



# Observatory Hill



## Cultural Landscape Inventory

December 2005

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## DEFINITIONS

### What is a “cultural landscape”?

The following document is based on concepts and techniques developed by the National Park Service. The NPS has produced a series of manuals for identifying, describing, and maintaining culturally significant landscapes within the national park system.<sup>1</sup>

The National Park Service defines a **cultural landscape** as

a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein[,], associated with a historic event, activity, or person, or [one] that exhibits other cultural or aesthetic values.<sup>2</sup>

In 1925, geographer Carl Sauer (1889-1975) summarized the process that creates cultural landscapes: “Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the writer J. B. Jackson (1909-1996) looked upon the landscape as a composition of spaces made or modified by humans “to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence.”<sup>4</sup>

### What is a “cultural landscape inventory”?<sup>5</sup>

This cultural landscape inventory for Observatory Hill is one of eight such studies completed as part of the UW-Madison Cultural Landscape Resource Plan. Each inventory defines the boundaries of a distinct cultural landscape on campus, summarizes its history, describes its current condition, and makes recommendations about its treatment. In addition to these eight cultural landscape inventories, two companion documents address the archaeology and overall history of the campus. This collection of documents is collectively entitled, “Cultural Landscape Report for the University of Wisconsin-Madison.” Within the national park system, a **cultural landscape report** (CLR) serves as the primary guide to the treatment and use of a cultural landscape.

**Overleaf:** Observatory Hill, Observatory Director’s Residence at left, ca. 1870-1891 (also figure 4).

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent and comprehensive of these publications is *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, published in 1998. Its lead author, Robert R. Page, is director of the Olmsted Center for Landscape Studies, based at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Charleston, Massachusetts: <http://www.nps.gov/oclp>

<sup>2</sup> Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 1998), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 343.

<sup>4</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

<sup>5</sup> The term “cultural landscape inventory” is not to be confused with the NPS Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI), a computerized database of cultural landscapes within the national park system.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

The U.S. Congress created the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, launching an ongoing census of historic properties. To be eligible for the National Register, a property must meet specific requirements. First and foremost, an eligible landscape must have significance: in American history, in architecture (including landscape architecture and planning), in archaeology, in engineering, or to specific cultures.

Understanding the historic context in which a landscape developed is key to determining its significance. To qualify for the National Register, a cultural landscape must be shown to be significant according to one or more of the four Criteria for Evaluation:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, or
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, or
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to archaeological or historical knowledge.

Properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places are primarily of state or local significance. Nationally significant properties—such as UW-Madison’s Dairy Barn—may be designated National Historic Landmarks (NHL) by the Secretary of the Interior. NHLs also are listed on the National Register.

**Table 1: KEY TO PLACE NAMES**

Extant Features<sup>6</sup>

<i><b>Current Official Name</b></i>	<i><b>Location</b></i>	<i><b>Other or former name(s)</b></i>
Adams and Tripp Halls, Carson Gulley Commons	1520, 1510, 1515 Tripp Circle	Van Hise Dormitories and Refectory
Elizabeth Waters Hall	1200 Observatory Dr.	
King Hall	1475 Observatory Dr.	Horticulture, Agricultural Physics
Observatory Hill Mound Group	West end Observatory Hill	ASI-47DA57
Observatory Hill Office Building	1225 Observatory Dr.	Loring Guild Home, President's House, Astronomer's Residence, Observatory Director's Residence
Howard Temin Lakeshore Path	Lakeshore path: N. Park St. to Oxford Rd.	Madison Park and Pleasure Drive segment
Washburn Observatory	1401 Observatory Dr.	

Commemorative Features<sup>7</sup>

<i><b>Name</b></i>	<i><b>Location</b></i>	<i><b>Other or former name(s)</b></i>
Chamberlin Rock	West of Washburn Observatory	Chamberlin Boulder
Class of 1908 Sundial	Northeast of Washburn	
Water Spirit Effigy Mound	West of Washburn Observatory	Turtle Mound, Two-tailed Turtle Mound
Bird Effigy Mound	West of Washburn Observatory	Bird Mound
Mrs. Adams Bench	East of Washburn Observatory, (moved from north end of Park Street in 1969.)	Class of 1897 Bench
Tree of Peace and stone marker	North of Observatory Hill bird effigy	
President's Oak	South of Washburn Observatory	
Wisconsin Council Ring	Southeast of Elizabeth Waters Hall	

Non-Extant Features

<i><b>Official Name</b></i>	<i><b>Location</b></i>	<i><b>Other or former name(s)</b></i>
Student Observatory	East of Washburn Observatory	
Solar Observatory	West of Washburn Observatory	Watson's Mystery House, Watson Solar Observatory
Toboggan slide	North slope of Observatory Hill	

<sup>6</sup> Space Management Office, University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Facility Name Registry," [www2.fpm.wisc.edu/smo](http://www2.fpm.wisc.edu/smo) (accessed January 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Einstein, "UW Commemorative Objects, version 5, Feb. 2008"

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## CHRONOLOGY

### **12,000 years ago: Native Americans arrive in region**

- 800 BCE-1650 CE: Native American mound building activity

### **1830s-1854: Early Development of University**

- 1833: General Land Office Survey

### **1855-1899: Early Construction and Agriculture**

- 1855: Loring Guild home (now known as the Observatory Hill Office Building) constructed. From 1864-1866, this building was a professor's residence; it was purchased by the university in 1866. In 1868 it became the home of the director of the Observatory.
- 1870s: Terraced orchard planted on northern slope; later agricultural activity included sheep pastures, oat fields and strawberry patches.
- 1878: Construction of the Washburn Observatory; the building was occupied in 1882.
- 1878: Solar Observatory constructed; it was demolished in 1949.
- 1880: Construction of Student Observatory began; occupied in 1882. It was moved off campus in July 1960.
- 1888: Earliest known burial mound survey by T.H. Lewis.
- 1890: Construction began on Hiram Smith Hall--completed in 1892.
- 1893: Construction of the east half of King Hall (formerly Horticulture) began--completed in 1894. The west half of King Hall (formerly Agricultural Physics) began in 1895--completed in 1896.

### **1900-1925: Agriculture and Recreation**

- 1921: The first toboggan slide constructed.

### **1926-1961: Residential Housing and Circulation**

- 1926: Adams and Tripp Dormitories (formerly Van Hise Dormitories) were constructed, along with the refectory, now called Carson Gulley Commons.
- 1933: A new toboggan slide was constructed; it was demolished circa 1938 in conjunction with the construction of Elizabeth Waters Hall.
- 1934: Observatory Drive realigned.
- 1938: The Kronshage residence halls (Turner, Gilman, Mack, Showerman, Conover, Chamberlin, Jones and Swenson) were constructed--occupied by 1939.
- 1938: Construction began on Elizabeth Waters Hall--completed in 1940.
- 1984: Construction of the Observatory Drive Overlook.



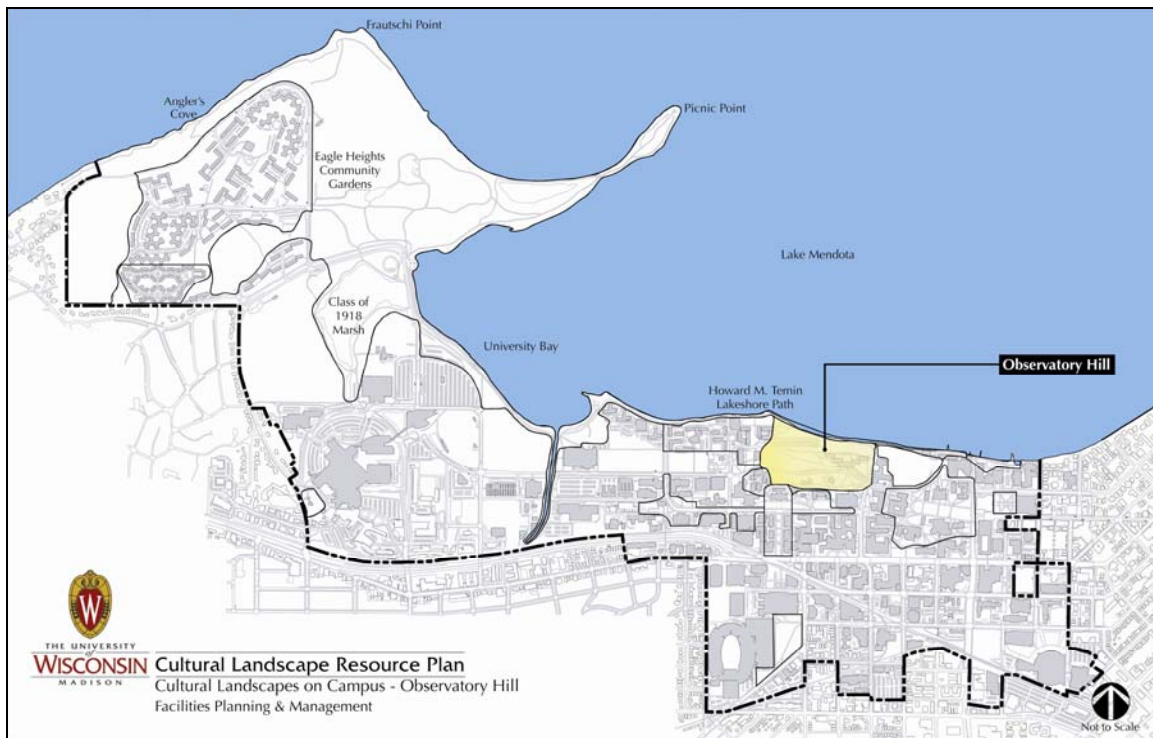
## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Inventory Unit Name:** Observatory Hill Historic Landscape

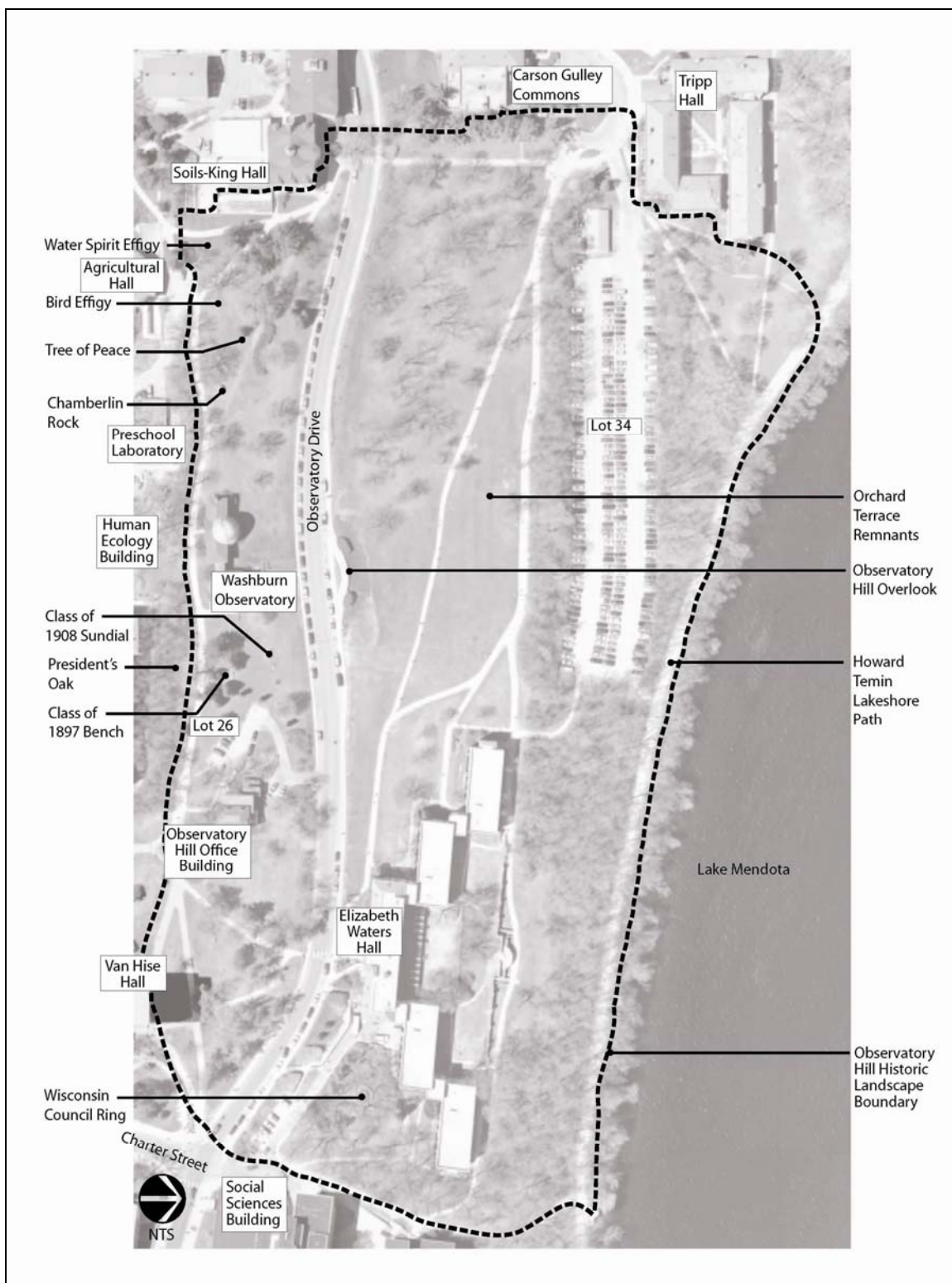
**Property Level:** Landscape

**Current and Historic Name:** Observatory Hill

**Location Map:**



**Figure 1: Location of Observatory Hill, 2004.**



**Figure 2: Observatory Hill Historic Landscape Boundary, 2004.**

**Boundary Description:**

Northern boundary: The northern boundary parallels the Lake Mendota shoreline.

Southern boundary: The sidewalk that runs south of the Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Hill Office Building constitutes the southern boundary. The north side of Agricultural Hall is the southwestern corner for this boundary.

Eastern boundary: The eastern boundary is defined by Charter Street Extended and the area just east of the Observatory Hill Office Building.

Western boundary: The western boundary runs along the eastern side of Soils-King Hall and continues along the sidewalk that runs toward Lake Mendota on the eastern side of Carson Gulley Commons and Tripp Hall.

**Historic Use/Function:**

The historic functions of the land associated with Observatory Hill include: passive and active recreation (toboggan slide, pleasure drive, and views): experimental agriculture (orchards, pasture, vineyard and strawberry fields): astronomical observation, and student residential facilities. Native American uses included: transportation, settlement, and ceremonial or ritualistic use related to the effigy mounds.

- Observatory Hill Mound Group:  
Historic Function: Religion/Ceremonial Site
- Washburn Observatory  
Historic Function: Instruction in astronomy and research
- Observatory Hill Office Building:  
Historic Functions: Private residence, residence of the first three university presidents, residence of director of the observatory
- Student Observatory:  
Historic Function: Provided students basic instruction in astronomy while freeing the main observatory equipment for research
- Solar Observatory:  
Historic Function: Used for the purpose of looking for a hypothetical planet near the sun
- Elizabeth Waters Hall:  
Historic Function: Women's dormitory
- Wisconsin Council Ring  
Historic Function: Outdoor gathering place

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### **Statement of Significance:**

The Observatory Hill Historic Landscape is a campus icon, a place that immediately materializes in the mind's eye of those who have spent time on campus. The quality of this landscape is derived from its physical characteristics as well as its cultural associations.

Observatory Hill is not simply a space between the buildings that skirt its edges: a space once used as an orchard, toboggan run and Native American encampment. It is a three-dimensional entity that exudes a definite sense of place and time. It is a kind of palimpsest in the landscape, where the traces of the past exist, visible to those who know the stories that interpret their meanings.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it represents numerous periods and numerous types of activities, and it continues to evolve.

