site, the terracing of the central

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flat, and the grading of a system of roads and trails, the park's skeletal structure was in place. The use of concrete for retaining walls and other channel improvements established precedent for the extensive future use of this material.

Phase II (Local Government Development, 1923 to 1933) When the City of Richmond took over responsibility for Alvarado Park in 1923, it was said to have been a "poison oak jungle" (Point Richmond Progress 4 October 1935) with dilapidated facilities. The City immediately began to clean up the poison oak, repair the pavilion, and demolish the slides (Richmond City Council Minutes 10:113, 13 August 1923).

From 1925 to 1943, improvements to Alvarado Park are documented in the City Auditor's annual report. Between 1925 and 1931--the last year before the City began to receive work relief funds--the City spent \$1187 on rock and concrete for stairs and retaining walls; \$281 was spent on grading paths; and \$237 on trees and shrubs. In 1923, the City commissioned Carol Aronovichi--who would become well-known as a pioneer in urban planning--to produce a plan for the development of Alvarado Park. The plan was drawn up by Thomas Church, who became a leading light in American landscape architecture. Although the City Council voted to approve the plan (Richmond City Council Minutes 10:83, July 1923) it was never carried out.

The principal improvements from this era are various features constructed in stone and concrete. The work is of several distinct types, such as cream-colored stone over grey stone, solid grey stone, concrete over grey stone, and others. By comparing plans of Alvarado Park made during the middle and late 1930s, it has been possible to seriate these types, thereby determining that the earliest surviving stone and concrete work from this era consists of concrete over grey rubble stone. The various phases are distinguished on the accompanying sketch maps (Maps 1-6).

The earliest type of concrete and stonework occur in only three places in the park, all within the central flat area. Two are stretches of retaining walls and one is a freestanding wall (Maps 5 and 6). The most impressive section of retaining wall is

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semi-circular in shape and supports a ramp that leads to the remains of the pavilion. The second retaining wall supports part of the hillside to the southwest of the ramp. This wall is less than 30 feet in length and is flanked on either side by later retaining walls, which may have replaced portions of this earlier wall. The surviving portion of freestanding wall is located at the extreme southwestern end of the central flat and overlooks a steep bank that falls to the creek. The wall line to the south and east is continued in a later type that may have replaced the earlier wall.

It is likely that the concrete weirs or low dams that occur in several places in the creek channel were installed during this phase of development to provide summer swimming holes.

Phase III (State and Federal Sponsored Development, 1934-1939)

During the ten years of operation of the various federal and state work relief programs, Alvarado Park was transformed into a formal park and many of its major features were established. The Civil Works Administration [CWA], a pilot program of the Works Progress Administration, was established in 1933 with the goal of distributing money to state and local government for public works projects. Agencies snapped up the available funds. By early 1934, Edward Hoffman, the Richmond City Engineer, had filed 17 project applications with the CWA (Richmond City Council Minutes 15:238, February 1934). Later that year, a water tank, pipeline, and "convenience station" were constructed in Alvarado Park, funded through grants from the State Emergency Relief Administration [SERA] (Richmond City Council Minutes 15, May-July 1934). Design plans, drawn up by Edward Hoffman, survive for several of the park's major features that were built between 1934 and 1939 with state and federal aid: these include the stone bridge, lamp standards, freestanding and supporting stone walls, and BBQ stoves (Figures 2a, 2b, 3, 4, and 5).

During this phase, the focus of development moved from the central flat and dance pavilion to the banks of Wildcat Creek. The dam that created the boating lake had collapsed some years earlier and was never rebuilt. Instead, six group picnic sites were constructed along the creek. Each site consisted of a portion of the canyon that was terraced flat by stone retaining walls above and below the site. Paths linked the sites which were

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also equipped with BBQ stoves, and wooden benches and tables. Stone light poles ["electroliers"] were installed here and in other parts of the park in 1938 and 1939 (Richmond City Auditor 1938, 1939). Two of the sites had elements on both sides of the creek, linked by a wooden trestle bridge. At least four of these bridges were built during this phase.

The integrity of these sites is generally very good. Although the original tables and benches have been replaced, most of the other elements survive. Site 1, the easternmost location, for example, has four BBQ stoves, three lamp standards, bridge abutments, and extensive stone retaining walls, both in the creek channel and on the adjacent banks (Map 1; Plate 1). In contrast, Site 6 the westernmost site, is in a very deteriorated condition; its BBQ stoves are fragmentary, and the retaining walls--if any existed--cannot be seen. Table 1 summarizes the content and condition on the creekside picnic sites. Figure 3 contains technical specifications for the stone light-poles; Figure 4 consists of the design plans for the BBQ stoves.

TABLE 1

Picnic Site:	1	2	3	4	5	6
# of BBQs	4	3	1	3	2	2
Ft. of wall	600	100	200	450	300	0
Sq. ft.	40000	10000	5000	10000	10000	?
Footbridge?	y	y	y	n	n	y
# of lamps	3	2	2	3	0	0
Condition	v good	fair	v good	v good	v good	poor

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Both the main park entrance and the stone bridge were reconstructed during this phase. The light poles were installed at the main park entrance in 1938-39 (Plate 5). Freestanding stone walls and stone curbs were built along the entrance road and around a rocky knoll to the east (Map 4). All these improvements have survived and are in excellent condition.

The stone bridge is the single most impressive feature in the park (Plate 4). It was constructed in 1935-36 by work relief recipients who included at least one Italian-born stonemason, "Pete" Merlo; Merlo was a member of the Italian community that bordered the park (Gavello interview, 1-89). The bridge, which has lamp standards along each side, is a single arch. The original design drawings are presented as Figures 2a and 2b.

Phase IV: Final Improvements (1943)

The last period of park development occurred in 1943, after a brief period of inactivity immediately preceding and in the early years of WWII. It is not known whether this phase had state or federal support. Map and oral history accounts testify to the absence of the stacked concrete walls and other features that are now plentiful in the park, before 1939; yet oral accounts state that they were present in 1945. The City Auditors report of 1943 lists an unprecedented \$1949 expenditure on retaining walls; this is taken to represent the installation of the stacked concrete features. The latter are made of pieces of roughly broken concrete slab, six to eight inches thick, stacked and cemented together. It is speculated that this material was reused sections of sidewalk. There is precedent in Richmond for using this material in new construction (Richmond City Council Minutes 9:482, January 1923).

Stacked concrete occurs in several locations in the park. In a picnic site #1, a 20-foot section of stone retaining wall was removed and a rectangular, stacked concrete recess was built into the slope to receive a large BBQ pit (Map 1; Plate 1). Near the main entrance, stacked concrete was used for both low retaining walls and for BBQ stoves (Map 4). However, the most extensive use

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of this material is adjacent to the central flat. Here, stacked concrete was used for a retaining wall around the site of the pavilion.

Stacked concrete is used for retaining walls all along the northwest side of the central flat. Where the flat overlooks Wildcat Creek to the southwest, freestanding stacked concrete walls are used. There is approximately 1550 feet of stacked concrete walls of both types around the central flat. On the northwest side of the flat, two group BBQ areas of stacked concrete and a poured concrete stairway were built (Map 6). One of the group BBQ areas is a half-circular concavity set into the hillside with four stacked concrete BBQ stoves arranged around it (Plate 8). It is illuminated by a stone lamp standard. The second group BBQ area is rectangular, also set into the hill, and focuses on a single BBQ pit. It is illuminated by two stone lamp standards set into a Phase I wall. Two cast concrete and brick BBQ stoves are adjacent to this wall (Plate 2) and may be contemporary with it. A wide stairway of cast concrete, flanked by walls of stacked concrete, lead up the hill from the second BBQ area (Plates 6 and 7).

All of these features are in excellent condition and have excellent integrity, although modern benches and tables have replaced the originals whose design is shown on Figure 4.

Summary Statement on Integrity and Condition As has been described in the preceding section, all of the major phases of park development are represented in the park. This section will summarize the surviving features from each era and comment on their condition.

Much of the development done in the earliest era, 1909-1922, was in the form of wood construction: a slide, dance pavilion, and entrance gate. All of these features are now gone along with the concrete dam that created one of the most attractive features of the park, the boating lake. The beginnings of the eucalyptus forest that now covers much of the hillside on the north side of the park, was planted at this time. The remains of concrete channel improvements can still be seen, although these are

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fragmentary. However, the basic park layout of entrance road, the central flat, and the network of trails that currently exist were established at this time.

During the 1923-1932 period, relatively few new features were added to Alvarado Park while the City of Richmond concentrated on clean-up and basic maintenance. Retaining and freestanding walls from this era survive and are in very good condition. A flight of concrete stairs--probably built at this time--from the central flat down to the creek, have been undercut by erosion and are now severely deteriorated. The arrangement of trees that is presently evident--all of which are native species except the eucalyptus--was completed at this time (Map 7).

