

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

Historic Name: Forest of Arden

Other Name/Site Number: Arden; Modjeska House; Modjeska County Park

**2. LOCATION**

Street & Number: Modjeska Canyon Road

Not for publication:

City/Town: Modjeska

Vicinity:

State: CA County: Orange

Code: 059 Zip Code: 92665

**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

Contributing

4

2

6

Noncontributing

3 buildings  
       sites

3 structures

1 objects

7 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 6

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_





**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 4**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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The exterior appearance of the Modjeska House is largely unchanged since her period of residence. Its main, or north-facing, facade features a large gable with two lower ones to its sides and the dining room wing to the east; the center of the main gable is graced by a Palladian window, with porthole windows above its side panels. The "living room" is behind this window. A bank of five 6-paned windows below the Palladian window is the most noticeable change to this facade since Modjeska's time. The center gable is still fronted by Modjeska's semicircular outdoor stage, now vine-covered.

The large east veranda of Modjeska's time, which was used for outdoor dining, was enclosed for service as a play room in the 1920s. Another large veranda, on the west side of the house, has not been enclosed.

**Interior**

The interior walls are redwood. Some have been painted in recent years. The living room, which served as library, den, and music room, is the most impressive in the house. It contains a large stone fireplace. Two large bedrooms opening onto the west veranda, those used by Modjeska and Count Bozenta, retain their original use--and original beds--as does the guest room next to Bozenta's room, which was used by Ignace Jan Paderewski, among others; the bathroom, across the hall, serving them, which contains the original tub and washbowl; and a walk-in costume closet. Bozenta's study serves as a guestroom; a bathroom has been added. The wainscotted dining room still features the couple's large oak table. Cabinetry and a modern stove have been added to the kitchen.

**OUTBUILDINGS****Caretaker's Quarters (Opid Cottage)**

The present caretaker's house, east of the main house, was built by the Modjeskas in 1888. It is a 2-story building. Behind it and built into the side of the hill is the "Rock Building" (also ca. 1888) which had an additional servant's quarters over a stone-lined wine cellar. (Both are classed as contributing to the historic significance of the property.)

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 5**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

**Store**

This small cottage, between the Modjeska House and the Caretaker's Quarters, dates to ca. 1914 during the period of hotel operation after Modjeska's departure. (Non-contributing.)

**Milk House**

This small white-painted hexagonal building, at the east end of the main grounds, dates from ca. 1888, during Modjeska's occupancy and is believed to be in a Polish style. It has been moved at least once. Other small buildings around it were built after Modjeska's occupancy. (Contributing.)

**Cinderblock House**

Constructed in the 1960s, east of the Caretaker's Quarters, this building does not contribute to the historic significance of the property.

**Bear Den**

Exotic animals were kept on the ranch during the Walker family's occupancy. The remains of the concrete bear den opposite the Caretaker's Quarters to the north date from that period. (Non-contributing.)

**White House**

Some distance northeast of the main buildings in the complex, the White House dates to ca. 1928. (Non-contributing.)

**GROUNDS**

The natural attractions of the area had drawn the Chlapowskis to it. Consequently, they did not alter the landscape extensively in the valley that contains the house and its dependencies. They did add a rose garden, palms to line the approach to the cottage, and a vegetable garden. The road into the Canyon passes through a grove of olive trees planted by Count Bozenta ca. 1890.

A "Crown of Thorns" bush planted by Modjeska still grows between the playroom and the former caretaker's cottage.

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 6**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

**Well**

The wellhouse to the east of the front door of the Modjeska House is renowned, because pictures of Madame Modjeska in front of it were sold widely in California in postcard form. The well is today capped as a safety measure; the wellhouse is in poor condition. (Contributing.)

**Modjeska Stone**

Beneath an oak tree across the lawn from the west end of the house is the Helena Modjeska Stone. Bozenta placed the plaque on the stone in the spring of 1909 as a memorial to his wife. The Orange County Historical Society added a plaque in Bozenta's honor in 1921. (Non-contributing.)

**Swimming Pool**

North of the driveway, near the main entrance gate, is Bozenta's swimming pool. Now clogged with ivy, it resembles a sunken garden. (Contributing.) A small greenhouse formerly stood by the pool.

**Bridges**

The stone bridge, over Santiago Creek, now in ruins, postdates Modjeska's occupancy, as does a wooden footbridge farther upstream. (Non-contributing.)

**Endnote**

1. This description was prepared from material extracted from the Orange County Environmental Management Agency's Draft Modjeska Historic Park Master Planning Program (Fall 1987), especially the section (pp. 5-19) of that report entitled "Inventory of Resources," and confirmed by on-site inspection in September 1987.