Observatory Hill is significant according to National Register Criterion A due to its relationship to the development of the University of Wisconsin from 1855 through 1926. Observatory Hill is a portion of the geographic landform referred to by early settlers as the "second hill" in Madison. The two hills, and their proximity to the lakes, drew settlers and eventually resulted in the development of the city, the state capital, and the university. Observatory Hill is located on the northwest slope of the western portion of the hill. This section of land has been revered for its views since the earliest days of human occupation. The landscape contains structures and landscape features related to the early development of the university, the agricultural experimental farm, the Washburn Observatory, the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive, and recreational use.

### Archaeological Significance:

The Observatory Hill landscape is locally significant according to Criterion D due to its association with ancient Native American use of this area. These early occupants constructed at least four mounds or earthworks on Observatory Hill, including a bird, a water spirit (early references refer to a "panther"), a two-tailed water spirit (early references call this mound a "turtle") and a linear mound. The above-grade features of the two-tailed water-spirit and the bird mounds are still visible. It is possible that the below

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<sup>8</sup> Defined by Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, a palimpsest is a "writing material (as parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased. The Electronic Labyrinth gives this description: "A palimpsest is a [manuscript](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0243.html) on which an earlier text has been effaced and the vellum or parchment reused for another. It was a common practice, particularly in medieval ecclesiastical circles, to rub out an earlier piece of writing by means of washing or scraping the manuscript, in order to prepare it for a new text. The motive for making palimpsests seems to have been largely economic--reusing parchment was cheaper than preparing new skin. Another motive may have been directed by the desire of Church officials to "convert" pagan Greek script by overlaying it with the word of God. Modern historians, usually more interested in older writings, have employed infra-red and digital enhancement techniques to recover the erased text, often with remarkable results." <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0243.html>. The concept of a palimpsest as a way to consider the traces of past activities in a historic landscape was presented by William Cronon in a discussion about the Observatory Hill cultural landscape, January 2005.

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grade features of the linear and water spirit mounds may still be intact. At the base of the hill a settlement site may have existed. In addition, Native Americans used a trail that passed along the edge of Lake Mendota. The known use and occupation of this landscape, and the extant effigy mounds, contribute to its significance as a landscape that has yielded, and is likely to yield further, information important to prehistory and history.

**National Register Information:**

- The Observatory Hill Landscape has not been previously evaluated or nominated.
- The landscape is locally significant according to Criterion A.
- The Observatory Hill Mound Group was listed on the NRHP in 2004.
- The Washburn Observatory and Observatory Director's Residence were listed on the NRHP in January 1985.

**Observatory Hill Mound Group statement of significance:**

"The Observatory Hill mound group, built between AD 750 and 1000 by participants in the Effigy Mound Culture, meets the registration requirements of the property type, 'Late Woodland Mounds' as defined in the Multiple Property Documentation, 'Late Woodland Stage in Archaeological Region 8.' The site contains two extant mounds—one bird effigy and one 'two-tailed turtle' effigy. The turtle mound is the only one of its kind in the world. The site has potential to yield important information about cosmological beliefs, ritual activity and social organization during the mature Late Woodland stage (AD 700-1000), and is thus eligible under Criterion D at the local level."<sup>9</sup>

**Washburn Observatory and Observatory Director's Residence statement of significance:**

"The Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Director's Residence are significant architecturally (local level) and in association with contributions to education made by the individuals with which the buildings are identified (state level). The observatory was designed by Madison architect David R. Jones, and while the architect of the house is unknown, it is the second oldest building on the university campus. Each of the successive directors of the observatory made major contributions to science in the fledgling field of modern astronomy. In addition, the director's house served as the first official residence of the president of the university during the tenure of the first three presidents, and was the home of the first chair of the Normal Department."<sup>10</sup>

**Periods of Significance:**

**Native American Occupation and Use**

Indigenous peoples were likely visiting Observatory Hill soon after their arrival in the region about 13,000 years ago. Effigy mound builders constructed four known mounds on Observatory Hill about 1000 years ago including a bird, a water spirit, a two-tailed water spirit and a linear mound. Today, two of the four mounds (the bird and two-tailed water spirit) are still visible. Native Americans continued to use trails running along the

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<sup>9</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Observatory Hill Mound Group, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Director's Residence, 1985.

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edge of Lake Mendota and a campsite at the northern base of the slope well into the period of early European-American settlement (see figure 3).

### **1855-1899, Early Construction**

Around 1855, the Observatory Hill Office Building was constructed on Observatory Hill. The Washburn Observatory soon followed, built between 1878 and 1882. Additional structures were built shortly after the Observatory, including the Student's Observatory, built from 1880 to 1882, and the Solar Observatory (Watson's Mystery House), built in 1878. King Hall was constructed in 1893 and Hiram Smith Hall in 1890. Landscape features associated with this period include a terraced orchard on the northern slope of Observatory Hill, which was present as early as the 1870s. Other features present in the 1890s and possibly earlier include a strawberry patch, sheep pasture, fences, and an oat field. Farm roads, which also served as public pleasure drives, were built along the shoreline.

### **1900-1925, Agriculture and Recreation**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the northern slope of Observatory Hill transitioned from primarily scientific uses, (experimental agricultural and astronomical research and teaching), to more recreational activities such as a toboggan slide. The Chamberlin Rock and the Class of 1908 Sundial were placed on the hill at this time.

### **1926-1961, Residential Housing and Circulation**

In 1926, the first major imposition between the hill and the lake was constructed. The construction of the lakeshore residence halls in the 1920s, the realignment of Observatory Drive in 1934, and the erection of Elizabeth Waters Hall in the late 1930s, changed the landscape of Observatory Hill. Circulation patterns, vegetation and spatial organization were altered, as the hill became a circulation corridor and a place known and loved for its vista to and from Lake Mendota. During this period, more residence halls were proposed for Observatory Hill, however, the space has been preserved with only a few alterations after the construction of Elizabeth Waters Hall.

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## LANDSCAPE HISTORY

### **Observatory Hill Mound Group: 750-1000 CE**

Archaeologists estimate that approximately 1000 years ago, Late Woodland Indians constructed four effigy mounds on Observatory Hill. Two mounds are still visible on the hill; one appears to be in the form of a bird and the other is a unique two-tailed water spirit effigy. The General Land Office first surveyed this area in 1833 and documented the presence of “burr, black and white oak intermixed with hazel and grasses on or near Observatory Hill.” Also, an “extensive marsh system with sedge meadows was located at the base of the hill, adjoining Picnic Point Bay.”<sup>11</sup>

T. H. Lewis conducted the earliest known archaeological survey of the mound group in August, 1888. In 1943, Arthur Quan prepared a sketch map of the mounds on Observatory Hill, based on his recollections from the early 1890s. A newspaper account of his work with Charles E. Brown recounts their search for the mounds:

On the western edge of this path was a fence which enclosed a tract of land then in use by Mr. Kleinheinz for pasturing his prize flock of University of Wisconsin sheep. In this sheep pasture were two Indian mounds which but few people besides Arthur Quan now remember. One was a linear, well-shaped mound about 100 feet long. One of its ends was cut off by the pasture fence. The second mound, a short distance below the other in the pasture, was an animal-shaped effigy resembling a panther. Mr. Quan and Mr. Brown found a remnant of that ancient mound the other day on their trek. The slope, they say, is now just an unsightly weed patch. The garden fields that were at the base of the slope are gone. A few half-dead trees of the once fine orchard remain...<sup>12</sup>

Charles E. Brown surmised that the Indian encampment associated with the Observatory Hill site was called Wak Andjaga (Thunder Bird). The site was occupied before 1828 and was associated with twelve mounds; two on the upper campus (present day Bascom Hill), four on Observatory Hill, three in the Picnic Grove (north of present day Kronshage Hall) and three in the Creek area (present day Willow Creek).<sup>13</sup> According to Brown, an “Indian encampment occupied the land on the bay shore where the men’s dormitories (Tripp/Adams Halls) now stand and from that point extended westward to beyond the present picnic grove.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Observatory Hill Mound Group, 2003.

<sup>12</sup>Madge Yohn, “All Around the Town,” July 1943. Unknown newspaper source, part of the Charles E. Brown Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup>Charles E. Brown Papers, Box 21, “University Observatory Hill Site,” Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>14</sup>Charles E. Brown, “Before There Was a Campus,” The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, July 1936.





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## Early Development of the University, 1830s-1854

Observatory Hill is a section of one of the two hills identified by early settlers of Madison as prime sites for development. The geography of Madison, consisting of three lakes, wetlands, and two large hills, surrounded by relatively flat topography, greatly influenced the development of the city and the university campus:

The early settlers of Madison, Wisconsin, identified two hills in the vicinity of Madison: one hill was to be the site of the State Capital, as Doty had planned, and the other was to be the site of a state university. By 1838, people commonly referred to the second hill as “College Hill,” although the university had not yet been founded. Before Bascom Hill was selected for the University of Wisconsin, native American mounds were sited there, followed by an early settlers’ cemetery.

The hill’s crest was chosen for the future College due to its prominent topographical location and unrivaled views. The committee who selected the hill thought that the scenic views of the lake and capital, with its location among informally arranged trees, would be inspirational for students of higher learning. The site was approved in 1838.<sup>15</sup>

During the earliest phases of Madison’s development, the “second hill” encompassed the entirety of what are today referred to as Bascom Hill and Observatory Hill. Bascom Hill represents the slope that faces northeast and Observatory Hill the slope facing northwest. Bascom Hill was conceived and developed in direct relation to the capitol: its relation to Lake Mendota considered only as secondary association. The portion of the hill directly north of the Bascom Hill slope is today referred to as John Muir Park. The name Observatory Hill was first applied when construction of the Washburn Observatory began in 1878.

## Early Construction and Agriculture on Observatory Hill, 1855-1899

The building known today at the Observatory Hill Office Building was constructed around 1855 for Loring Guild, a Madison merchant. Several years later, in 1864, Professor Daniel Reed bought the home and lived there until 1866 (see figure 4). The building was sold to the university in 1866 and served as the home of the president of the university during the next twelve years. In 1878, when construction of the observatory began, the building became the home of the director of the observatory.<sup>16</sup> The building is known today as the Observatory Hill Office Building and serves as an important link to the earliest days of campus development.

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<sup>15</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Director’s Residence, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 4: Observatory Director's Residence (currently Observatory Hill Office Building), circa 1870-1891. Building on right side of photo is the Old Gymnasium, which was constructed in 1870 and burned in 1891.**

The earliest map of the hill indicates the presence of an orchard on the northern slope around 1870 (see figure 5-6). During this period, the university began developing an experimental farm on the hill and on lands situated to the west. A variety of small fruits and other crops were grown on the farm; cattle also grazed. In April 1892, the *Daily Cardinal* indicated that a new horticultural garden would be established on the University Farm.

There is to be--indeed the work has already begun--an addition to the horticultural division of this department that will be a credit to the University, and especially to Professor Goff, whose ability is more widely recognized every day. It has been decided that the part of the University Farm lying between the Dairy Building, on the one side, and Lake Mendota on the other, is to be turned into a horticultural garden. ... Work has already begun and there will immediately be planted apple, pear, plum, peach and cherry trees, and also small fruit. The ground will be enclosed by a woven wire fence. ...One feature of the enterprise will be to test the value of irrigation. In seasons of drought it is proposed to pump water from Lake Mendota by steam engine or windmill. The irrigation will be practical, especially on small fruit and garden crops. ...The ground has a fine location, lying as it does on the slope toward Lake Mendota, from which there is an unobstructed view. It will be beautiful to see, and a point from which the beautiful can be seen to advantage.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"A Garden by the Lake," *The Daily Cardinal*, April 23, 1892.

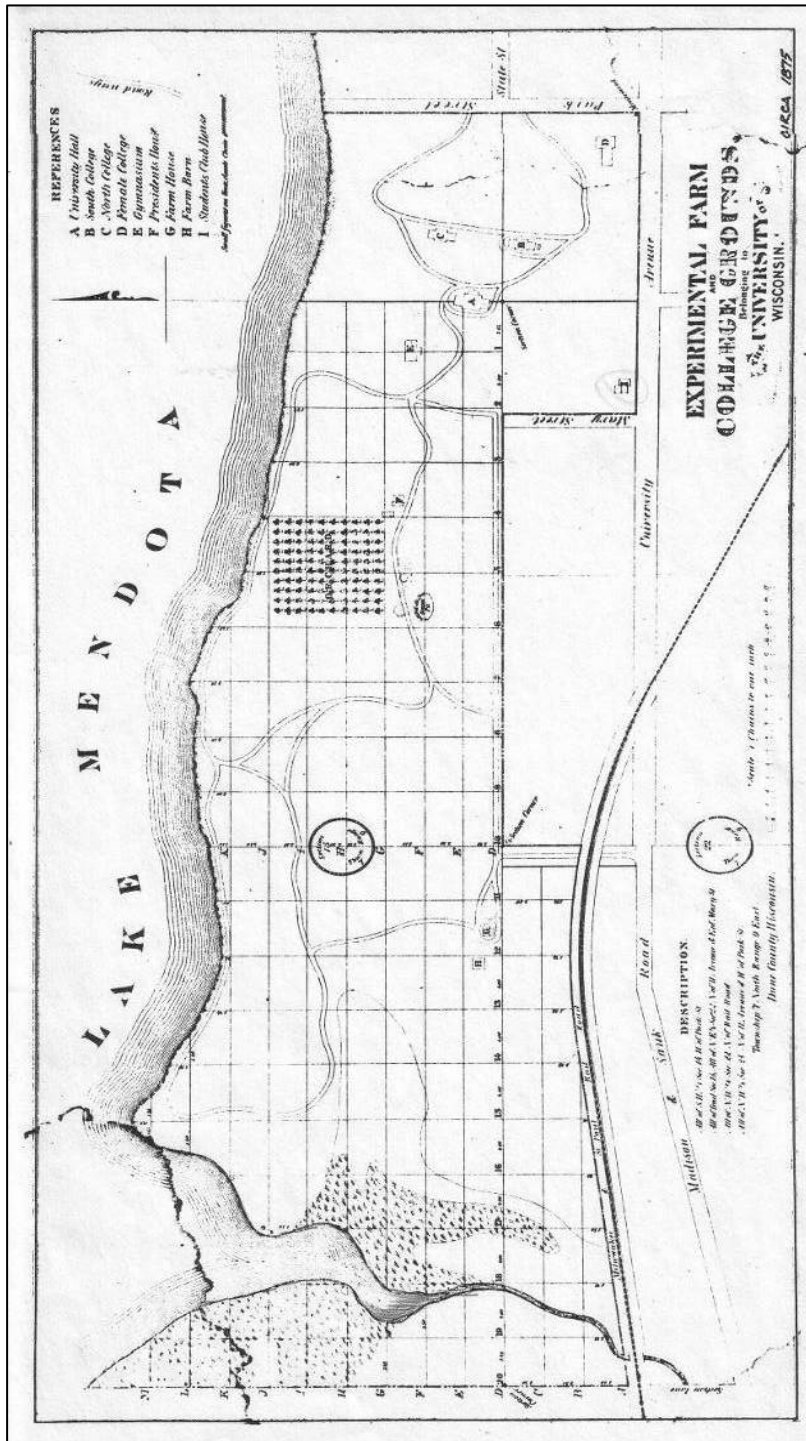


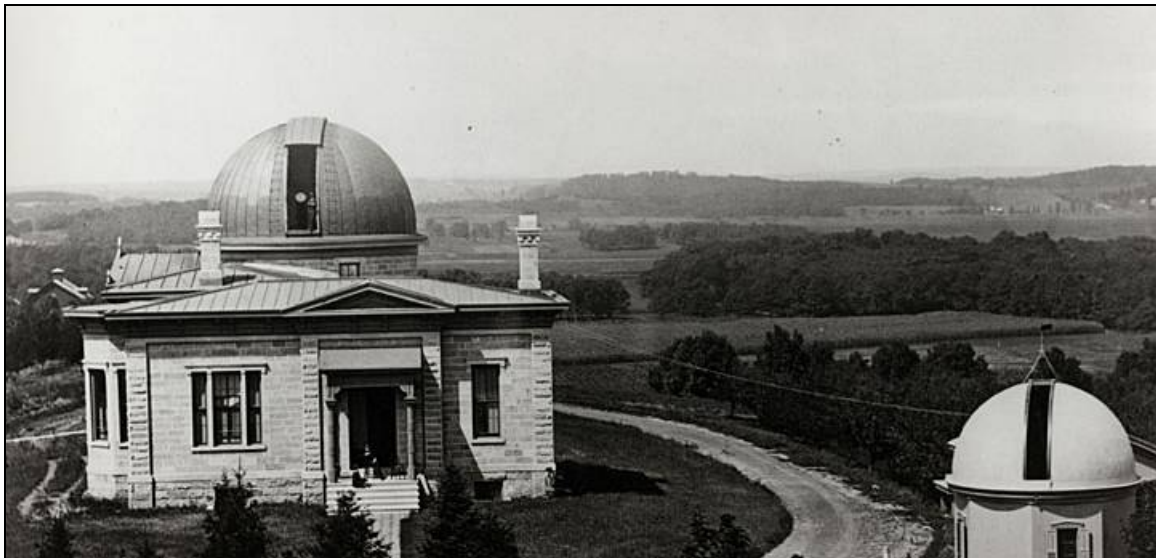
Figure 5: Experimental Farm, circa 1870-74.