The final phases, 1933-1939, 1943, are represented in at least 3200 feet of retaining and freestanding walls, a stone single-arch bridge, a wood trestle bridge, 21 BBQ stoves, and 22 stone light poles. The integrity of these features is excellent, for little work has been done to the park since the early 1950s, except for the asphaltting of the central flat. Most of the walls are in very good condition. An exception is the retaining wall at the extreme northeast end of the central flat, which is danger of collapse. This wall has been deformed by inadequate drainage and the weight of the soil behind it; it is convex and has cracked in several locations. In addition, a portion of the cast concrete, creek channel wall just upstream from the stone bridge is being undercut by the water flow (Plate 3). In recent years, a crack has opened at the top of the stone bridge's arch. Although engineers have determined the structure is sound, only official vehicles are allowed to cross it and plans are being made to repair the damage. Of the six trestle bridges constructed during the latest phase, only one survives, and even this may have been rebuilt. Footings remain from the others. Five of the six picnic site complexes and their components are in fair to excellent condition and are still in use; picnic site #6, described above, is an exception, being in a severely deteriorated condition. All light poles are in excellent condition; they are no longer used for lighting for their electrical wiring has deteriorated. One light pole, located near the current parking area, is leaning at an angle of about 20 degrees, the soil having eroded from under part of its footing.

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Summary of Resources

1 contributing site

7 contributing structures -- 4 footbridges, 1 stone bridge, 1 wood trestle
bridge, 1 wall system

1 non-contributing building (pavilion)

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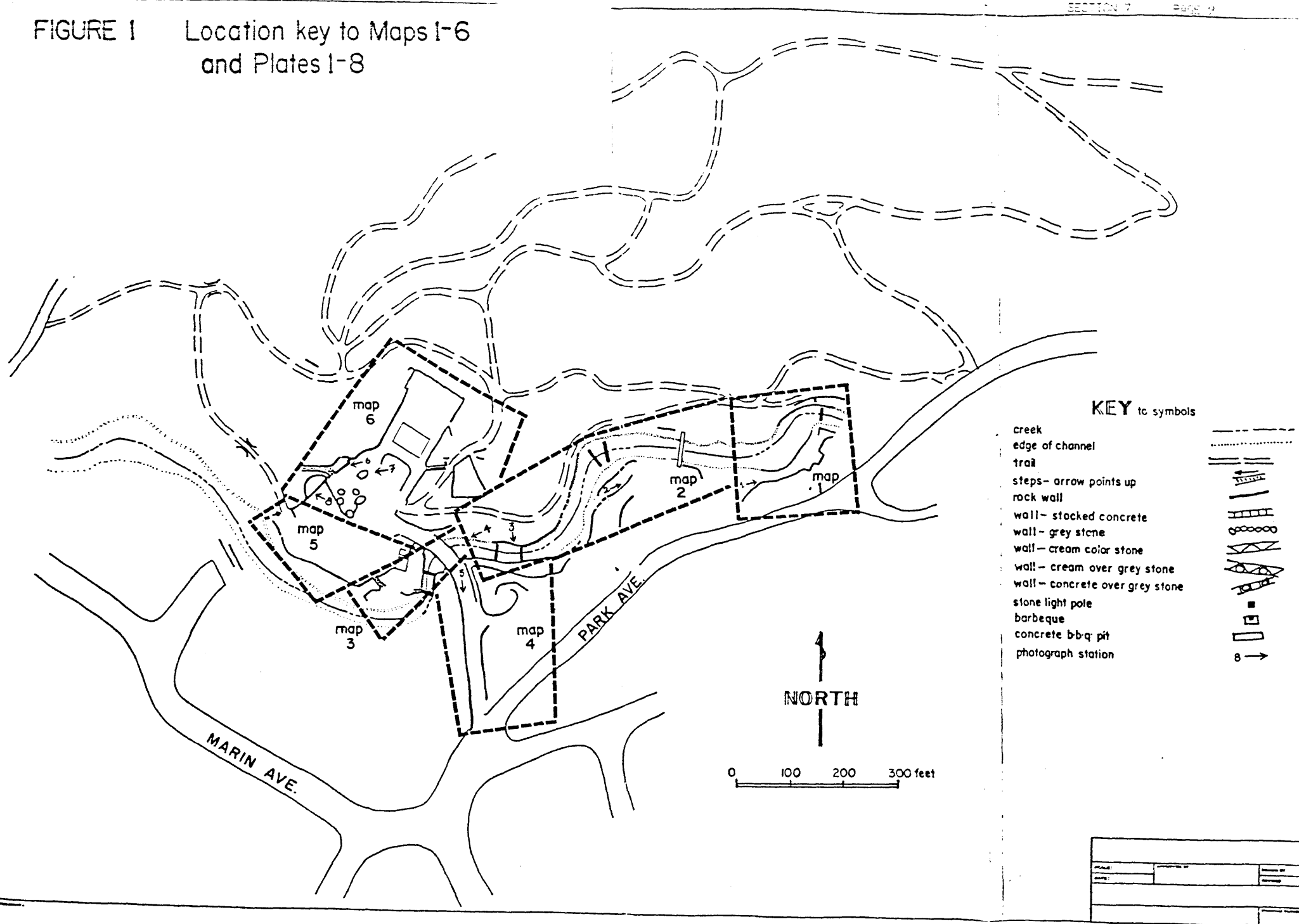
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DESCRIPTION OF PLATES 1-8

1. Picnic site, showing stone light pole (right) and stacked concrete and stone retaining walls.
2. Typical cast concrete and brick BBQ stove.
3. Stone retaining and freestanding walls surmounted by stone light pole, just east of the bridge.
4. The stone bridge with retaining walls and concrete weir (foreground).
5. Main entrance to Alvarado Park, looking south from the bridge; showing stone light poles, entry posts, retaining walls, and curbs.
6. On the central flat, cast concrete stairs flanked by stacked concrete retaining and freestanding walls, group BBQ areas (left and right), and stone light pole and retaining wall (right foreground).
7. On the central flat, group BBQ areas, stairs, light poles, and cast concrete and stacked concrete BBQ stoves.
8. Stacked concrete BBQ stove and retaining wall on central flat.

FIGURE 1 Location key to Maps 1-6 and Plates 1-8



KEY to symbols

- creek
- edge of channel
- trail
- steps- arrow points up
- rock wall
- wall- stacked concrete
- wall- grey stone
- wall- cream color stone
- wall- cream over grey stone
- wall- concrete over grey stone
- stone light pole
- barbeque
- concrete bbq pit
- photograph station

