

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

National Register of Historic Places

Date Listed: August 31, 2026

NRIS No. SG100013362

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Kerr, Peter and Laurie King, Estate

other names/site number Elk Rock; Garden of the Bishop's Close; Elk Rock Garden

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A

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

2. Location

street & number 11800 S. Military Lane

☐ not for publication

city or town Portland

☐ vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97219

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B X C D

Ian P. Johnson
Ian Johnson (Jul 20, 2026 15:44:48 PDT)

07/20/26

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| ☒ | private |
| ☐ | public - Local |
| ☐ | public - State |
| ☐ | public - Federal |

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| ☐ | building(s) |
| ☒ | district |
| ☐ | site |
| ☐ | structure |
| ☐ | object |

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
3		site
7	3	structure
	1	object
12	4	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

LANDSCAPE / garden

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE / garden

SOCIAL / civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER / Scottish Vernacular

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: CONCRETE

roof: ASPHALT

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary Paragraph¹

The Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate (now known as Elk Rock Garden), 11800 S. Military Lane, is five miles south of Portland, Oregon, and 2.5 miles north of Lake Oswego in a residential neighborhood of substantial single-family homes. The 8.72-acre property lies on a naturally occurring shelf of land running north-south on a steep hillside, 300 feet above the Willamette River to the east and 1100 feet below the top of Palatine Hill to the west. The property consists of a **house** and **garage** both finished in 1917,² carefully placed within a garden begun in the late 19th century.³ The landscape retains many resources dating from the 1897-1957 period of significance, including seven contributing structures: **entry walls**; a **network of paths** throughout the property, leading to several viewpoints; **rock walls and stairs**; a **pond**; a **linear water feature**, called "The Cascades"; a **rock garden**; and a former **tennis court** including a viewing niche and stone grotto. The property also includes three contributing sites: **two large, open lawns** and a boxwood-lined **cut flower garden**. Noncontributing structures are the **forecourt** and concrete deck of the historic **swimming pool**, which both date to the period of significance but have been substantially altered and no longer retain integrity, as well as the **bridge** over The Cascades, which is a ca. 1995 replacement for an original bridge in the same location. There is also one noncontributing object, a substantial stone **altar** added in 1961 after the period of significance.⁴

The Kerrs' **house**, which is a contributing building, is in the northwest corner of its property just inside the gates at the end of a narrow, paved lane. The house, which is Scottish vernacular in style, is two stories in height and arranged in two uneven wings that meet at an engaged stair tower rising to third floor height. Low-pitched hipped roofs are punctuated with chimney stacks indicating the seven fireplaces within. Structurally, the house is of wood frame construction, but its exterior is covered with gray, rough cast cement known as "harling," an exterior finish prevalent on houses in Lowland Scotland (Figure 22). Wood-framed windows, except for their sills, are recessed within their reveals. Other than its size, the house evokes the simple rectangular homes common in southwestern Scotland where its owner was raised. A detached **garage**, also a contributing building, is just west of the house. It is one and a half stories in height with a small apartment on the upper floor, and its style echoes that of the main house. Alterations to the estate since the end of the period of significance in 1957 include filling the swimming pool with gravel; graveling and converting the tennis court for visitor parking; the addition of the altar; the removal of an attached greenhouse from the end of the west wing of the house and the construction of a visitor center in its place; and the construction of a large chapel addition to the east wing of the house. Despite these changes, the estate overall retains exceptional levels of integrity to its 1897-1957 period of significance.

¹ The buildings, structures, sites, and objects enumerated in Section 5 are denoted in **bold** in the following narrative.

² "Contract Let for Kerr Residence," *Sunday Oregonian*, April 2, 1916, 10; Nona Lawler, "Benefit Teas Now Command Much Attention," *Oregon Daily Journal* (Portland, OR), March 3, 1918. By early March 1918, the Kerrs were hosting a benefit "for the patriotic fund for British soldiers families" at their "beautiful home at Elk Rock."

³ Peter Kerr to James Dewar, March 12, 1898, Kerr Coll.74, Reel 2. Research Library, Oregon Historical Society.

⁴ "Altar Rites Due May 21," *Oregonian*, May 20, 1961, 32.

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Narrative Description

LOCATION AND SETTING

The Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate (Elk Rock Garden) consists of a 9,516-square-foot house, a garage, and an almost nine-acre garden including various structures and sites. The property is in its original location at the end of a short lane that branches off Oregon Highway 43 between the cities of Portland and Lake Oswego, Oregon. The area, commonly referred to as Dunthorpe, is an enclave approximately four miles square containing many large houses with well-maintained landscapes on quiet, winding streets. Except for the public Riverdale School, the neighborhood is exclusively residential. Adjacent green spaces extend its aura of tranquility: on the north are the 350 acres of the River View Cemetery, established in 1882. To the west of the estate, several miles above the highway, is Lewis & Clark College and Law School, its 137-acre campus composed of two early 20th century estates. The hillside south of the college gradually descends through 658-acre Tryon Creek State Park, terminating at Lake Oswego. The southern boundary of Elk Rock Garden ends at the crest of the tall basalt promontory that lends the property its current name. Below and opposite the garden, on the east side of the Willamette River, the small town of Milwaukie is bordered on its north by the private, 138-acre Waverley Golf Club, established in 1896. When Peter Kerr, who developed the estate, and two other bachelors arrived on site as renters in 1897, it was a rural outpost with few neighbors. Impetus for the area's development was triggered by the completion of a small railroad that ran between (then) Oswego and Portland; this gradually led to its conversion into a commuter suburb of Portland. Despite the infill that has taken place in the intervening 130 years, because of its size, residential nature, extensive tree coverage, nearby green spaces and absence of commercial intrusion, the area surrounding the Elk Rock estate reinforces its sequestered atmosphere.

The estate is accessed via S. Military Lane, a short narrow street flanked by large single-family homes. At the foot of the lane, entry is indicated by two towering Giant sequoia trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) rising behind a 5.6' high rough-cast wall (Photo 1). A right turn between two gate posts (Photo 2) leads to a paved forecourt and the main entry to the house (Photo 3). Plantings around the two wings of the house hint at the garden beyond while concealing it from immediate view.

THE GROUNDS

The three tax lots (Figure 4) that make up the Elk Rock estate form a long triangle, with the widest part at the property entrance (northern edge) tapering to its south edge atop Elk Rock (Figure 6). Several contributing resources located on the grounds were established in the earliest years of the period of significance, 1897-1957. The first known survey of the property under Kerr's ownership, which was completed in January 1910 (Figure 41), indicates that some portion of three of the contributing structures (the **network of paths**, including viewpoints; **network of rock walls**; and the **pond**) were in place by that time, as well as two contributing sites (the **North and South Lawns**).⁵

The **network of paths** (contributing structure; Figure 41) winds through the grounds, from the house near the northern boundary to the southern edge of the property atop the Elk Rock promontory, where there are several viewpoints are collectively referred to as "The Point." Throughout the garden, paths are surfaced with a mix of pea and quarter minus gravel, without edging. Most are three to four feet wide, narrowing to approximately two feet on the hillside beyond the South Lawn (contributing site, Photo 11). Construction of the paths began soon after the three bachelors, Peter Kerr and his brother Tom Kerr and

⁵ The January 1910 survey, by R.S. Greenleaf of Portland was commissioned by Peter Kerr after his meeting in late 1909 with John C. Olmsted. The map, recording all of the existing garden features (omitting the Cliff Cottage) was then traced in the Olmsted office in Brookline, Massachusetts. Olmsted superimposed onto this tracing his suggested location of a future house, oriented to the mountain view to the east. It was labeled "Preliminary Plan for Estate of Peter Kerr, Esq." and dated March 25, 1910.

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friend Pat Gifford, began renting the property on May 1, 1897.⁶ Within a year of moving into the original house on the property, known as “Cliff Cottage” (later demolished to make way for the 1917 house), Peter was writing to his sister in Scotland about laying out a path.⁷ He also referred to the activity in that same year in a humorous account of his bachelor days written prior to his marriage in late 1905.⁸ The 1910 survey map (Figure 41) shows paths running parallel to the eastern and western property lines, zigzagging up the hill toward the Point, and interweaving among the main routes to guide visitors through a variety of planted areas; this map confirms that these portions of the network were established by this time, well before construction of the house in 1917 (cf. Figure 6 and 41). The 1910 map also depicts the beginnings of the **network of rock walls** (contributing structure, Photo 10, Figure 17), which line the pathways that parallel the eastern property boundary, leading through several garden resources to the southern edge of the property (Figures 17 and 41). Stacked in irregular courses of uneven basalt (some are mortared), it averages two feet in height and is visible in photographs dating from at least 1905 (Figures 15 & 17). In late 1909, Olmsted wrote of the walls after a visit to the property, “He [Peter Kerr] has rebuilt the stone parapet with larger stones for coping and has stuck in sedums and rock plants.”⁹ There are additional rock walls and steps, including some dating from the early 1920’s, throughout the garden; these are noted below.

Beginning at the northern edge of the property, immediately east of the entrance from S Military Lane, the network of paths begins with a curving route known as the “Cliff Cottage Walk,” after the property’s original house. It is bordered by mature specimen trees, including Giant sequoia, birch, Atlas cedar, *Sassafras*, *Stewartia*, and magnolias underplanted with low shrubs and perennials. At the midpoint of this walk the open expanse of the **North Lawn** (contributing site, Photo 5) is first revealed, stretching to the south. In 1897, the northeast corner of the almost two-acre lawn was the location of Cliff Cottage as well as a grass surfaced tennis court created immediately after the arrival of the three bachelors (Figure 11).¹⁰ It is unclear what refinements were made to create the smooth surface of the court and lawn, but it appears the large open area was already clear of trees, stumps, etc. which would otherwise have required extensive preparation. Peter Kerr planted many trees on the lawn (Figures 13 and 14) but after his marriage in 1905 moved the fruit trees onto a narrow north/south terrace on the western hillside (Figure 16) to create the open expanse seen today. The North Lawn remains a large, open space, with native oaks on the eastern perimeter and a few specimen trees near the house (Photos 5, 6, and 9).

As it approaches the steep cliff that marks the eastern boundary of the property, Cliff Cottage Walk turns south to become the Spring Walk (Photo 10). This walk is named for the plantings on its east and west sides containing shrubs and perennials that flower in early winter: hellebores, *Viburnum*, *Sarcococca*, and *Corylopsis*. Between the path and the rock wall paralleling its eastern edge are additional shrubs: *Loropetalum*, *Mahonia*, *Sycopsis* and *Oemleria*, underplanted with swathes of bulbs, including winter aconite, snowdrops and Scilla. On a clear day, openings in the Douglas fir on the east side of the Spring

⁶ “On the first day of May 1897, the Pleasant Country Residence known as the Cliff Cottage was formally taken possession of by the Club bearing its name, and the Members entered into residence.” Peter Kerr, *The Veracious Chronicles of the Cliff Cottage Club*, (Portland, Oregon. 1905).

⁷ “I got it [poison oak] through digging the nasty shrub out of a path we were making.” Peter Kerr to sister Jane Kerr, May 12, 1898. Kerr Collection 74, microfilm reel 3. Oregon Historical Society Research Library. Hereafter materials in this collection will be abbreviated to OHS.

⁸ “Vigorous path-making operations and landscape gardening improvements by Mr. Gifford and Mr. Wheeler, under the active directions of the President [Peter Kerr], through the poison oak shrubbery.” *Veracious Chronicles of the Cliff Cottage*, February 18, 1898.

⁹ John C. Olmsted, “Peter Kerr-Abernethy Heights”, visit by J.C.O. December 18, 1909. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job File#3722, microfilm reel 230, Washington, D.C. Materials from the Library of Congress collections will hereafter be referred to as “Library of Congress.”

¹⁰ “Mr. Gifford worked hard at tennis lawn in hot sun.” May 10, 1897, *Veracious Chronicles*. “Formal close of the tennis season...”, October 9, 1897, *Veracious Chronicles*.

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Walk offer a view of Mt. Hood, 80 miles to the east (Figure 24). Plantings along the Spring Walk are pruned to ensure this view remains open.

The Spring Walk, lined by the rock wall, continues south to a wood **bridge** (noncontributing structure, Photo 12) over a **linear water feature**, "**The Cascades**" (contributing structure, Photo 12), near the midpoint of the eastern side of the property. Originally a dry gully (Figure 15), the Cascades were constructed ca. 1920-1922, within the 1897-1957 period of significance. The 100-foot-long feature begins to the west of the bridge, gradually widening and deepening to flow under it. A mix of ornamental shrubs and small trees line the banks of the descending pools and a white wisteria drapes along the edge of the bridge. The bridge itself is the most recent replacement for a series of other bridges in the same location, dating back to at least ca. 1905 (Figure 15).

At the south end of the Cascades, the path forks, extending west across the southern edge of the North Lawn or turning east, rising briefly, then dropping to the **pond** (contributing structure, Photo 13). This rectangular feature is 28 feet long, 10 feet wide and approximately four feet deep. Lined with concrete, it fills from a seep in the rock wall that rises in two levels to the west. The lower level, approximately two feet high, is planted with hardy fuchsias. Behind it, the rock wall rises to serve as a retaining wall for the eastern edge of the lawn above. The pond contains pots of water lilies and is home to rough-skinned newts (*Taricha granulosa*) and short-lived goldfish "donated" by garden visitors. The pond may predate the beginning of the period of significance in 1897; building it would have been a major undertaking for the Cliff Cottage tenants, but its construction is not mentioned in any of Peter Kerr's accounts (correspondence, pocket diaries or the *Veracious Chronicles*). In his 1910 summary to Kerr, John C. Olmsted refers to it, commenting, "it may have been built by another gardener."¹¹ Regardless, its relationship to the Spring Walk and rock walls demonstrate that Kerr incorporated the pond into his overall design for the landscape.

At the south edge of the pond, a flight of stone steps constructed ca. 1920-1922 curves up the hillside to the **South Lawn** (contributing site, Photo 11). The South Lawn is approximately 0.6 acre, about one-third the area of the North Lawn, and toward its southern edge begins to rise in elevation as it approaches Elk Rock promontory. It is roughly oval in shape and closely bordered with native and specimen trees, including Douglas fir, magnolias, prunus, *Osmanthus*, ginkgo, and an Atlas cedar. A large stone **altar** (noncontributing object, Photo 11), designed by the architectural firm of Stanton, Boles, Maguire & Church was placed on the South Lawn in 1961 by the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon, which owned the estate at the time.¹²

From the pond the path continues to follow the east edge of the South Lawn, rising slightly until intersecting with another, narrower path that veers southwest toward the highest viewpoints. At the intersection, the main path drops along a short flight of stone steps, ending at a small turnout with a view to the east of the Willamette River and 15-acre Elk Rock Island below.¹³ The rock wall here increases to three feet in height. Several switchbacks and a series of stone steps lead to the two higher viewpoints, referred to by the Kerr family as the "Crow's Nest" and the "Eagle's Nest." These viewpoints are collectively referred to as "The Point" and (for the purposes of Section 5 of this nomination) are considered part of the network of paths. These paths are narrow because they have been cut into the steep hillside, allowing no space for a continuation of the rock wall; however, they are lined on their outer edges with rows of single stones. Due to the steep climb, several nonhistoric simple, black metal

¹¹ "A previous gardener had built an oval reservoir, near [the] path, for a spring with a parapet wall all around it." John C. Olmsted, "Peter Kerr-Abernethy Heights", visit of 18th December 1909. From microfilm. Job#3722, Library of Congress, Washington, C.D.

¹² "Altar Rites Due May 21," *Oregonian*, May 20, 1961, 32.

¹³ Originally purchased in 1910 with two partners, by 1940 Peter and Laurie King owned the island, which they donated to the City of Portland. "Island Park Offered City," *Oregonian*, December 22, 1940, 1.

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handrails have been added for safety.¹⁴ This farthest south reach of the garden has no supplementary water supply, so plant material consists of native trees (Douglas fir, madrone, and white oak) and shrubs such as Oregon grape. The minimal gardening activity is focused on clearing the narrow paths and steps and removing dried vegetation to reduce summer fire hazard.

At the Eagle's Nest viewpoint (the highest point of the property), the path wraps sharply back to the north, gradually descending along the west side of the property toward the South Lawn (Figure 6). En route several smaller paths connect: one from the Crow's Nest; a second from the stone steps on the south side of the pond; and one from the southwest corner of the South Lawn. At the lawn's northwest corner, the path from the Eagle's Nest meets the Magnolia Walk, which is bordered by the trees that give this stretch of pathway its name.

The Magnolia Walk extends north along the west edge of the North Lawn, terminating near the southwest corner of the house at a set of stone stairs leading to the **rock garden** (contributing structure, Photo 15). The rock garden was built between 1920 and 1922 by Adolph Meyer.¹⁵ Its main entrance is opposite the western end of the house, the former location of the greenhouse and current location of the visitor center (Photo 16). The rock garden rises up the hillside to the west of the house via several sets of winding stone stairways that end at a level terrace or "parterre," a narrow shelf 25 feet wide, 300 feet long, running south/north (Figure 42) above the rock garden and the former tennis court/current visitor parking lot (Photo 17). It may also be reached through a narrow opening in the rock wall at the south end of the visitor parking lot. The original rock walls, steps and planting niches are intact, filled with miniature conifers and shrubs, small perennials, and sedums. At the base of the stairs from the Magnolia Walk is an original small stone basin, dripping with water from a pipe supplied by a seep (Figure 32).