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The University Farm provided a place for various types of crops to be grown and closely monitored. Its close proximity to the campus had advantages for scientific experiments and teaching opportunities, but there were also disadvantages; people trampled crops, moved or destroyed labels, and picked fruit. Eventually, the farm was used for experiments in dairying and feed stock.<sup>18</sup>

By the time construction of the Washburn Observatory began in 1878, the slope of Observatory Hill was covered with orchards and a vineyard (see figure 7 and 11).<sup>19</sup> Former Governor Cadwallader C. Washburn funded construction of the observatory, which was equipped with “superior facilities for investigations in astronomical science.”<sup>20</sup> The building was completed in 1882.<sup>21</sup> Built of local buff colored sandstone, the observatory is Italianate in style with classical details.<sup>22</sup> The building measures eighty feet along the east-west axis, forty-two feet north to south and has a 48-foot high dome. The architect, chosen by Washburn himself, was D.R. Jones of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.<sup>23</sup> Jones also designed Music Hall.



**Figure 7: Washburn Observatory and the Student Observatory, post-1880.**

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<sup>18</sup>Merle Curti and Vernon Carstenson. *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1848-1925, Vol. 2*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1949, 469.

<sup>19</sup>Bob Bless, “Washburn Observatory 1878,” May 1978, 1.

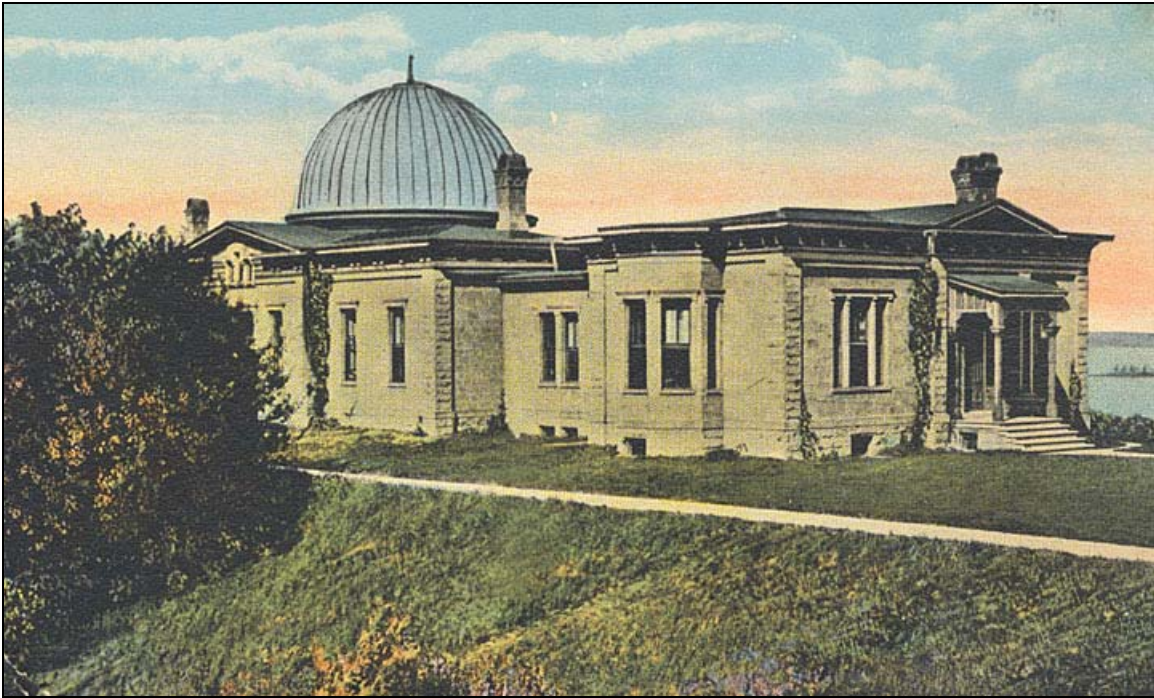
<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, and the Wisconsin Electronic Reader (WER), Chapter 8, “History of the University of Wisconsin,” <http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/WIReader/Thwaites/Chapter08.html>

<sup>21</sup>National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Director’s Residence, 1985.

<sup>22</sup>Gordon D. Orr Jr., “Perspectives of a University, A Survey of the Campus *Architectural, Historical, Archaeological and Memorial Resources and Recommendations for Preservation*.” Report prepared for the University of Wisconsin Department of Planning and Construction, 1978.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*





**Figure 8: Washburn Observatory postcard, date unknown.**

Before the construction of the observatory was complete, James Craig Watson, the university's first astronomer, determined that intense use of the valuable equipment by students could be devastating. To protect the equipment and provide more workspace, construction of a Student Observatory was undertaken in 1880. The one-story frame building was completed in 1882. It was 45 feet long and contained a seven-foot dome and a twelve-by-fourteen foot transit room. The building was situated east of the Washburn Observatory and contained a six-inch Clark refracting telescope (see figure 9).<sup>24</sup> For many years the structure was used by students for research purposes, however, when the department left the Washburn Observatory in 1959, the Student Observatory was donated to the Madison Astronomical Society.<sup>25</sup> In 1960, the Student Observatory building and dome were moved to 5512 Bjorksten Place in Fitchburg (part of Fitchburg Center) and re-named the Oscar Meyer Observatory. It was used by the Astronomical Society until the mid-1980s, at which time light pollution made the site unsuitable.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Director's Residence, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Feldman, *The Buildings of the University of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1997), 48.

<sup>26</sup> Nomination form for Fitchburg historic landmark designation. Undated. Facility Planning and Management files.



**Figure 9: The Student Observatory, located east of the Washburn Observatory on Observatory Hill, ca. 1930s.**

Shortly after the construction of the Washburn Observatory, Watson designed a Solar Observatory, located on the north facing slope of Observatory Hill, just to the west of Washburn Observatory (fig 10). Watson hoped that this unique observatory would allow him to search for a hypothetical planet within the orbit of Mercury. He named his theoretical planet, Vulcan.

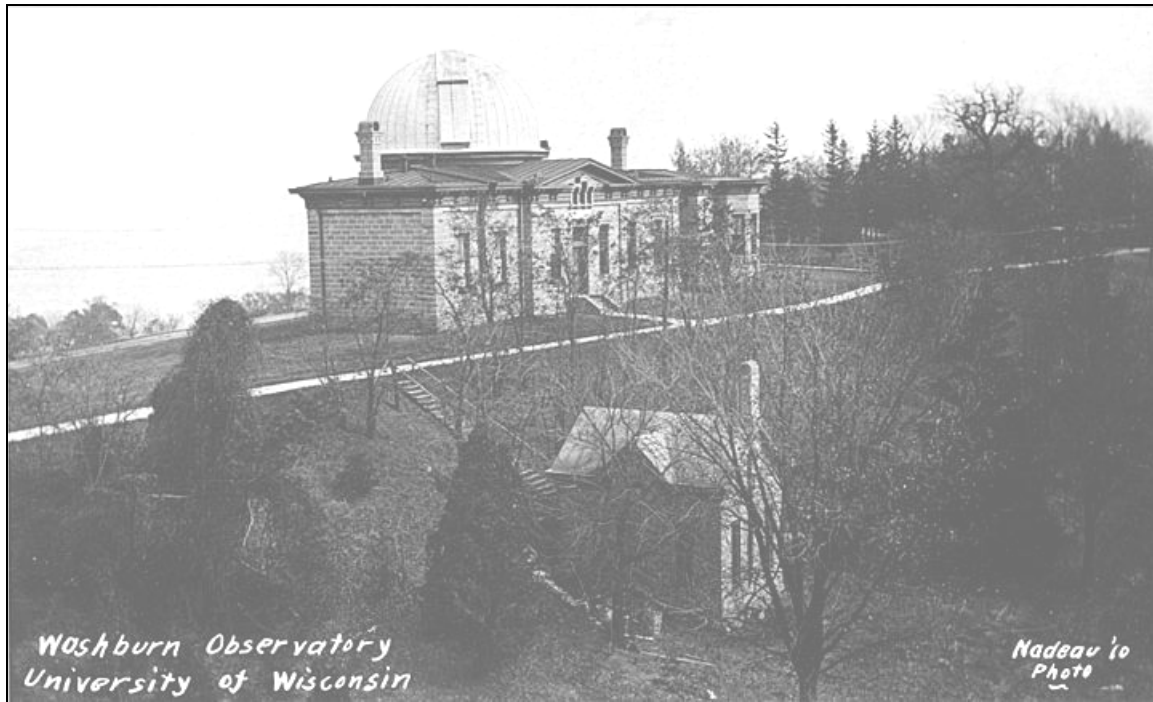
The Solar Observatory consisted of a 16 by 20 foot stone structure with a twenty-foot deep cellar. A 12-inch tilted shaft extended from the cellar through the crest of Observatory Hill to a “pier on the surface of the north side of the hill where a mirror could reflect any part of the sky down the tube to a six inch telescope ....”<sup>27</sup> Watson’s design for this observatory was based on the principle that at midday one can observe stars from the bottom of a well.

Watson died in November of 1880 before he was able to conclude his Vulcan experiment. His successor pursued the search for the planet, but soon concluded that this particular device could neither prove or disprove the existence of Vulcan. The project was abandoned shortly after. The odd little building was subsequently referred to as “Watson’s Mystery House.”

In the years that followed, the structure was used for book storage and to house observatory assistants. In 1949, as the building was being torn down it caught fire, drawing a crowd of 250 students to watch the spectacle.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Holden, Edward S., *Publications of the Washburn Observatory*, Vol. 1, pg. 36. UW-Archives, Series 7/4/1.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Feldman, *The Buildings of the University of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1997), 44.



**Figure 10: Washburn Observatory and Solar Observatory (Watson's Mystery House), post-1880.**

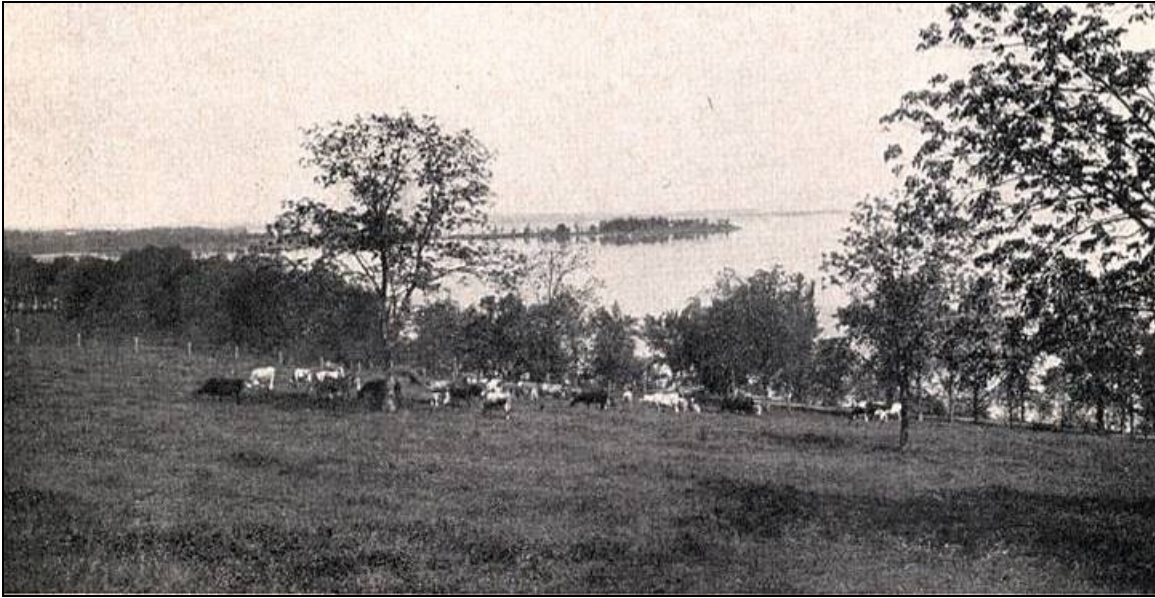
The site for the Washburn Observatory was received enthusiastically. In 1882, university president John Bascom wrote,

On a spot not to be surpassed in beauty, a beauty of which he stood in lively recognition, he [Washburn] has built an observatory, ample in its outfit for the continuous pursuit of science which deals with conceptions of the widest scope and most tranquil character of any that find access from the physical world to the mind of man. Most happy was he, obeying the promptings of a wise mind and generous heart, in placing a monument in his name at a point which the beauty of earth and the peace of heaven touch each other and mingle in eternal fellowship. Feelings already sacred unite themselves to associations already grand as one comes within the large physical and intellectual horizon of Observatory Hill, bearing memorials on its front, after the brief history of four years, the names of James C. Watson and Cadwallader C. Washburn.<sup>29</sup>

For many years the Washburn Observatory served a fundamental role in astronomical research at the university, becoming well known across the United States. However, as the university grew, development near the observatory impacted its basic use; the once isolated area became the site of the most logical area for expansion of the university. This began before the turn of the century, as buildings were constructed to serve the needs of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. By 1896 Hiram Smith and King Hall had been constructed in close proximity to the observatory and the slopes of the hill were used for agricultural endeavors.

<sup>29</sup>“Observatory Hill,” Subject File, University of Wisconsin Archives.