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide:      Locally:     

Applicable National Register Criteria:           A X   B X   C        D     

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

NHL Criteria:   #1, #2

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
Ethnic Heritage:	1888-1906	_____
European	_____	_____
Performing Arts	_____	_____

NHL Themes:   XX. Theater  
                  B. Performance  
  
                  XXX. American Way of Life  
                  E. Ethnic Communities: Polish-Americans

Significant Person(s): Modjeska (Modrzejewski), Helena

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: White, Stanford

**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

Summary

"Arden" was the ranch home of internationally famed Shakespearean actress and Polish patriot Helena Modjeska and her husband Karol Bozenta Chlapowski from its construction in 1888 until 1906, during the years of her greatest celebrity in the United States. It is her only home in America that survives.

Helena Modjeska was a nationally known actress in Poland before she immigrated, with uncertain prospects, to California in 1876. In her adopted country, she became a stage personality of the

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 8**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

first rank, after first learning to speak and act in English. Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry, giants of the French and British stage, respectively, acknowledged her as a peer. [1]

In the manner of many exiles, however, she never lost an interest in her native land; by speaking out against the division of Poland and Russian ill-treatment she found herself barred from returning home, although, after her death in 1909, her husband was permitted to bury her in her homeland.

Modjeska's life is also inextricably linked with that of a younger Pole, pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski, to whom she served as mentor. Both were consummate artists, but consumed by patriotism, living by the motto: La patrie avant tout, l'art ensuite (The nation before everything; art, next). His first concert in Cracow was given with her and later, in fact, he briefly joined her circle of Polish exiles in Southern California. While she died in exile, he lived to return as Premier of a free and reunited Poland. [2]

Modjeska's son Ralph became a noted American engineer and bridgebuilder and is a figure of importance in his own right. "Arden," his home as a youth, is less of a monument to him than the great bridges he designed.

**History**

Helena Opid was born in Cracow, a traditional center of Polish political and cultural life, in 1840. [3] She was married, while in her teens, to Gustav Modrzejewski (a name she shortened to Modjeska in the United States), her guardian. She aspired to the stage from childhood and with her husband's assistance began her career traveling in the provincial theater. By 1865, she was widely hailed in the city of her birth (then under Austrian occupation). In 1868, she joined the Imperial Theater in Warsaw (in Russian Poland) and remarried, Modrzejewski having died in the interim. Her new husband, Karol Bozenta Chlapowski, a journalist, was a member of the Polish nobility, and she shared his nationalistic views; both chafed under Czarist rule. She remained, "the reigning actress of the nation, until 1876." [4]

In that year, with her husband and son and a small party of like-minded Poles, she came to America. Joining Henryk Sienkiewicz (later the author of Quo Vadis) at Anaheim, the group strove to establish a utopian colony, a venture which quickly collapsed.



**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 9**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

Following the failure of the colony, she learned to speak English in a few months and quickly debuted on the San Francisco stage, the beginning of her brilliant American career, which spanned the years 1877 to 1907.

While Madame was in San Francisco after the brief days of the Polish colony at Anaheim, Bozenta and their son lived for a while in a cabin above the home of the Joseph E. Pleasants in Santiago Canyon. Madame visited the Pleasants with her husband and son between tours in 1883 and 1885. In 1888, they purchased the Pleasants' homestead and built "Arden," which they occupied between Helena's theatrical tours from 1888 until 1906. [5]

Modjeska referred to the retreat as "Arden," because, as she wrote:

... like the "Forest of Arden" in "As You Like It," everything that Shakespeare speaks of was on the spot--oak trees, running brooks, palms, snakes, and even lions--of course California lions--really pumas. [6]

Modjeska toured the United States for a major part of each year after 1877, also often appeared in London, and made return visits to Poland. In 1893, however, at the Chicago World's Fair, she delivered a speech that resulted in her being banned from the Russian Empire for the rest of her life.

A portion of this speech follows:

I shall not dwell upon the development of our political institutions. They have laughed to scorn the belief that there was ever a Polish nation. They have restricted, if not wholly prohibited, the use of our language. Under such conditions could there be any organized effort of women? Why, it would be considered a political crime; it would bring its punishment. I cannot tell what the Polish women are doing, because to do so would bring punishment upon the heroic workers.