NORTH

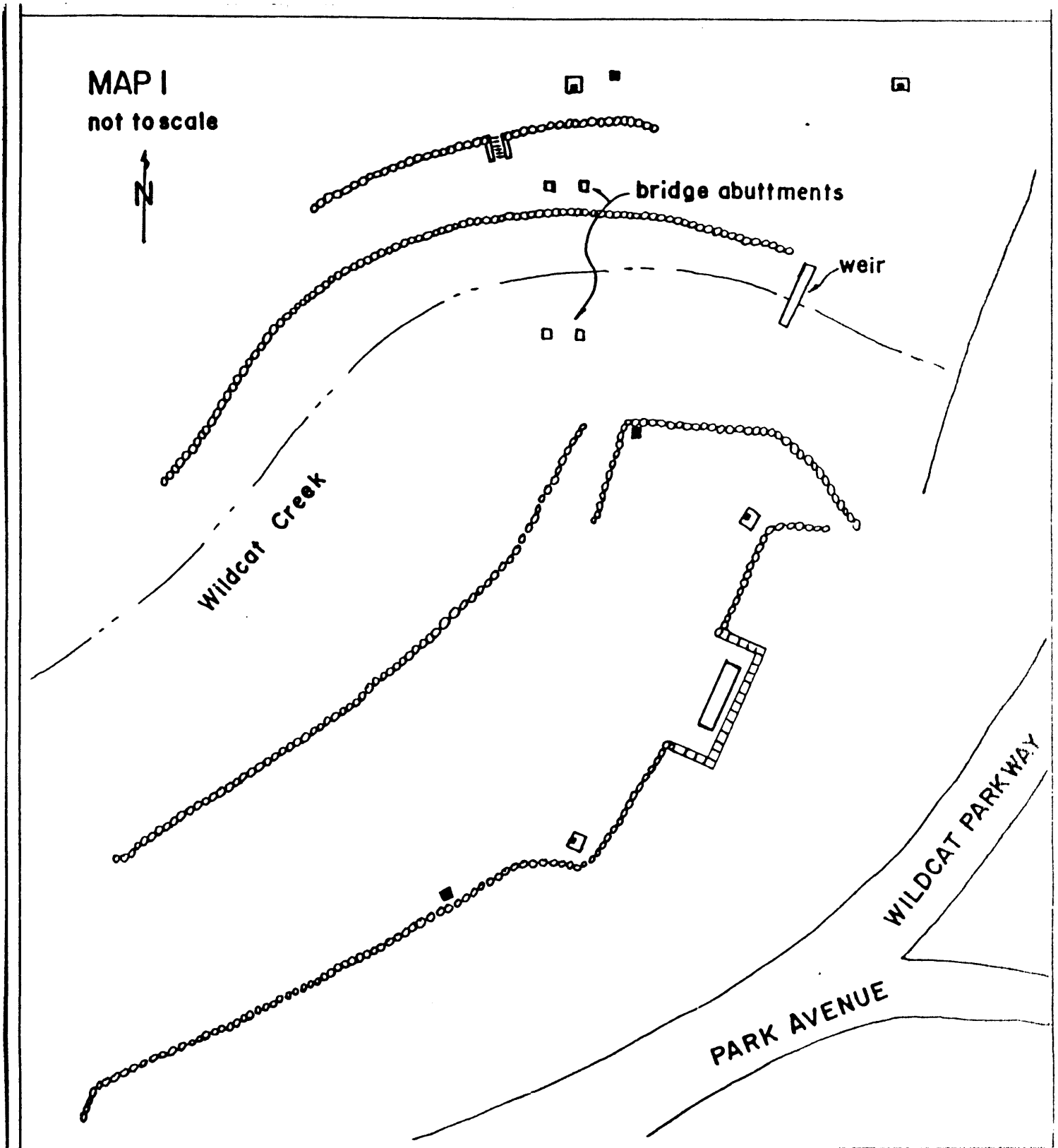
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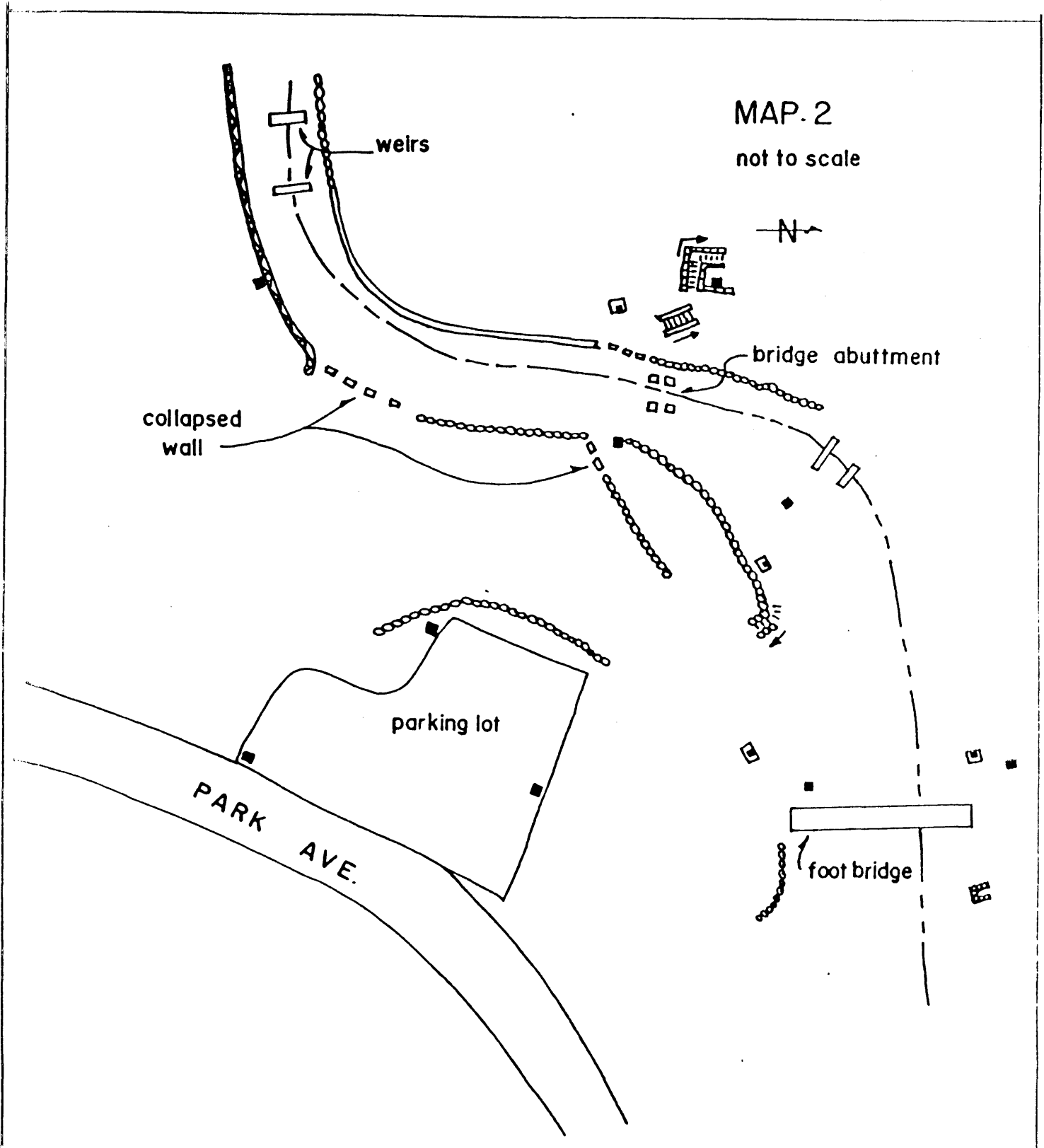
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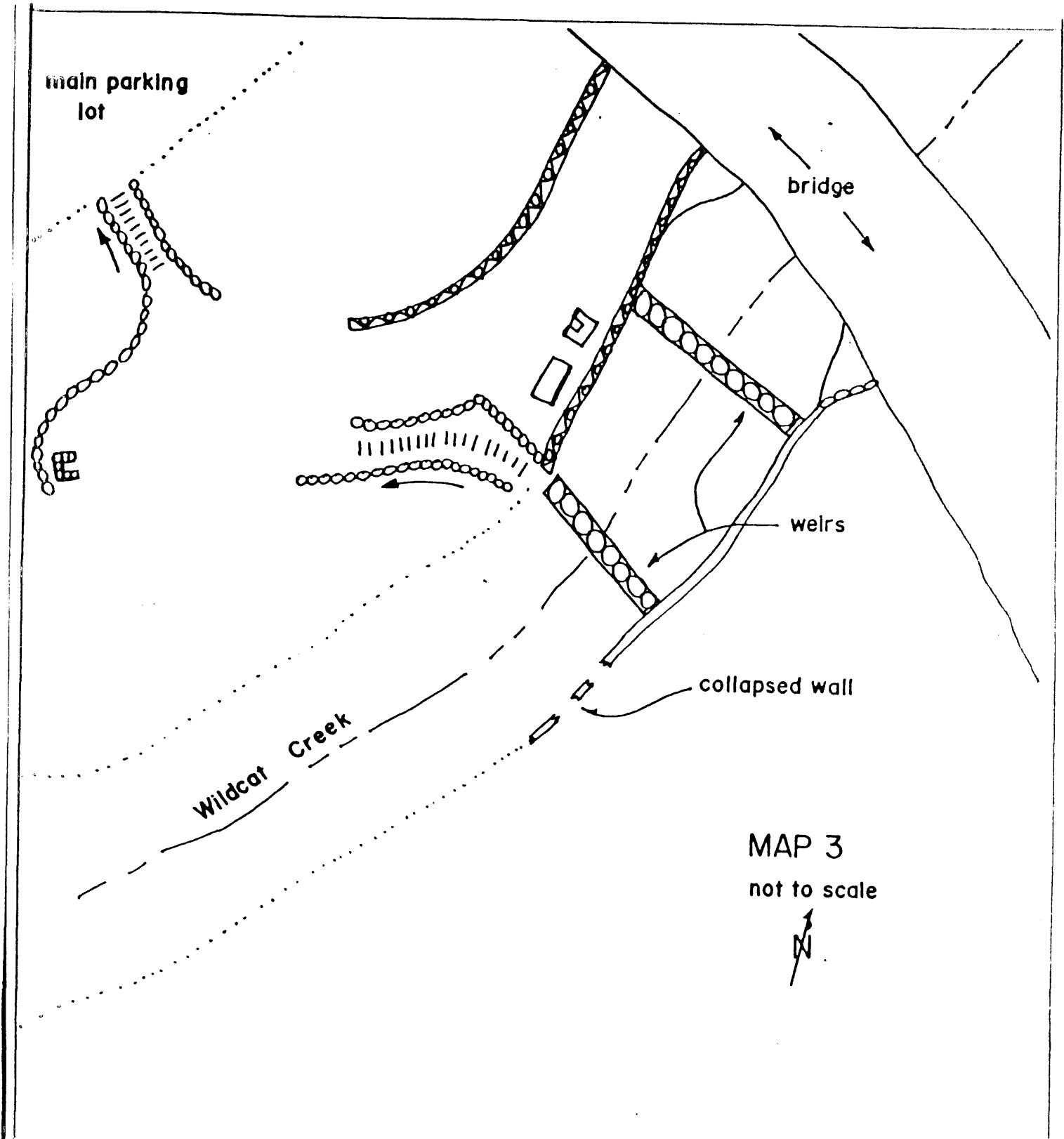
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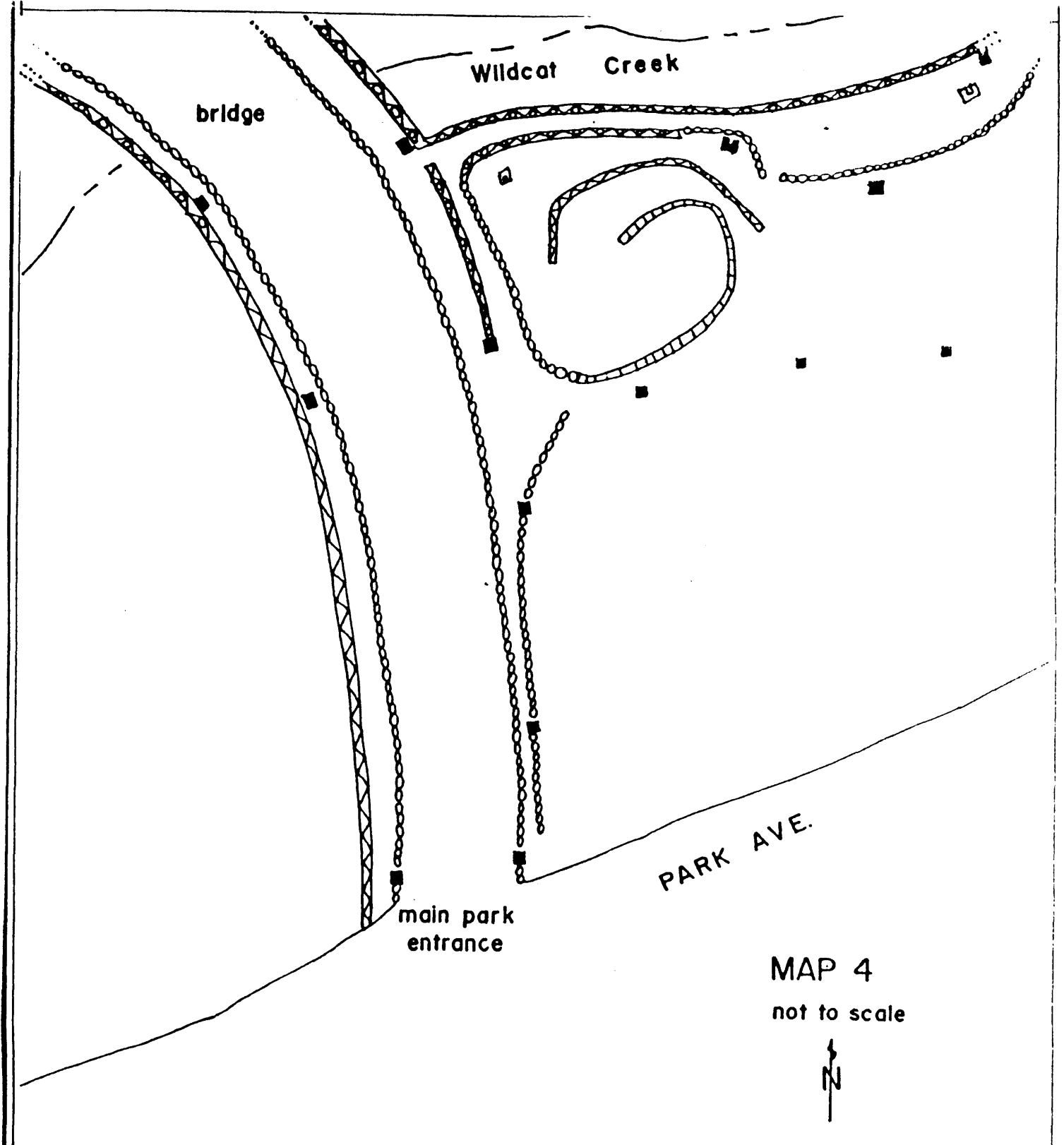