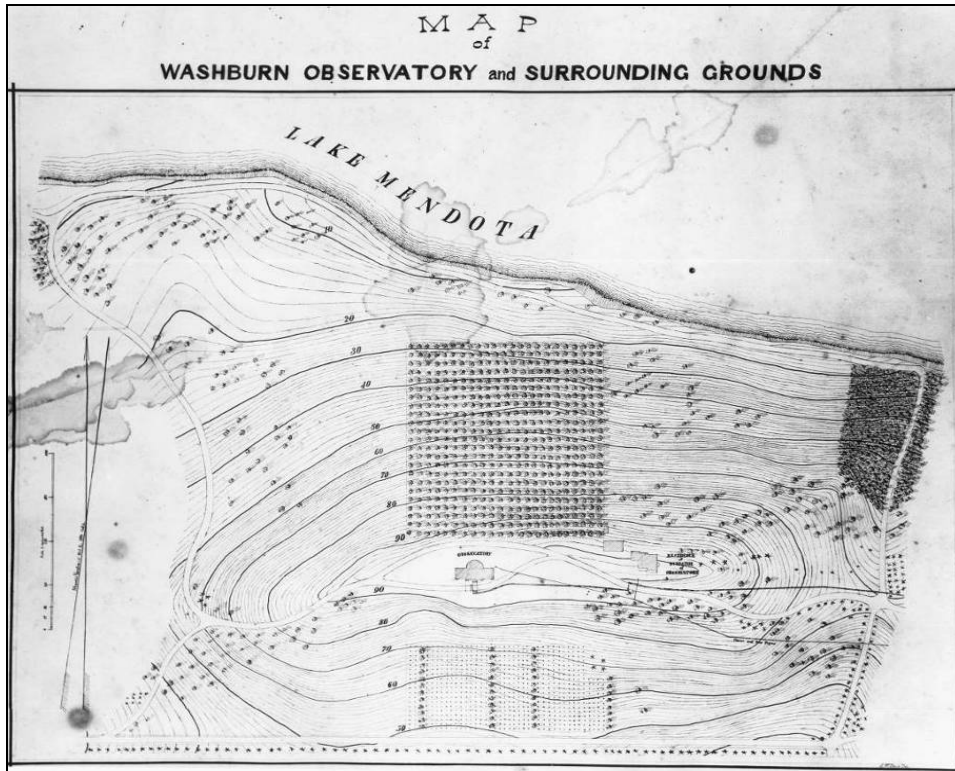




**Figure 11: Cattle grazing near the base of Observatory Hill, ca. 1900s. Picnic Point visible on horizon.**



**Figure 12: Cattle grazing with the Student Observatory in the background post 1880.**



**Figure 13: Map of Observatory Hill and surrounding grounds, circa. 1880. Note location and size of the orchard on the northern slopes of Observatory Hill.**

In 1899, a portion of the Camp Randall property was used for cattle pasture by the College of Agriculture. A proposal to use the Camp Randall site as a golf course, however, led to the suggestion of Observatory Hill as an alternative pasture.<sup>30</sup> Farm crops, the horticultural garden and an orchard were also located on Observatory Hill. According to Charles E. Brown, writing on the origins of the orchard,

The first plantings in the present experimental orchard on Observatory Hill were made in about 1891. The original orchard was started for the purpose of trying out new varieties of apple trees in an endeavor to find some which were desirable and were sufficiently hardy for Wisconsin weather conditions ... In the northern half of this orchard there were planted in alternating rows a rural named variety and a rural seedling. The seedlings were from seed sown by Prof. E.F. Goff, the first horticulturalist at the University station. When the seedling trees began to bear fruit, those which were considered undesirable were removed. This test was at its height in 1905 and 1908... The orchard just north of the Observatory was set out in about 1902 or 1903... The northern half of this orchard was started in 1907. This orchard is being used primarily to furnish different varieties of fruits for the use of the students in the study of systematic pomology.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence, 12 April 1899, Deans Henry and Russell File, Series 9/1/1/5-1, University of Wisconsin Archives

<sup>31</sup> Charles E. Brown, *The Trees of Campus*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Museum, 1925.

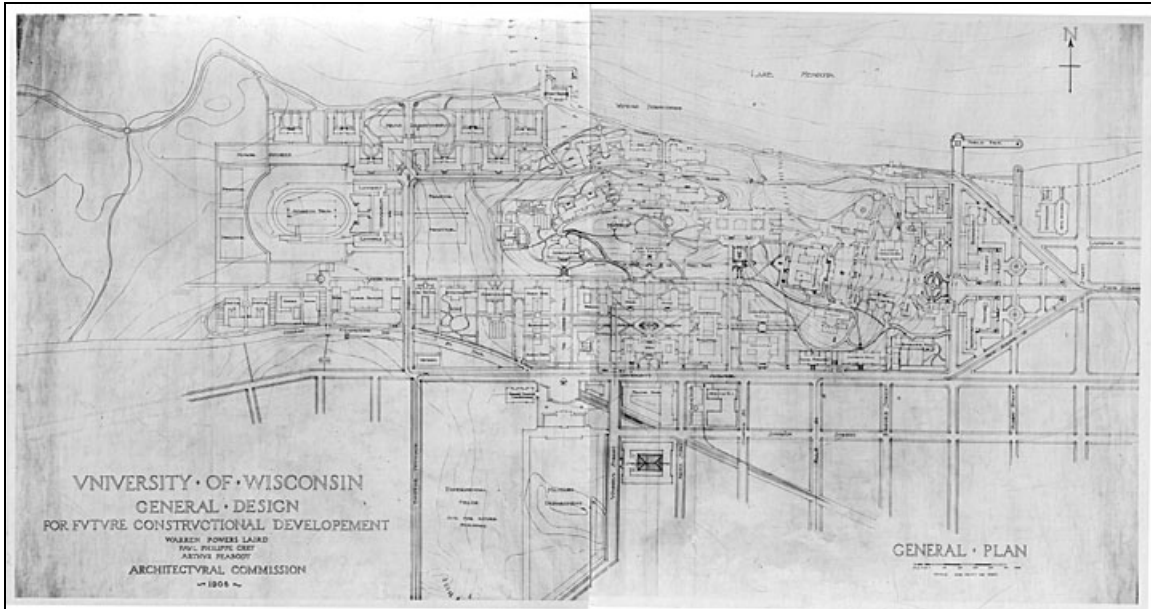
Another account indicates that the earliest orchard on campus was located nearby, at the site of Hiram Smith Hall. The Eleventh Annual Report of the Agricultural Experiment Station, made in 1894, indicated that, “The last trees of the apple orchard formerly planted on our Experiment Station farm were removed in the fall of 1891, to make room for the new Dairy School Building. The planting of fruit trees for a new orchard was commenced in 1889 and has been continued to the present time, more or less trees having been planted each spring.”<sup>32</sup> That same report indicated that after six years the trees were not producing well: “Thus far trees on our new orchard, which is located on a north slope adjacent to the Horticultural building, have borne so little that no report of them seemed called for.”<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 14: The lower slope of Observatory Hill, circa 1916. Notice the fences, which may indicate the use of this land as pasture or other agricultural purposes.**

<sup>32</sup> Eleventh Annual Report of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin for the year ending June 30, 1894, Madison, Wisconsin: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1895, 343.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 343-344.



**Figure 15: University of Wisconsin General Design for Future Constructional Development, 1908. Notice the plan for dormitory development on the northern slopes of Observatory Hill.**

A master plan for the campus was developed in 1908. The plan included major developments throughout the western portion of campus, including on Observatory Hill, which worried observatory director George Comstock (see figure 15). In his report to the regents in 1908, Comstock urged the following:

I desire to urge upon your consideration, at this time, the serious damage that may be inflicted upon the observatory as a research institution through the erection of university buildings in its immediate proximity. The college of agriculture and the central heating plant are illustrations of such injurious proximity to which the observatory may properly submit from considerations of the general university welfare. Much more serious damage would result from placing any university building in or near the meridian of the observatory, and I desire to record here my formal protest against such location.<sup>34</sup>

Comstock continued to express his concern over the increasing threat of university expansion on the observatory over the next two years. He reaffirmed his fears to the regents in 1910:

The past two years has been a period of much anxiety with respect to the encroachment of new buildings upon the space surrounding the observatory, but this matter has already been so fully brought to your attention that I need not here repeat the tale of injury that threatens its scientific work. The growth of the university will doubtless require at some future time the removal of the

<sup>34</sup>The University of Wisconsin. Biennial Report of the Board of Regents for the Years 1906-1907 and 1907-1908, 173.



observatory to a more remote site, if its scientific activity is to be preserved. Such removal will, however, so impair its educational service to the community as to be undesirable so long as tolerable conditions can be maintained in the present site.<sup>35</sup>

Comstock was not the only person concerned with increased development on campus. In 1906, the Committee on Buildings and Grounds stated their distaste for development on the lakeshore, a site proposed for dormitories in the 1908 plan. The committee recommended the following concerning the lake front:

This distinctive feature of the University is the beautiful Lake Mendota. It seems to this Committee that every effort should be made to preserve the lake front free from buildings and unsightly objects. Undoubtedly the necessities of the University may force it to use some of the lake front for buildings, but there seems no reason for using it for a dumping ground for ashes and other refuse. Such, however, seems to be the use to which the lake front near the old chemical laboratory is put. This Committee would earnestly recommend that steps be taken to clear the lake shore of all unsightly debris and that its natural beauty be, so far as possible, preserved.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>The University of Wisconsin. Biennial Report of the Board of Regents for the Years 1908-1909 and 1909-1910, 265-266.

<sup>36</sup>The University of Wisconsin. Biennial Report of the Regents of the University for the Years 1904-1905 and 1905-1906, 203.







Observatory Hill (rev 2010).doc

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## Agriculture and Recreation, 1900-1925

On the south side of the hill new buildings were added around the turn of the century, a time when concerns about development around the observatory were already an issue. Certain details of the plans for Agricultural Hall (constructed 1901-1903), for example, were modified by university officials to take the observatory into account: "We are forced to use hard coal because of the proximity to Washburn Observatory."<sup>37</sup>

An addition to the Observatory Hill Office Building, designed by J.T.W. Jennings, was added in 1903.<sup>38</sup> After Jennings's addition, little has changed on the structure. Construction of the Home Economics and Extension Building (currently Human Ecology) began in 1911; the building was ready for occupation by 1914.

Development also threatened the preservation of the effigy mounds on Observatory Hill. In 1904, Reuben Gold Thwaites, university regent and director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, argued passionately for the preservation of the mounds: "an institution which stands for the advancement of knowledge among men can ill afford to allow its own historical memorials to become prey of an unappreciative spirit which has already worked irremediable damage."<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, mounds were destroyed in the name of expansion across the campus.

By 1904 the two extant mounds had been damaged as a result of the construction of sidewalks, a road (that clips the bird effigy's eastern wingtip) and the installation of underground utilities.<sup>40</sup> Two additional mounds on the hill were severely damaged. The installation of a terraced apple orchard impacted a portion of a 60-foot linear mound. The remaining section of the linear mound, as well as a water spirit (panther) mound with a 100-foot tail and a 40-foot body were present as late as 1922. Erosion caused by livestock degraded the surface features of these mounds.<sup>41</sup> Four years after Thwaites urged preservation, two descriptive wooden markers were placed near the bird and two tailed water spirit (turtle) mounds; the markers were replaced with metal tablets, on concrete bases, nearly six years later at a formal dedication ceremony.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Correspondence, 20 September 1902, Regents Report to Farm Committee, Series 9/1/1-2, University of Wisconsin Archives, Madison...

<sup>38</sup>Feldman, *The Buildings of the University of Wisconsin*, 1997, 14.

<sup>39</sup>Reuben G. Thwaites, "Our Prehistoric Earthworks—A Suggestion to the Regents," *The Wisconsin Engineer*, April 1904

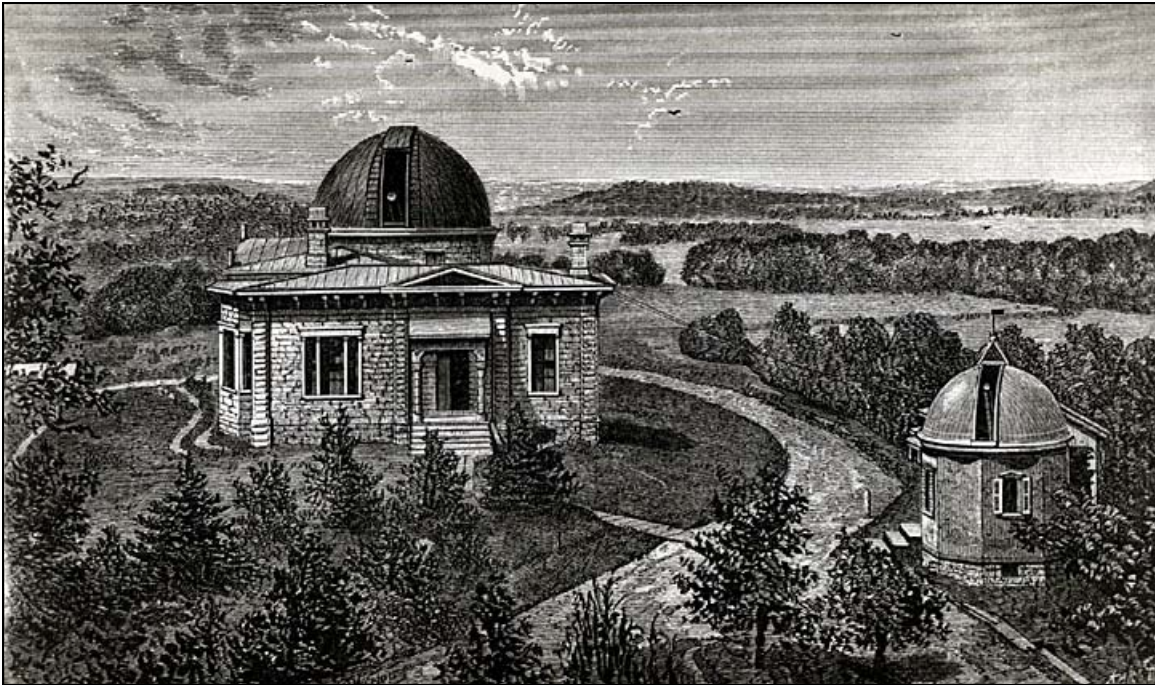
<sup>40</sup>National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Observatory Hill Mound Group, 2003; and "Editorial," *The Wisconsin Engineer*, April 1904.

<sup>41</sup>Brown, Charles E., Papers, Box 21, "Observatory Hill Mounds," Wisconsin Historical Society; and National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 2003.

<sup>42</sup>Brown, "Marking Historical Sites at Madison," *The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1914.



**Figure 17: Fence lines and the edge of the orchards and horticultural gardens at the base of Observatory Hill, circa 1913.**



**Figure 18: Lithograph of the Washburn Observatory and the Student Observatory, post-1880.**



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## View from Observatory Hill

From atop Observatory Hill, one can see much of Lake Mendota and its shoreline. Preserving this view from encroachment has been a long challenge. In a 1906 letter to President Charles Van Hise observatory director Comstock requested the relocation of a building that obstructed views of the lake:

Permit me to call to your attention the case presented by the horse-cart house, recently erected near the Washburn Observatory. The site for this house has been ill-chosen, in that it interferes seriously with what is, perhaps, the finest view to be had from the University grounds.<sup>43</sup>

Comstock's request was supported by architect Arthur Peabody who requisitioned funds to relocate the offending building; it appears that the building was moved soon after the request.

In 1912, an outdoor campus theater was suggested, proposed first for Bascom Woods (now John Muir Park) and then on Observatory Hill.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to the *Daily Cardinal*, Ruth Green suggested that constructing the theater at Bascom Woods would require the removal of the "only piece of natural timber on campus," and that it would "ruin the most attractive part of Lover's Lane, and would completely spoil the outlook from the northern side of the campus over the lake." She suggested, instead, that the theater be placed on Observatory Hill, "to the left of where the toboggan slide now is." She pointed out that the slope was suitable for the use, and that the fruit trees would make a "fine background for any performance." She argued that this location would preserve the view from the lake and the drive (now the Howard Temin Lakeshore Path), stating that "one could scarcely ask for a more beautiful view than that from Observatory hill, over Lake Mendota, to Picnic Point."<sup>45</sup>

The May 1914, *Daily Cardinal* reported that a new permanent "Greek sylvan theater" was under construction on the shore of Lake Mendota. This theater was to replace the temporary one on Observatory Hill, which was, reportedly, not ideal due to automobile noise.<sup>46</sup> By May 1916, the *Daily Cardinal* however, reports that an amphitheater was under construction behind Main Hall (Bascom Hall):

The stage is a reinforced elevation of rocks, soil, and turf at the foot of the hill where a large cluster of pine trees forms a background. The hillside terrace affords a seating capacity for five thousand. So far however, only one thousand seats have been secured which will be permanently available.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> University of Wisconsin Archives, Madison, Series 24/8/10.

<sup>44</sup> "Greek Theater for University," *Daily Cardinal*, March 27, 1912, 1.

<sup>45</sup> "Editorial," *Daily Cardinal*, April 23, 1912, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Cardinal* May 1914.

<sup>47</sup> "Make Permanent Out Door Theater," *Daily Cardinal*, May 12, 1916.