We have had a constant struggle for our independence. An unholy alliance was formed to crush out our country, rob it of its free government and destroy our institutions. The gates have been closed. Men have destroyed Poland, and her women had stood guard at the gates of their country. It was she who preserved patriotism and honor in spite of Siberia,

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 10**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

and what is worse, the lash, to the everlasting disgrace of the Russian government. Our enemies make a great mistake if they think they have destroyed us. As long as a Polish woman lives, Poland will live . . . . The Polish mother is waiting patiently for the insurrection, and if there is a place on earth, she will not wait in vain. [7]

As one of the first "stars" to live in Southern California, Helena Modjeska cut a broad social swath. Among nationally and internationally known personalities who spent time as guests at "Arden," in addition to Paderewski, were the Barrymore family, Edwin Booth, and members of the Otis Skinner family.

Madame Modjeska and the hospitality of Arden were legendary locally as well. She frequently participated in local benefit performances, training amateur actors and even lending out her costumes.

In the autumn of 1906, Arden was sold. The couple rented a house in Tustin, California, for a year and later moved to a small cottage on Bay (later Modjeska) Island at Newport Beach, California. Modjeska died there in 1909. (Neither of these two later brief residences survives.) [8]

**Architectural Significance**

Recent scholarship supports attribution of "Arden" to Stanford White, who moved in the same New York social circles as the Bozentas. The cottage contains features characteristic of his work, such as Palladian, mullioned, and round windows, and the use of natural materials, shingles, and Classical touches. It is his only surviving work west of Kansas City. [9]

**Endnotes**

1. Theodore Payne, Life on the Modjeska Ranch in the Gay Nineties (Los Angeles: Kruckenberg Press, 1962), pp. 24, 27.
2. Markham Harris, "Ignace Jan Paderewski," Encyclopedia Americana (New York: Americana Corporation, 1953), 21, 92a-92b.
3. Walter Prichard Eaton, "Helena Modjeska," Dictionary of American Biography, XIII, 73-74, is the primary source for this brief sketch of Modjeska's career.

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 11**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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4. Ibid., XIII, 73.
5. Ellen K. Lee, "Helena Modjeska: The California Years," in Polish Americans in California, 1827-1977 and Who's Who, Jacek Przygoda, ed. (Los Angeles: Loyola Marymount University, [1977]), pp. 45-49.
6. Cited in Ellen K. Lee, Helena Modjeska (Leaflet, 1970), p. 2.
7. "Modjeska's Speech," San Francisco Chronicle, April 25, 1893.
8. Lee, "Helena Modjeska: The California Years," op. cit., pp. 50-52.
9. Orange County Environmental Management Agency, Harbors, Beaches, and Parks, Draft Modjeska Historic Park Master Planning Program (Fall 1987), p. 19; Leland M. Roth, "Report on Extent of Stanford White's Involvement in the Design of the Modjeska House," September 1989.

## Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)

Page 12

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Coleman, Marion Moore. Fair Rosalind. Cheshire, Conn: Cherry Hill Books, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_, and Arthur Prudden. Wanderers Twain. Cheshire, Conn.: Cherry Hill Books, 1964.

Durand, W.F. "Ralph Modjeski," National Academy of Sciences Biographical Memoirs, XXIII, 243-261. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1944.

Eaton, Walter Prichard. "Helena Modjeska," Dictionary of American Biography, XIII, 73-74.

Harris, Markham. "Ignace Jan Paderewski," Encyclopedia Americana. New York: Americana Corporation, 1953. 21, 92a-92b.

Kwapiszewski, Michael. Letters to Emilia, Record of a Friendship. Cheshire, Conn.: Cherry Hill Books, 1967.

Lee, Ellen K. Helena Modjeska. 1970. (Leaflet.)

\_\_\_\_\_. "Helena Modjeska: The California Years," pp. 42-53, in Polish Americans in California, 1827-1977 and Who's Who. Jacek Przygoda, ed. Los Angeles: Loyola Marymount University, [1977].

Modjeska, Helena. Memories and Impressions of Helena Modjeska. New York: Macmillan Co., 1910.

"Modjeska's Speech," San Francisco Chronicle, April 25, 1893.

Orange County Environmental Management Agency, Harbors, Beaches, and Parks. Draft Modjeska Historic Park Master Planning Program. Fall 1987.

Payne, Theodore. Life on the Modjeska Ranch in the Gay Nineties. Los Angeles: Kruckenberg Press, 1962.

Leland M. Roth, <sup>4</sup>Report on Extent of Stanford White's Involvement in the Design of the Modjeska House," September 1989.

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)**

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 14 (fourteen) acres.

UTM References:

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing		
	A	11	442086	3729935	B	11	442334	3729932
	C	11	442337	3729773	D	11	442082	3729769

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lot A of Modjeska Home, Sheets B, C, H, and I, per maps recorded in Book 9, pages 17-18; Book 16, page 19; and Book 21, page 13, of Miscellaneous Maps in the office of the County Recorder of Orange County; except that portion thereof lying northerly of the northerly line of that certain 40.00 feet wide strip of land described in the deed to the County of Orange, recorded July 16, 1937, in Book 892, page 445.