Immediately north of the rock garden is the former **tennis court** (contributing structure (Figure 33), which was built 1920-22 by Adolph Meyer and currently used as a visitor parking lot.¹⁶ An earlier tennis court, built by Peter and Tom Kerr and Pat Gifford around 1897, was demolished when the current house was built. Following completion of the house and garage in 1917, Meyer began work on the new court. This required excavation of the sloping western hillside next to the south side of the new garage to create a flat area, 100 feet by 40 feet. A dry-stone wall, 10 feet high and 100 feet long, was built to retain the hillside to the west. In the middle of the wall a recessed viewing niche was added, with a roof made from sheets of bark (Figure 33). Gaps in the wall were planted with small, spring-blooming plants, creating a vertical rock garden (Figure 34). Meyer also crafted a small, stone grotto in the southwest corner of the court with a bowl that slowly fills with water from a hillside seep. In 1959, the tennis court was graveled and became a visitor parking lot. In the fall of 2025, the northwest corner of the wall which had collapsed from a falling tree was rebuilt. The wall at the back of the viewing niche is showing signs of movement and is scheduled for cautious repair to preserve the wisteria (Figure 39). Although its original function has changed and the grass is replaced with gravel, the tennis court retains its original dimensions, level topography, and key original features including the viewing niche and grotto, and is therefore a contributing structure.

A **cut flower garden** (contributing site, Photo 14) is located west of the tennis court, at the north end of the parterre (Figure 6). It is the most formal landscape feature in the garden, consisting of a semicircle of wedge-shaped beds outlined with low boxwood hedging and currently planted with witch hazel; the design of the garden, not the plants themselves, are the character-defining feature. Designed in 1921 by

¹⁴ The handrails were funded from the estate of Sir James McDonald who died in early 1989. *Meeting minutes* of the Elk Rock Garden Committee, May 11, 1989, Collection of Elk Rock Garden Foundation.

¹⁵ Adolph Meyer Project Photobook, Courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2003.

¹⁶ Adolph Meyer, Project Photobook, Courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2003. Also interview with Paul Meyer, April 24, 2003.

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Emanuel T. Mische,¹⁷ it replaced an earlier round cutting garden on the lawn that was eliminated in 1917 when the current house was built. It is 50 feet long (north-south), with a narrow central path extending 27 feet towards the western hillside. Here, a 10-foot high curved stone wall echoes the shape of the bed and serves as a retaining wall for the steep hill above that stretches to Highway 43, the western boundary of the property. This hillside is minimally cultivated, primarily serving as a barrier to the unfenced property. However, the lower edge of the hillside, just above the parterre, is a mix of second-growth Douglas fir and specimen trees, including beech, yew, birch, magnolia, and flowering plum.

South of the cut flower garden in the parterre is the former **swimming pool** (noncontributing structure) (Figure 6), which has been substantially altered. Designed in 1918 by Henry F. Blood,¹⁸ the pool measured 31 feet by 11 feet. According to Anne Kerr McDonald, it was about four feet deep at the ends and five feet deep in the middle. It had no heat or circulation system and was filled with a hose. When it was drained, the children were required to scrub it before it was refilled.¹⁹ The pool was filled in with gravel after 1959 by the Diocese; while the concrete edge is still visible, the design and original purpose are no longer apparent.

Between the former tennis court and the house is the **forecourt** (noncontributing structure Photo 3), accessed from S. Military Lane to the north. The entrance to the forecourt is lined for a short distance by the **entry walls** (contributing structure, Photo 2), 5.5 feet tall and clad with gray harling to match the house and garage. A photograph taken in 1917 when the house was completed suggests the walls were finished at that time. There is no perimeter fence around the property, so these are the only visible barriers. But the walls are so low they function to indicate the estate entrance, not as a physical obstacle. They extend to the west along the northern property line, only as far as the western edge of the garage. To the east a short section was replaced at an unknown date by wooden garden service gates. Beyond these, a dilapidated wire fence, reinforced with roughly-pruned shrubbery forms the eastern extension of the property's northern boundary. The roots of the two Giant sequoias on the south side of the wall are lifting the asphalt at the foot of the lane and causing cracks in the harling.

Passing through the gateway from S Military Lane and following the driveway southwest toward the forecourt, the piers on either side of the entrance walls are surmounted with their original metal lanterns with amber glass (Photo 2). The driveway forks, with one arm leading west to the garage and former tennis court/current visitor parking lot, and one leading south to the oval **forecourt** (noncontributing structure). The forecourt was originally a single automobile in width and covered with gravel, with a large planting bed with neatly mowed grass and a large spring-flowering tree in the center. The plantings in this bed, at the entry and on the western edge of the forecourt were designed in 1917 by E.T. Mische.²⁰ He suggested several varieties of Japanese weeping cherries and crabapples underplanted with other floriferous material that softened the gray harling on the exterior of the house (Figure 28). When the Diocese moved their offices into the house in 1959 and the garden was opened to the public, the forecourt was re-purposed for parking. It was paved with asphalt and over time the central bed shrank to its current dimension, approximately 6 feet square. It contains colorful annuals in the summer months, and while a large magnolia survives next to the stairs leading from the visitor parking lot, most of the other plants, including the beds next to the house are low-maintenance evergreen material. Although the

¹⁷ "Planting Plan for a Cut Flower Garden for the Estate of Mr. Peter Kerr," Portland, Oregon, June 1921. Emanuel Tillman Mische, Landscape Architect, Portland, Oregon. Olmsted Plans & Drawings Collection, Job#3722-Plan-1004. Courtesy of the National Park Service, FLO National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.

¹⁸ Invoice for design and pencil drawing of Swimming Pool, \$5.00, Henry F. Blood, Sellwood, Oregon, May 3, 1918. Ellis F. Lawrence files, Coll AX 56, folder 2, Research Library, University of Oregon, Eugene.

¹⁹ Kerr-McDonald, December 5, 1986, tape 5, side 1, p107.

²⁰ "Planting Plan for the Estate of Peter Kerr," January 30, 1917. Olmsted Plans & Drawings, Collection, Job#3722-1005. Courtesy of the National Park Service, FLO National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.

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outline of the forecourt survives, its function as a point of arrival and departure is gone, as well as its original plantings that hinted at the riches of the garden beyond.

THE HOUSE (contributing building)

Exterior

Overview

The 1917 Scottish vernacular **house**, located near the northwest corner of the property, has 7,104 square feet of livable space plus an additional 2,412 square feet in the unfinished attic and basement. The foundation is poured concrete; some is pargeted, but on the primary façade it is covered by the rough cast walls that reach the ground. It is organized in two long wings connected at an obtuse angle: the longer “east wing” runs roughly north-south for approximately 85 feet, while the shorter “west wing” runs northeast-southwest for approximately 65 feet. An octagonal stair tower is located on the west (primary) side of the building in the nexus point between the two wings. The façade is broken into multiple volumes or “bays,” each two stories but varying slightly in height and width, plus the three-story stair tower. All volumes have low-pitched hipped roofs and walls sheathed in gray rough cast cement (harling). Most of the windows are large one-over-one double-hung wood windows, their narrow wooden casings, except for sills, recessed into the reveals (Figure 23). The arrangement of the windows is irregular. Together the irregularity in massing and windows reduce the mass of the house, countering the sober effect of the gray harling cladding and minimal trim.

East Wing

The primary entrance, which faces the forecourt, is in the west façade of the “east wing,” near the base of the octagonal stair tower (Photo 3). The door is recessed under a shallow, five-sided shingled porch hood, supported on each side with nine-foot tall, Tuscan pillars resting on three-inch concrete plinths. The floor of the small entry porch is surfaced with tan quarry tile, a material that continues through the entry hall to the terrace on the east side of the house. The modest front door is oak of three vertical panels with a brass door knocker centered at head height. Above is an operable, screened, semicircular transom. This, the door, and its screen door are original and in good condition.

The entrance is located at the southern end of the house’s largest volume or “bay,” which extends approximately 36 feet to the north. This bay also features a single window (all windows are one-over-one, double-hung wood windows, unless otherwise noted) and a three-sided bay window at the ground floor. Above the door, on the second story, is a group of four windows. Continuing north from these is a single window, a six-foot space, then two more single windows, three feet apart. The second-floor windows do not align with those on the first floor. At the north end of the first bay is a tall, wide chimney stack with multiple chimney pots that rises high above the house’s hipped roof.

The next bay to the north is 12 feet wide. While it is flush with its neighbor to the south, it is several feet shorter and visually separated by a vertical drainpipe that runs along the intersection of the two bays.²¹ It features two windows in the ground floor and one in the second story. The next and final bay to the north is approximately 32 feet wide and projects about 6 feet forward from the face of the neighboring bays. On the ground floor, it features six windows, unevenly spaced, ranging from 22 to 36 inches apart. In the second story are three windows, roughly evenly distributed across the façade, but these do not align with those on the floor below.

Turning the corner, the north façade of this bay is approximately 19 feet wide (Photo 4). At the east side of the ground floor is an entrance with a three-sided porch hood clad in asphalt shingles to match the roof. The wood door and its screen door are original, and open onto a 13-foot by 21-foot concrete terrace. Originally enclosed with tall wooden fencing with lattice top, this is now encircled with a 4-foot-

²¹ The ceilings on the first floor of the house are 12’ high, reduced to 9’ on the second floor. In the service wing the ceilings are 8’ high.

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high high boxwood hedge. It serves its original purpose for storing garbage bins; a modern wooden gate leads to the entry drive to the west. At the west side of the ground floor is a single window, and in the second story there are two more windows that align with the door and window below. Centered in the roof above is a small eyelid dormer.

Turning the next corner, the east façade of the bay abuts a long ramp running to the basement. To the other (east) side of the ramp is the chapel, an addition constructed in 1977. It is 34 feet long from north to south and 17.5 feet wide from east to west. While it is separated from the north bay by the basement ramp, it does connect to the house at its southwest corner via a small porch, or slype, with a shed roof. The chapel walls are 12 feet high, lower than those of the original house. In the northeast corner of its side-gabled roof is a square light monitor, approximately 6 feet tall. Like the house, the walls are covered with gray harling, and its four tall, lead-glass casement windows are recessed in the east façade. There is a fifth, smaller window in the south-facing wall of the slype. A painted wood-paneled door in the east-facing wall of the slype is 52 inches wide with a shed porch roof supported by two wood brackets.

South of the chapel addition, the original east façade of the wing continues, facing the North Lawn and Mt. Hood in the distance (Photo 5). An approximately 36-foot-long bay fronts a large, rectangular terrace with the same square tan quarry tiles as at the primary entrance on the west façade; a temporary wood ramp has been added along the eastern edge. Beginning at the southern edge of the bay is an original oak door, directly east of the primary entrance on the west façade. The door is 44 inches wide and 7 feet tall, divided into three vertical panels with a semicircular transom above. It has its original screen door and above, an original metal lantern with amber glass panels (Figure 35) matching those at the entrance walls (Photo 2). To the north of the door, a break in the terrace is planted with a large white wisteria, trained onto a horizontal metal bar above the door. To the north of the vine are four windows, evenly spaced 2 feet apart. On the second floor are four slightly smaller windows, not aligned with those on the first floor. Above the door, in the low-pitched hipped roof, is another eyelid dormer.

The south end of this bay is marked by a narrow, tall chimney stack with multiple pots that extends approximately 8 feet above the roof. From here, another bay projects approximately 7 feet forward and extends approximately 34 feet to the south. On this bay, a string course marks the division between the targeted foundation and the harling-clad walls. On the ground floor, the bay has three evenly spaced windows. On the second floor are two windows aligned halfway over the outermost windows on the first floor.

West Wing

Turning the corner of this bay, the string course marking the top of the foundation continues across the three bays that form the southeast façade of the "west wing" (Photo 6). The northernmost bay, which is approximately 22 feet wide and faces south, has three irregularly spaced windows in the upper story and two at the ground floor. The south edge of this bay meets the north edge of the next at an approximately 145-degree angle; a five-sided bay window is located at the ground floor at the vertex of this angle.

The next bay, which is the same height as its neighbor to the east, is approximately 40 feet wide and faces roughly southeast, toward the South Lawn. The ground floor features a regularly spaced series of three windows near the five-sided bay window as well as one singular window at the opposite (west) end. At the upper story, a sleeping porch at the west end of the bay jetties forward about one foot from the wall below. It is supported at its corners with simple, square corbels and contains a ribbon of five operable windows topped by large transoms, approximately half as tall as the fixed windows below.

The jetty wraps around the corner of the west wing to the building's southwest façade, where it continues the ribbon of windows with a series of six identical operable units with transoms. In the ground floor below is a one-story visitors center addition, measuring approximately 10.5 by 13 feet, that was built ca. 1990 in the location of an original greenhouse (Photo 16). The visitor center is inset from the northwest and southeast facades of the west wing and is visually subordinate to the original 1917 building. It has a low

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gable roof and the southwestern and northwestern ends are open; the south side, the wall facing the garden is wood-framed and covered with gray rough cast cement.

The jetty again wraps the corner to the northwest façade of the “west wing,” which faces the forecourt. Here it features a ribbon of five operable windows with transoms, matching in number and appearance those on the southeast façade. To the east of the jetty, the second story features three evenly spaced windows. At the ground floor are two windows below the jetty and, to the east, two windows in a 12-foot-tall, 16-foot-wide bay that projects approximately 1 foot forward from the wall plane. The top of this bay is covered with a short, sloping strip of metal, and a historic photograph indicates it was the location of a planter box.

Stair Tower

At its eastern edge, the northwest façade of the west wing meets the engaged, 37-foot-tall octagonal stair tower. Each of the three exposed sides of the tower is 6.5 feet wide and features a 1.5-foot-wide, 7-foot-tall window opening containing one square 16-lite leaded glass window over a rectangular 40-lite leaded glass window; the glass is a fine “crackled” texture. The windows are staggered in height, falling from approximately 13 feet above the foundation nearest the west wing to approximately 8 feet above the foundation nearest the east wing and the primary entrance. They all have their original interior screens. An additional window is located at the ground floor in the tower wall near where it meets the “west wing.”

At the top of the tower, above the eaves of the two wings, is a sleeping porch with a series of thirteen casement windows. Eleven of these are 45-inch-tall eight-lite wood windows; the two at the extreme edges, where the sides of the tower intersect with the hipped roofs of the two wings, are 36-inch-tall six-lite wood windows. One of the eight-lite windows has been removed and filled with plywood to accommodate an air conditioner, but the windows are being restored and a replacement window is being fabricated. All of the original window screens are intact. The peak of the tower’s octagonal roof is topped with a copper weathervane with the letters P.K. and a sailing ship, a 90th birthday gift to Mr. Kerr in 1951.²²

Interior – First Floor

Note on alterations: Post-period of significance alterations to the interior spaces are primarily in the basement, service wing on the first floor and on the second floor. They took place while the property was owned and used for offices by the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon, 1959-2022. No plans, permits or other documentation have been found for the changes. Therefore, the dates of these changes can be no more specific than “within the 63 years of Diocese occupation.”

Entry Hall

The primary entrance, located in the west façade of the east wing, opens from the forecourt into a hall that functions as the hub for passage to the drawing room, the library and gun room in the west wing, and the dining room and service functions in the east wing. The floor of the entry hall is surfaced with tan quarry tile. To the immediate south of the entrance doors is the bottom of the staircase that winds up the staircase tower. Its square newel posts are topped with vase shaped caps. The 21 stairs pass the three tall leaded glass windows to a large landing on the second floor. Under the stairwell is a small powder room and coat closet.

An important function of the entry hall is providing direct access to the garden. At the east side of the hall, directly opposite to the primary entrance, another screened oak door leads onto the broad, tan quarry-tiled terrace. The south wall of the hall contains coat closets, and the north wall contains a large cupboard which houses the original canvas hose for a built-in fire suppression system. There are similar

²² Kerr-McDonald interview, March 12, 1987, tape 17, side 2, p382-383.

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cupboards on the second floor and in the tower. While never used, when the house was finished in 1917, distant fire stations made this a sensible precaution.

Hallway

Through a curved portal in the south side of the entrance hall, a short hallway stretches along the west wall of the drawing room to meet the west wing. The walls are covered with dark oak wainscoting reaching halfway to the twelve-foot-high ceiling edged with simple crown molding. The hall terminates in an alcove with a bay window facing south (Photo 18). In the center of the alcove is a substantial three-sided carved oak stand with metal liner for house plants.

Drawing (Living) Room

Two doors at the east side of the hallway open into the drawing room or living room. The 31-foot-by-20-foot drawing room has two windows facing south and three facing east to a view across the North Lawn toward Mt. Hood. The north wall of the room has a large six-foot-wide fireplace flanked by open, built-in bookcases of painted wood. There are original metal wall sconces with glass shades next to the two doors and on both sides of the fireplace.

Library & Gun Room (Office)

At the south end of the hallway, at the west side of the alcove, is the door to the library. This room measures 22.5 feet by 15.5 feet and has light oak wainscoting almost five feet high. Opposite the door is a fireplace. Like five of the other six fireplaces in the house, it is faced with plain, square ceramic tile. To the right of the fireplace is a door to the 13.5-foot-by-15.5-foot "gun room" beyond. The room's name was a facetious reference to Kerr's single shotgun.²³ The space also served as his home office. The fireplace in this room is back-to-back with that in the library, and it is the only one in the house faced with red brick rather than tile. The pale oak wainscoting is identical to that of the library but is less than three feet high. Both rooms are well-lit with two large 1:1 windows on the north (facing the forecourt) and two on the south (facing the garden). Below the windows, as throughout the house, are boxed-in radiators with their original wooden covers, a delicate lattice woven of thin strips of wood. Some of these are damaged but new, hand-woven replacements were crafted by students during the University of Oregon Preservation Field School in August and September 2025. There is a small powder room on the west side of the room with a door that leads into the open-sided visitor center, which replaced the greenhouse at the end of the west wing around 1990.²⁴

The Dining Room

There are two doorways at the north side of the entry hall: one into the 26-foot-by-21-foot dining room, which faces east toward the garden, the other to the service wing, which faces west toward the forecourt. There is a fireplace on the north wall of the dining room and on the east wall are four 1:1 wood sash windows. As in the drawing room, these look toward the North Lawn and Mt. Hood in the distance. Dark oak wainscoting rises 3 feet, 3 inches from the floor with painted walls above to the 12-foot ceiling. There are original silver metal wall sconces with glass shades next to the two doorways and windows. There is no built-in cabinetry in the room. The walls on either side of the fireplace are recessed. A door on the right side of the fireplace leads to the chapel addition and the north end of the terrace.