**Figure 19: Open Air Theater, ca. 1916.**

### **Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association and its Relationship with Observatory Hill**

Historically, the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association (MPPDA) had strong ties to the university. The *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine* described the relationship in 1902: “Though the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association is not in any sense a University organization, it is one of much interest and importance to the University. This is true because University professors and alumni are largely represented among its officers and its most active members; and chiefly because the more extensive of the two series of drives maintained by the association begins on the University grounds and is a continuation of the campus walks and drives.”<sup>48</sup>

Later, in the MPPDA’s 1907 Annual Report, a route for the proposed Boulevard Drive, which would pass over Observatory Hill, was suggested:

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<sup>48</sup> “The Madison Drives,” *The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June 1902, 348.

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“From Capital Square via Monona avenue to Wilson Street, thence to Bassett, to Brittingham Park, to West Washington avenue via Brittingham Park drive, to Warren street on West Washington avenue, to Henry Vilas Park, to Van Buren street through Henry Vilas Park, to Monroe street, to Spooner street, to Chadbourne avenue, to Roby road, to Summit avenue, to Ely place, to Prospect avenue, to University avenue, to Breese Terrace extended northeast to Linden drive, thence traversing in the rear of Agricultural Hall along the summit of the ridge in the University grounds, passing by the Washburn Observatory and Main Hall on its front and reaching Park street just south of State street, thence to Langdon street, to Wisconsin avenue,....”<sup>49</sup>

A portion of the drive was constructed by 1908, with plans to continue construction in the following years.<sup>50</sup> Existing university drives were incorporated into this plan, improved upon, rather than constructed by, the MPPDA.

In 1920, an article in *The Country Magazine* described the view from the hill:

Let us follow this walk to the summit of that hill where the dome of the Washburn Observatory gleams brightly against the sky. From here, the highest promontory on the campus, we can get our first glimpses of the many enchanting views and enticing vistas that lay about us....Spread out beneath us on the southern and western slopes of the hill are the numerous college buildings with their red-tiled roofs and pleasing architectural lines. A murmuring grove of evergreens well nigh closes the vista to the southward, revealing between its branches, tantalizing bits of scenery that make us want to explore the beauties that lie beyond.<sup>51</sup>

## The Toboggan Slide

The first toboggan slide on Observatory Hill was reportedly constructed in 1886. It was replaced in 1911 by a new wooden run, 600-feet long and 3-feet wide, with an additional 600 feet cleared out onto the lake.<sup>52</sup>

In January of 1921 *The Capital Times* reported that, “Two new toboggan slides have been built on Observatory Hill by the Physical Education Department. They follow the contour of the hill, bridge over the drive and go out on the lake for a quarter of a mile.”<sup>53</sup> The Department of Physical Education was enthusiastic to revive tobogganing as a sport, and the location was praised by department head T. E. Jones: “Observatory Hill with the lake beyond, offers opportunities for tobogganing that are equaled by few other universities.”<sup>54</sup> Tobogganing on Observatory Hill became a popular sport among many

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<sup>49</sup>Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association Annual Report, 1907, 52-54.

<sup>50</sup>Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association Annual Report, 1908, 49-50.

<sup>51</sup>John Pinney. “Strolling Around the Campus: Where the Winding Paths Lead to New Surprises,” *The Country Magazine*, University of Wisconsin, June 1920.

<sup>52</sup>The University of Wisconsin Collection, UW-Archives, photo caption for image 24/14/4.

<sup>53</sup>“Toboggan Slides to Revive Sport,” *The Capital Times*, 13 January 1921.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

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university students. So much so that the Class of 1933 gave a donation to help the Hoofers construct a new concrete toboggan slide.<sup>55</sup> The new slide was “complete with water lines for icing the chute, safety gates, and an automatic toboggan release, all designed to achieve greater speed and safety than in the old dirt chutes.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, these toboggan chutes were illuminated for nighttime use (see figure 20-21).<sup>57</sup>

In 1939, a toboggan slide was considered for University Woods (also known as Bascom Woods and now John Muir Park Woods), but it was decided that a new slide would detract from the “spiritual and humanizing influences of native growing plants, beautiful landscape, and unusual expressions of natural beauty are coming to be recognized more and more in this highly industrialized age...The construction of a toboggan slide in the University Woods would seem to endanger many of those values which should be conserved for Wisconsin’s future.”<sup>58</sup> Today, areas of Observatory Hill near the dormitories are still used as sledding area; however, toboggans are seldom used for sledding anymore, replaced by lunch trays.

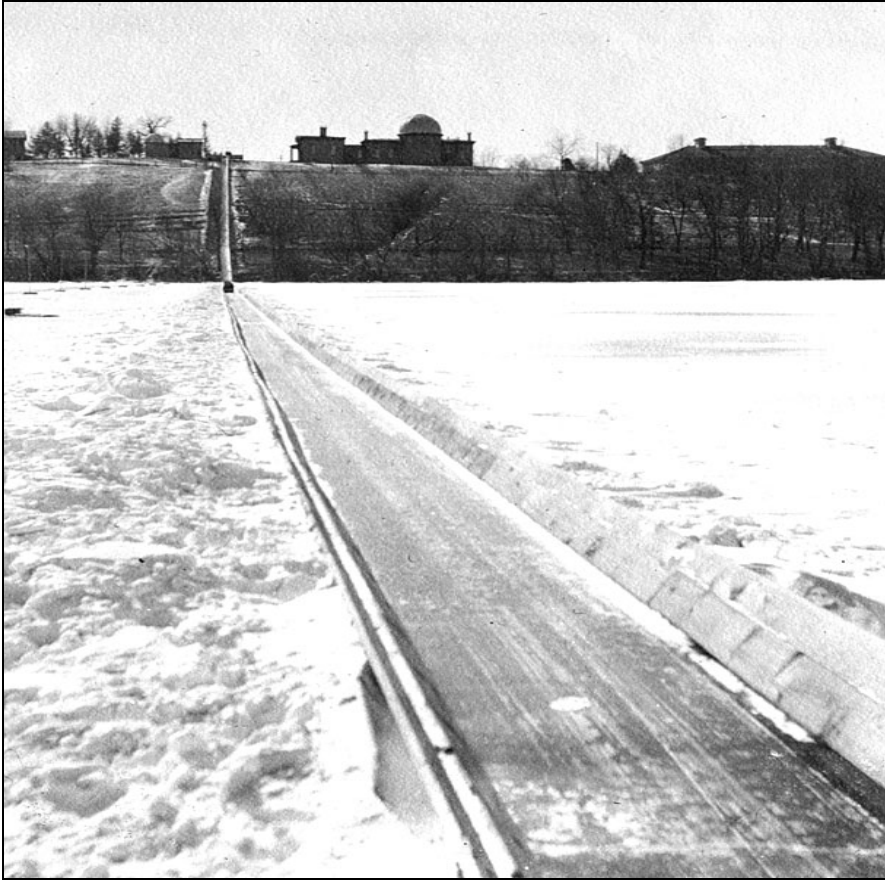
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<sup>55</sup> David E. Cronon and John W. Jenkins. The University of Wisconsin: A History: Politics, Depression and War, Vol. 3 (1925-1945). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, 660.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 658; also “A Report on the Location of a Toboggan Slide for the Use of University Students” 18 July 1939, Facilities and Planning and Management file.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.



**Figure 20: Toboggan slide on Observatory Hill looking south towards the Washburn Observatory, ca. 1930s.**



**Figure 21: Students near the toboggan slide on Observatory Hill, ca. 1930s. Note the orchard on the left side of the photo.**

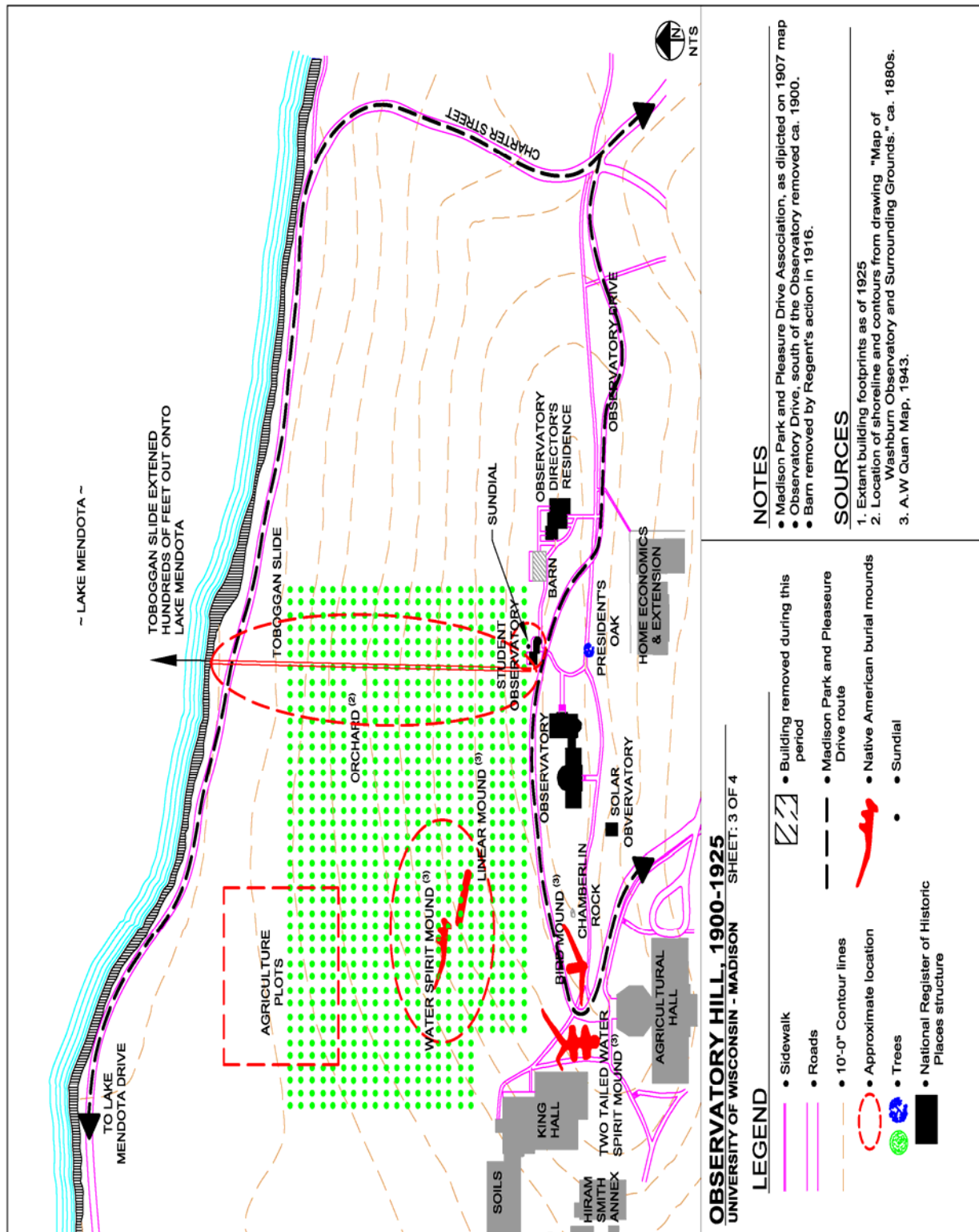


Figure 22: Historic Period Plan, 1900-1925.





**Figure 23: Aerial campus view, 1923. (Wisconsin General Hospital under construction.)**  
Note agricultural fields near the base of Observatory Hill as well as the orchard on the slope of the hill.



**Figure 24: Aerial campus view, circa 1926. Note the orchard on Observatory Hill and construction of Carson Gulley Commons.**

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## **Residence Halls and the realignment of Observatory Drive, 1926-1961**

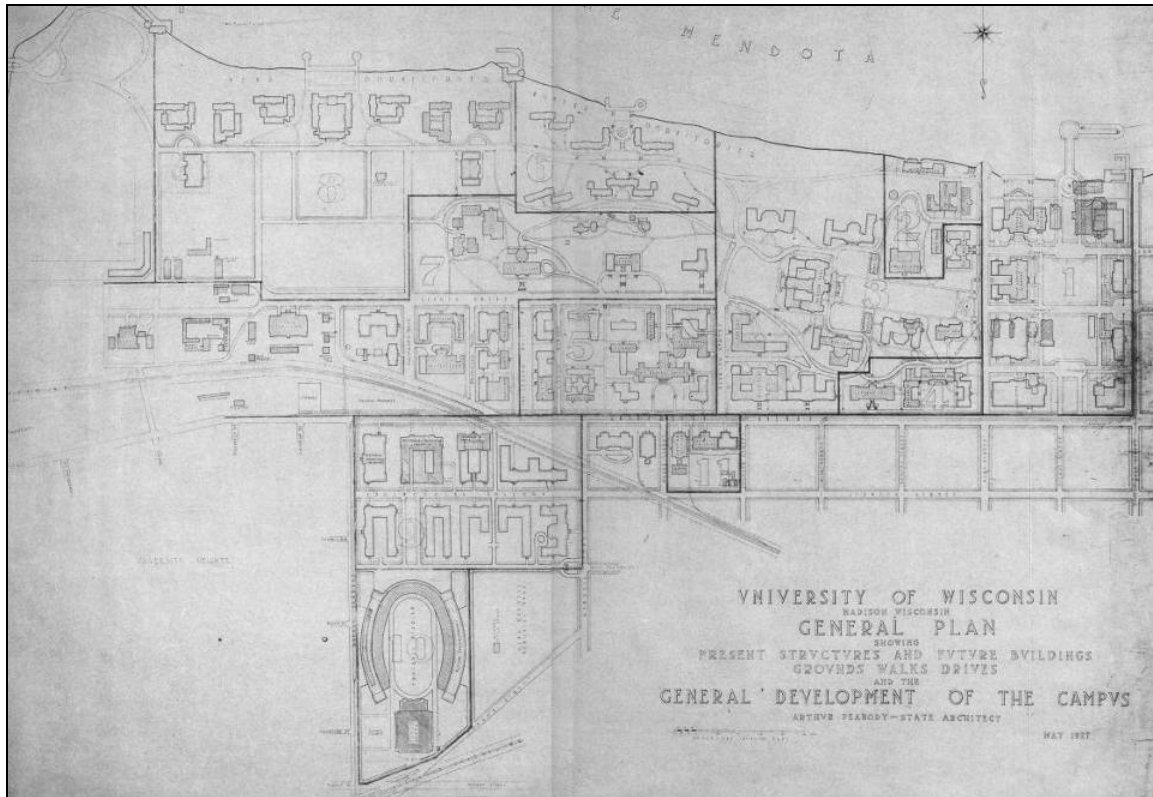
University sentiment toward the use of Observatory Hill began to shift in the mid 1920s. During this period, Observatory Hill began to change from an agricultural area to a residential and recreational area. The first significant shift occurred with the construction of Adams and Tripp halls near the northern base of the hill in 1926. Shortly after construction was complete, the 1927 University of Wisconsin General Plan of Development was completed, which called for wide-scale development of student housing on Observatory Hill (see figure 25).

The construction of Adams and Tripp halls in 1926 resulted in the abandonment of the orchard on Observatory Hill. According to James G. Moore, of the Horticulture Department, “(We) have found it necessary to find a new location for the orchard and small fruits. It is the intention of the Horticulture Department to have a much larger and more conveniently planned orchard for both small and tree fruits.” A new orchard was planned for the Raymer Farm (near present day University Houses at Eagle Heights). Of the new site, Moore said, “It is expected that this new plan will give better opportunity for studying various phasing of orcharding than they have heretofore been able to do, and they will not be handicapped by lack of sufficient space to carry out their work with greater accuracy.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>“Professor Moore Tells of New Orchard Site,” The Wisconsin Country Life Magazine, June 1926, 293.