Also including Lot 77 of Modjeska Home, Sheet C, per map recorded in Book 9, page 18, of Miscellaneous Maps; except any portion thereof included within Lot 656 of Modjeska Home, Sheet I, per map recorded in Book 21, page 13, of said Miscellaneous Maps.

**Forest of Arden (Modjeska House)****Page 14**

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)  
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

---

Including all of the rights and rights of way granted to C.J. Walker in those certain deeds from Modjeska Ranch Company recorded October 27, 1923, in Book 494, Page 240, of Deeds and recorded September 17, 1924, at Book 540, Page 139 of Deeds, Orange County.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundary includes the remaining undivided portion of Helena Modjeska and Karol Bozenta Chlapowski's ranch holdings acquired by Orange County in 1987.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: James H. Charleton, Historian

Organization: History Division, NPS

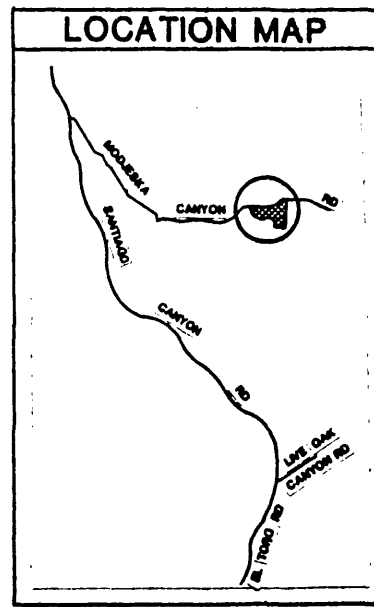
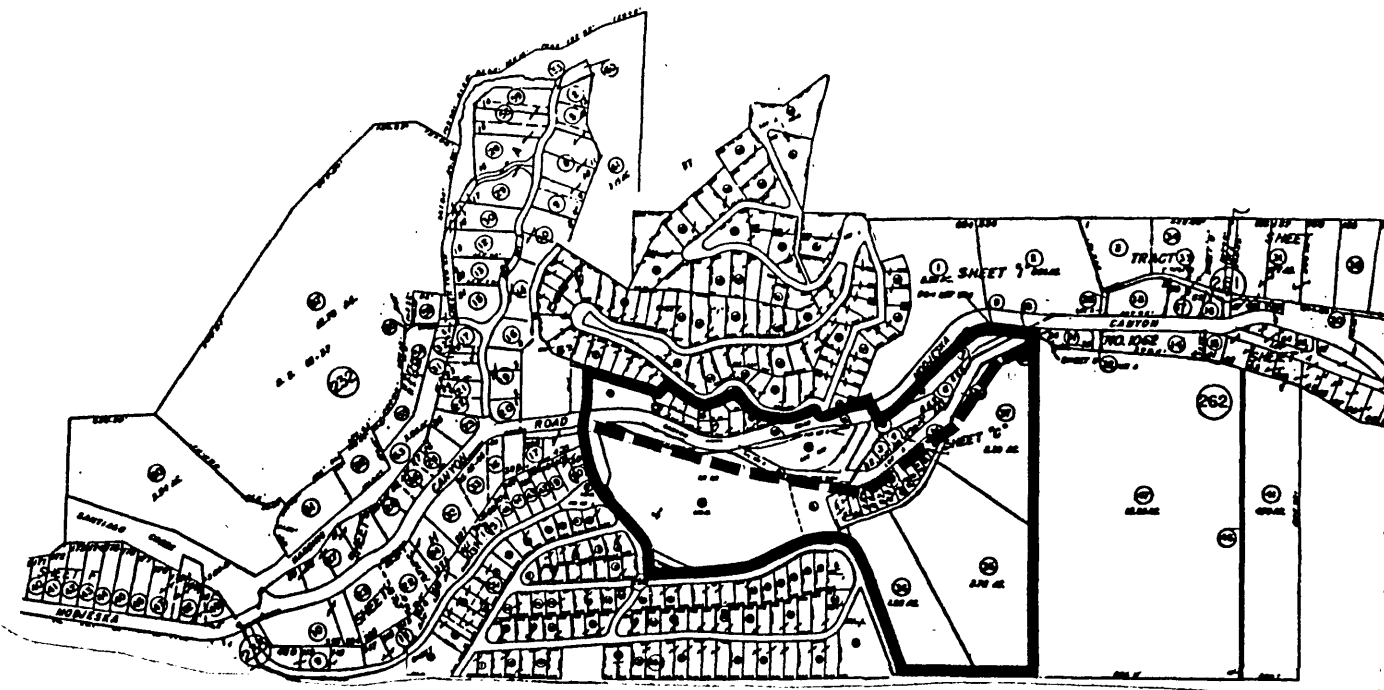
Date: June 16, 1990