Service Wing: Pass Pantry, Kitchen, Laundry

Many of the thoughtfully-designed features of the service wing are intact. At the northwest corner of the dining room a swinging door leads into a pass-pantry, lined with original glass fronted cabinets above for

²³ Kerr-McDonald, November 12, 1986. Tape 3, side 1, transcript p62, OHS. "Father was not a war-like person at all. In fact, he never went shooting very much because he said he was such a bad shot that nobody would let him come along." According to Kerr's pocket diary of September 21, 1892 (transcription in the preparer's private collection), he purchased an Anson-Deely hammerless shotgun in London prior to his second trip to Portland.

²⁴ The visitor's center was "nearing completion in early March 1989. *Meeting minutes* of the Elk Rock Garden Committee, March 2, 1989, Collection of Elk Rock Garden Foundation.

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tableware, with cutlery drawers and storage below. This pantry extends into the kitchen (to the north) and the stairwell to the basement (to the south). A bay window in the west wall of the pantry provides generous light from the forecourt. The wooden counter under this window has a three-tier horizontal radiator, probably for warming food. The large kitchen is lined with original built-in cupboards and tilting bins below the counters for large bags of flour, sugar, etc. There is a modern freestanding worktable. Against the east wall is the stove alcove and to its left a large modern refrigerator. There are Formica topped counters on both sides of the stainless-steel sink and to the left of the refrigerator. There is a 1:1 window next to the refrigerator facing north. To the right of the sink counter is a small 5-foot-square room with door and window facing the forecourt. This originally had a marble shelf for making pastries but is now used as a cleaning closet. In December 2025, a new mop sink was installed. The original maple floors in the pantry, kitchen, and hallway are covered with vinyl flooring.

Beyond the kitchen, a service hall running north passes a door to the chapel on the east. Next to this doorway (to the north) is the original cool larder with ventilating window to the outside. This is now used for additional cleaning materials and AV equipment for the chapel.

On the west side of the hall are three smaller rooms. The first was the "servants hall" and is used for storage. Continuing north to the end of the hallway are the final two rooms on the west, just before the back door (in the north exterior wall). These were originally a single laundry room, with washing machine and tubs, built-in ironing board, and a gas heated cabinet for drying laundry (not a modern tumble dryer). The room was divided in two by the Diocese sometime after their ownership began in 1959, and they are currently being repurposed as a lunchroom and workspace for garden volunteers.

At the end of the service hall on the east is the staircase to the second floor and, in the north wall, a door to the service yard.

Chapel

The chapel, which can be accessed from the interior via both the dining room the service hall, was added to the northeast corner of the house by the Episcopal Diocese in 1977, after the period of significance. It measures 17.5 feet by 34 feet and is a single, open space with wooden roof trusses, a light monitor and aggregate pebble floors. It is used for lectures and garden workshops.

Interior – Second Floor

There are two access points to the second floor: from the main staircase inside the front door or via the service stairs at the north end of the kitchen/laundry hallway.

Family Wing (West Wing)

At the top of the main staircase from the entry hall, a large square landing (Photo 19) presents several options. Turning west, a short passage leads past a bathroom with original white hexagonal tile floor. It has a large single 1:1 window facing south over garden. Beyond the bath is a large bedroom, 17 feet by 15.5 feet, with a fireplace on the west wall (Photo 20). There are two 1:1 windows facing south (garden) and two facing north (forecourt). Beyond the bedroom is a walk-in closet lined with shelves and built-in cupboards; it has two 1:1 single windows. The final room at the end of the west wing is the sleeping porch (one of three in the house) (Photo 21). Its windows are arranged in groups of five facing south and north and six facing west. Their plain glass panes are divided into 1:1 thirds. The original screens pull up out of the wall below the sills and still function, albeit awaiting restoration.

Off the southeast corner of the landing is a 12-foot-by-12-foot bedroom that extends to the southeast corner of the house. It is now used as a conference room. It has two large 1:1 windows facing south and two facing east. A doorway on the western wall of this bedroom historically connected to the 8-foot-by-12-foot dressing room and master bathroom, but this is sealed off with storage closets. In the northeast

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corner of the room is a narrow room, designated as a 'wardrobe' on the original blueprints. It is now lined with open, painted wooden shelves.

Off the east side of the landing, one door leads to a narrow staircase up to the top of the tower, and another leads along a short passage to a 13.5-foot-by-16-foot bedroom. This has one 1:1 window facing east over the main lawn. Against the north wall is five-foot-wide fireplace. This was the children's bedroom and is now an office. Through a door to the left side of the fireplace is a bathroom with white hexagonal floor tile and original fixtures. There is a single 1:1 window in its east wall. In 2026, a new door into the hallway was inserted into the west wall of this bathroom. At the end of the passage is a final large bedroom, measuring 16.8 feet by 14.5 feet. It has an adjacent bathroom, identical to the one next to the children's bedroom. On the south wall of the bedroom is a built-in closet with drawers underneath. On the north wall is a large fireplace. There are two large 1:1 windows facing east and a single one on the right side of the fireplace. It originally had a view down to the small garden off the north end of the terrace but now overlooks the chapel roof.

Returning to the second-floor landing, against the west wall is a 9.5-foot-by-10.5-foot room located above the first-floor entry door. On plans it is shown as a sleeping porch. It has four large 1:1 windows, looking west over the forecourt, and it is now used as an office.

Tower Room

Behind one of the doors at the east side of the landing is a narrow wooden door behind which is the 18-inch wide stairway that leads to a third sleeping porch at the top of the stair tower. At its narrow landing a door on the north leads to the unfinished attic. To the south is a tiny bathroom with tub; sink and toilet have been removed. It has a single eyebrow window that drops open on a chain to a narrow view of the garden to the east. The door into the sleeping porch and the two horizontal windows that flank it have ribbed obscure glass. The tower room is 18-foot-by-16-foot with a curved ceiling and two small closets. On the wall to left of the door (south) is the single, original brass wall scone with glass shade. The thirteen casement windows have views down to the forecourt and of the western hillside gardens. The ceiling suffered water damage when the roof leaked and was crudely patched. The fir floor was also damaged. There are two small, unboxed radiators under the center windows that still emit faint heat.

Service Hall (East Wing)

This hall extends 55.5' along the west side of the house, above the pass pantry, kitchen and first floor service hall. Its fir floors are covered with vinyl tile. It is accessed at its south end by the short hall that passes past the bedrooms and through a door facing west. The hall then runs north until it reaches the northern end of the house. Immediately to the left (south) when entering this hall are floor-to-ceiling cupboards lined with Port Orford cedar for wool clothing and blankets. The eastern side of the hall is lined with storage cupboards and drawers. On the west side of the hall a laundry chute is concealed under a hinged window seat; adjacent is the wood/trunk lift from the basement. As on the ground floor there are outlets in the hallway baseboards for the built-in vacuum system. One of the closets houses the fire suppression system. Throughout the house are outlets and buttons for the extensive intercom system, no longer serviceable.

Halfway along the passage, four steps lead down to the final 38 feet of the hall. Here the ceiling height drops from nine to eight feet. On the right is a 10-foot-by-10-foot bedroom, one of the former "servants chambers." Next to it is a closet which originally had a slop sink, subsequently removed. Beyond is the top of the service stairs to the first floor. Across the hall on the west side of the wing is another 10-foot-by-10-foot bedroom with a single 1:1 window and closet. Next to it to the north is the servants' bathroom; its original fir floor is covered with battered Marmoleum. The original bathtub is gone, and it has a replacement sink and toilet. A single 1:1 window faces west to the forecourt. Outside the bathroom door is a metal lined chute with hinged lid (the original laundry room was just below).

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At the north end of the hall were originally two more servants' bedrooms, both 10 feet by 9 feet. They still have their 1:1 windows on the west, east and north walls. The wall between these rooms was removed by the Episcopal Diocese and it is now a single large sitting room.

Basement

There is an unfinished, full cement basement under both wings of the house, extending only to the library in the west wing, where it diminishes into a crawl space. The ceiling is 8 feet high. The basement amenities specified by the Kerrs included a locked wine cellar; trunk storage and lift; silver safe; wood storage and ash pits for the fireplaces; the wood burning (later gas) furnace that fueled the radiator system; water heater(s); vacuum system; flower arranging table and work bench. Most of the partitions to these spaces have been removed. In the past 40 years the basement has also housed sump pumps, as it is susceptible to flooding in heavy rain. Access is from the interior stairs between the entry hall and the pass pantry, and from the outside via the ramp on the east side of the service yard.

GARAGE (contributing building)

Finished in 1917, the **garage** is a separate building located across a short, graveled driveway to the west of the house (Photo 7). It is a wood-framed building clad in gray harling and its windows are recessed to match the main house. It has an irregular footprint including two major volumes, a primary 1.5-story volume measuring roughly 31 feet by 40 feet and a secondary one-story volume measuring about 16 feet square.

The primary volume contains a garage space, which formerly housed an automobile, in the north half of the ground floor; and a modest one-bedroom apartment for the gardener in the south half of the ground floor and in the upper floor. The garage is accessed by a pair of original wood doors, together measuring 11.5 feet wide, that are centered in the east or primary façade. The upper third of each door contains eight lights. The apartment is accessed from a second set of wood doors, also 11.5 feet wide, immediately south of the garage doors. The lower half of each door is paneled and the upper half contains six lights. Overhead, on a wire trellis, is a climbing hydrangea.

Above the doors on the primary façade, the building has a shed roof that rises to a hipped roof over the apartment. There are two recessed dormers containing modern, vertical metal sash replacement units. On the north façade is a narrow concrete ramp that climbs west along the side of the building to the entrance of a room at the rear (west) of the apartment that has a low flat roof, partially covered with plexiglass, and a brick floor suggesting the space may have served as a propagating shed. On the ground level of the north façade are two recessed windows, each with 12 lights. Above are two 1:1 recessed windows. On the south façade, there is a pair of 1:1 windows in the propagating shed, plus a pair of modern sliding doors and two modern replacement windows with vertical sash in the apartment (Photo 8).

The secondary one-story volume is attached to the southeast corner of the primary volume containing the garage and gardener's apartment. Its west façade has a wooden door, the upper half divided into four lights. On the north side of the door is a small, square transom window. On the wall on the south side of the door is a metal trellis supporting a vine. The south façade has a trio of six-light windows. This was a bathroom for the adjacent tennis court from 1917-1959 and is now a restroom for garden staff. It has a pyramidal hipped roof. All of the garage roof is covered in asphalt shingles.

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ALTERATIONS AFTER THE PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

Most notable alterations to the property since the end of the period of significance in 1957 were made between 1959 and 2022, when the property was owned by and used as the administrative headquarters for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon.²⁵

Alterations to the Grounds

A few significant changes have been made to the garden since 1959. The swimming pool was filled with gravel, obscuring its original use almost entirely and rendering it noncontributing. The forecourt, which was originally planted with flowering crabapple and cherry trees that framed a circular grass island, creating a visually softening effect to the gray harling on the house exterior (Figure 28), was paved for employee parking, reducing its central planting bed and diminishing its original role as a formal arrival space to the point that it is also noncontributing (Photo 3). The tennis court was covered with gravel to serve as visitor parking; because it retains its character-defining dimensions, level ground, and stone wall with viewing niche (Photo 7) and grotto, it remains a contributing resource despite this change.

In 1961, the Episcopal Diocese installed a large stone altar designed by Stanton, Boles, Maguire & Church on the South Lawn.²⁶ The bridge over The Cascades, which has been replaced several times, was replaced with its current iteration around 1995.²⁷ As both the altar and bridge postdate the period of significance, they are noncontributing.

Because the garden is a living landscape, some plant materials have changed since the end of the period of significance; however, the overall design intent and spatial organization established during that time have been carefully maintained. One of the few notable changes to plantings is the replanting of the cut-flower garden with witch hazel; despite the shift in plant material, the beds retain their characteristic wedge-shaped design and low boxwood borders. Most other interventions have been maintenance- or safety-related. Several rock walls have required repair over the years, including the rebuilding of the northwest corner of a collapsed wall in 2025. Handrails were added to some of the walls at the Point around 1990.²⁸ Currently, the wall behind the viewing niche is slated for careful stabilization to protect the mature wisteria, which does date to the period of significance.

Alterations to the House

As early as 1960 the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon was contemplating the addition of a chapel to the house.²⁹ The 18-foot-by-34-foot structure was finally built in 1977, on the northeast corner of the house, north of the terrace. It replaced a narrow ornamental garden, but the garden's brick balustrade was incorporated into the eastern façade of the new structure. The exterior of the chapel addition was covered with harling, to match the existing house. An interior door to the new chapel was inserted into the wall on the east side of the fireplace in the dining room and a new porch from the chapel to the terrace replaced the original door from the kitchen.

²⁵ "Plot Plan. Alterations & Additions to Kerr Residence. Episcopal Diocese Office," Stanton Boles Maguire & Church, July 17, 1959. Copy courtesy of George Otten, Beaverton, Oregon, 2004.

²⁶ "Altar Rites Due May 21," *Oregonian*, May 20, 1961, 32.

²⁷ Eileen Fitzsimons, personal recollection.

²⁸ The handrails were funded from the estate of Sir James McDonald who died in early 1989. *Meeting minutes* of the Elk Rock Garden Committee, May 11, 1989, Collection of Elk Rock Garden Foundation.

²⁹ "Proposed Development Plan of the Bishop's Close," March 1960, George H. Otten & Son, Landscape Architects. Copy from George Otten, Beaverton, Oregon, 2004.

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Around 1990, an open-sided visitor center was built on the end of the west wing, in roughly the same location as an original greenhouse that was removed at an unknown date.³⁰ A powder room was added (date unknown) at the end of the gun room, with a door to the visitor center.

Changes to the interior spaces are primarily concentrated in the basement and service wings on both the first and second floors. No plans, permits or other documentation has been found for alterations, so the date of most of these changes is uncertain. Most changes appear to have been relatively minor and did not impact spatial qualities or flow between rooms. It is understood that the wall separating two servants' bedrooms on the second floor at the north end of the house were combined into a single room; both of the original doors to the hall, and individual small clothes closets remain. The most puzzling change relates to the two large bedrooms on the second floor in the west wing. Plans show a large connecting dressing room, but it appears to have been replaced with a set of storage closets. The first-floor laundry room was divided into two spaces and repurposed for duplicating and mailing supplies and tasks; storage cupboards for vestments, communion supplies, etc. were added to the room shown on plans as the servant's hall next to the kitchen. Originally there were no ceiling fixtures in the drawing or dining rooms or entry hall; modern ones were added.

Between December 2025 and April 2026, upgrades of the plumbing, electrical and heating systems were underway, as well as asbestos removal. Restoration of the windows and floor and ceiling in the tower sleeping porch were scheduled. Replacement of the bathroom floor tiles with similar hexagon tiles was necessary for plumbing replacement, but original fixtures were returned where possible. Otherwise, despite almost 65 years of office use, the 109-year-old house is remarkably intact; flooring, wainscoting, walls, windows, doors, millwork, etc., generally remain as constructed.

INTEGRITY

Location and Setting

The Kerr Estate (Elk Rock Garden) remains in its original location at 11800 S. Military Lane, on the Elk Rock promontory above the Willamette River. While the setting has evolved since Peter Kerr first began developing the gardens nearly 130 years ago, its essential qualities remain legible. Although the surrounding area is no longer on the rural outskirts of the City of Portland, the estate still sits at the end of a narrow dead-end street edged by lawns and overhung with mature trees. The residential character of the neighborhood, with substantial setbacks, hedges, and well-maintained landscaping, reinforces the quiet, secluded approach to the property. On the Willamette River to the east, recreational boating has replaced commercial river traffic.³¹ The steam, and then electric trains that at their peak in the 1920's made 64 trips per day on the tracks below Elk Rock still run twice daily on weekend days in the summer.³² With the exception of the nearby public school, the traffic hum of Highway 43, and weekly landscape services at neighboring properties, the setting retains a sense of calm consistent with its historic character.

Equally important is the property's relationship to its natural setting, which also remains consistent with the period of significance. The house continues to occupy its original position overlooking the Willamette River, separated by the steep slopes of the Elk Rock promontory. The alignment of the dining and drawing rooms toward the view of Mt. Hood, a defining feature of the estate's siting and one emphasized by John C. Olmsted in early consultations,³³ remains open and central to the experience of the property

³⁰ The visitor's center was "nearing completion in early March 1989. *Meeting minutes* of the Elk Rock Garden Committee, March 2, 1989, Collection of Elk Rock Garden Foundation.

³¹ "Local river traffic declined... with improved highways in the 1920's." Richard M. Engeman, *The Oregon Companion*, (Timber Press: Portland, Oregon 2009) 323.

³² Willamette Shore Trolley, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willamette_Shore_Trolley. Accessed April 3, 2026.

³³ John C. Olmsted, "Peter Kerr-Abernethy Heights," December 18, 1909, TD (photocopy), Washington D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job File #3722. Microfilm

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from the east side of the house and from the North and South lawns. The topography and the relationship between the house, the river, and the distant mountain continues to anchor the estate in its historic landscape.