**Figure 25: University of Wisconsin General Plan of Development, 1927. Note the proposed development on Observatory Hill.**

In June 1926, a reporter from the *Wisconsin Country Magazine* described the landscape change occurring on Observatory Hill: "Just as in the days of our forefathers the virgin timber gave way to homes of Wisconsin Pioneers, so has the university orchard given way to a massive home for Wisconsin's future leaders."<sup>60</sup> The author also commented on the conversion of agricultural land to residential use:

The possibility of housing five hundred students in the heart of the agricultural campus is already beginning to cause changes. The horticultural plots and orchards are being moved near Hill Farm, two miles distant. Many of the nearby experimental fields will be used for athletics, making it necessary to establish new agricultural plots. The pressure of increased enrollment is thrusting the agricultural buildings and activities farther westward, rather than toward the closely built up eastern side of campus.<sup>61</sup>

The article concluded by describing a vision of the hill for the future: "With paths laid out and velvety lawns, varied by shrubs and trees, for a setting, this new beehive of student activity which nestles under Observatory Hill, will take on added beauty and be a harmonious and beautiful addition to the buildings already on our campus."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup>Ralph K. Jacobs, "Another Symbol of Advancement," *The Wisconsin Country Magazine*, June 1926, 277.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>62</sup>Jacobs, 1926, 284.

Two years later, in 1929, Michael Olbrich conducted a study of student housing and wrote an ambitious two-phase plan of development for the university. The plan site stretched along “Lake Mendota from Observatory Hill to Picnic Point” and included several new dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses and faculty housing to create a “university city.”<sup>63</sup> The onset of the Great Depression affected future university development, however, and neither Olbrich’s vision nor the outlines proposed by the General Plan of 1927 were implemented. Not all building stopped, though. In 1930 the Wisconsin Council Ring was constructed on Observatory Hill. The Friends of Our Native Landscape and Jens Jensen were present at the dedication.<sup>64</sup> Information on the council ring is difficult to find, but it may have been designed by Franz Aust with input from Jensen.<sup>65</sup>

Observatory Drive was altered to its current alignment in 1934. Prior to the construction of the new drive, the road ran between the Observatory Hill Office Building and the Washburn Observatory before looping down behind Agricultural Hall to meet Linden Drive. (See figure 22.) The new route was located about 30 feet below the old road on the north slope of the hill...<sup>66</sup> The new alignment of the road changed the land use, spatial organization, views, vegetation, and sense of place of the landscape. According to the *Wisconsin Alumnus*,

Modern romance has been barred from Observatory Hill. Chains have been placed across the road leading to the hill because headlights from cars interfere with work at the Observatory. Thus the modern romance which flourishes in a parked car is no more on Observatory Hill...The chains do not bar the strolling couples who wander to the hilltop to sit on the grass because shining light orbs apparently do not distract scientists as do gleaming headlights.<sup>67</sup>

Although the orchard on Observatory Hill had been declining for several years, its demise was solidified by the realignment of Observatory Drive. By 1938, increasing university enrollment necessitated the construction of additional dormitory facilities. The Kronshage residence halls (Turner, Gilman, Mack, Showerman, Conover, Chamberlin, Jones and Swenson) were constructed in 1938 and occupied by 1939. In addition, the Elizabeth Waters Hall was constructed to house female students. *The Daily Cardinal* reported that the university planned to construct a row of men’s and women’s dormitories along Lake Mendota “without destroying the scenic effects of the observatory hill.”<sup>68</sup> Preliminary plans indicate concern on the part of the university for the preservation of the view shed from Observatory Hill:

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<sup>63</sup>Cronon and Jenkins, 1994, 120.

<sup>64</sup>“Landscape Friends Plan Ceremonies,” *The Capital Times*, 8 October 1930, 4.

<sup>65</sup>Personal e-mail correspondence with Bill Tishler, 25 October 2004.

<sup>66</sup>Leslie, G. Janett, “Campus Gets New Road,” *The Wisconsin Engineer*, January 1934, 59.

<sup>67</sup>Harry C. Thoma, “Up and Down the Hill” *Wisconsin Alumnus*, June 1937.

<sup>68</sup>“Elizabeth Waters Dormitory,” *Daily Cardinal*, 9 October 1938.

Mr. Kirchoff, State Architect, presented sketches and a plot of the proposed lake shore dormitories for women. Mr. Kirchoff suggested that these dormitories be placed between the Observatory hill road and the lake, and parallel with the road and the lake, and that the development include five connected units, with the central unit placed near the upper side of the area and the remaining units placed further down the slope toward the lake and to the east and west of the central unit. The natural grade of this area will permit the substitution of a first floor for the top floor, as the “wing” buildings are located farther down the slope, thus making it possible to adhere to the general plan of three stories and a basement in all of the five connected units.<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately, a revision of these initial plans was approved and the new women’s dormitory was open and ready for inspection on May 19, 1940.<sup>70</sup> Immediately, Elizabeth Waters Hall became a popular place for students and continues to be so today.

As the years progressed, orchards and other agriculturally-related forms of vegetation had replaced the oaken grove that originally covered Observatory Hill when John Bascom arrived in Madison. By the 1940s the orchard was in dramatic decline. Large portions of open lawn space was scattered with the remnants of old dying apple trees.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Regents Board Minutes, August 26, 1938.

<sup>70</sup>Feldman, 1997, 228.

<sup>71</sup>Madge Yohn, “All Around the Town,” July 1943. Unknown newspaper source, part of the Charles E. Brown Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.



**Figure 26: Aerial view, Tripp/Adams Halls and refectory, circa 1928. Note the orchard on Observatory Hill is in decline and Carson Gulley Commons construction is complete. A few parked cars are visible in the area east of Tripp Commons where parking lot 34 is now located.**



**Figure 27: Observatory Hill after the realignment of Observatory Drive, circa 1940-1945. Note the orchard terraces, where the fruit trees are in decline.**



**Figure 28: Aerial view, Observatory Hill, circa 1953-1960. Note the orchard continues to decline and the established parking lot 34, east of Tripp Commons.**



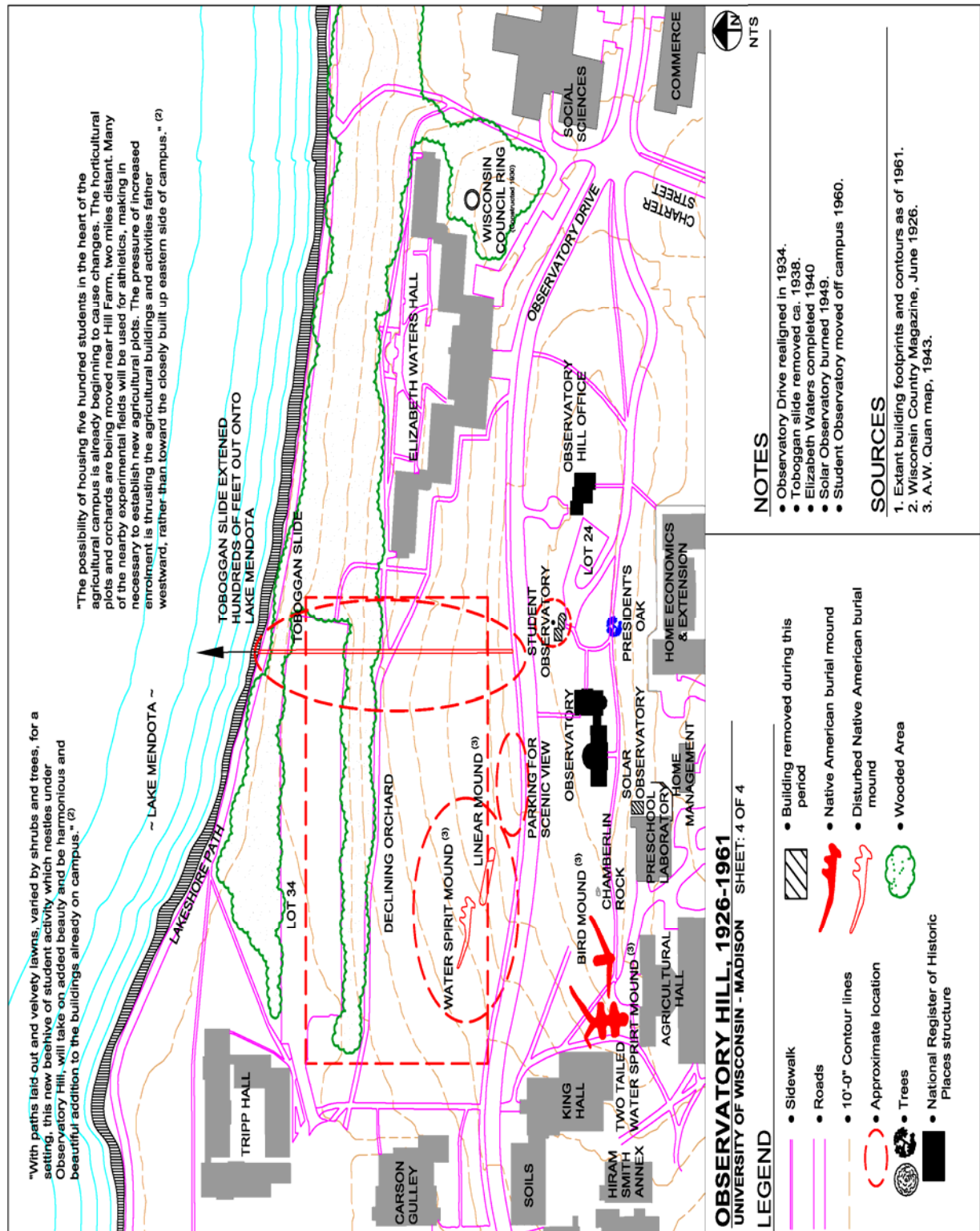
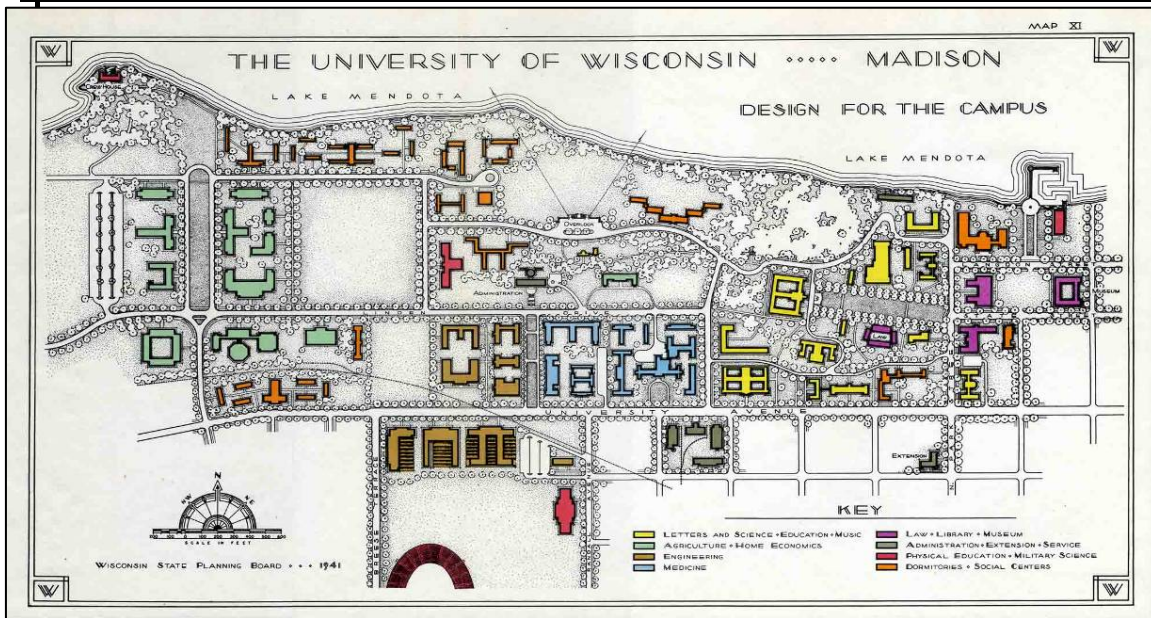


Figure 29: Period plan: 1926-1961.



**Figure 30: Campus Plan, 1941.** There is no planned development on Observatory Hill and the view from the overlook is emphasized.

In 1941, a new campus master plan was prepared. The plan indicated no new development on Observatory Hill. Rather, it emphasized the view from the overlook on Observatory Hill and indicated that the hill should be used as an open space (see figure 30).

University sentiment toward Observatory Hill changed again in the late 1950s. Rather than a space for development, Observatory Hill came to be appreciated for its natural beauty and was an area of pride for the university. The Campus Planning Commission had recommended that a women's dormitory for 500 co-eds be built between Elizabeth Waters and Tripp Hall on Lake Mendota, but the regents balked at placing a building between Observatory Hill and the view to Picnic Point. Remarking on the plan, President E.B. Fred said, "Although you could see over it, you would have to look over the rooftop to get what I consider the most scenic view on our campus."<sup>72</sup>

By the 1950s, increased light pollution from the city and the university had made it hard to see the night sky from the Washburn Observatory. As a result, the observatory was abandoned and a new observation facility was opened in 1959 near Pine Bluff, approximately 15 miles west of Madison.<sup>73</sup>

### **Contemporary Construction on Observatory Hill, Early 1960s-Present**

Concurrent with the move of the observatory to the Pine Bluff facility, the Astronomy Department also moved out of the Observatory Director's Residence (now called the Observatory Hill Office Building.). During the 1960s, the Departments of Social Work and Preventive Medicine used the Observatory Hill Office Building for a short time.

<sup>72</sup>George Richard (ed.), "Compendium" *Wisconsin Alumnus*, January 1958, 10.

<sup>73</sup>Feldman, 1997, 38.

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Then in 1973, the building housed the Program in Health Administration. In 1993, the La Follette Institute for Research in the Social Sciences moved into the building.<sup>74</sup>

Shortly after the construction of the new observatory at Pine Bluff in 1959, the university considered renovating the now vacant Washburn Observatory and using it as the new Alumni House on campus. The plan for remodeling called for “considerable interior remodeling and the addition of a wing to balance the old structure and provide added space.”<sup>75</sup> The plan was abandoned, however, when the lower campus was selected as a better location for the new alumni building.

The Institute for the Study of Humanities moved into the building and remained until a major restoration was undertaken in 2008. A \$3 million interior and exterior restoration of the structure was completed in July 2009. Careful paint sample research was performed to determine the original exterior paint scheme, resulting in the choice of a bronze tinted paint for the exterior trim. All of the original wood double sash windows were rehabilitated and new exterior storm windows were installed. Restoration work was guided by Department of Interior standards and was coordinated with the Wisconsin Historical Society. The Letters and Science Honors Program is the new primary occupants. The Astronomy Department continues to provide public tours of the telescope.

## **Observatory Hill Overlook**

In 1959, Andrew W. Hopkins wrote several articles concerning the need for protecting important, scenic views on the University of Wisconsin campus:

From points on Observatory Drive, high above Mendota’s waters, may be seen one of the finest views on any American campus... Many of those, who have visited universities throughout the country, vote this view from Observatory Hill one of the most beautiful to be found anywhere.” He continues, “...we have yet to make it possible for visitors to enjoy, in a leisurely manner, the beautiful view nature has so generously added to our campus.”<sup>76</sup>

Hopkins urged the university to provide a parking spot or overlook where visitors and students alike could enjoy the views. James Watrous, in a 1961 article, articulated much the same idea:

The panorama of the lake from Observatory Hill is matched by few in the Upper Midwest despite its interruption by ponderous masses to the East. We take delight in Lake Mendota when its presence is not obscured or stingily

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<sup>74</sup>Feldman, 1997, 19.

<sup>75</sup>George Richard (ed.), “University Considers Observatory as Site of Alumni House,” Wisconsin Alumnus, May 1960, 14.

<sup>76</sup>Andrew W. Hopkins Collection, “Nation’s Most Beautiful Campus,” Wisconsin Historical Society, November 1959.