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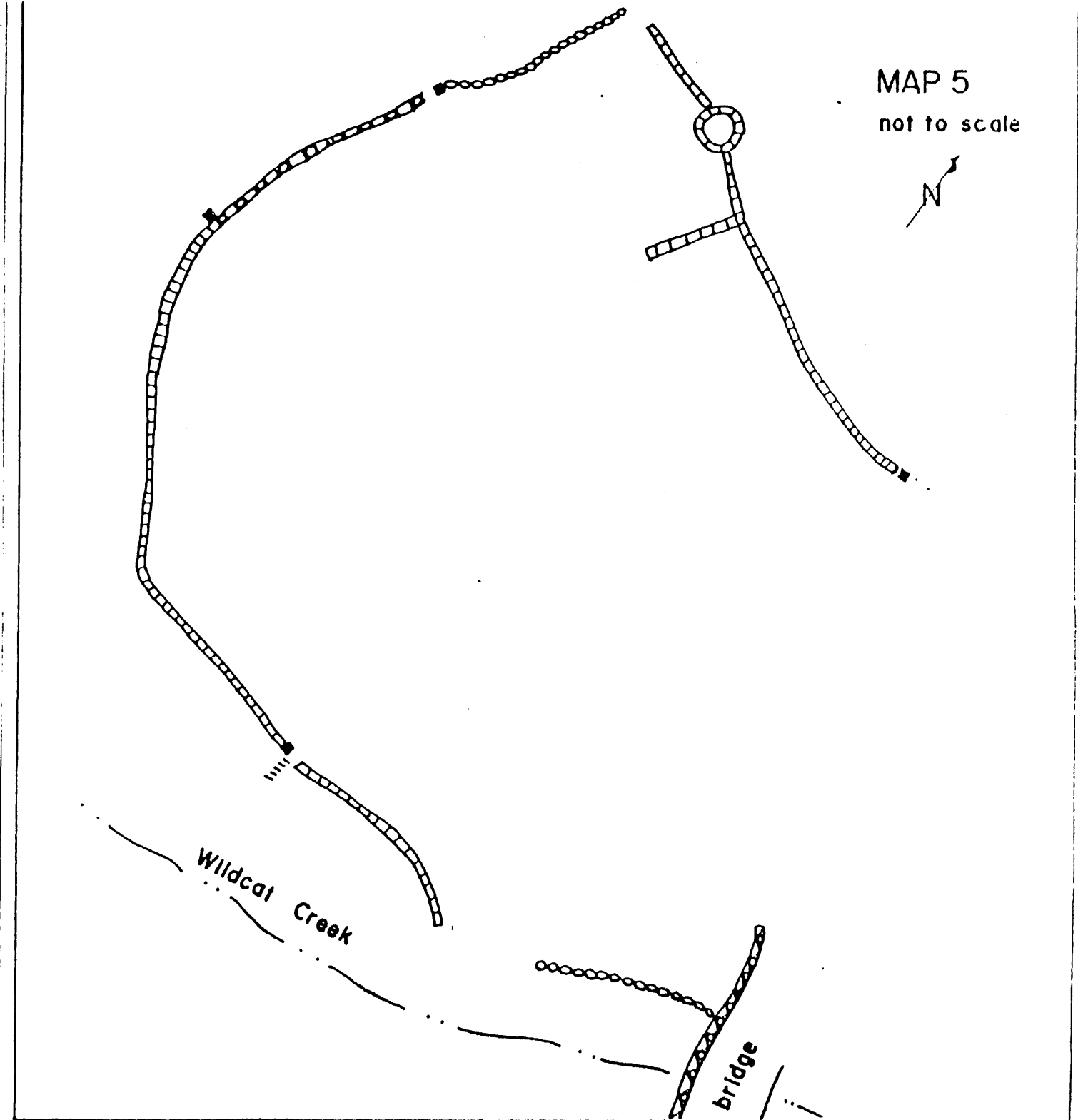
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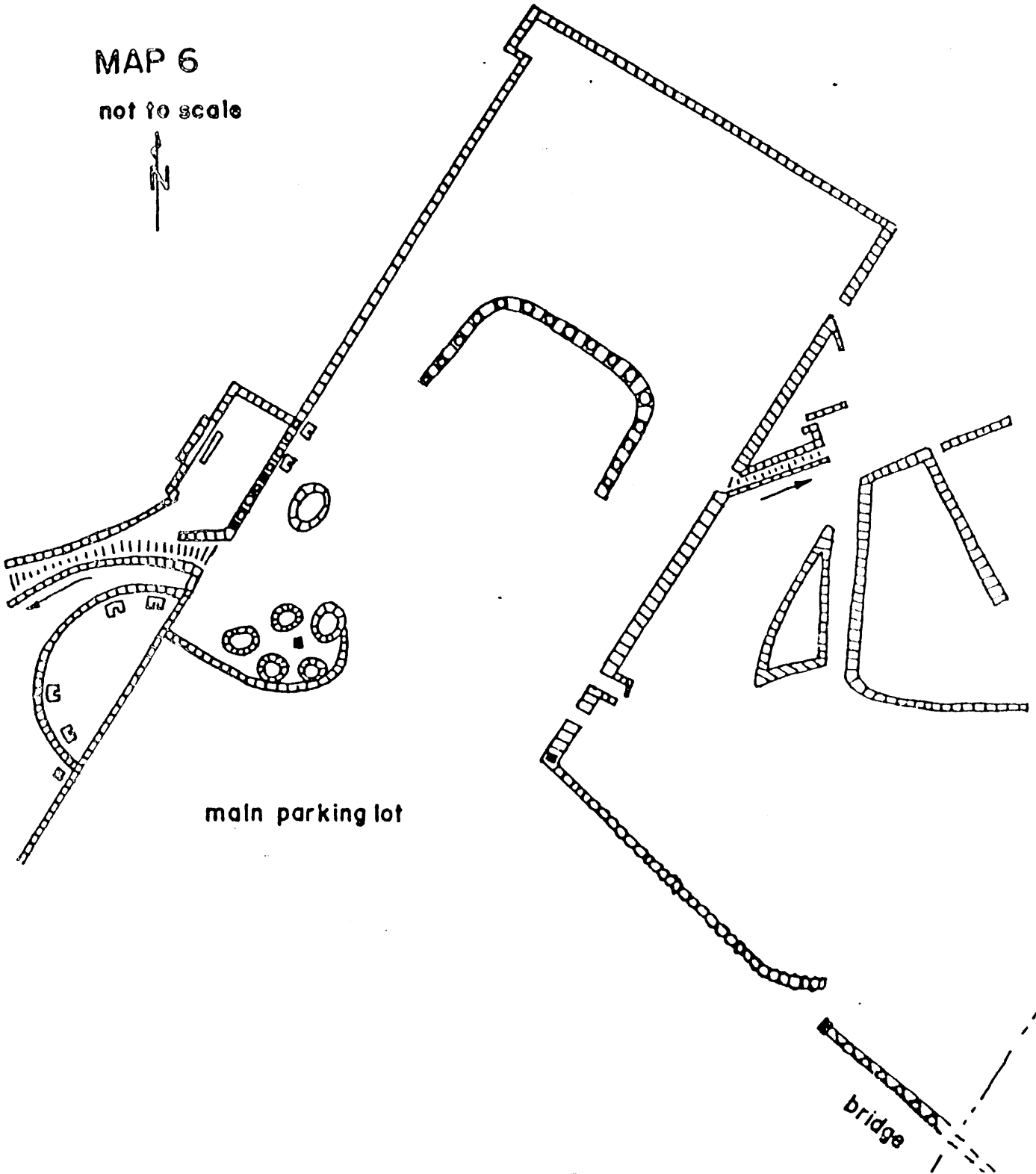
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MAP 6