Design, Materials, and Workmanship

The Kerr Estate's house, garage, and garden resources retain the essential aspects of their historic design, materials, and workmanship through their extant historic fabric, organization, and orientation on the property. As previously noted, the alignment of the house toward views of Mt. Hood—one of the most deliberate and significant design decisions in the development of the estate—remains unchanged. The overall massing, circulation patterns, and spatial relationships between the house, garage, and garden features, particularly the network of pathways, continue to reflect the original design intent, and most resources retain original historic fabric that demonstrates integrity of materials and workmanship. While the garden is a “living” landscape, meaning that plant material has changed over time and will continue to do so, it remains organized within the historic physical framework and according to the design intent established during the period of significance. Peter Kerr's original blending of specimen trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs with existing native species—such as white oak, Douglas fir, and madrone—and native plant materials including red currant, trillium, erythronium, and Oregon grape established a character-defining planting strategy that shaped the landscape's identity. This approach was thoughtfully maintained from 1959 through 2022 under the stewardship of Kerr descendants and a garden committee, and it continues today under the direction of the current nonprofit owner, preserving continuity with the historic design intent.

The exterior elements and fabric of the 1917 Scottish vernacular-style house remain intact, including recessed double-hung wood windows, exterior doors and their screen doors, low-pitch hipped roofs, leaded-glass windows in the stair tower, and unpainted gray harling cladding the wood-framed walls (Figure 6). The 1977 chapel addition is located at the far northeast corner of the house; its recessed windows, leaded glass, and gray rough-cast cement reduce visual contrast while its streamlined design differentiates it from the original structure. The 1991 visitor center is modest in scale—smaller than the demolished greenhouse it replaced—and uses compatible materials such as gray rough-cast cement on its garden-facing side. Interior alterations have been minimal. Changes to the house's layout are limited to tertiary spaces, including the division of the former laundry room into two rooms, the removal of a dressing room connecting the two south bedrooms, and the removal of a wall between two servants' bedrooms at the north end of the service wing. Most rooms retain their original doors and hardware, windows, fireplaces, hardwood and quarry-tile flooring, wainscoting, cornice moldings, baseboards, wall sconces, radiators and covers, and fire-suppression system. Material changes are similarly limited, consisting primarily of vinyl flooring installed over original wood in the service wing, in-kind replacement of bathroom tile and radiator screens, and replacement of other minor finishes. The garage has experienced slightly more extensive alterations, including the replacement of original window sash, but continues to communicate its original design intent through its harling cladding and recessed window openings. The harled entry walls are similarly preserved and retain original gate piers and lamps.

The same integrity of design, materials, and workmanship is evident in the garden features. Although the garden is a living landscape and plant materials have therefore changed over time, its circulation, planting plans, and major structures have largely survived. The network of paths, some of them dating to the very beginning of the period of significance, follows historic routes and retains associated rock walls and stairs added through the 1920s. The North and South Lawns, the rock garden, and designed water features—including the pond, “The Cascades,” the tennis court's grotto, and the rock garden's basin—also reflect the original workmanship and design intent. Repairs and routine maintenance have generally

Reel 230. “My idea was to set the house further west and turn it so as to front forward to Mt. Hood which I said to my mind a far more important feature than his lawn...He did not care so much for Mt. Hood as he had got so used to it.”

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followed the original design and used in-kind materials, and even where changes have occurred, the underlying design generally remains legible: for example, the tennis court's grassy surface has been replaced with gravel, but its dimensions and features, including the viewing niche, remain intact, and the replanting of the cut-flower garden with witch hazel preserved its semicircular form and boxwood edging. The infill of the pool and the broadening of the forecourt, though they rendered these resources noncontributing, and the addition of the altar to the South Lawn are relatively minor alterations when considering the estate as the sum of many interrelated parts. Overall, Elk Rock Garden retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship.

Feeling and Association

Elk Rock Garden continues to convey the feelings and associations that characterized the estate during the 1897–1957 period of significance. Each of the extant resources was created with a deliberate purpose serving the values, interests, and/or daily rhythms of Peter Kerr and his family over their long residence, and many reflect the input—and in some cases the direct contributions—of notable architecture and landscape architecture professionals. Wandering paths throughout the district, laid out by Kerr, encourage contemplative walks, appreciation of dramatic views, and observation of seasonal changes; associated rock walls provided safety along steep slopes while also evoking the rugged landscapes of his native Scotland. The orientation of the house toward Mt. Hood reflects the recommendation of John Olmsted, while its design references both Kerr's heritage and the family's pragmatic requests. The large lawns established by Kerr, his brother, and their colleague during their bachelor years, along with the tennis court designed by Adolph Meyer, offered beautiful and practical opportunities for vigorous outdoor exercise and socializing. Various garden sections provided outlets for creative expression and horticultural experimentation, including Emanuel Mische's cutting garden for Laurie Kerr and Meyer's rock garden. Although plant material within the garden has changed over time and a handful of garden resources have been altered, nearly all of these activities and design intents remain legible within the structural framework established during the period of significance.

Despite more than sixty years of office use, the estate's house retains the appearance and character of a grand private residence, and the property overall continues to communicate its significance as a rare late-19th- to early-20th-century country estate. Although no longer a private home, the original functions of the house and garage remain clearly legible. The garden likewise maintains its historic sense of feeling as a quiet, restful, and beautiful refuge, preserving the contemplative and experiential qualities that defined it during the period of significance. The approach along the quiet, tree-lined lane, the preserved views toward the Willamette River and Mt. Hood, and the unfolding sequence of outdoor spaces all contribute to a tranquil and immersive experience. The relationship between the various contributing resources and the integration of the garden with the natural topography further reinforce the historic character of the property. Overall, the district retains a strong sense of feeling and association with the period of significance and with the architectural and landscape-architectural qualities that qualify the property for significance under Criterion C. The stewardship of Peter and Laurie King's daughters, Anne and Jane Kerr, along with the work of the volunteer Garden Committee, landscape professionals such as George Otten, Wallace K. Huntington, Craig Kiest, and Kailla Platt, and the Elk Rock Garden Foundation has maintained the estate's historic character while acknowledging the garden as a living landscape that evolves with time and nature.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1897-1957

Significant Dates

1897: Kerr moves to property and begins
developing the landscape

1917: current residence constructed

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kerr, Peter: landscape designer and gardener

Lawrence, Ellis F. & Holford, William G.: architects

Mische, Emanuel Tilman: landscape architect

Meyer, Adolph: landscape architect

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Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate (Elk Rock Garden) begins in May 1897, when Peter Kerr, his brother Tom, and their colleague Patrick Gifford arrived on the property as renters and began making improvements, including building paths, rock walls, and level lawns for a tennis court and golf greens; significant portions of these features were incorporated into the estate's later iterations and survive to this day.³⁴

After Peter Kerr's marriage to Laurie King in 1905, he assumed full responsibility for the garden's design, building terraces for a garden, expanding his orchard, and planting ornamental trees. The couple consulted with nationally known landscape architect John C. Olmsted, who provided recommendations on organizing the estate and siting a future house with a view east to Mt. Hood.³⁵ The next several years gave the Kerrs time to develop a list of features desired in a house, and after a year of discussion with architects Ellis Lawrence and William Holford building commenced.³⁶ Completion of the house and associated garage in 1917 led to the addition of new landscape components, including a new tennis court, a swimming pool, a rock garden, linear water feature, formal cut flower garden, and an increased focus on ornamental plants and trees.³⁷

The third phase of the garden development, which lasted from about 1922 to 1957, was a period of experimentation and refinement of plantings. Kerr "made copious notes about the garden" during this period and persuaded his daughters to drive him to nurseries.³⁸ He employed a gardener and, his daughter Anne Kerr McDonald recalled, "every day before he went into town he went out into the garden and told the gardener what he wanted done. When he came home in the evening, he went out to see if they were done or how they had progressed."³⁹

The development of Elk Rock Garden's grounds continued up until Kerr's death in April 1957, his daughter observing, "The beds were filled when father died. He kept it right up."⁴⁰ The period of significance therefore ends in 1957, which marked the conclusion of the garden's active evolution; later stewardship has maintained the estate within the structural framework Kerr established during his residence on the property.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate (Elk Rock Garden) is locally significant under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Landscape Architecture for its high artistic merit and as a rare surviving example of a turn-of-the-century country estate on the outskirts of Portland. The property's design reflects the layered contributions of its owner, grain commission merchant Peter Kerr, and several prominent design professionals over the 1897–1957 period of significance. Early guidance from John C. Olmsted, a leading figure in early American landscape architecture, established the estate's defining axial view toward Mt. Hood; Emanuel T. Mische, a trained horticulturalist and Portland's first professional parks superintendent, shaped certain grading

³⁴ Peter Kerr to James Dewar, March 12, 1898, Kerr Coll. 74, OHS Reel 2.

³⁵ John C. Olmsted, "Peter Kerr-Abernethy Heights," December 18, 1909, TD (photocopy), Washington D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job File #3722. Microfilm Reel 230.

³⁶ Michael Shellenbarger, ed., *Harmony in Diversity: The Architecture and Teaching of Ellis F. Lawrence* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 1989), 40.

³⁷ "Planting Plan for Cut-Flower Garden for the Estate of Mr. Peter Kerr," Portland, Oregon, June 1921. Brookline, Plan#3722-1004; Paul P. Meyer, interviewed by author, Portland, Oregon, April 24, 2003; Adolph Meyer, Project Photobook, Courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2003. Also interview with Paul Meyer, April 24, 2003.

³⁸ Kerr-McDonald, March 12, 1987, Tape 18, side 1, p387, OHS. "Kerr-McDonald, November 19, 1986, Tape 4, side 2, p 106. "When I learned to drive I could take father in our car to a nursery."

³⁹ Ibid., November 19, 1986, Tape 2, side 2, p101.

⁴⁰ Ibid., March 18, 1987, Tape 19, side 2, p 421, OHS.

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and planting decisions; and Adolph Meyer, a Swiss-trained landscape architect known locally for his rockwork and water features, introduced features such as the rock garden that are central to the property's character.⁴¹ Kerr himself was a lifelong gardener, trained by his mother during his childhood in Scotland, and guided the estate's development from his arrival at the property in 1897, originally as a renter, up until his death in 1957. He and his wife Laurie King worked closely with celebrated Oregon architects Ellis Lawrence and William Holford on the design of the property's current house and garage, which echo the Scottish vernacular houses Kerr knew from his youth (Figures 18-22). Carefully sited within the developing garden, the house was designed so that its asymmetrical massing and large windows harmonize with and frame the surrounding landscape, while its somewhat severe lines and gray harling walls provide a neutral backdrop for the effects of colorful spring-blooming trees, perennials, and climbing vines. The totality is a cohesive and thoughtfully integrated landscape that, over its six decades of development, drew professional and public admiration, appearing in *Beautiful Gardens in America* (1915) and attracting visits from horticulturists, landscape architecture students, national organizations, and garden clubs. Now open to the public, Elk Rock Garden continues to embody high artistic values and stands as one of the area's only country estates or large private gardens to retain much of its original scale, setting, and design unity.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

PETER KERR, FROM SCOTLAND TO OREGON⁴²

The second of eight children, Peter Kerr was born in October 1861 in Newton Stewart, a small agricultural town in southwestern Scotland. The family lived in apartments above the bank managed by his father, but Mr. Kerr rented a nearby 200-acre mixed farm that provided fruit, vegetables, poultry, eggs and dairy products for the family's meals. Mrs. Kerr taught her children gardening skills in a small stone walled plot on the hill above the main street and there was a small, attached greenhouse on the riverside of the bank. The children were free to roam the fields and forests around town, swimming and ice skating on ponds and rivers. They attended the local school through the American equivalent of eighth grade, receiving scores in national tests. In addition to general classes, Peter recorded high marks in drawing and Latin, both useful in his future garden-making.

After three years clerking in his father's bank, at age seventeen Peter moved to London, leaving his bucolic rural community for the shocking bustle of the metropolis at the height of the Victorian era. He began as an errand boy in the commodities-trading firm of Dewar & Webb, the partners being Major Bridges Webb and Peter's uncle James Dewar. In the following eight years he worked his way up in the office, learning all aspects of the business. Although he had two brothers in London, Peter missed his family life in Scotland, gardening, and proximity to nature, and always returned home for his annual vacation. He spent some weekends at his uncle's house in Putney, where he mowed and edged the lawns, pruned and cultivated garden plants. During his final two years in London his boarding house was near the Royal Horticultural Society gardens at Kew and he recorded many visits.⁴³

⁴¹ John C. Olmsted, "Peter Kerr-Abernethy Heights," December 18, 1909, TD (photocopy) (Washington D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates Records, Series B, Job File #3722, Microfilm Reel 230); "Planting Plan for the Estate of Peter Kerr," January 30, 1917, Emmanuel Tillman Mische, Landscape Architect, Portland, Oregon, Olmsted Plans & Drawing Collection, Job#3722, Mr. Peter Kerr, Portland, Oregon, Plan#3722-1005 (courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA); "Planting Plan for Cut-Flower Garden for the Estate of Mr. Peter Kerr," Portland, Oregon, June 1921 (Brookline, MA Plan#3722-1004); Paul P. Meyer, interviewed by author, Portland, Oregon, April 24, 2003; Adolph Meyer, Project Photobook, Courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2003. Also interview with Paul Meyer, April 24, 2003.

⁴² The biographical information in this section is largely compiled from *Pocket Diaries* into which Peter wrote brief daily notes from the age of 15 (1876) to 33 (1894), and which were transcribed by this nomination's preparer during the period in which the house was owned by the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon. Other material is from five reels of microfilm that combine business and personal correspondence. The microfilm is part of the Kerr collection, 74, at the Research Library of the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. The current location of the Pocket Diaries is unknown.

⁴³ Peter Kerr Pocket Diaries, July 12, 1885; September 6, 1885; October 17, 1885.

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On the other side of the world in Oregon, beginning in the 1870s, the dry lands east of the Cascade range were planted with grain, primarily wheat. Commission traders began establishing offices on the west coast and in November 1888, Peter was sent to Portland on behalf of Dewar & Webb to gauge the viability of a permanent office. The natural beauty of the city's surroundings in winter was unimpressive: rain and snow dampened its appeal. Transferred to San Francisco for six months, he enjoyed its drier Mediterranean climate and wildflowers. In the following three years, he spent eighteen months in New Zealand and Australia, Buenos Aires, and finally, in late 1892 returned to Portland where he opened an office for his employers. As spring arrived, he resumed outdoor activities, a pastime he had seldom enjoyed for sixteen years. While hiking, fishing and rowing on the Willamette, he mused to his cousin about Oregon as a permanent home, "In Oregon one can live a kind of regular life as one does at home."⁴⁴ He watched for farmlands at affordable prices, but they were too far from Portland. Making future plans, he wrote to his brother in London, asking that he send books on horticulture, dairying, botany, farming, electricity, and how to purchase a horse.⁴⁵

It was fortunate that Peter was a salaried employee, as he had many competitors in the grain commission business, and a global recession that began in the early 1890's diminished sales. In September 1893, he formed a partnership with business rival William Sibson and when Tom, one of Peter's younger brothers arrived, the Sibson Kerr firm expanded to Tacoma, Washington.⁴⁶ Soon they were reinforced by Patrick Gifford, a friend from Newton Stewart. Then a major investment failed, prolonged lawsuits followed, and Sibson left the partnership in July 1899. Within days, the new firm of Kerr Gifford was established. Despite the arrival of a third Kerr brother, Andrew, in 1902, the firm struggled as depressed market conditions extended into the first years of the 20th century.

DEVELOPMENT OF ELK ROCK GARDEN

Ironically, the 1890's recession that flattened grain sales led to Peter's arrival at what would become his permanent home. Speculators who bought property before the downturn failed to make their mortgage payments, prices dropped, and investment opportunities emerged. The Kerr brothers had been living in boarding houses since leaving Scotland in the 1870s. Through fellow members at the Arlington Club (811 SW Salmon St., Portland), or perhaps from their then-business partner William Sibson, who lived at the head of Military Lane, the Kerrs and Pat Gifford learned that a foreclosed house and property was available for rent in the recently platted subdivision of Abernethy Heights (Figure 5), six miles south of Portland. Writing to his uncle, Peter commented, "We have arranged to take a house near Sibson's. I figure that we shall save a good deal of money."⁴⁷

Phase I: Bachelor Years, 1897- 1905

On May 1, 1897, Peter and Tom Kerr and Pat Gifford arrived on the property at Elk Rock (Figure 1). The house on the property at that time was a rambling, Queen Anne style dwelling built as a "summer place" ca 1895 (Figure 13), dubbed the "Cliff Cottage." It was situated on the northeast corner of Lot 8 of the Abernethy Heights subdivision, on 2.58 acres. Uninsulated and heated with fireplaces, it sat high on an eight-foot foundation, with a porch on the east, providing a view of the City of Milwaukie across the Willamette River and Mt. Hood in the distance. The three bachelors immediately invested their time and labor, converting the property to meet their desire for recreation, social connection, and gardening. A double grass-surfaced tennis court with wire fencing was erected to the south of the house. The area alongside the courts, stretching to the base of the hill on the west, was used for a driving range; the three tenants were members of the newly established Waverley Golf Club across the river.⁴⁸ A few greens with flags were established on the lawn and stretched south into adjacent, undeveloped property. In a nod to Scottish custom, several cairns (stacks of stones) were placed on the lawn, as well. (Figure 12). Peter also began laying out rock-lined paths that extended southward from the house to the elevated end of Lot 9 of the Abernethy Heights subdivision, now

⁴⁴ Peter Kerr to David McLaren, London, February 18, 1893, Kerr Coll.74, OHS, Reel 1.

⁴⁵ Peter Kerr to Tom Kerr, London, March 23, 1893, Kerr Coll. 74, OHS, Reel 3.

⁴⁶ "Founded the new house of Sibson & Kerr," Pocket Diary, September 6, 1893.

⁴⁷ Peter Kerr to James Dewar, London, April 5, 1897, Kerr Coll. 74, OHS Reel 3.

⁴⁸ The Golf Club was spelled with an "e" (Waverley), but the subdivision to the east was spelled Waverly.

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known as "The Point."⁴⁹ Near the house the paths may have been surfaced with hoggins, a mixture of small sharp rock compacted into the soil, preferably clay. It was a familiar garden path surface in Great Britain. The paths and rock walls have survived to the present day and are contributing structures within the district; the areas where the tennis court, driving range and golf greens were located are part of the North and South Lawns, both contributing sites.