Street &amp; Number: P.O. Box 37127

Telephone: (202) 343-8165

City or Town: Washington State: DC

ZIP: 20013-7127

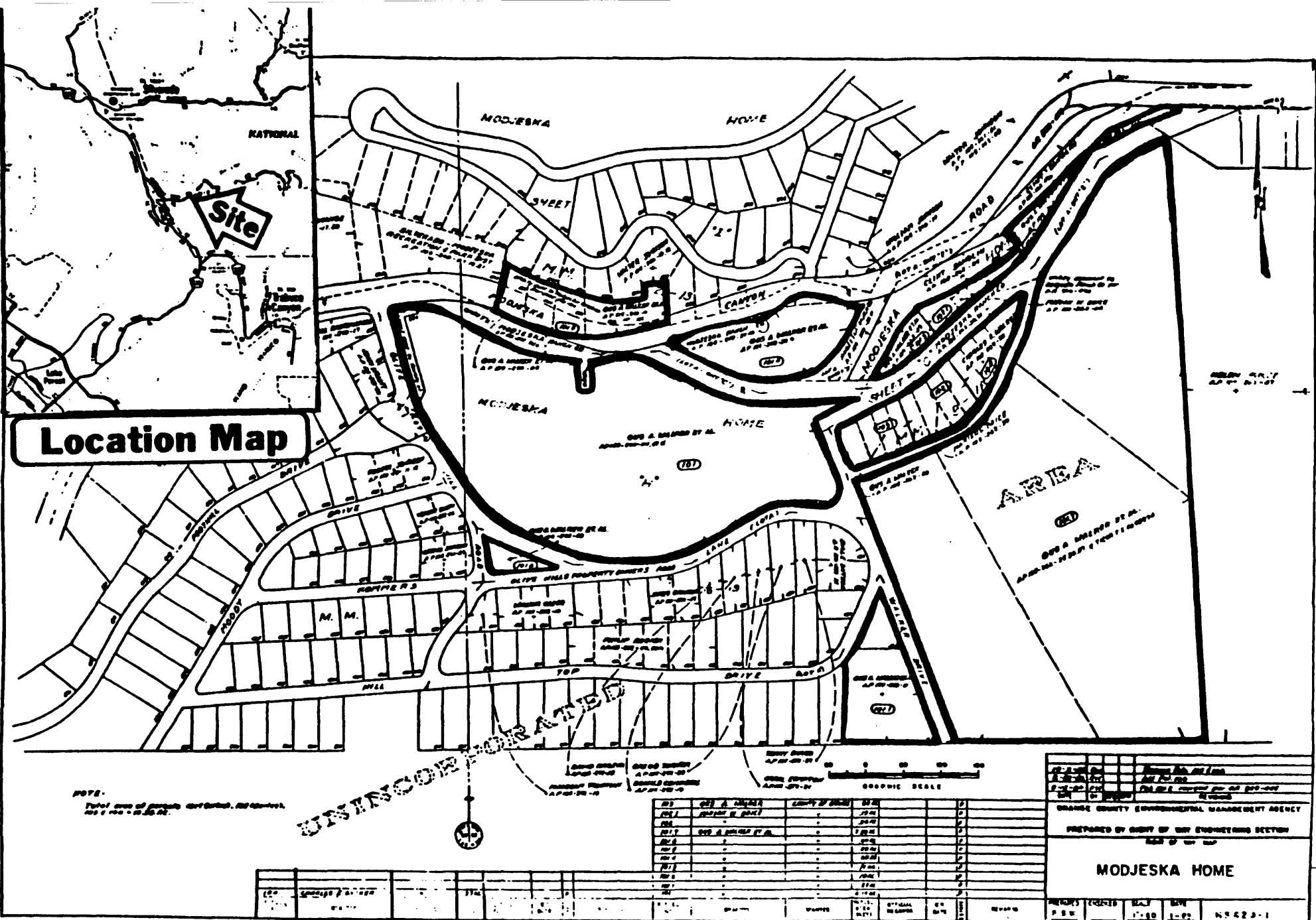


# MODJESKA RESIDENCE

- PROJECT SITE
- - -** APPROXIMATE CREEK LOCATION



SCALE-1":400'



HS42A MODJESKA HOME