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revealed at street ends and through peek-holes between buildings and trees. ...We no longer have a pastoral or "ivy-covered" campus. If we are to save woods and vistas, and produce greenways and concordant architecture, which will provide a sense of space and beauty, we must build upward in combinations of low and high-rise structures. To continue to build out over every parcel of land will doom the campus to being two enormous piles of brick and mortar. What once was Bascom and Observatory Hills will become sprawling mounds of masonry.<sup>77</sup>

In a December 8, 1959 letter, Hopkins asked President Conrad Elvehjem to consider rectifying the parking situation on Observatory Hill so that the visitor could enjoy the beautiful views of Lake Mendota:

From points on Observatory Drive, high above Mendota's waters, may be seen one of the finest views on any American campus. Every year large numbers of visitors to the campus are inspired by brief glimpses they are able to take of the wide expanse of Lake Mendota spread out beyond the wooded shoreline, and of Picnic Point jutting out from the mainland. Many of those, who have visited universities throughout the country, vote this view from Observatory Hill one of the most beautiful to be found anywhere. ...But—we have yet to make it possible for visitors to enjoy, in a leisurely manner, the beautiful view nature has so generously added to our campus. The south side of the Drive is given over to a reserved parking area often crowded with cars. The other side of the Drive is used, much of the daytime, by busy east and west bound traffic. This means that visitors can pause but briefly, if at all, to enjoy the beautiful scene...Why not meet the needs of our visitors by providing them with a place where they may park their cars and with an attractive seat from which they may view the lake and the surrounding landscape?<sup>78</sup>

Plans for an overlook on Observatory Hill were presented to the regents in September 1960. The proposal included new sidewalks and seating on the north side of Observatory Drive and west of Elizabeth Waters Hall.<sup>79</sup> The construction of a small overlook platform was also approved, provided that funds were available. Correspondence between William J. Hagenah, the primary donor for the project, and President Elvehjem in December of 1960 indicated Hagenah's desire to provide seating on Observatory Hill:

The brief discussion at our recent Winnetka meeting gave me a better understanding of the proposed bench and lookout on Observatory Hill.... I am firm in the view that some such addition to campus is needed and I would like to make the contribution to finance this work, once its form, extent and cost are agreed upon...It is my thought that this development will not only permit persons to stop and enjoy the scenery that unfolds before them, but

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<sup>77</sup>James S. Watrous, "The Wisconsin Campus of the Future," *Wisconsin Alumnus*, February 1961, 22-24.

<sup>78</sup>Hopkins, Andrew W. Collection, correspondence, Wisconsin Historical Society, 8 December 1959.

<sup>79</sup>Regents Board Minutes, Vol. 22, September 10, 1960.

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will also serve in a broader sense to provide the university area a quiet place for rest and meditation.<sup>80</sup>

However, Hagenah withdrew his offer to support the project when the design developed by Leo Jakobson proved more elaborate than the bench he had agreed to fund.

The Observatory Hill overlook was not constructed in the 1960s. Heavy vegetation (undergrowth) was allowed to grow on the north side of Observatory Drive and just west of Elizabeth Waters Hall. In the early 1980s, the Class of 1933 contributed \$40,000 toward the construction of the scenic overlook on the high point of Observatory Drive. According to the *Class of 1933 Newsletter*, the overlook was constructed during the summer of 1984. The project included “concrete retaining walls, hard surfacing for the walk area, and handrails.” Wood benches, trees, shrubs and flowers were added to increase “the attractiveness of the project.”<sup>81</sup> Today, the Observatory Drive Overlook continues to provide visitors with exceptional views of Lake Mendota and Picnic Point.



**Figure 31: Observatory Drive, circa 1983. Notice the dense vegetation present on the northern slope of the hill prior to the construction of the scenic overlook in 1984.**

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<sup>80</sup>Correspondence from William J. Hagenah to President Elvehjem, December 19, 1960. File at Facilities Planning and Management, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

<sup>81</sup>University of Wisconsin Class of 1933 Newsletter. File at Facilities Planning and Management, University of Wisconsin-Madison.



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## EXISTING CONDITIONS

A comprehensive survey of existing conditions was conducted for the Observatory Hill historic landscape during the summer of 2004. The information in this chapter is based on the conditions apparent at that time. Changes may have occurred since then that are not reflected in this report. A few notable condition updates were added for the January 2010 revision.

### **Spatial Organization:**

The landscape is dominated by and organized around views of Lake Mendota and the Washburn Observatory. An open lawn creates the central portion of the space, enclosed on three sides by buildings, including historic structures, which were constructed both on the crest and at the base of Observatory Hill. The central portion of the site is divided by Observatory Drive, creating two areas: the crest of the hill and the northern slopes. The crest is dominated by historic structures surrounded by open lawn interrupted by mature deciduous trees and clusters of shrubs. The eastern sector of the northern slope has another open lawn but no vegetation, while the western sector of the northern slope is characterized by open grown deciduous trees amid mowed turf. The remnants of terracing from the historic orchard are still visible.

### **Water Features:**

Observatory Hill overlooks Lake Mendota. It is essential when considering views from Observatory Hill to take into account its relationship with the lake.

### **Circulation:**

Observatory Drive provides a vehicular route through the central portion of the site. Circulation on Observatory Hill is primarily oriented toward pedestrian use, however, and a series of sidewalks run along the northern base and the crest of the hill. Residents of the Lakeshore Dormitories and Elizabeth Waters Hall are the primary users of the sidewalks located on the northern slopes of Observatory Hill. In contrast, the sidewalk that defines the crest of the Observatory Hill boundary is a general pedestrian route.

A diagonal drive runs between the sidewalk on the crest of the hill (near Chamberlin Rock) and the northeast corner of King Hall. The upper portion of this drive truncates the wing tip of the bird effigy mound. It appears to have at one time been covered in gravel but currently grass grows over this hardened surface. The drive connects with an asphalt segment that continues toward northeast corner of King Hall. Evidence of this drive first appears in photographs following construction of the Van Hise Dormitories (now Tripp and Adams Halls) in the late 1920s (see figure 26).

### **Land Use:**

The current land use associated with Observatory Hill includes active and passive recreation as well as circulation. Historically, as early as the 1860s, the land associated with Observatory Hill was used for agricultural purposes. Crops were grown and cattle



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were let out to pasture in this space. Much of Observatory Hill remained agricultural for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and for several decades after, but this agricultural use began to recede as the university expanded. By 1926, Adams and Tripp Halls consumed a tract of land previously used to produce agricultural crops, and the university began to see Observatory Hill and its magnificent lake views as a potential site for expansion. As agricultural use decreased, residential dormitories took over a portion of the northern slope. Orchards on the northern face of Observatory Hill declined and were eventually replaced with lawn. Today, the landscape reflects the value that we place on views and open green space on a densely developed campus.

**Vegetation:**

The vegetation on Observatory Hill consists of an assortment of lawn, deciduous trees and shrubs. As mentioned above, a large lawn lies along the mid-section of the northern slope. Most of the trees, except for the President's Oak, are relatively young. A cluster of trees in the 50-100 year age class is located in the northwest corner of the northern slope. A band of 25-50 year age class trees separates the base of the northern slope from parking lot 34.

**Buildings and Small Scale Structures:**

Tables 1-3 in the Analysis of Integrity section lists the contributing, compatible, and non-contributing features located within the Observatory Hill Historic Landscape. The information below is meant to supplement the tables.

**Observatory Hill Office Building**

This Italianate-style building was constructed circa 1855. The primary building material is brick and the foundation is constructed of coursed, rock-faced sandstone block. J.T.W. Jennings completed additions to the building in 1903; no other major alterations have been made to the exterior.

**Chamberlin Rock**

Chamberlin Rock commemorates Thomas Chamberlin, Wisconsin State Geologist (1873-1882) and University President (1887-1892). A plaque was affixed to the boulder in 1926.<sup>82</sup> According to *"Seeing" The University of Wisconsin-Madison Today*:

This boulder was brought from ancient pre-Cambrian bedrock in Canada and deposited here in the last or Cary substage of the Wisconsin Glacial Stage about 13,500 years ago (Pleistocene time). It originally rested flat upon the hill near what now is Observatory Drive, but was moved and set upon its edge as the Chamberlin Rock. Recently Henry Reynolds of the Reynolds Transfer and Storage Co. reminisced about moving the rock. It was his first assigned project for his father's company and was a tough one. However, they did succeed in skidding the rock into place by a system of cables and pulleys and finally of turning it upward, as you see it today.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Regents Executive Minutes, Vol. K, p. 343, November 11, 1926.

<sup>83</sup>Elizabeth McCoy, E.B. Fred and Eleanor Oimoen "Seeing" the University of Wisconsin-Madison Today," 1978, 48.

### **Class of 1908 Sundial**

Today, the Class of 1908 Sundial is located near the crest of Observatory Hill, a slight alteration from its original location as recommended by the regents in 1910.<sup>84</sup> Damage to the sundial's original stone foundation, the result of vandalism as well as the effects of time, led to its move in 1971 and reestablishment on a more significant foundation.<sup>85</sup>

### **Mrs. Adams Bench (Class of 1897)**

Today, the stone bench, a gift of the wife of President Charles Kendall Adams sits on Observatory Hill.<sup>86</sup> Originally, the bench sat at the north end of North Park Street. Mrs. Adams donated the bench in memory of the Class of 1897 to help visitors enjoy the view across Lake Mendota. Unfortunately, the bench and its view of the lake were eventually blocked by the construction of a small brick building. As a result, the bench was refurbished and moved to Observatory Hill in 1969.<sup>87</sup>

### **The President's Oak**

It is believed that this bur oak is nearly 300 years old. It takes its name from its proximity to the nearby residence once occupied by university presidents. The *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine* describes the history of the tree:

“A large burr (sic) oak near the old astronomer's residence on Observatory Hill is known as the President's Tree. It stands prominently on the hill overlooking the campus and lake, and it has existed longer than the university itself, dating well over two hundred years. It shaded the house and lawn of a succession of UW presidents.... During the Civil War, soldiers stationed at Camp Randall used the tree for gunnery practice, causing considerable damage. The tree has overcome its “war wounds” though it no doubt still carries shrapnel in its trunk and limbs.<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, in 1915, a break in the bark of the tree was fixed using concrete.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, “to protect this beloved tree, President E.B. Fred had it cabled and bolted for additional structural support. It stands today as a living witness to the entirety of campus history.”<sup>90</sup>

The validity of the story of the President's Oak being used for gunnery practice during the Civil War has been challenged in that there is no natural backstop to intercept errant shots aimed at the tree. Of greater concern would be missed shots originating from the northwest coming to rest in the Loring Guild home (now the Observatory Office Building) built ca. 1855.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Regents' Board Minutes, Vol. G, p. 522, April 20, 1910.

<sup>85</sup>McCoy, Fred and Oimoen, 1978, 48.

<sup>86</sup>E. B. Fred, “A University Remembers,” Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1969, 86.

<sup>87</sup>McCoy, Fred and Oimoen, 1978, 48.

<sup>88</sup>Susan S. Pigorsch, ed., “The Presidents Tree,” *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, Sept-Oct 1989, 28.

<sup>89</sup>McCoy, Fred and Oimoen, 1978, 31-32.

<sup>90</sup>Pigorsch, 1989, 28.

<sup>91</sup>Personal communication, Daniel Einstein, 2004.

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Armillaria root rot (a fungal disease) was noted at the eastern base of the tree in the summer of 2009. It is possible that this tree, which has been in decline for many years, may have been further stressed by recent soil disturbances associated with the recent restoration work at Washburn Observatory.

### **Archaeological Resources**

The Observatory Hill Historic Landscape includes two archaeological sites (47DA571 – Observatory Hill Mound Group), and (47DA1207 – Observatory Hill Village). The Observatory Hill Mound Group once contained at least four burial mounds, of which two are still visible. Somewhere to the north of the extant mounds were a linear mound and a panther-shaped effigy (water-spirit) mound. The surface features of these mounds are not visible but the subsurface features may be intact. Throughout the late nineteenth and into the first half of the twentieth century, there were reports of archaeological materials recovered from the crest of Observatory Hill, the orchard on the northern slope and at the base of the hill along the shore of Lake Mendota. The current boundary limits for DA 1207 overlap a portion of the Observatory Hill Historic Landscape near the east side of Tripp Hall. Additional survey work will be necessary to determine if the boundaries of the archaeological site should be extended to the east to include areas that reportedly have produced artifacts in the past.

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## ANALYSIS OF INTEGRITY

### **Spatial Organization:**

The spatial organization of Observatory Hill remains largely intact.

### **Water Features:**

Lake Mendota remains largely unchanged except for the shoreline.

### **Small Scale Objects:**

The small-scale objects retain a high level of integrity.

### **Land Use:**

Remnants of the pre-European-American settlement landscape remain in the form of two visible effigy mounds. Agriculture played an important role in the early development of the university and the landscape of Observatory Hill. The site retains a high level of integrity related to recreation, views, and historic architecture.

### **Vegetation:**

Current vegetation on Observatory Hill relates most directly to the recreational development period. The present-day trees on the northern slope were planted or established as “volunteer seedlings” after the agricultural use of the hill ended. Vegetation along the edges of the landscape helps to buffer views of intrusive features, such as parking lot 34 and the residence halls. Undesirable invasive/exotic woody vegetation (e.g., honeysuckle, black locust, and buckthorn) is present in these natural landscape areas.

### **Circulation:**

Prior to European-American settlement, a Native American trail ran alongside Lake Mendota, and today, portions of this trail likely follow the same route as the lakeshore path. From 1855-1933, many of the same roads were used when considering circulation on Observatory Hill. In 1934, Observatory Drive was realigned, which signaled a significant shift in circulation paths as well as land use on the hill. Since then, however, little significant change to circulation has occurred. Pedestrian access to Observatory Hill dramatically increased as the residence halls were constructed in the area.

### **Views and Vistas:**

Prior to European-American settlement the view from Observatory Hill likely overlooked an oak savannah. As white settlers moved into the area, burning of the landscape was curtailed, and woody vegetation became established. Observatory Hill’s views were directly altered when an orchard was planted on the central portion of the northern slope of the hill. The orchard thrived for fifty-to-sixty years before it fell into decay as a result of the installation of several residence hall complexes. The construction of Tripp, Adams, and Elizabeth Waters Halls affected the views from Observatory Hill. The red tile roofs of the Tripp and Adams residence halls add a contrast to the view and their height and shape are complimentary to the overall scene.