The bachelors' other use of the property was the development of a "smallholding," common in Great Britain, an attempt at food self-sufficiency (Figure 13). To this end a large vegetable garden, sloping to the west above the lawn, was planted and a long wooden shed built on a narrow shelf of land above the garden (now the Parterre). The shed served as poultry coop and laundry. A milk cow was acquired as well, and Cliff Cottage cook and houseman Ching Ben Yen put the foodstuffs to use, preparing breakfast and dinner. The residents walked downhill to the Elk Rock stop on the nearby commuter railroad, rode to their office in Portland, and commuted home to dinner, afterwards polishing their golfing skills or working in the garden. The three renters had intended to stay only for the summer, but had created amenities (paths, rock walls, tennis court, putting greens, the smallholding, a shed), acquired animals (poultry, a cow, a Jack Russell terrier) and hired an employee (Ching Ben Yen). They enjoyed their new environment and lifestyle too much to return to the confinement of boarding house life, and they decided to remain.

Their new, suburban homestead also provided opportunities for the bachelors to develop relationships in a relaxed atmosphere, away from the formal "calling card" protocols listed in the city's Blue Book, which admonished, "A gentleman should not make a first call upon the ladies of the family...without an introduction or an invitation."⁵⁰ At the Cliff Cottage, the promise of a vigorous game of tennis, the opportunity to improve one's golf game, sit on the lawn or porch to enjoy tea and conversation, or take a private stroll across the grounds into the woods beyond the tennis court, made it an unconventional destination for single women, who could escape the watchful eyes of their parents and socialize freely. Eventually some friendships bloomed into romance; within two years, in late 1899, Tom Kerr married Mabel Macleay and moved into her childhood home in the city. Other bachelors filled the empty bedrooms, until in 1905, Peter, age 44, married Mabel's childhood friend Laurie King, age 28. Just before his marriage Peter purchased Cliff Cottage and its acreage, and within a few years acquired all of Lots 8, 9 and 10, for a total of 13.38 acres. The family soon expanded with the arrival of the couple's two daughters, Anne and Jane.

Several changes to the landscape were made or overseen by Peter in the four years after his marriage. He had planted fruit and ornamental trees on the lawn between the tennis court and the vegetable garden. Laurie King Kerr was a keen, competitive golfer who won many trophies at the Waverley Club. Although not a gardener herself, she enjoyed flowers and arranging bouquets for the house. To provide a supply of material for his wife, a large round flower bed was cut into the turf between the house and vegetable garden (Figure 14). A second, major alteration was to the vegetable garden itself, which was rebuilt into several terraces. Stone steps led up the hillside from the lawn to the narrow terrace above, called the "parterre." The central pathway was covered with a substantial rose-covered pergola (Figure 16). A photograph of the terraces was included in a 1915 book, *Beautiful Gardens in America*, the first time the garden at Elk Rock appeared in print.⁵¹ A second shed, for the cow and tools, was built on the upper shelf, just south of the first one.

Phase II: Professional Advice, 1906-1922

Apparently Laurie Kerr was unhappy with the many fruit trees that were crowding the lawn, perhaps restricting her golf practice. After four years of marriage, the Cliff Cottage was losing its charm: it was cold, drafty and felt crowded for the growing family. Although they lacked funds, the Kerrs dreamed of a future, custom-built house. In addition to the Elk Rock property, they owned a five-acre lot across the river, adjacent to the Waverley Golf Club in Waverly Heights. In 1909, they decided to enlist professional advice and engaged the services of nationally renowned landscape architect John C. Olmsted for several reasons. First, Peter wanted an evaluation of the twelve-year-old garden he had created. Second, the couple wanted to discuss the pros/cons

⁴⁹ Peter Kerr to James Dewar, March 12, 1898, Kerr Coll. 74, OHS Reel 2.

⁵⁰ *The Portland Blue Book and Pacific Coast Elite Directory*, (San Francisco, Bancroft Co., 1893).

⁵¹ Louise Shelton, *Beautiful Gardens in America*, (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1915), 32.

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of staying at Elk Rock or moving to the Waverley lot. Finally, reflecting his precarious financial situation, Peter requested a subdivision plan, in case some of the Elk Rock property had to be sold, while allowing the Kerrs to remain on part of it. Writing to Olmsted, Kerr explained, "The nature of my business is such that...it might be necessary for me to take up my residence in London and in that event I should not care to have a large, expensive, not-ready-of-sale place on my hands."⁵²

John C. Olmsted

Olmsted was well qualified to advise on all four matters. His firm, Olmsted & Associates, established a national reputation during the career of his stepfather, Frederick Law Olmsted, who retired in 1898. By 1909 John was a familiar presence in Portland, guiding planning for the 1905 Lewis & Clark Exposition & World Fair; creating the initial plan for the city's expanding parklands and providing design advice for other public institutions as well as private clients. He spoke on many occasions about civic planning, park and garden design, and was quoted in the local newspapers.

On December 17, 1909, Olmsted arrived by train at Elk Rock. After lunch with the Kerrs, he toured the grounds, then was rowed across the river to evaluate the Waverly land. Olmsted later dictated a ten-page report for his clients.⁵³ He first recommended that if possible, the Kerrs should remain at Elk Rock. Addressing his clients, Olmsted wrote, "If I were you I should build on the Abernethy Heights place...based largely on its superior landscape advantages. It is susceptible of a greater amount and more interesting variety of landscape gardening improvements, the accomplishment of which can be spread over many years, thus affording you a great source of interest and occupation."⁵⁴ The plot at Waverly was flat and to create a view toward the Cascade range, the house would have to be elevated. He was adamant about the view of Mt. Hood from the Elk Rock property, stating that the primary rooms of a future house should be aligned toward that view. He thought it could be built back from the edge of the eastern bluff, to avoid the east winds but retain as much of the lawn as possible. Olmsted added, patronizingly, that "Its position would also conceal the sordid little houses of Milwaukie."⁵⁵ Finally, he could see that Peter was an experienced and passionate gardener, that he would soon have the small space at Waverly finished, but the garden at Elk Rock would engage him for a lifetime.

Olmsted also listed possible improvements to the garden at Elk Rock. He preferred clear delineation of garden functions. He approved of the terraces on the western hillside but in his report he agreed with Laurie Kerr that the "promiscuous plantings" of the fruit trees detracted from the repose of the lawn (Figure 14) and suggested that perhaps the fruit trees could be espaliered on the upper levels of the terrace. He also advised the path that ran along the base of the terraces, toward the lawn to the south was too flat and straight; a gentle curve would be an improvement, with a pergola at the intersection where two paths joined. Peter had contemplated filling a shallow gully located near the north end of Lot 9 of the Abernethy Heights subdivision (now the linear water feature known as The Cascades) but Olmsted suggested to Kerr that it was "an opportunity for effective picturesque treatment." A serviceable, rustic bridge across the gully, whose sides and deck were made of tree branches (Figure 15) had been built to ease crossing the 45-foot gap; it was suggested that this be replaced with an "picturesque rustic rock arch."⁵⁶ Olmsted closed his report by requesting a survey of the property in

⁵² Peter Kerr to John C. Olmsted, February 17, 1910, Library of Congress, Olmsted job #3722.

Records of the Olmsted firm are in two separate archives. Correspondence and property evaluations are at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Plans and maps are held at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts. For private properties Olmsted made a site visit, dictated a summary for himself and then used the summary to prepare a written narrative for the client of his impressions and recommendations.

Olmsted records for Peter Kerr's properties are catalogued at both archives as Job Number 3722. The materials at Brookline include thirteen plans and drawings held by Olmsted office but not necessarily created by them. This includes a tracing of a contour and site map of the Cliff Cottage property prepared by Portland surveyor R.S. Greenleaf in January 1910. The original is held by Portland landscape architect Craig Kiest. Also in the Brookline collection are plans generated by Emanuel Tillman Mische, an Olmsted employee from 1898-1906. After 1914 he was developing his own landscape business and his plans for Kerr were created when he was self-employed.

⁵³ *Peter Kerr – "Abernethy Heights", Visit by J.C.O., 18th December, 1909*, Library of Congress, Job 3722.

⁵⁴ John C. Olmsted to Peter Kerr, January 1, 1910, Library of Congress, Job 3722, microfilm.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 10.

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order to prepare a subdivision plan. This was provided and is the first visual record of the garden created by Kerr. It showed the entry drive, house, tennis court, rock walls, paths, lawns, major trees – primarily oak and fir, the small pond, terraces, and sheds (Figure 42).⁵⁷

The Kerrs thanked Olmsted, paid his fee (\$180), and stated they were in no position to build at that time. Either enthused by the potential development of Elk Rock or the possibility of generating more detailed plans (and fees), Olmsted nevertheless drew up a “Preliminary Plan for the Estate of Peter Kerr.”⁵⁸ Dated March 25, 1910, it showed a square house placed at the foot of the western hill, just inside the (current) entry gate. It had a circular courtyard, terrace on the east side and an arrow indicating the mountain view (Figure 41). Peter paid the unanticipated \$330 bill and stated firmly to Olmsted that he did not want any more plans, writing, “I am having a bad season in business.” This was an understatement. Three years later he wrote a discreet letter to a family friend, offering to sell his entire property, with improvements, for \$120,000. Receiving no reply, he repeated his offer two months later. There is no record of her response.⁵⁹ He did sell the Waverley acreage and perhaps accepted a loan, managing to remain at Elk Rock. Then unexpectedly, at the outbreak of World War I, the Kerr Gifford firm experienced a year of fortuitous grain sales.⁶⁰ With their finances finally stabilized and after almost ten years of marriage, the Kerrs were ready to proceed with their dream house. By February 1915, they were meeting with prominent Portland architects Ellis F. Lawrence and William Holford to devise the plans.

Ellis F. Lawrence and William Holford, Architects

Architects Ellis Lawrence and William Holford executed the plans for the estate’s house and garage, which reference Scottish vernacular design reflective of Kerr’s birthplace. A native of Massachusetts, Ellis Lawrence earned a master’s degree in architecture from M.I.T. in 1902, followed by several years of apprenticeship in Boston and Portland, Maine. After his marriage, he and his wife moved to Portland in 1906. In 1913, he and fellow MIT graduate William Holford—originally a draftsman in Lawrence’s office—formed a partnership that lasted until 1941. It has been stated that Lawrence (or his firm) completed nearly 500 projects across the Pacific Northwest, with some of their most visible buildings in Portland including the Albina Branch Library, the Sellwood Park Bathhouse, the Riverview Cemetery Superintendent’s Residence, and Westminster Presbyterian Church.⁶¹

A 1989 publication on Lawrence’s career notes that over the course of his practice, he and his various partners designed an estimated 200 residences in a wide range of architectural styles including Colonial Revival, Arts and Crafts, English Tudor, Mediterranean, and French Renaissance.⁶² Although extant records do not specify whether Lawrence or Holford took the lead role in designing the Kerr Estate, it is clear that the Kerrs themselves played an exceptionally active role in shaping the project. As noted in the same 1989 publication, “Occasionally the client’s wishes dominated a project [...] An interesting and unique example of a client’s significant involvement is that of the Peter Kerr house. Lawrence designed the Kerr house adhering to [the Kerrs’] written description.”⁶³ The Kerrs’ extensive involvement in the project directly guided its architectural expression and is responsible for the Scottish vernacular influences visible in its form and materials.

⁵⁷ *Plan of Property of Peter Kerr, Esq., Being Lots 8, 9 & 10, Abernethy Heights and Lot B, Riverwood*. Surveyed January 1910 by R.S. Greenleaf, C.E. Huntington and Kiest, Portland, Oregon, December 2, 2025.

⁵⁸ *Preliminary Plan for Estate of Peter Kerr, Esquire, Abernethy Heights – Oregon*, March 25, 1910. Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, Brookline, Massachusetts, File No. 3722 – Plan No. 8. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts.

⁵⁹ Peter Kerr to Miss Failing, January 2, 1913, March 13, 1913, Kerr Coll 74, OHS, Reel 4.

⁶⁰ Fitzsimons, *Golden Grain*, 36.

⁶¹ Richard Ellison Ritz, *Architects of Oregon: A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased-19th and 20th Centuries*, (Portland, Oregon: Lair Hill Publishing, March, 2003), 190-191; 242-244.

⁶² *Harmony in Diversity*, 25.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 39, 40

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The Kerrs had had ten years of marriage to develop their ideas and presented the architects with a 2½ page list of features, including the dimensions of main living spaces.⁶⁴ While conceding to the architects the alignment of those rooms to the view of Mt. Hood, most of the interior amenities were determined by the clients.⁶⁵ “Economy would be to some extent a consideration, but we would rather go without than have any poor work.”⁶⁶

The Kerrs wanted a “comfortable and simple, but not severe house, of no specific style.”⁶⁷ Because the grain commission business remained volatile, Kerr was still concerned that he may need to sell his property at Elk Rock, stating in a letter to Lawrence that he wanted a “plain house, because in his experience it would sell more quickly.”⁶⁸ French doors in the dining room that would open onto the terrace were suggested, but eliminated, as the couple were weary of the cold winter winds that arrived from the east.⁶⁹ Anne Kerr McDonald stated her parents wanted as much light as possible coming into the house, rejecting overhanging eaves like on the William Whidden-designed house just up Military Lane. She also related her father’s growing frustration with the architects, stating that he expressed a desire for a Scottish “baronial” house but was not being heeded.⁷⁰ Finally, Kerr presented the architects with a magazine illustration of a Presbyterian minister’s manse in Dumfries & Galloway in southwestern Scotland (Figure 21). It was a two-story house with multiple chimneys and stair tower, recessed window casings, the exterior covered with harling, and it clearly served as inspiration for the house that was ultimately constructed.⁷¹

The house at Elk Rock is a hybrid version of a Scottish architectural style transplanted into the Pacific Northwest. Writing in 1966, architectural historian John G. Dunbar noted the emergence of a new architectural type in Scotland, beginning in the mid-1700s. The model was “a small laird’s house or parish manse.” Typical components of the “plain rectangular block, of two main stories with a small lobby and central staircase (Figure 19). The door was centered in the front façade, with even numbers of glazed windows on either side.” Lime mortar was commonly available by the early 1800s and was applied over the stone exterior to reduce drafts (Figure 22). Fireplaces with chimneys were built into the end walls in gable-roofed houses or centered in a partition wall in those with hipped roofs.⁷² In more modest scale, the style became popular with residents of the small towns that were developing as tenant farmers left their isolated cottages due to the Clearances (eviction of tenants from Scottish Highlands and Islands to repurpose the land for highly profitable commercial sheep and cattle farming) and changes in farming practices, beginning in the mid-1700s.⁷³ It was a type that is still common in Kerr’s birthplace, Newton Stewart, the ground floor often the site of a business, with living quarters above (Figure 18).

The Elk Rock house incorporates most of the design elements described by Dunbar, although its two wings were a greatly expanded version of the Scottish model. In spite of its appearance as a traditional stone house finished with rough cast harling, underneath it is standard balloon frame construction, as was common in the Pacific Northwest at the time. Instead of two identical rectangular units, the house is divided into five irregular volumes which vary in size, height, window placement and surface detail, lessening its overall mass. Realizing that the gray color of the harling might appear dour, Kerr suggested that the walls be softened with creepers.

⁶⁴ Shellenbarger, ed., *Harmony in Diversity*, 40.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁶ Peter Kerr, “General Conception of House,” n.d. Ellis F. Lawrence files, CollAX56, folder 2, Research Library, University of Oregon, Eugene.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Sketch on paper, collection of John W.S. Platt, Portland.

⁷⁰ Anne Kerr McDonald, interview, by Rick Harmon, Portland, Oregon, November 12, 1986. Transcript of tape recording, tape 2, side 2. Research Library, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

⁷¹ Illustration from an unknown publication, in Ellis F. Lawrence Papers, Coll AX56, Special Collections, University of Oregon. Also a photograph of the manse in a collection at the Dumfries, Scotland, public library, 2004.

⁷² John G. Dunbar, *The Historic Architecture of Scotland*, (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1966), 81-83.

⁷³ T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A Modern History* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 129.

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A number of vines were encouraged to climb on simple trellises of galvanized pipe and thick wire; several remain in place. Climbers included trumpet vine, and clematis, but primarily Virginia creeper (Figure 38).

At last, in the spring of 1916 the design was finalized, the bid was awarded and Scottish born contractor Archibald Mckenzie was hired to build the house. The estimated cost was to be \$25,000.⁷⁴

Garden Advice from Emanuel Tillman Mische, 1916-1917; 1922

As excavation began for the new house, Kerr sought the advice of Emanuel T. Mische. By several accounts, he was an exceptionally knowledgeable plantsman, with credentials from the Missouri Botanical Garden, a year of practical gardening coursework at Kew Garden in London, plus six months at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Between 1898-1906 he was employed by Olmsted & Associates, as John C. Olmsted assumed responsibility for the firm.⁷⁵ While Mische absorbed management skills in Olmsted's office, the firm relied on him to put the "right plant in the right place" in their projects. Summarizing Mische's approach to design, a reporter wrote, "(he) was not interested in any particular flower or shrub but used impartially any flower that filled the particular needs of the place in which it was to be used...he preferred the natural to the artificial effect."⁷⁶ From 1908-1914, he was the City of Portland's first professional parks director. While in that position, Mische implemented many of the of Olmsted's earlier "big picture" plans for the city's parks including Laurelhurst, Peninsula and Mt. Tabor.