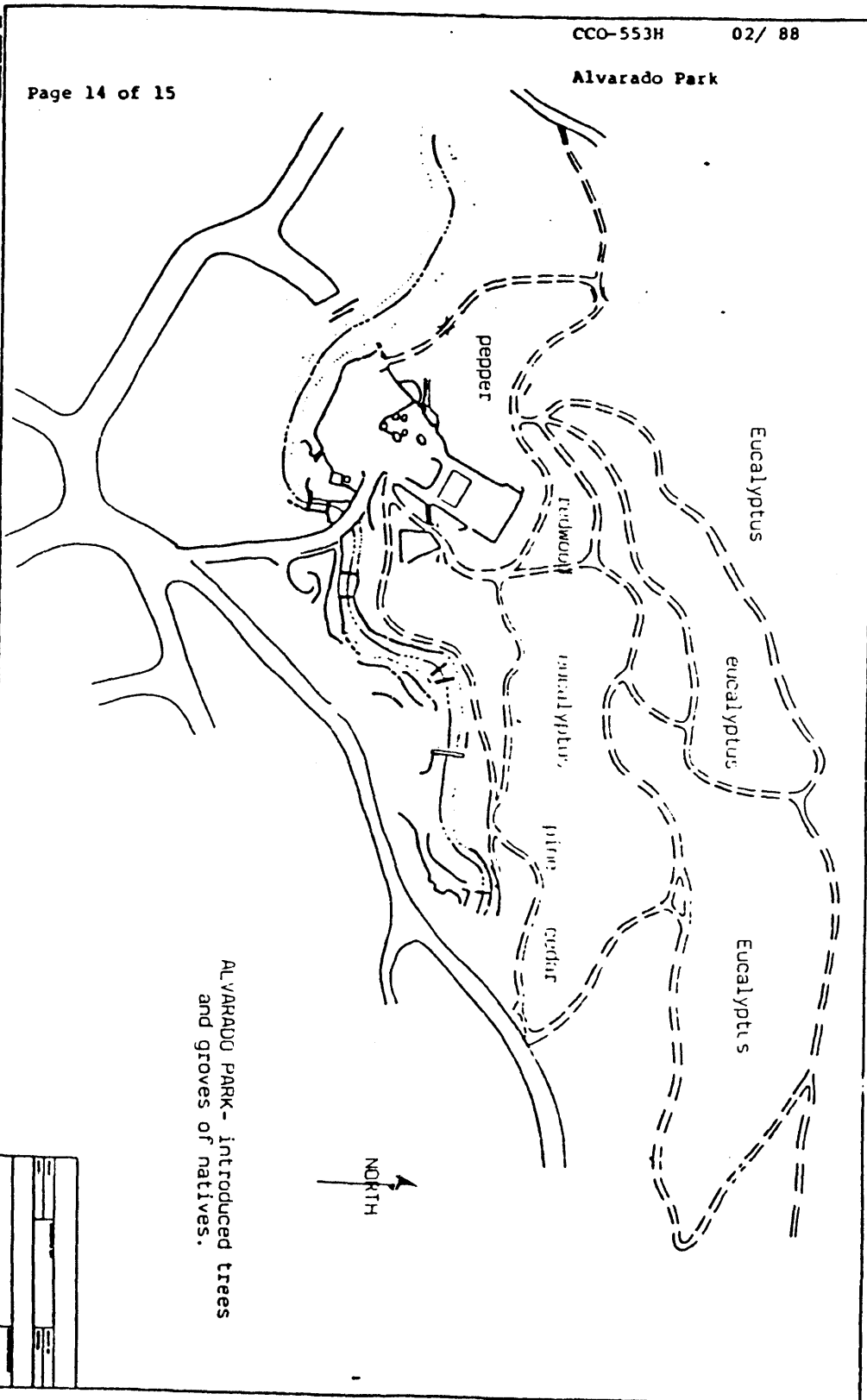
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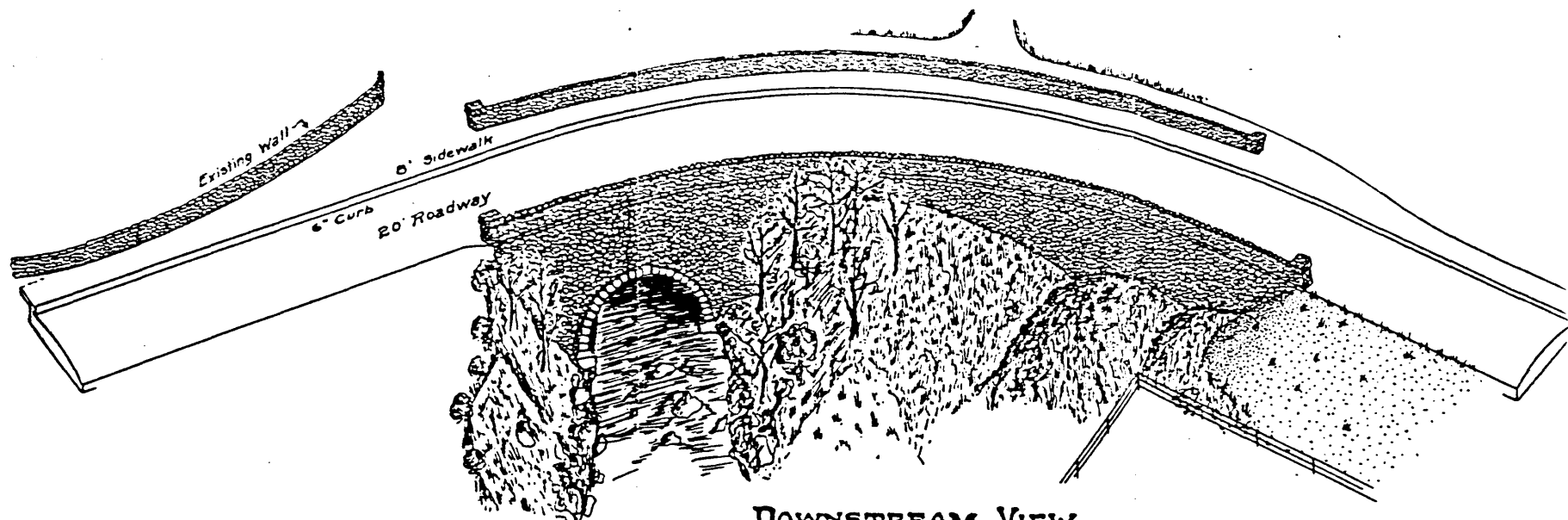
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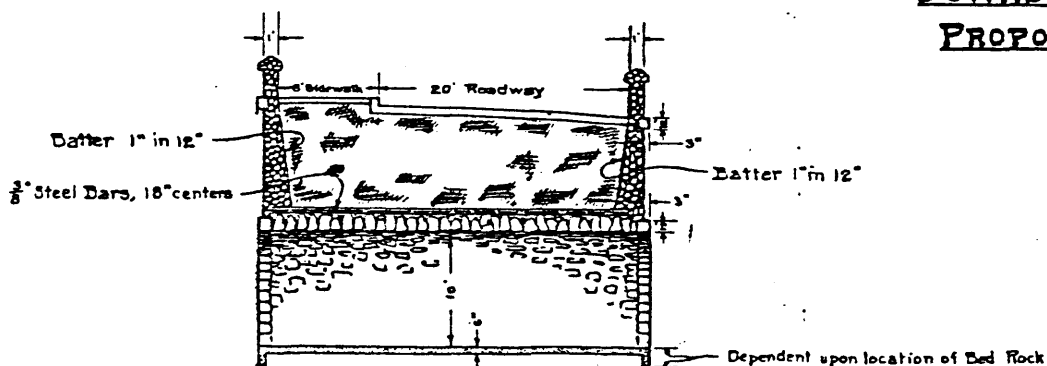