**Table 2: Contributing Features**

Contributing Feature	Description	Condition
Washburn Observatory	Italianate structure with classical details, constructed 1878-1882.	Good
Observatory Hill Office Building	Italianate structure, constructed circa 1855.	Good
Effigy Mounds	One bird effigy and one water spirit effigy, constructed approximately 1000 years ago. Impacted by sidewalks.	Fair
Chamberlin Rock	Large rock with plaque, moved to present location circa 1925.	Good
Class of 1908 Sundial	Sundial mounted on a pedestal, base is not original.	Good
Mrs. Adams Bench	Stone bench, located between the Washburn Observatory and the Observatory Hill Office Building.	Good
President's Oak	Approximately 300-year-old bur oak tree.	Fair
Wisconsin Council Ring	Circular stone council ring near the southeast corner of Elizabeth Waters Hall. Possibly designed by Franz Aust and influenced by Jens Jensen.	Fair

**Table 3: Compatible Features**

Compatible Feature	Description	Condition
Plaques associated with effigy mounds	Two bronze tablets, mounted on concrete pedestal, located on the bird and water-spirit effigy mounds. Placed circa 1908/09.	Good
Elizabeth Waters Hall	Women's dormitory complex situated on Observatory Hill overlooking Lake Mendota. Opened in 1940.	Good
Adams and Tripp Halls, Carson Gulley Commons	Residence hall complex constructed 1926.	Good
Observatory Drive	Two-way paved road with parallel parking divides the district into a north and south portion. Vehicular and pedestrian traffic use the route.	Good
Howard Temin Lakeshore Path	Gravel path at edge of Lake Mendota and base of Observatory Hill.	Good
Observatory Drive Overlook	Plaza overlooking Lake Mendota provides place for pedestrians and vehicles to stop and view the surrounding terrain. Constructed 1984.	Good
Tree of Peace and marker	White pine tree and granite marker with inscription: "For those people of the earth who search for the past, to healing power, wisdom and security. The tree will never die as long as the tree live people live. Placed 9 April 1988."	Good

**Table 4: Non-Contributing Features**

Non-Contributing Feature	Description	Condition
Parking lot 34	Asphalt parking lot situated at the northern base of Observatory Hill on the eastern side of Tripp Hall.	Good
Parking lot 24	Asphalt parking lot situated on the western side of the Observatory Hill Office Building.	Good
Parking lot 26	Parking area situated on the southern side of Observatory Drive parallel with the drive.	Good
Metal Bike Racks	One bike rack located near the Washburn Observatory and the other located near the Observatory Hill Office Building.	Good
Metal Trash Cans	Located near the Observatory Drive Overlook and the Washburn Observatory.	Good
Tree Markers	Numerous small tree identification signs, mounted on short wooden posts dot Observatory Hill.	Good
Red Fire Hydrant.	Located on Observatory Drive	Good
Red Emergency Light Fixture	Located on Observatory Drive near the overlook.	Good
Contemporary Light Poles	Located near most northern sidewalk at the base of the slope in between Elizabeth Waters Hall and the Lakeshore Residence Halls.	Good
Contemporary Light Poles	Located on the northern side of Observatory Drive.	Good
Contemporary Light Poles	Located on the southern boundary of the district near the sidewalk that runs behind the Observatory and Office.	Good
Metal Signs	Metal traffic signs along Observatory Drive.	Good



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## LANDSCAPE TREATMENT

### Approaches to treatment

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for establishing professional standards and providing advice on the stewardship of cultural resources listed in eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Secretary's standards describe four basic approaches for treatment of historic landscapes.<sup>92</sup>

- **Restoration** is the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period in time. This includes reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period, and removal of features from all other periods. The approach can be considered only when the property's significance during a particular period of time outweighs the loss of extant elements from other historical periods; and when there is substantial physical and documentary evidence for the work; and when contemporary alterations and additions are not planned.<sup>93</sup> Restoration is not an appropriate approach for the Observatory Hill Historic Landscape because significant extant features relate to more than one historic period (examples include the effigy mounds, the observatory, and the orchard terraces), adequate documentary evidence does not exist to restore the property to one period, and contemporary needs may require some alterations.
- **Reconstruction** is the act or process of using new construction to depict a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object as it appeared at a specific period of time in its historic location. The approach is appropriate only when the property's significance during a particular period of time outweighs the potential loss of extant features that characterize other historical periods. In addition, there must be substantial physical and documentary evidence for the work, and the work must be clearly identified as a contemporary re-creation.<sup>94</sup> The Observatory Hill Historic Landscape is not eligible for reconstruction because significant extant features relate to more than one historic period, adequate documentary evidence does not exist to reconstruct the property to one period, and contemporary needs require some alterations.
- **Preservation** involves applying measures to sustain the *existing* form, integrity, and materials of a historic property. This approach focuses upon stabilizing and

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<sup>92</sup> National Park Service, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, edited by Charles A. Birnbaum with Christine Capella Peters. (Washington: 1996), 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 127-129.

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protecting extant historic resources, rather than replacing missing elements. It is appropriate when a historic property is essentially intact and does not require extensive repair or replacement; depiction at one particular period of time is not appropriate; and when continuing or new use does not require additions or alterations.<sup>95</sup> Preservation could be effectively applied to the Observatory Hill Historic Landscape. To determine if this approach is appropriate, possibilities regarding the future use of Observatory Hill need to be considered. Preservation would preclude the introduction of new elements within the historic landscape.

- The act or process of **Rehabilitation** allows repairs, alterations, and additions necessary to enable a compatible use for a property as long as the portions or features which convey the historical, cultural, or architectural values are preserved. This approach is appropriate when depiction at one particular period of time is not appropriate; repair or replacement of deteriorated features is necessary; and alterations or additions are needed for a new use.<sup>96</sup> Rehabilitation has been chosen as the most appropriate management philosophy for the Observatory Hill Historic Landscape. This philosophy has been chosen because of the existence of features related to more than one type and period of significance, and the need for minor alterations to accommodate contemporary use. The long period(s) of significance for the landscape, absence of key historic elements, and presence of non-contributing features also indicate a need for flexibility in treatment.

### Management concerns

- The identification of a landscape as one that has historic significance does not necessarily lead to the protection of that resource. Listing on the National Register or even designation as a National Historic Landmark provides no protection from impacts or complete destruction. The entity in charge of managing the landscape, in this case the University of Wisconsin, can serve as a guardian for the resource by carefully considering the significant extant resources and implementing a management plan designed to retain integrity related to historic significance. Given that the main mission of the university is education and research, and not the protection of cultural resources, the current and future needs of the university must be considered when directing management and treatment of these resources.
- The Observatory Hill landscape contains remnants of elements related to its rich historic development. Some of these elements are not identifiable to the casual viewer. The Native American and historic agricultural use of the hill remains greatly unknown to most people who visit the hill.
- Development pressures may threaten the existence of this landscape.
- There are at least two mounds present in the Observatory Hill landscape whose surface components have been disturbed, but may have intact subsurface features.
- There are reports of a large archaeological site in the vicinity of Observatory Hill with at least a Late Paleo-Indian component.

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

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- There are sidewalks and other hard surface features within the 25-foot buffer of the cataloged burial mounds at the top of Observatory Hill. A post and chain fence delineates the edge of the mounds and the sidewalks. However, annual snow plowing activities continue to damage these posts.
  - The presence of parking lot 34 is unsightly and incongruent with the historic character of the landscape.

## Treatment recommendations

### General Recommendations

- All planning and design projects that are related to this landscape should be developed through careful consideration of: the Cultural Landscape Resource Plan and Cultural Landscape Report for the university; the Campus Master Plan; and the Master Plan for the Lakeshore Preserve.
- Rehabilitation is the recommended treatment philosophy for the landscape.
- Manage the landscape based on the treatment recommendations provided in Tables 4-6, and according to the management zones illustrated in figure 32.
- Consider developing an interpretive plan for the historic landscape. As a portion of the interpretive plan, consider developing an interpretive display to be installed at the overlook that provides historic photographs and information about the historic uses of the hill.

- Archaeological Recommendations

The Archaeology chapter of the CLR provides detailed information regarding archaeological sites on campus. Please refer to that chapter for more details regarding archaeological resources located within the Observatory Hill landscape.

- The southern portion of the Observatory Hill landscape should be surveyed for archaeological materials.
- The sites of the two burial mounds that have had their above-grade features disturbed should be identified using a combination of archival sources, non-invasive geophysical remote sensing methods (ground penetrating radar, electrical resistivity, magnetometry), and ground truthing.
- There are a series of sidewalks that are currently within twenty-five feet of the extant mounds on the top of the hill. These sidewalks have provided a means by which the mounds have been damaged by snow plowing and it is in the best interest of the resource to have the sidewalks closed, re-located, or maintained in a different manner. The sidewalk that divides the two mounds should be closed. Pedestrian traffic should be routed to the south of the mounds along the former road route whose grade is still present. Snow removal should be conducted using equipment that fits on the sidewalk.

**Recommended treatments by management zone (See figure 32).**

**Zone A:** Preserve the archaeological resources.

**Zone B:** Maintain contributing features and preserve views to and from Lake Mendota.

**Zone C:** Preserve the historic orchard terraces. Do not alter the grades or conduct other ground-altering activities in this area.

**Zone D:** Remove parking lot 34 and restore a consistent grade between the areas north and south of the existing parking lot. Establish herbaceous species in this area, possibly a meadow. Coordinate with the Lakeshore Nature Preserve to determine appropriate species to plant.

**Zone E:** Consider constructing a low-profile residence hall in this area. The design for the building should be consistent with the style, scale, materials and workmanship of Tripp and Adams Halls.

**Zone F:** Manage vegetation and erosion according to the Lakeshore Nature Preserve master plan.

**Zone G:** Remove parking lot 26 and regrade this area to provide a consistent slope. Develop a planting plan that is consistent with the rest of the hill and emphasizes views to the lake.

**Table 5: Treatment Recommendations for Contributing Features**

Contributing Feature	Recommended Treatment
View between lake and hill	Preserve
Washburn Observatory	Preserve
Observatory Hill Office	Preserve
Effigy mounds	Preserve. Reduce impacts by relocating sidewalks.
Chamberlin Rock	Preserve
Class of 1908 Sundial	Preserve
Mrs. Adams Bench	Preserve
President's Oak	Monitor and preserve
Wisconsin Council Ring	Preserve
Orchard Terraces	Preserve

Compatible features are those that are non-contributing but are consistent with the historic character of the historic landscape. Due to the emphasis on views in this historic landscape, elements that are present but not visible (for instance, Lot 34) are acceptable as long as they do not impact other significant landscape characteristics. Management recommendations for these elements are presented in Table 5.

**Table 6: Recommended Treatment for Compatible Features**

Compatible Feature	Recommended Treatment
Plaques associated with effigy mounds	Maintain
Elizabeth Waters Hall	Maintain
Adams and Tripp Halls and Carson Gulley Commons	Maintain
Observatory Drive	Maintain
The lakeshore path	Maintain
Diagonal sidewalks on the lower northern slope	Maintain. Allow adjustments in alignment as necessary to address erosion or circulation. Do not construct paths in the area of the orchard terrace remnants.

Compatible Feature (cont.)	Recommended Treatment (cont.)
Vegetation at the crest of the hill (south edge of historic landscape)	Maintain this vegetation as a screen that directs views toward Lake Mendota and encloses the historic landscape. Consider developing a detailed treatment/maintenance plan for this area to address pruning and removal of hazardous trees. Also prescribe desirable plants to be added as openings develop.
Vegetation screening parking lot 34	When parking lot 34 is removed, then eliminate the vegetation at the south side of the parking lot and restore a consistent grade. Until this occurs, monitor and maintain this vegetation to provide a screen of the parking lot from the hill and the lake. Consider selective removal of undesirable tree species, especially if tree height obstructs views to lake. Consider developing a detailed treatment/maintenance plan that addresses the desired plants and conditions in this area. Also, monitor erosion along the steep slope and consider developing an erosion control plan.
Vegetation along the lakeshore path	Treat as directed by the Lakeshore Nature Preserve master plan. However, if the plan indicates changes that will open views toward lot 34, consider developing an alternative treatment approach in this area to maintain the screen.
Vegetation on the hill	Maintain an 80% or higher amount of open space free of vegetation above 3' high. Consider planting native grasses and forbs on the hill to reduce maintenance costs while preserving the open character of the landscape. Maintain existing trees as long as they do not impact views between the lake and the hill. Plant only native species on the hill. Consider developing a detailed treatment/ maintenance plan that provides guidance for future planting on the hill.
Vegetation along the western edge of the historic landscape (by Carson Gulley Commons)	Maintain.
Overlook	Maintain. Consider adding interpretive information regarding Observatory Hill.
Tree of Peace	Maintain.

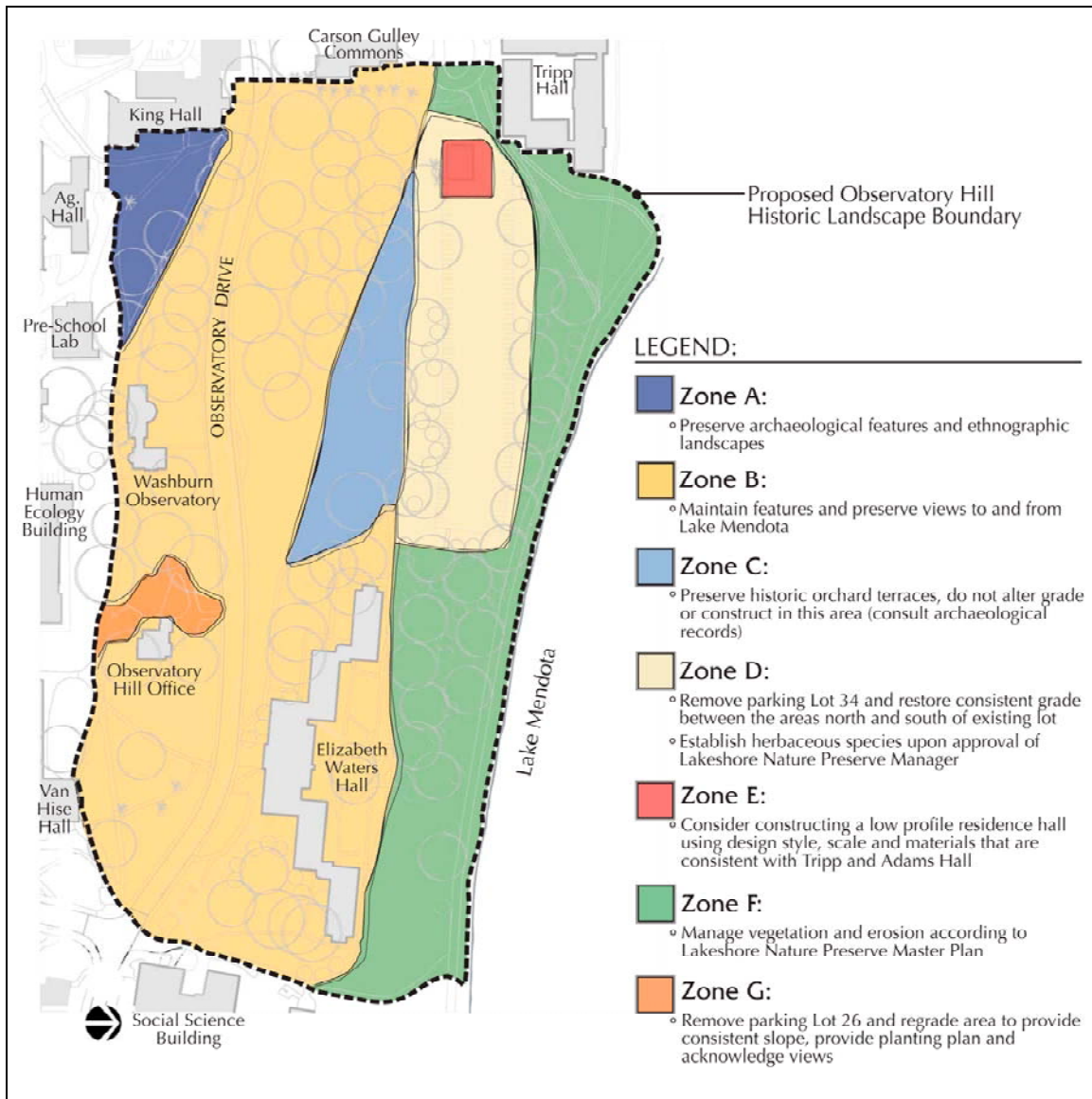


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Non-contributing features within the historic landscape are mostly small-scale and do not significantly impact the historic resources. However, there are some non-contributing elements that are incongruous with the historic character of the landscape and should be removed. Table 6 provides specific direction for the treatment of non-contributing features.

**Table 7: Recommended Treatment for Non-Contributing Features**

Non-Contributing Feature	Recommended Treatment
Parking lot 34.	Consider removing the parking lot and restoring the topography of the hill to enhance the connection between the hill and the lake. Until that occurs, maintain the vegetative buffer to screen views of this parking lot from Observatory Hill and from Lake Mendota.
Parking lot 26 — next to Observatory Office Building.	Consider removing this parking lot and establishing turf in this area.
Vegetation screening lot 24.	Consider these plants individually. Remove plants that detract from the overall character and openness of the hill. Retain plants that are consistent with the pastoral quality of the landscape of the hill.
Parking lot 26 – parallel parking along Observatory Drive.	Maintain parking as it does not significantly impact the character of the historic landscape.
Metal bike racks	Maintain
Metal trash cans	Maintain
Wooden tree markers	Maintain
Red fire hydrant	Maintain
Red emergency light fixture	Maintain
Contemporary light poles	Maintain
Metal signs	Maintain



**Figure 32: Recommended management zones for Observatory Hill, 2005.**

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