By November 1916, dirt from the house excavation was spread on the lawn and piled around the foundation. Mische was in California but asked Holford to take photos of the areas between the main lawn and house so he could design a grading plan. Mische went further, and by the end of January 1917 prepared a detailed planting plan for the entire property except for the terraced area at the northwest known as the "parterre."⁷⁷ His plan for the area between the entrance gates and front door appears to have been implemented not long after the house was completed. Spring flowering trees around the perimeter and in the grassy central bed of the forecourt softened the severe appearance of the gray harling (Figure 28). As Peter Kerr had suggested to Olmsted, vines, especially Virginia Creeper, began to scale the rough cast wall (Figure 38). However, except for individual plants scattered throughout the garden, there is limited evidence that the remainder of Mische's plans were followed. Two Giant sequoias he proposed along the northern property line survive, but the suggested hemlock, cedar and big leaf maple were not added. Mische's intensely filled borders with plants repeated in large numbers was incompatible with Kerr's inclinations; he was a collector and connoisseur. For example, while he planted many rhododendrons, he was disinclined to use fifty of the same variety for the "visual impact" preferred by Mische. Additionally, some material, such as *Magnolia watsonii*, may not have been available in local nurseries at the time.

Mische's final, permanent contribution to Elk Rock Garden was his 1921 plan for a new "Cutting Garden" for Mrs. Kerr.⁷⁸ Her round flower bed on the lawn had been eliminated during construction. A new one, the most formal element in the garden at Elk Rock, was placed at the northwest end of the narrow upper parterre. It was composed of a semi-circle of wedge-shaped planting beds, outlined in closely clipped boxwood with a rustic pergola overhead.

⁷⁴ "Contract Let for Kerr Residence," *Sunday Oregonian*, April 2, 1916, 10.

⁷⁵ Much of the biographical information on Mische is from a thesis by Kenneth James Guzowski, *Portland's Olmsted Vision (1897-1915): A Study of the Public Landscapes Designed by Emanuel T. Mische in Portland, Oregon* (M.S. diss. University of Oregon, 1990). Also Mische's personnel file, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England.

⁷⁶ Jean Hollowell, *Oregon Journal*, August 16, 1942, 13.

⁷⁷ "Planting Plan for the Estate of Peter Kerr," January 30, 1917, Emmanuel Tillman Mische, Landscape Architect, Portland, Oregon. Olmsted Plans & Drawing Collection, Job#3722, Mr. Peter Kerr, Portland, Oregon, Plan#3722-1005. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts.

⁷⁸ "Planting Plan for Cut-Flower Garden for the Estate of Mr. Peter Kerr," Portland, Oregon, June 1921. Brookline, Plan#3722-1004.

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The Kerrs likely moved into their new home by late 1917 (Figure 25).⁷⁹ Cliff Cottage was likely removed soon afterward, through some of Peter Kerr's smallholding survived, reformed into the terrace gardens. He apparently intended to retain them, for in January 1919 he placed an order with a nursery in Hertfordshire, England for dozens of dwarf fruit trees, raspberries and strawberries.⁸⁰ The trees were to be espaliered on the upper terrace, replacing the ones removed from the lawn. However, not long after, this final reminder of Kerr's smallholding garden from his bachelor days became history. The most extensive disruption and biggest physical changes to the garden were about to begin.

Adolph Meyer, Landscape Architect

Swiss-born, Adolph Meyer arrived in Portland in 1914 with a degree in landscape architecture and floral design from the University of Geneva.⁸¹ According to his son, Meyer had an affinity for languages, including French, Italian, and German, and in Portland attended English classes at night until proficient enough to open his own nursery in 1922. He wrote articles for *Better Gardens* magazine and on at least one occasion gave a radio talk on rock gardens.⁸² In addition to plant sales and installation, he designed water features, drainage and irrigation systems, rock walls and rock garden, bridges, pergolas, and grottos.⁸³ Paul Meyer stated that his father did much of the rock work at the National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother ("The Grotto," 8840 NE Skidmore St.) and Ascension Catholic Church on the north side of Mt. Tabor in Portland.

It is unknown how Peter Kerr met Meyer; it was possibly a personal recommendation from other property owners in Riverdale or during one of Kerr's visits to the Swiss Floral Company, where Meyer was first employed. At Kerr's direction, Meyer undertook significant structural changes to the garden at Elk Rock, beginning around 1920. First was removal of the second utility shed on the parterre. From the south end of the new garage to a point in alignment with the west end of the house (and greenhouse), the hillside to the west was excavated to create a flat area measuring approximately 40 feet by 100 feet. This became a new grass-surfaced tennis court (currently the graveled visitor parking lot). A ten-foot-high unmortared rock wall on the western edge of the court had spaces between the stones for small plants. Midway along the wall a viewing shelter was inserted, "roofed" with sheets of bark with space for a long bench underneath (Figure 33). Later the bark was replaced with a stout pergola of pipe, and the now-famous purple wisteria was planted (Figure 39). At the south end of the tennis court was a new stone wall to enclose Kerr's longed-for rock garden that rambled up the hillside to a swimming pool, added in 1919 (Figure 27). In the corner where the two walls intersected Meyer created a grotto with concrete basin that captured water seeping from the hillside, a refreshing feature on a warm day. At the foot of the rock garden Meyer took advantage of another seep and inserted a pipe to channel water that still drips into a small concrete bowl (Figure 32). He may have also reconfigured the stream that is now known as "The Cascades" into a series of irregular pools that drop down the grade to pass under a bridge. Other Meyer contributions were the stone steps in the rock garden, those that rise up the hill next to the pond, and others that accommodate grade changes on the steep paths at the Point. It took an estimated 18-24 months for these final changes to be finished, and doubtless Kerr was shopping for plants while they were underway.⁸⁴

Phase III: Final Years of Peter Kerr at Elk Rock Garden, 1923-1957

Between the 1920s and the early 1940s, the garden at Elk Rock was at its peak beauty. The tennis court wall was planted, creating a sheet of bright color (Figure 34). The rock garden was filled with a variety of small

⁷⁹ Nona Lawler, "Benefit Teas Now Command Much Attention," *Oregon Daily Journal* (Portland, OR), March 3, 1918. By early March 1918, the Kerrs were hosting a benefit "for the patriotic fund for British soldiers families" at their "beautiful home at Elk Rock."

⁸⁰ Peter Kerr to Thomas Rivers Sons, January 14, 1919, Kerr Coll 74, OHS, Reel 5.

⁸¹ "Landscape's Service Set," *Oregon Journal*, June 6, 1961, 8.

⁸² Adolph Meyer, "Well Constructed Rock Gardens." Script of talk on KGW radio, Portland, Oregon, and KFOA, Seattle, Washington, in *Better Flowers* magazine, June, 1928, 8.

⁸³ Paul P. Meyer, interviewed by author, Portland, Oregon, April 24, 2003; Alice Meyer Elkerton, interview by author, April 7, 2003.

⁸⁴ Paul P. Meyer, interviewed by author, Portland, Oregon, April 24, 2003; Alice Meyer Elkerton, interview by author, April 7, 2003..

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plants, adapted to various conditions, sunlight and drainage. Autochrome images reveal sedums, primulas and native *Lewisia*. Rhododendrons were planted throughout the garden, under native and specimen trees. The southern terrace bed, now the Magnolia Walk, became a long border of perennials (Figure 30) and in one photo planted with species of tulips. Masses of trilliums and erythroniums ran down the wooded hillsides. Kerr was almost 60 years old in 1920 but had an indefatigable curiosity about plants. He did not have a master plan for his garden and left no records of when and where he planted. But he experimented, and at last financially stable, spent freely on his garden.

Dozens of undated photographs reveal specimen trees planted on the lawn, reaching a height of 20 feet or more, before disappearing to make room for a new one. A few of these vanished trees have been identified, including a horse chestnut, tulip tree, and hemlock. After more than 20 years on the property, Kerr knew where it was wet or dry, sunny or shady, rocky or heavy clay, and planted accordingly. Viewing the photographs taken until World War II, the level of maintenance would have required a skillful head gardener and additional help. The greenhouse was used for propagation and overwintering tender plants, their large pots moved onto the terrace in warm weather (Figure 36).

During the Second World War, gardening help was difficult to find. The military draft and shipyard work reduced the pool of potential employees, and the few photos from this period show overgrown shrubs and trees. After the war, nurseries re-opened and Kerr purchased the many magnolias that make up the Magnolia Walk; trees that he would not live to see bloom. Working with his final head gardener, they began catching up on maintenance. In 1955, Kerr donated a little over three acres south of the Eagle's Nest and down the face of Elk Rock to the City of Portland as a "park."⁸⁵ The area houses an endangered native plant and is a nesting site for peregrine falcons.

Peter Kerr could not have known that he would be so long-lived; according to actuarial projections, he lived twice as long as predicted at his birth. He brought his business through the Depression and two World Wars, surviving cycles of financial uncertainty. Finally at age 90, he officially retired from the grain commodities business he had developed, with nine branch offices and six shipping facilities at ports on the west coast, including British Columbia.⁸⁶ Three years later he approached the Cargill Company, based in Minnesota, to ask if they wanted to acquire Kerr Gifford, Inc.⁸⁷ Although an astute and successful businessman, Kerr had never become a U.S. citizen, and a vestige of sentiment may have influenced his overture to Cargill, also established by a Scottish immigrant. After the sale he spent most of his remaining years in his garden. He recovered from a broken hip and was slowing down but moved around his estate in an old golf cart, consulting daily with his head gardener. When he died in 1957, he was acknowledged by the local media as the "patriarch of Pacific Northwest grain exporting...contributing hugely to the strength and vitality of Pacific northwest agriculture in the period of its greatest growth."⁸⁸

Elk Rock Garden after Peter Kerr

Kerr had not made provision for the future of his estate property after his death. The main house was considered too big for the Kerr daughters and their families. Anne, her husband, and their three offspring were settled in their 1942 house up the street on Military Lane. Jane, her husband, and their two sons were some miles away on their own property. Kerr had shared his love of gardening with his daughters, and both were already developing their own (smaller) notable gardens. Servants were rare after the war and the house at Elk Rock was too large to manage without them. There were discussions with Mrs. Kerr about the future of the

⁸⁵ "Portland Takes Elk Rock Gift," *Oregonian*, June 23, 1955, 1.

⁸⁶ Fitzsimons, *Golden Grain*, 70.

⁸⁷ "Kerr Gifford to be Sold," *Oregon Journal*, June 11, 1953, 1.

Wayne G. Broehl, Jr., *Cargill-Trading the World's Grain* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1992), 773-774.

⁸⁸ "A Link to the World," *Oregonian*, April 20, 1957, 10.

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property after her husband's death, but it was left to the daughters and their husbands to make a final decision.⁸⁹

At the same time, the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon was seeking permanent administrative headquarters. Although the Kerrs were not active members of the church, the family offered the property to the Diocese on two conditions: that the garden be opened to the public as a testament to Peter Kerr's creation, and that the property not be sold, leased, or otherwise disposed of during the lifetimes of Anne McDonald and Jane Platt without their consent. The Diocese accepted these terms and moved its offices into the house in early 1959, following Laurie King Kerr's relocation to a new residence constructed on a small parcel carved from the northwestern edge of the estate in 1958-1959.⁹⁰ She occupied this new house—a Modern design by local architect John Storrs, very different from the large Scottish vernacular home she had shared with her husband—for only a few months before her death in March 1959. Around this same period, a small amount of additional acreage was separated from northwestern boundary of the Kerr estate, bordering Highway 43, at the remote edges of the property. As Kerr had never cultivated these areas and as they have only been minimally developed since, their removal has not affected the coherence or setting of the historic district.

The Kerr family paid for the continued maintenance of the garden with personal funds for twenty years, later supplemented with interest from an endowment they established. Peter Kerr's final Head Gardener, Tony Candiello, who began working at Elk Rock after World War II, remained with the property until 1964. This was fortunate as responsibility for care of the garden was still being arranged between the descendants and the Diocese. The Kerr family was paying the salary of the gardener plus expenses for materials, supplies, etc. Jane Kerr Platt and Anne Kerr McDonald hired Wallace K. Huntington on a nominal retainer to work with them and Tony to guide the work for two years.

Later, a Garden Committee was established, its membership composed of knowledgeable professionals and Kerr family members. Meeting regularly, they hired and directed the gardener's work and made decisions on changes to plantings. There were many head gardeners after 1964 and a list of names as well as their years of employment is incomplete. However, from 1964-2026 they included Michael Vann, Randy Meyer, Ken Meyer, John Boroziak, Jay Minor, Linda Pittman, Sue VanLoon, Hillary Maurer, Richard Milton and Nico Swarz.

In 2022, after 63 years of ownership, the Diocese announced the sale of the Kerr estate, and the garden was closed to visitors. After a year of uncertainty, the property was purchased in July 2023 by the nonprofit Elk Rock Garden Foundation. Their office is now on the second floor of the house, and the garden is once again open to the public. While acknowledging that plant material will always change and evolve, the board intends to preserve the garden designed by Peter Kerr while developing new techniques for its care in the face of climate change.

PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL APPRECIATION OF ELK ROCK GARDEN

Although the Kerrs' estate was private until 1959, word of its beauty and artistic merit spread beyond its gates. An initial article appeared in the 1915 book, *Beautiful Gardens in America*, including a colored photograph of the Kerr daughters on the terrace. During World War I, plants were contributed from the garden to raise money for the Red Cross. Numerous tea parties and other charitable events were regularly reported in local newspapers, increasing the garden's visibility, and in 1932, it hosted a tour for attendees at the national convention of the American Legion.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Kerr-McDonald, March 18, 1987, Tape 19, side 1, p 413-414. "I think Father would have liked one of us to take the house but he never made us promise. He pretty much left it up to us. Elk Rock is a big house but it was too large and spread out. When mother had it she had plenty of servants to run it."

⁹⁰ "11930 SW Riverside Dr.," Multnomah County Division of Public Health Sewage Disposal Report (July 2, 1958); "Kerr, Laurie King, House," *Oregon Historic Sites Database*, accessed April 13, 2026, https://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_siteSummary&resultDisplay=674236.

⁹¹ William F. Willingham and William John Hawkins, *Classic Houses of Portland, Oregon: 1850-1950* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 1999), 19.

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As the estate and its gardens matured, it came to be valued not only as a beautiful setting for events but also as a destination for academic field study. By 1929, students in the landscape architecture program at Oregon State College were photographed on a field trip to the property.⁹² It is not known how long these educational visits continued, but there was a notice of a class visit in 1990. In 2000, this nomination's preparer visited on a field trip from a plant identification class at Clackamas Community College, and later when employed as a gardener at Elk Rock, directed students from Mt. Hood Community College on a visit.

Members of the Garden Club of America visited Elk Rock during its annual conference in July 1930; this attention from a national gardening organization demonstrates the quality of the estate's landscape design, in the years after most major features were in place. Of special mention was "the natural rock wall [behind the tennis court] with ferns and mosses coming from every crack and crevice. Up a steep path through a rock garden, to rose and carnation gardens...containing an amazing amount of fine bloom. One could spend weeks studying the beauty and variety of this garden."⁹³ A year later, a *Magnolia parviflora* from Elk Rock won a silver cup for "best flower in show" at a competitive and educational event cosponsored by the Portland Garden Club and the City of Portland's Park Department in Laurelhurst Park. Anne and Jane Kerr designed and set up individual displays as representatives of the Junior League.⁹⁴

After the estate was opened to the public in 1959, its notoriety and appreciation increased. The Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon's monthly newsletter stated, "The flower gardens on the estate have been an attraction for years. The late Peter Kerr was a noted gardener, and his garden was famous throughout the West. He spent his life collecting plant material from all over the world and designed the garden with consummate artistry. It has been visited by horticulturists from around the world."⁹⁵ Anne Kerr McDonald, who lived just up Military Lane, often gave personal tours to groups ranging from Brownie Scouts and garden clubs to international visitors. In 1988, its special qualities were recognized in *Sunset*, the national lifestyle magazine: "Venerable estate gardens are rare in the Northwest. Wandering the garden's eleven [*sic*] acres gives visitors not just glimpse of gracious living but also a unique chance to see mature plants working together. One frequent visitor says, [it is] a place of great vistas and views where your eyes and your mind are encouraged to wander."⁹⁶ In the *Oregonian* newspaper in 2010, popular local garden writer Dulcy Mahar commented, "I love this garden for many reasons. Foremost is that it is an all-season garden. I have strolled in it on New Year's Day and found it as beautiful as in high summer. It includes many shrubs and rare trees and its collection of magnolias is glorious."⁹⁷

ELK ROCK GARDEN IN THE CONTEXT OF PORTLAND'S EARLY ESTATES AND GARDENS

Elk Rock Garden estate fits within a broader landscape of Portland-area country places and private gardens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elk Rock did not emerge in isolation; during this period, several wealthy Portland families established country estates along the Willamette River and in the rolling hills to the west. These properties reflected a national trend toward semi-rural living, promoted locally by *The West Shore* in 1888 as an escape from "the smoke, dust, noise and unhealthfulness of the city."⁹⁸ Elk Rock emerged within this movement, yet it stands apart today for the exceptional integrity of its house, garden structure, circulation patterns, and views.

Elk Rock Garden is unusual among Portland-area estates and private gardens for both its architectural and landscape character. The house is a rare American example of Scottish vernacular design—an enlarged interpretation of the modest stone houses in the part of southwestern Scotland where Peter Kerr lived for the first seventeen years of his life, adapted with wood construction and generous interior light. The surrounding

⁹² Arthur L. Peck, *Landscape Architecture*, June 1929, Oregon State Agricultural College, Corvallis, Oregon. Courtesy, Oregon State University Libraries, Special Collections & Archives Research Center, Corvallis.

⁹³ "Mr. and Mrs. Peter Kerr's Garden," *Bulletin of The Garden Club of America*, September, 1930, No.11,86, 87.

⁹⁴ "Rare Blooms of Infinite Colors Displayed," *Sunday Oregonian*, May 3, 1931, 1.

⁹⁵ *Oregon Churchman*, May, 1958, Vol.50, No.5, 1.

⁹⁶ "Come on in for a Stroll," *Sunset*, April, 1988, 254.