MAP 7
TREE PLANTINGS IN
ALVARADO PARK,
RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

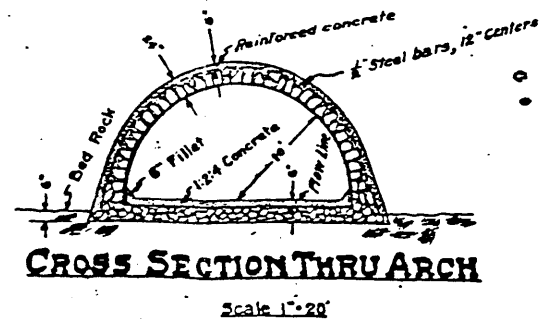
FIGURE 2a "Proposed masonry and concrete bridge...1935"



**DOWNSTREAM VIEW
PROPOSED BRIDGE**



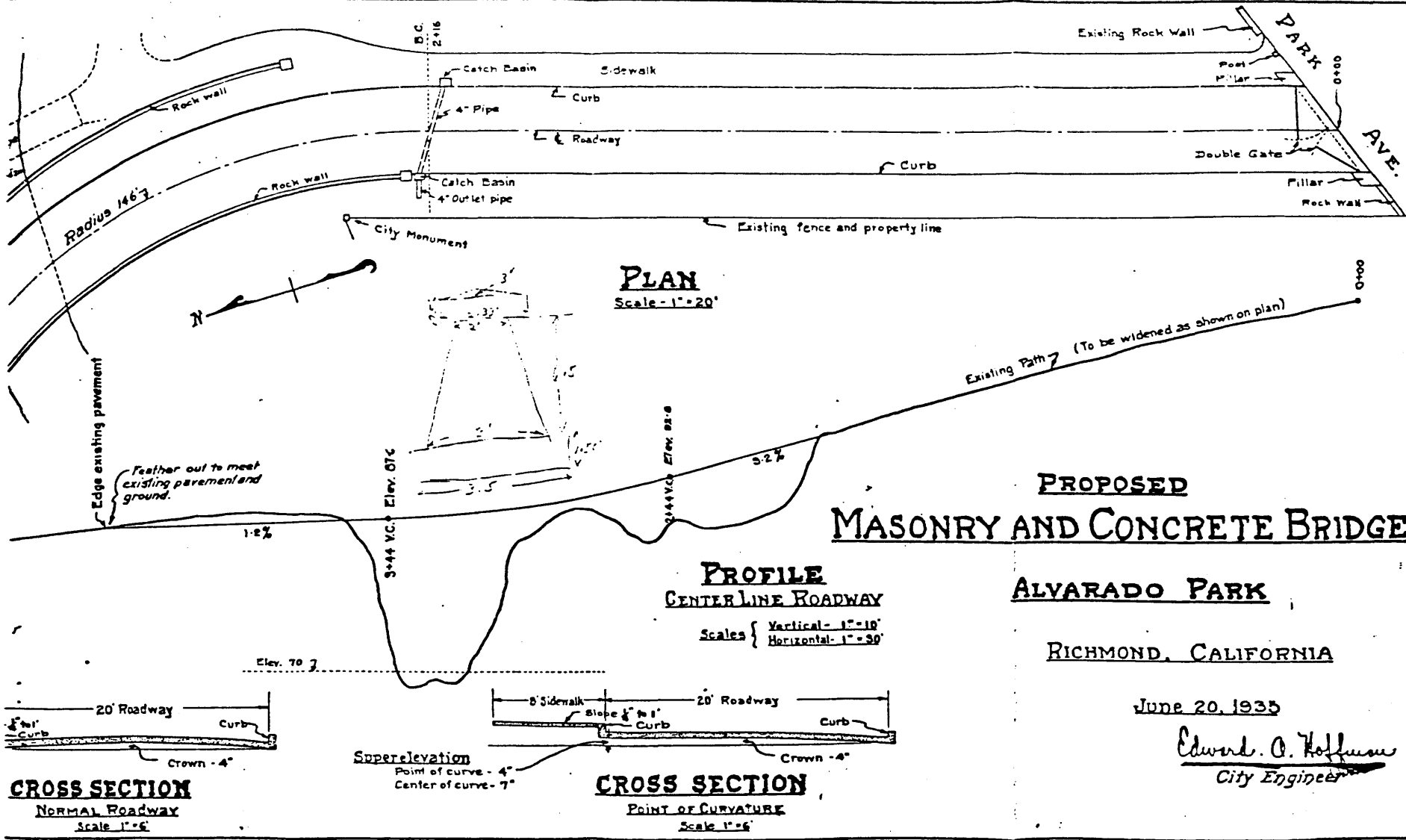
**LONGITUDINAL VIEW
THRU ARCH**



CROSS SECTION THRU ARCH

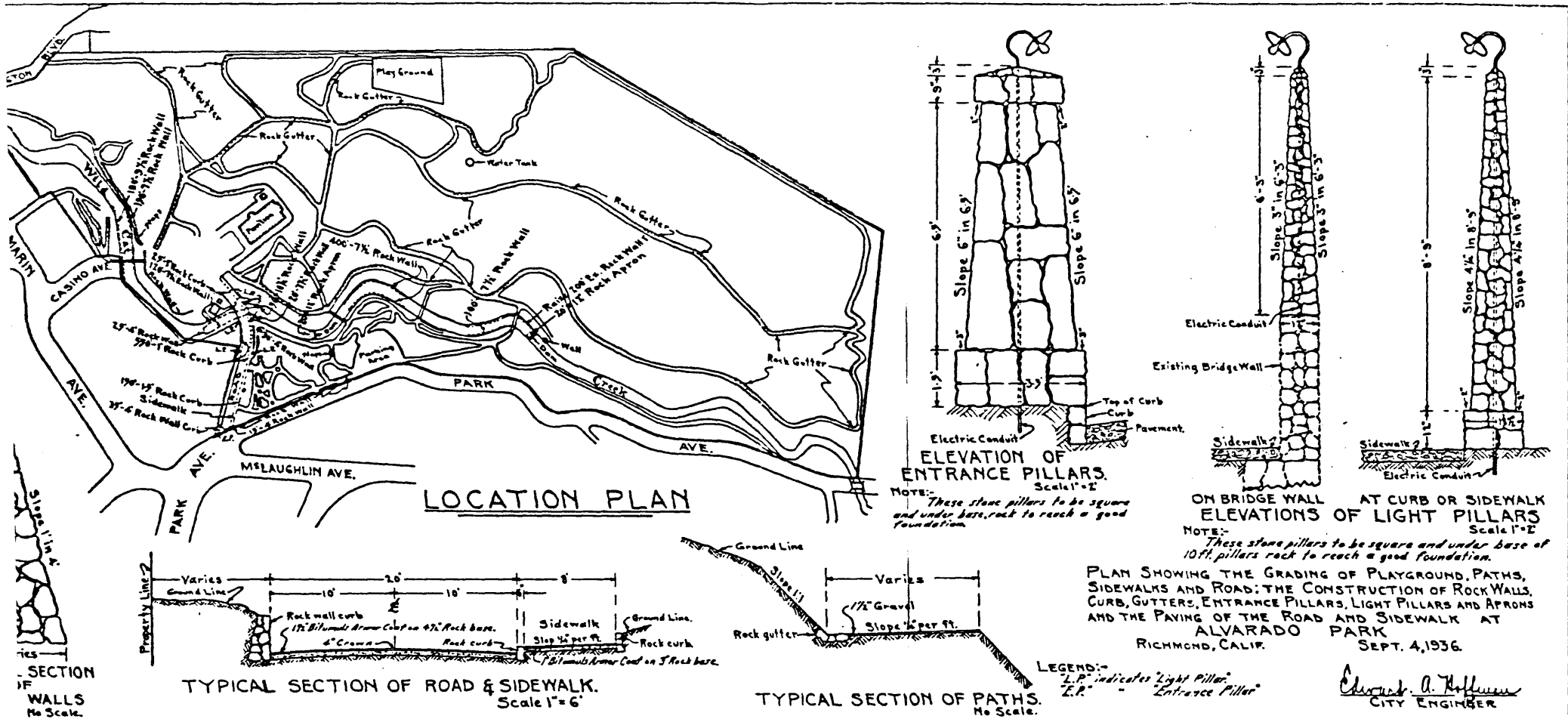
Scale 1"=20'

FIGURE 2b "Proposed masonry and concrete bridge...1935"



1-C-14

FIGURE 3 "Plan showing...the construction of rock walls...light pillars...1936"



1-8-36
C.H.F.

FIGURE 4 "Plan for the construction of stoves...1936"

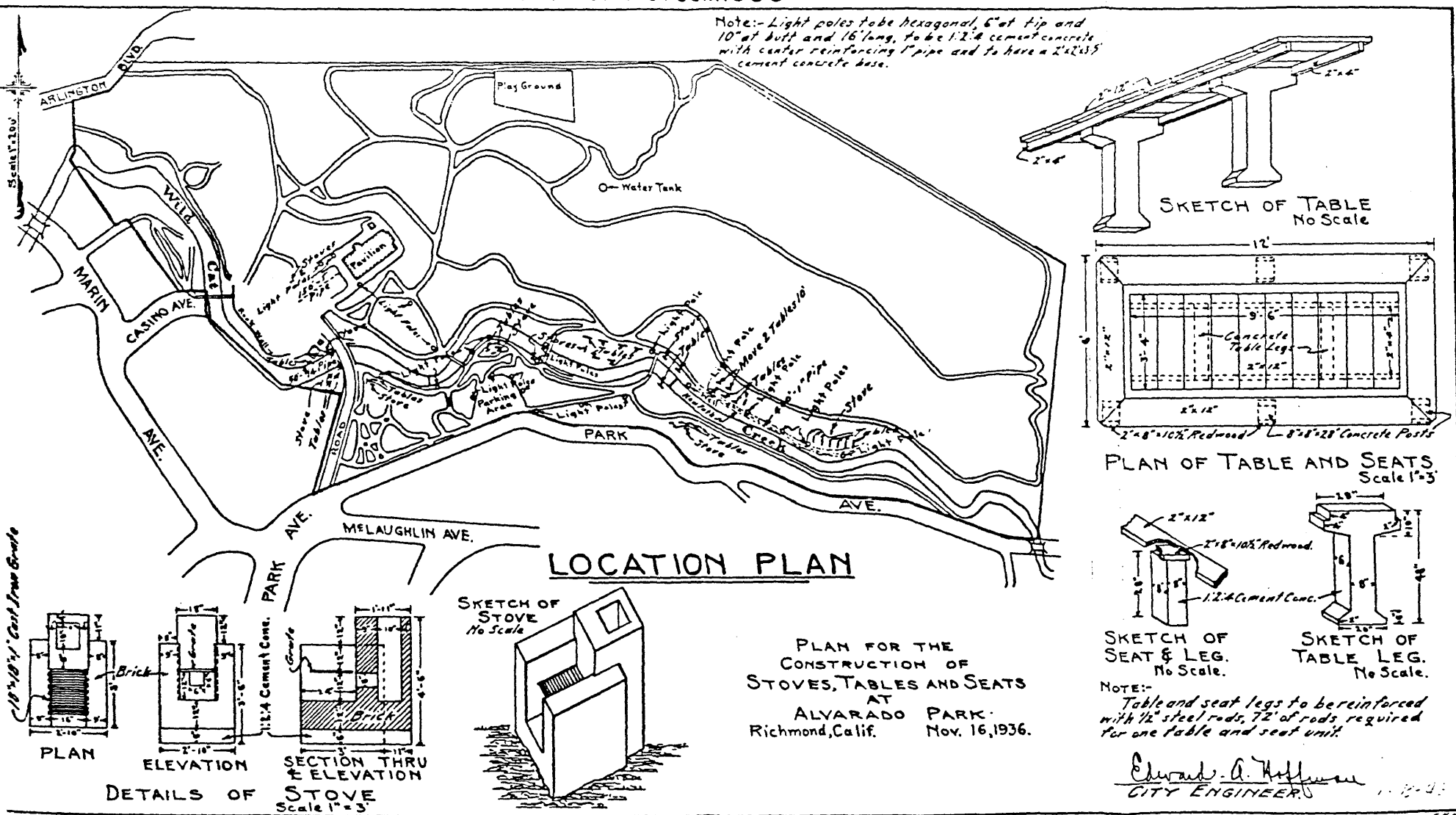
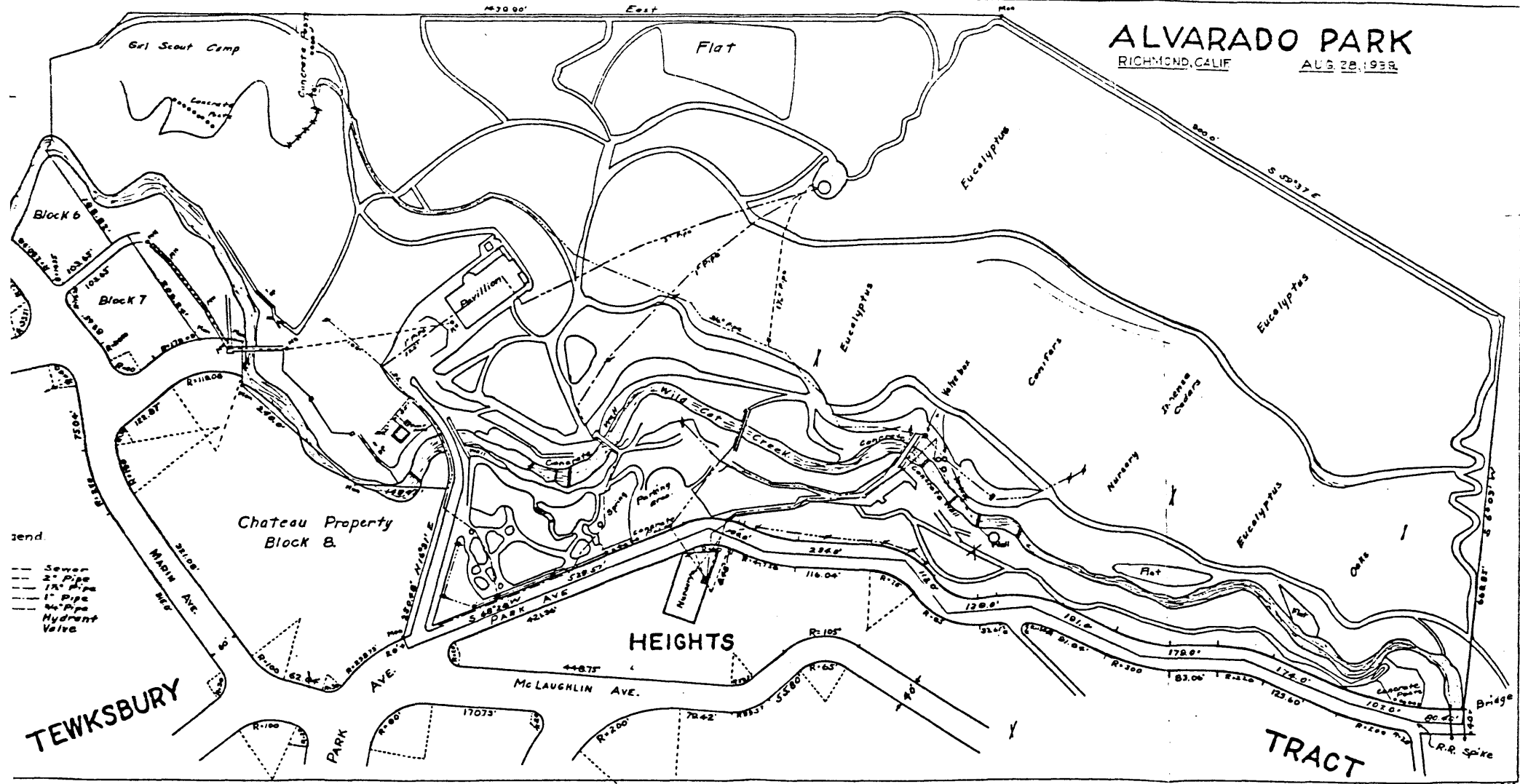


FIGURE 5 "Alvarado Park...1939"

3-1



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)

Social History
Landscape Architecture
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1909-1943

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hoffman, Edward A., Richmond
City Engineer

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

Summary Statement

Alvarado Park has its origins in the outdoor recreation movement of the early 20th century. The site's developer, Bernard Shapiro, touted Wildcat Canyon as a scenic area on the edge of his poorly-selling real estate subdivision. Although the park's basic form was determined during this era of private ownership, most of its elements were not constructed until the middle 1930s. Beginning in 1934, work relief money was channeled into improvement projects at Alvarado Park. The first recorded project was funded by the Civil Works Administration [CWA], the earliest of the federal programs designed to provide work for the unemployed during the depths of the Depression. This was followed by grants from the State Emergency Relief Administration. Alvarado Park is largely a product of the Depression-fighting policies of the federal and state governments. It also reflects local government's efforts to improve public facilities through the talents of local unemployed craftsmen, such as Italian-American stonemason "Pete" Merlo.

Unlike the Civilian Conservation Corps [CCC], whose work in public parks during the Depression was tightly controlled by National Park Service [NPS] guidelines, the state-funded workers in Alvarado Park worked to plans drawn up by Edward Hoffman, the City of Richmond's Engineer. Nevertheless, the resulting park landscape is a unique example of features usually associated with rural CCC work, in a concentrated urban setting. The park landscape represents a variation on the nationally-expressed NPS style of "rustic park architecture" carried out in an urban setting.

The integrity of park features and general layout from its primary period of significance is excellent (see concluding discussion under Section 7).

The boundaries of the proposed National Register site are those of the original Grand Canyon Park; park boundaries have not changed since they were established in 1909.

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Alvarado Park is believed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C.

* Justification for Criterion A: Much of the park's present appearance is the result of projects financed by state and federal work relief programs during the period 1934-1939. Work relief was enacted in response to the period of massive unemployment that followed the stock market crash of 1929 and lasted until the active participation of the United States in World War II. While the products of the federal CCC and WPA abound in state and federal parks, Alvarado Park is unusual in that it represents the use of state funds -- through the California State Emergency Relief Administration -- for a city-administered recreation project. There is no doubt that the improvements at Alvarado Park are the most visible and imaginative relief-funded public works undertaken in Richmond, where, like other cities, this money was usually put into more mundane projects, typically road work.