⁹⁷ "Rev up Your Hog," *Oregonian*, July 15, 2010, 14.

⁹⁸ "A Suburban Home," *The West Shore*, 1888 Vol.14, 442.

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garden blends organic, vernacular features such as wandering paths, water features, and rock walls with more formal elements including a boxwood-lined cutting garden, terraces and level lawns, specimen trees, and carefully framed views of Mt. Hood. According to Norman T. Newton's authoritative history of landscape architecture, typical components of country estates between 1890 and 1933 included service buildings, vegetable gardens, recreational facilities, orchards, rolling lawns, shrubs, and specimen trees.⁹⁹ The Kerr estate possessed all of these elements at some point during the period of significance. Although the vegetable gardens and orchards were removed as Kerr expanded the garden and the swimming pool was infilled after his death, many of these original components retain integrity today.

Portland-area Estates of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Many of Peter Kerr's friends and neighbors also left the urban center of Portland for a semi-rural lifestyle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1891, the family of Kerr's business partner, William Sibson, left downtown Portland for a five-acre plot at the head of Military Lane. Escaping their boarding houses, Peter and his brother Tom became familiar with the country subdivision of Abernethy Heights during visits to the Sibsons. Between 1895 and 1897, Peter's friends Charles and Sarah Ladd established themselves on a 15-acre site named "Cedarhurst" (11175 SW Riverwood Rd), opposite the Sibsons.¹⁰⁰ Cedarhurst had many of the requisite components of a country estate mentioned by Newton, including a lawn, shrubbery border, formal garden, tennis court, vegetable garden, chicken yard, stable, paddock, ravine with brook, and additional outbuildings.¹⁰¹

Perhaps due to the global economic recession that began in 1893 and lasted through the end of the nineteenth century, the estates of the Sibsons, Ladds, and Kerrs were not joined by others until the early 1900s. In the western suburbs, Kerr's grain-trading competitor T. B. Wilcox completed his new mansion on 50 acres in 1913, naming it "Glenwood Farm."¹⁰² In the same year, an eight-acre property below Elk Rock became "Rockholm," the country place of Dr. A. E. and Phila J. Rockey.¹⁰³ In the late 1920s, two more estates were finished atop nearby Palatine Hill: the 63-acre "Fir Acres," built in 1926 by M. Lloyd Frank, and across the road, the estate of Hamilton Corbett, completed in 1928.¹⁰⁴

In comparison to the Kerr family's long tenure at Elk Rock Garden, owner occupancy at these estates was brief, and nearly all were subdivided, developed, or absorbed into institutional campuses by the mid-twentieth century—at which time Peter and Laurie Kerr were still residing at Elk Rock. Charles and Sarah Ladd left Cedarhurst in 1911 for a farm in rural Carlton, Oregon, in a house designed for them by Lawrence & Holford; after her husband's death in 1924, Sarah Ladd subdivided and sold the Cedarhurst property. T. B. Wilcox died before completion of his estate, but his widow remained until it was sold to a military school in 1948; although the mansion, lawn, and formal hardscape remain, the property is now surrounded by housing and no longer retains integrity of setting. The Rockeys remained at their estate until 1935, when the land was subdivided and sold, leaving just a one-acre garden. The Franks left Fir Acres in 1935, less than a decade after its completion, and the Corbetts departed in the 1940s. While the Franks' and Corbetts' houses and some original landscaping survive, both estates have been incorporated into the campus of Lewis & Clark College and Law School, and their original settings have been fundamentally altered. This pattern was widespread, as

⁹⁹ Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land, The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 345, 440.

¹⁰⁰ "Talbot, Guy & Geraldine, House," *Oregon Historic Sites Database*, accessed April 11, 2026, https://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_siteSummary&resultDisplay=662613.

¹⁰¹ John C. Olmsted to Mr. C.E. Ladd, May 18, 1903, Library of Congress, Olmsted #3224, microfilm, Reel 1791.

¹⁰² John M. Tess and Richard Ritz, "Wilcox, Theodore B., Country Estate," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1993).

¹⁰³ Virginia Guest Ferriday, "Rockney, Dr. A. E. and Phila Jane, House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1985).

¹⁰⁴ Jon Horn and Reed Elwyn, "Frank (M. Lloyd) Estate ("Fir Acres")," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1978).

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subdivision and redevelopment became the common outcome for nearly all country estates in the Portland area.

One estate that does retain some integrity is the Jenkins Estate (8005 S.W. Grabhorn Road, Beaverton), established in 1915 on 68 acres in what was then rural Washington County, more than ten miles west of Elk Rock Garden. The estate began as a summer retreat for Belle Ainsworth, daughter of a steamboat captain and banker, and her husband Ralph Jenkins, a station agent for the railroad, but they enjoyed the rural area so much that it became their permanent home. The property incorporated many early twentieth-century estate features: an ornamental pond, rockery, cut-flower garden, tea gazebo, greenhouse, stable with covered riding arena, and broad lawns.¹⁰⁵ Several original structures—including the 9,000-square-foot English-style house, farmhouse, stable, and water-storage building—survive. Since its purchase by the Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District in 1975 and its National Register listing in 1978, the estate has served as a public venue for weddings, recreation, and educational programs. It is open to the public and houses the county's Master Gardener program and a day camp for adults and children with developmental disabilities. Although the house and core landscape retain integrity, the addition of a large parking lot, modern buildings, and a neighboring gravel pit have diminished aspects of its original design and rural setting.

Portland-area Private Gardens of the Early Twentieth-Century

Alongside estate landscapes such as the Jenkins Estate, a parallel tradition of privately created botanical gardens developed in the Portland area in the early twentieth century—properties shaped not by the country-place model of large houses and extensive service grounds, but by the horticultural interests and ambitions of their owners. These gardens shared Elk Rock's emphasis on plant collection and experimentation while differing in scale, design, scientific rigor, and long-term preservation. The Leach and Rae Selling Berry gardens are leading examples of this related pattern.

The Leach Botanical Garden (6704 SE 122nd Avenue, Portland) was created in the 1930s by Lilla and John Leach on a four-acre parcel in East Multnomah County. The Leaches lived first in a small stone cottage while their main house was completed in 1936. Lilla, a trained botanist, and John, a pharmacist, were dedicated plant hunters who undertook numerous botanical expeditions throughout Oregon—especially in the rugged Siskiyou Mountains—searching for and documenting native species. Around their property, nicknamed "Sleepy Hollow," Lilla established specialized plant collections, including species she helped identify; one discovery was later named in her honor. The City of Portland accepted donation of the property in 1983 and later expanded it by 13 acres to mitigate flooding along Johnson Creek. A volunteer "Friends" group and the Parks Bureau maintained the garden, added parking areas, constructed a new treetop skybridge, and offered guided tours. The house and terrace became popular wedding venues, though recent City budget cuts have made the garden's future uncertain.¹⁰⁶

The Rae Selling Berry Garden (11505 S.W. Summerville Road), located in the Abernethy Heights subdivision uphill and west of Highway 43 from Elk Rock, was another privately created botanical garden of regional significance. Rae Selling Berry, the daughter of a successful clothing merchant, was a self-educated and highly skilled plant collector. She, her engineer husband, and their three children initially lived in northeast Portland, where she cultivated seeds obtained through plant-hunting expeditions on her home lot and two adjacent parcels. In 1928, she used an inheritance to purchase the Summerville Road property and, after her children reached adulthood, built a house and developed a garden characterized by numerous microclimates and carefully sited plantings. Like the Leaches, she sought rare native plants, especially in the Willowa Mountains. Her propagating skills were widely admired, and her work attracted a dedicated group of volunteers.¹⁰⁷ After

¹⁰⁵ Frank C. Allen, "Jenkins, Belle Ainsworth, Estate," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1978).

¹⁰⁶ "Garden History," *Leach Botanical Garden*, accessed April 11, 2026, <https://www.leachgarden.org/about/garden-history>; Rhoda Love, "Lilla Leach (1866-1980)," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed April 11, 2026, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/leach_lilla_1886_1980/.

¹⁰⁷ Janice Dodd, "Rae Selling Berry Garden and House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2002).

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Berry's death in 1976, a nonprofit organization maintained the garden until 2011. The property was listed in the National Register in 2002, and before its sale, a comprehensive plant survey was completed and seeds were placed in a Portland State University seed bank.¹⁰⁸ Several troughs of alpine plants were donated to Elk Rock, where they remain on the parterre at the northwest end of the property. Although the site has not been developed since its sale, the garden is slowly being reclaimed by nature.

While the Leach and Berry properties are well-known botanical landscapes and are more important examples of horticultural experimentation, they are fundamentally different from Elk Rock in that they lacked the architectural presence and full complement of features that characterized Newton's country-place model. Their histories also underscore the fragility of such sites: each has faced substantial challenges to long-term preservation, whether through suburban encroachment, budget constraints, or the difficulty of sustaining specialized horticultural collections. In this broader context, Elk Rock Garden remains distinctive—not only for its botanical richness, but for its rare combination of intact architecture, designed landscape, and continuity of setting.

CONCLUSION

Despite their age and the fact that the garden is a living landscape, the features of the Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate—more commonly known as Elk Rock Garden—remain remarkably intact and possess integrity. The property is a rare surviving example of a late-19th- to early-20th-century country estate on the outskirts of Portland, distinguished by high artistic merit in both architecture and landscape architecture. Its design reflects the layered contributions of its owner, Peter Kerr, and several prominent design professionals over the 1897–1957 period of significance. Early guidance from John C. Olmsted established the estate's defining axial view toward Mt. Hood; Emanuel T. Mische shaped key grading and planting decisions; and Adolph Meyer introduced rockwork and water features that remain central to the property's character.

Peter Kerr began working on the garden when he took up residence on the property in 1897 and continued for sixty years. A lifelong gardener trained in Scotland, Kerr was an autodidact who expanded his knowledge through reading, observation, and experimentation. He was familiar with plants from exotic climates but held deep affection for the native flora of both his homeland and the Pacific Northwest. He imported seed and occasional plants from Scotland—dianthus, foxglove, perennial nasturtium, narcissus—and combined them with Oregon natives such as trillium, *Erythronium*, wild currant, and *Philadelphus*. Native trees including Douglas fir, madrone, cedar, white oak, and dogwood mingled with magnolias, Atlas cedar, flowering plum, and beech. Working with thin, stony soils and limited sunlight, Kerr created a garden of exceptional richness and subtlety, one that remains deeply expressive of his personal vision.

The house and garage, designed in collaboration with prominent Oregon architects Ellis Lawrence and William Holford, were carefully integrated into the existing landscape to take advantage of views over the Willamette River toward Mt. Hood. Their style is a hybridized interpretation of Scottish vernacular architecture familiar to Kerr, with a lack of ornamentation, asymmetrical massing, and gray harling walls deliberately selected to provide a restrained exterior that harmonizes with and frames the surrounding garden. Together, the house, garage, and garden form a cohesive and thoughtfully integrated landscape that reflects both professional contributions and the deeply personal vision of its owner.

In an era of shrinking personal landscapes and increasing development pressure, Elk Rock Garden offers the rare luxury of open space, an unimpeded mountain view, and the beauty and solace of a carefully crafted landscape. It remains one of the area's only country estates or large private gardens to retain much of its original scale, setting, and design unity. The estate continues to embody the architectural and landscape-architectural qualities that make it significant under Criterion C and stands as a testament to Peter Kerr's lifelong dedication to creating an exceptional, enduring, and immersive garden.

¹⁰⁸ "Rae Selling Berry Seed Bank & Plant Conservation Program: History," *Portland State University*, accessed April 11, 2026, <https://www.pdx.edu/seed-bank/history-0>.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository: Oregon Historical Society

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 8.72 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1 45.439513°

Latitude

-122.651788°

Longitude

3

Latitude

Longitude

2

Latitude

Longitude

4

Latitude

Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated area encompasses 8.72 acres, including the entirety of tax lots 1S1E35CA 100 (Property ID R100225), 1S1E35 100 (Property ID R100211), and 1S1E35CA 600 (Property ID R100214) in Multnomah County (Figure 4). These are roughly bounded by the terminus of S. Military Lane to the north, railroad tracks to the east, the top of Elk Rock promontory to the south, and Oregon Highway 43 to the west.¹⁰⁹

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

At its largest, the Peter and Laurie King Kerr Estate (Elk Rock Garden) covered 13.38 acres, including all of the nominated area (Figure 5). In 1955, still during the period of significance, Kerr donated 3.11 acres south of the Eagle's Nest and down the face of Elk Rock to the City of Portland as a park.¹¹⁰ In the decade following Kerr's death and the end of the period of significance, several small pieces of property in a strip extending diagonally northwest from the Eagle's Nest to Highway 43 were sold off.¹¹¹ All of the land that was sold was at the remote edges of the estate (cf. Figures 4 and 5) and never actively cultivated by Peter Kerr, and its removal therefore did not affect the coherence of the district nor any of its character-defining features. The nominated boundary therefore coincides with the current legal boundaries of the property, which encompass 8.72 acres across three tax lots.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eileen G. Fitzsimons date July 16, 2026

organization Elk Rock Garden Foundation telephone 503-234-4589

street & number 1405 S.E. Martins St. email ravendene@outlook.com

city or town Portland state OR zip code 97202

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- Regional Location Map
- Local Location Map

¹⁰⁹ Multnomah County Survey and Assessor's data, accessed April 8, 2026, at sail.multco.us.

¹¹⁰ "Portland Takes Elk Rock Gift," *Oregonian*, June 23, 1955, 1.

¹¹¹ "11930 SW Riverside Dr.," Multnomah County Division of Public Health Sewage Disposal Report (July 2, 1958). The property that was sold off was developed in 1958-1959 with a new John Storrs-designed house for Laurie King Kerr, which she inhabited for only a few months before her death ("Kerr, Laurie King, House," *Oregon Historic Sites Database*, accessed April 13, 2026, https://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/index.cfm?do=v.dsp_siteSummary&resultDisplay=674236).

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- **Tax Lot Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:	Kerr, Peter and Laurie King, Estate		
City or Vicinity:	Portland		
County:	Multnomah	State:	OR
Photographer:	Eileen G. Fitzsimons (Photographs 1, 2, 4-17) Stephanie Donovan-Brown (Photographs 3, 19-21) Caitlyn Abrahms (Photograph 18)		
Date Photographed:	June 2025 (Photograph 3); December 2025 (1-2, 5-6, 9, 11); February 2026 (Photograph 10, 12, 15-16); April 2026 (Photographs 19-21); June 2026 (Photograph 18); July 2026 (Photographs 4, 7-8, 13-14, 17)		

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Photograph 1 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0001
End of Military Lane, estate entry, camera facing south. |
| Photograph 2 of 21 | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0002
Entry gates, camera facing southwest. |
| Photograph 3 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0003
West (main) elevation of house, camera facing northeast. |
| Photograph 4 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0004
North elevation of house, camera facing south. |
| Photograph 5 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0005
East elevation of house, camera facing west. |
| Photograph 6 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0006
South elevation of house, camera facing northwest. |
| Photograph 7 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0007
East elevation of garage, camera facing west. |
| Photograph 8 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0008
South elevation of garage across visitor parking lot, camera facing north. |
| Photograph 9 of 21: | OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0009
View from terrace across North Lawn toward Mt. Hood, camera facing east. |

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- Photograph 10 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0010
Path along Spring Walk, rock wall on left marks eastern edge of garden, camera facing south.
- Photograph 11 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0011
View across South Lawn, altar in center, camera facing south.
- Photograph 12 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0012
The Cascades and bridge, camera facing east.
- Photograph 13 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0013
Pond, camera facing north.
- Photograph 14 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0014
Boxwood hedging of Cut Flower Garden in parterre, camera facing south.
- Photograph 15 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0015
Foot of Rock Garden, camera facing southwest.
- Photograph 16 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0016
Visitor center, site of former greenhouse, facing south.
- Photograph 17 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0017
Former tennis court, now visitor parking lot, camera facing northwest.
- Photograph 18 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0018
Interior of house, first-floor hallway, camera facing south.
- Photograph 19 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0019
Interior of house, top of primary staircase, second floor, camera facing west.
- Photograph 20 of 21:** OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0020
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Interior of house, sleeping porch at west end of house, second floor, camera facing south.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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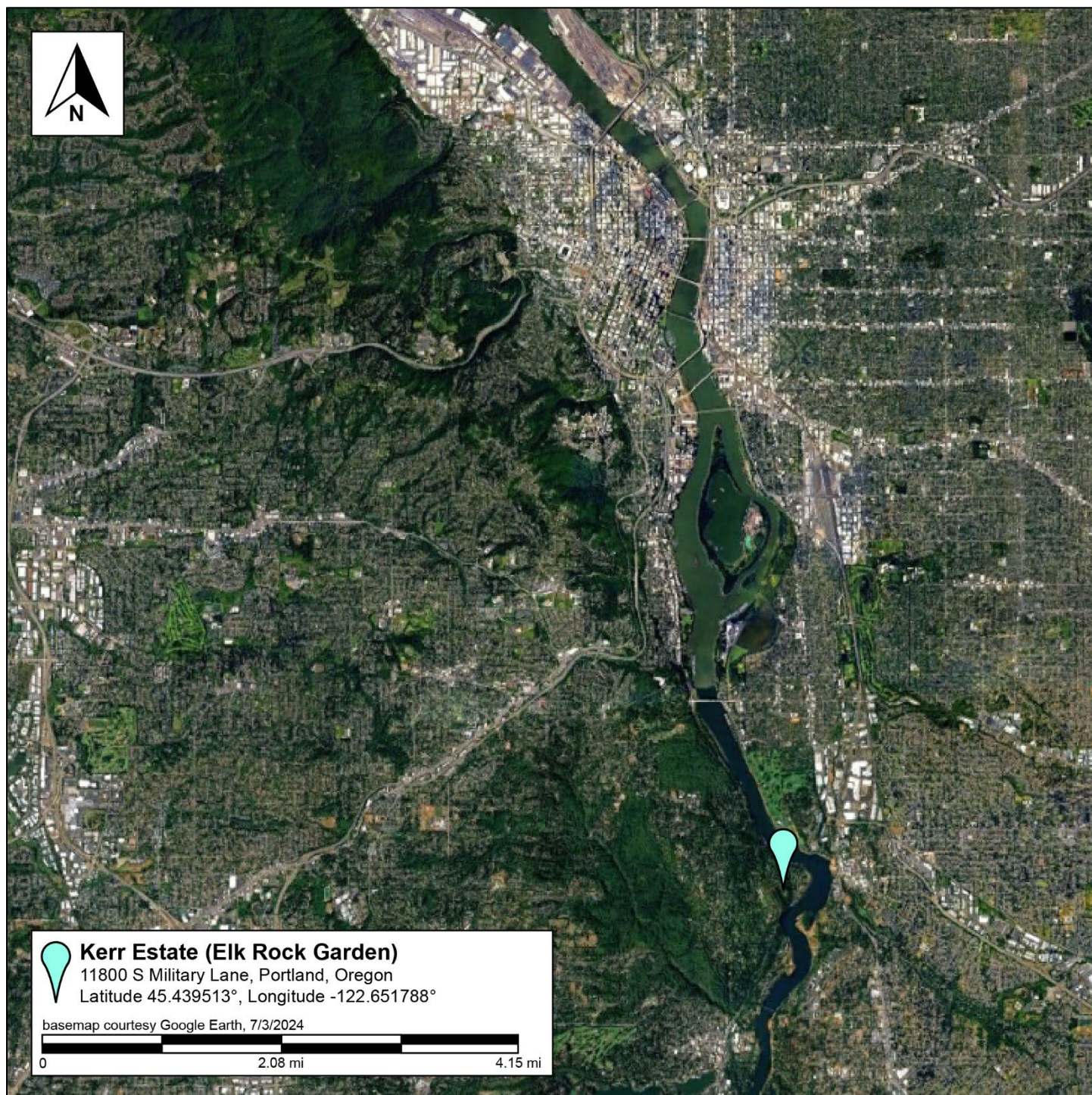
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Figure 1: Regional Location Map of Elk Rock Garden. Google Earth.