The period of significance for Alvarado Park covers the era in which organized, outdoor recreation was of great importance in American community life. Alvarado Park was unquestionably the most important focus of these activities in the East Bay area. From its establishment through the 1930s monthly summer picnics were organized by various fraternal, union, and veterans' groups from the East Bay and San Francisco that regularly attracted 3000-4000 people who danced and were entertained into the night.

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It may be that the overly formal 1923 Aronovichi plan was not carried out because it ignored the needs of the working and middle-class people who were the principal users of the park. Better than any other public park of its size and era in the Bay area, Alvarado retains the feeling of a recreation area designed to accomodate this once-popular large scale community group use.

* **Justification for criterion "c":** The features of Alvarado Park that were created during the era of the Depression represent types of design and construction that are characteristic of those used contemporaneously by federal work relief agencies, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. The latter were built to strict National Park Service [NPS] guidelines as part of the well defined and nationally expressed Rustic Park Architecture style. This NPS policy, which developed between the two world wars, sought to create park improvements that were compatible in material and form to the natural landscape, and emphasized the use of handcrafted, native materials. The features built between 1934 and 1939 in Alvarado Park, however, are a unique mixture of federal, state, and local influences: funded by state relief money, designed by the City of Richmond Engineer in the federal NPS style, and constructed by local craftsmen. Alvarado Park is a rare West Coast example of an urban park that was constructed in the rustic NPS style and yet was abundantly supplied with modern amenities. This mixture of urban function and rustic form is exemplified in the park's stone lamp standards that are essentially rustified street lamps, urban features for which there is no NPS equivalent. No better example of an urban/rural park from this era has survived in the local region.

Furthermore, the stonework of this period was the product of immigrant Italian masons--some of whom lived in the Alvarado Park neighborhood--and who can legitimately be described as master craftsmen. The stoneworking tradition of northern Italy was continued by immigrants to the San Francisco Bay area beginning in the late nineteenth century. While Italian stonework is

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exemplified in many public and private buildings in the Bay area and well documented in the basalt block cutting industry of Sonoma County, Alvarado Park is the only property of its type in the region that is known to be the product of this craft tradition.

* **Criteria considerations:** As the most recent features at Alvarado Park--the stacked concrete walls and BBQ stoves--were built within the last 50 years, their inclusion as contributing elements to the proposed National Register site requires justification. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the construction of these elements was funded as work relief: Although the WPA existed until 1943--the time of construction of the stacked concrete features--by this date, mandatory military service and war-related production had reduced the unemployment rolls considerably.

In spite of these factors, the stacked concrete features are an important part of the park landscape. These features represent the final phase of the evolution of the Park design from an emphasis on formal, organized, public activities--such as boating and dancing--to the accomodation of casual, more individuated activities, notably group and family barbecues. The final layout was the antithesis of Carol Aronovichi's 1923 plan which had proposed large scale public spaces and facilities, such as an open air theater, and formal walkways and gardens. Organizations including the Lions Club, the Westside Ladies Improvement Club, The Order of Redmen, and the Richmond Civic Center Club, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, all encouraged the purchase of the Park. These and many other community organizations went on to use the park for their gatherings; even the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, who had initially opposed the purchase, held meetings in the park during the 1920s (Richmond City Council Minutes 10, January-March 1921; Gavello interview, January 1989).

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The material employed for these late improvements was concrete, a substance that had been used in the park since the earliest days. Stylistically, the stacked concrete walls fit with the pragmatic construction that replaced the rustic masonry of the 1930s, when plentiful labor reinforced preference for natural materials. The use of stacked slabs of reused material--probably left over from sidewalk reconstruction--is an important feature in its own right for it reflects the replacement of the rural rustic style by the new, more circumscribed, utilitarian approach that characterized the post-World War II era. This retrenchment in style is also tied to the call by the federal government to conserve resources in the early days of the second World War.

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* Historical Context: (the following was written for this nomination by Phoebe Cutler, author of The Public Landscape of the New Deal, Yale University Press, 1985)

"Alvarado is a WPA park that looks and acts like a CCC park. Indeed, it conveys in one compact setting a sense of the rural Civilian Conservation Corps-type park better than any other park in the San Francisco Bay Area. Its principal elements--bridge, retaining walls, and light standards--constructed in the pervasive rustic masonry style, and its singular location contiguous to Wildcat Canyon Park, allied it then as now to the contemporaneous CCC work in Wildcat and the other of the East Bay Regional Park District's five original parks. However, since Alvarado is, by both statute and origins, a city park, it presents the unusual combination of rustic features in a confined and accessible area. Finally, since it, like all other remarkable historical preservation sites, suffered a long period of beneficial neglect, Alvarado has retained its redolent setting that invokes the Depression era's recourse to nature as an antidote to hard times.

"Generally urban in character, the typical WPA park consisted of a moderate-to-small area bustling with games and play equipment, and with, perhaps, an outdoor theater or rose garden, or both if the park was destined to be prominent. San Francisco enjoys a number of parks that are variations on the sporting model. They may have facilities for basketball, baseball, tennis, and playgrounds with concrete shelters, but none has the fillip of an outdoor theater or rose garden. Berkeley and Oakland, on the other hand can claim no standard WPA game park, but they both have spectacular examples of those two deluxe attractions of the rose garden and theater. Both San Francisco and Berkeley also have the aquatic version of the sporting model, San Francisco's Aquatic Park being the grander of the two. In sum the region is richly endowed with a New Deal recreation legacy; however, nowhere in the area is there any park quite like Alvarado.

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"Alvarado approximates in spirit none of these urban equivalents, but is more like a '30s state park as found much more readily in all parts of the country except the West Coast, where federal park land predominates. Alvarado is smaller than the typical state park; so with its strings of walls and its picnic sites along the creek, it concentrates the experience of a '30s woodland park, even more so than a state park. Moreover, this concentration is natural in an urban park, but it is unusual combined with rustic appurtenances.

"One state park in the Bay Area does have outstanding Depression-era handiwork. The contrast between New Deal features at Mt. Diablo as opposed to Alvarado aptly supports the main argument for Alvarado's effectiveness: Mt. Diablo is an immense and precipitous site with facilities dispersed along ridges and hollows. The sense of the extent of the labor and of the unity of the work is missing, for the viewer cannot take it all in. This dispersal is even more pronounced in the five original East Bay system parks, because there is even less CCC work spread out over even larger distances. Alvarado telescopes the work and offers it for easy viewing. The end result is not only a feel for the extent but also for the intent of the recreation movement of the time.

"Neither Mt. Diablo nor the rose gardens, neither the aquatic nor the game parks offer the extra dimension that Alvarado possesses of traces of a '20s and teens past. Only elements in Golden Gate Park and around Oakland's Lake Merritt evoke that earlier, more gracious era of recreation. The remains of the Alvarado dance pavilion survive as a symbol of that past. The historically important 1923 plan indicates the importance of the park to the community. Thomas Church's current and future biographers will be fascinated to know that he worked with the prominent planner Carol Aronivichi before completing his graduate work at Harvard and going on to become the foremost residential landscape architect in postwar America. The almost exclusive use of native plants shows that, once more, a modern trend is an old one. Like its plan, Alvarado is a park of surprises, the whimsical character of which should always be retained."

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Nystrom, Stanley

1989 Notes of Interview. On file at East Bay Regional Park
District, 11500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA.

Richmond, City of, City Auditor's Office

1923- "City Auditor's Annual Report, Richmond, California, for
1949 Fiscal Year(s) ending June 30." Located in Richmond
Collection, Richmond City Library, Richmond, California.

Richmond, City of, City Clerk's Office

n.d. Index to Leases, Deeds, Agreements, and other Cabals.

Richmond, City of, City Council

1923- Minutes (of City Council meetings). Volumes 9-16.
1943

Richmond, City of, Public Works Department

n.d. Drawings files and card index to same.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Allardt, G.F.
1893 Map of the San Pablo Rancho. Oakland, California: Oakland Blue Print Company.

Cole, Susan
1980 Richmond-Windows to the Past. Richmond, California: Wildcat Canyon Books.

Contra Costa, County of, County Recorder's Office
n.d. Books of Maps.
n.d. Books of Deeds.

Gavello, Louis
1989 Notes of Interview. On file at East Bay Regional Park District, 11500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA.

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:

East Bay Regional Park District
11500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property 42.46 acres

UTM References

A 10 | 550480 | 4200780
Zone Easting Northing

C 10 | 560160 | 4200410

B 10 | 5596100 | 4200410
Zone Easting Northing

D 10 | 5599200 | 4200710

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1 of Block 6 and Lot 5 of Block 7 of the Tewksbury Heights Subdivision as shown on "Map of Tewksbury Heights" (Contra Costa County Recorder's Office, Volume 2 of Maps:38).

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

District consists of the entirety of Alvarado Park whose boundaries have remained unchanged since their establishment in 1909. The District is composed entirely of property owned by the East Bay Regional Park District.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Adrian Praetzellis/Senior Historical Archaeologist
organization Anthropological Studies Center date September 8, 1989
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