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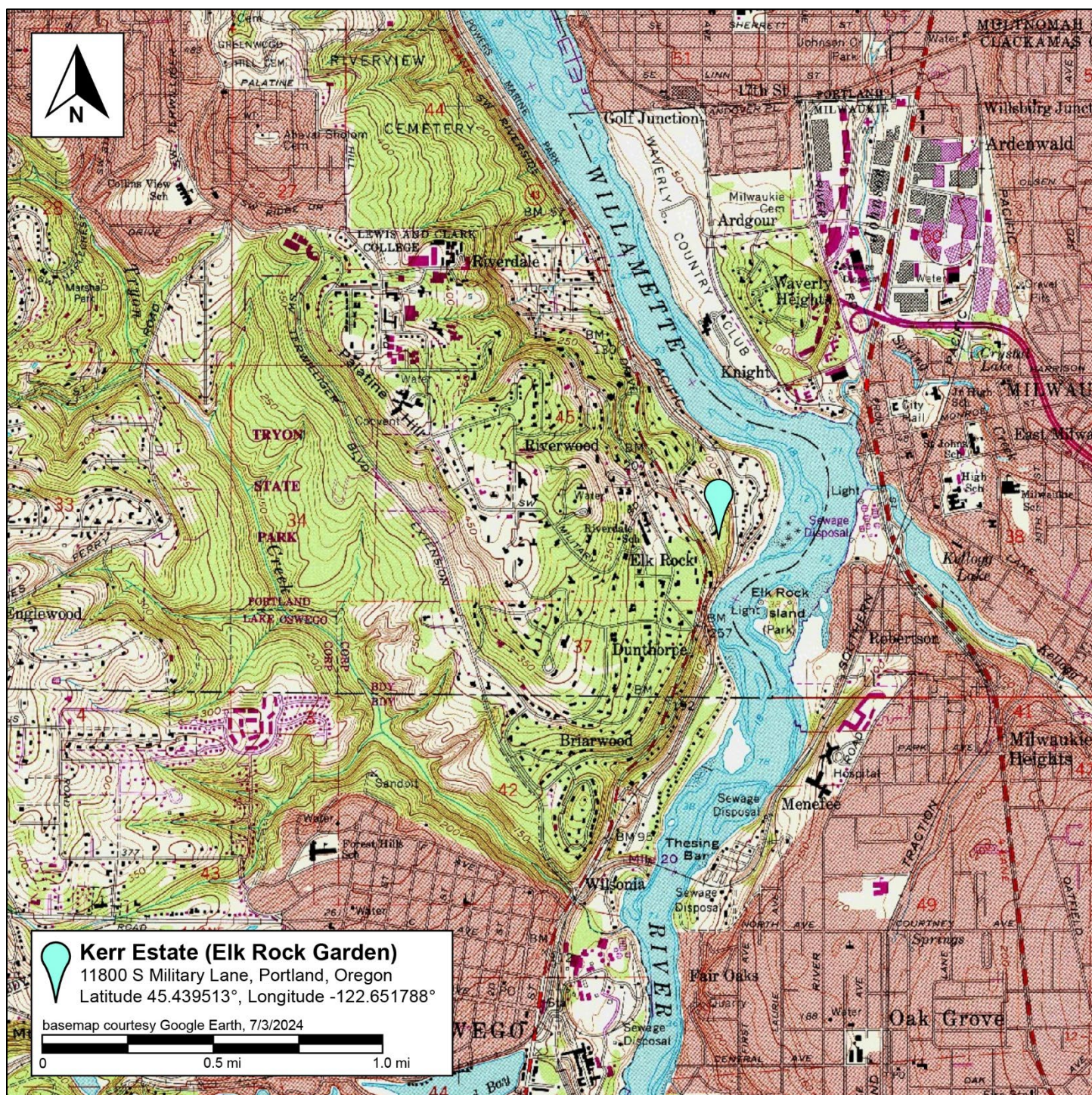
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Figure 2: Regional Location Map of Elk Rock Garden. USGS map (1961).



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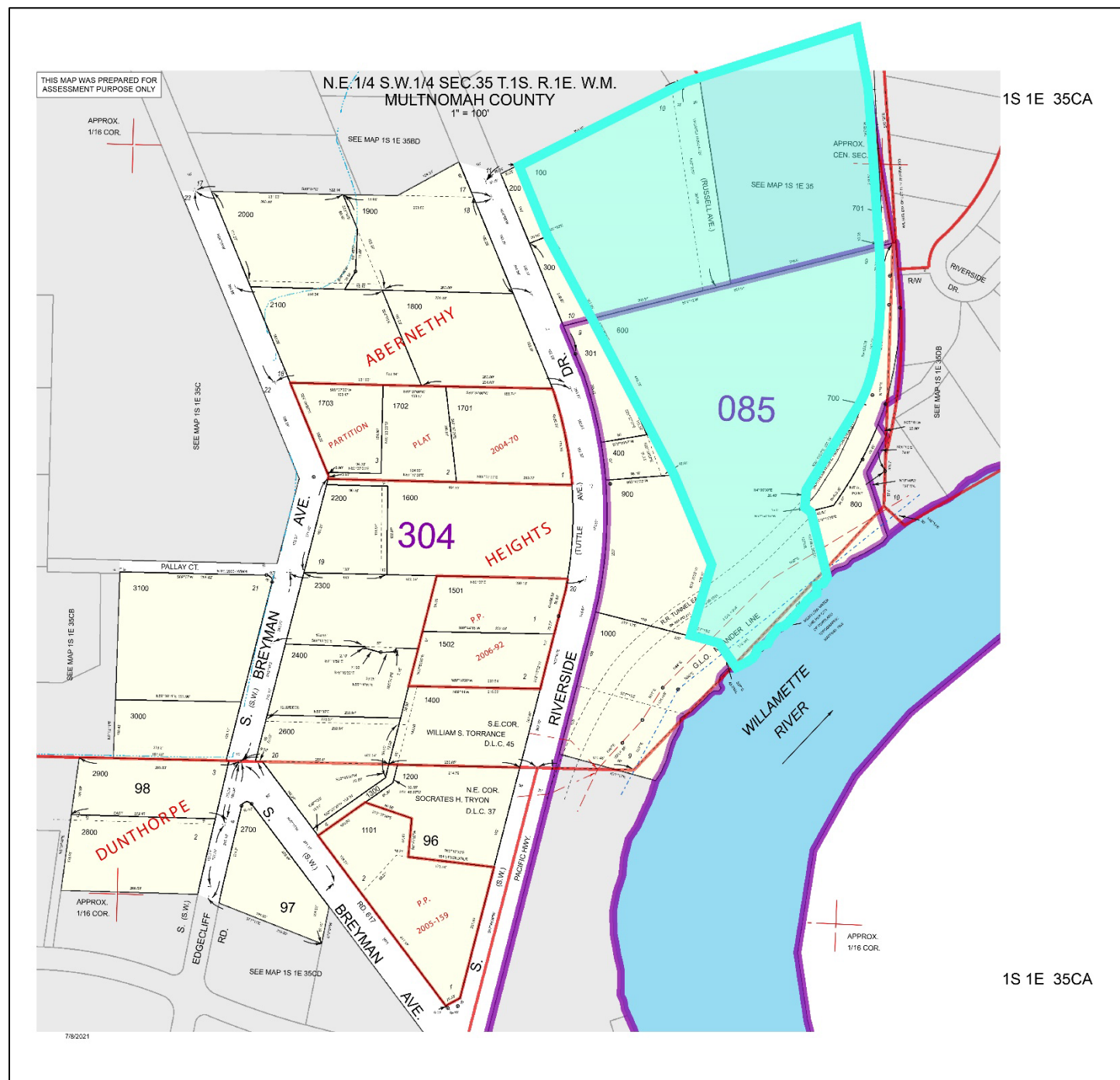
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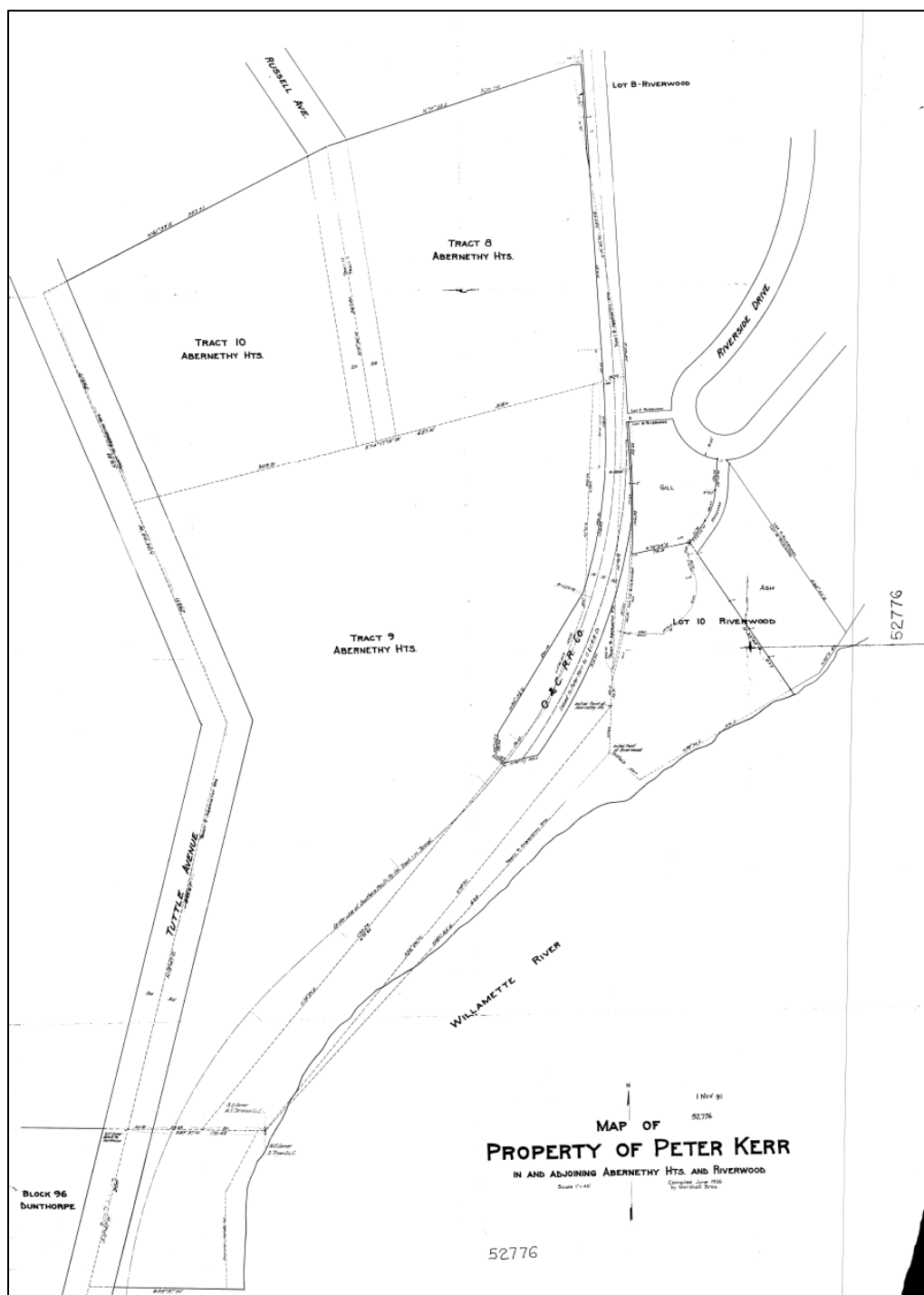
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Figure 5: 1926 Tax Assessor Map of Abernethy Heights (Lots 8,9 and 10).

Multnomah County Surveyor's Office, Survey & Assessor Image Locator, survey record 52776, June 1, 1926. Surveyor: Marshall Brothers.



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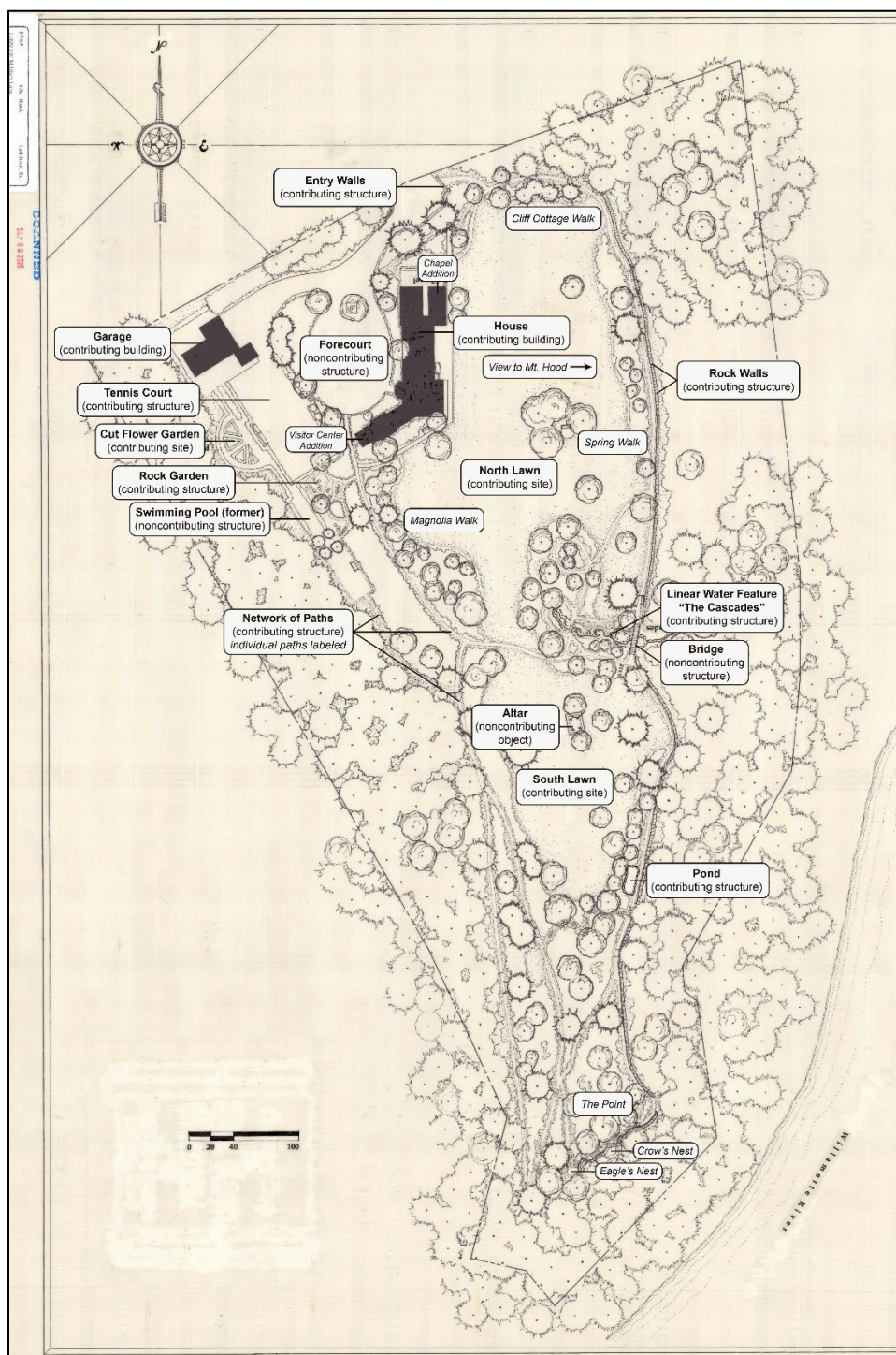
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Huntington and Kiest Landscape Architects, December 1992 (accurate to 2026);
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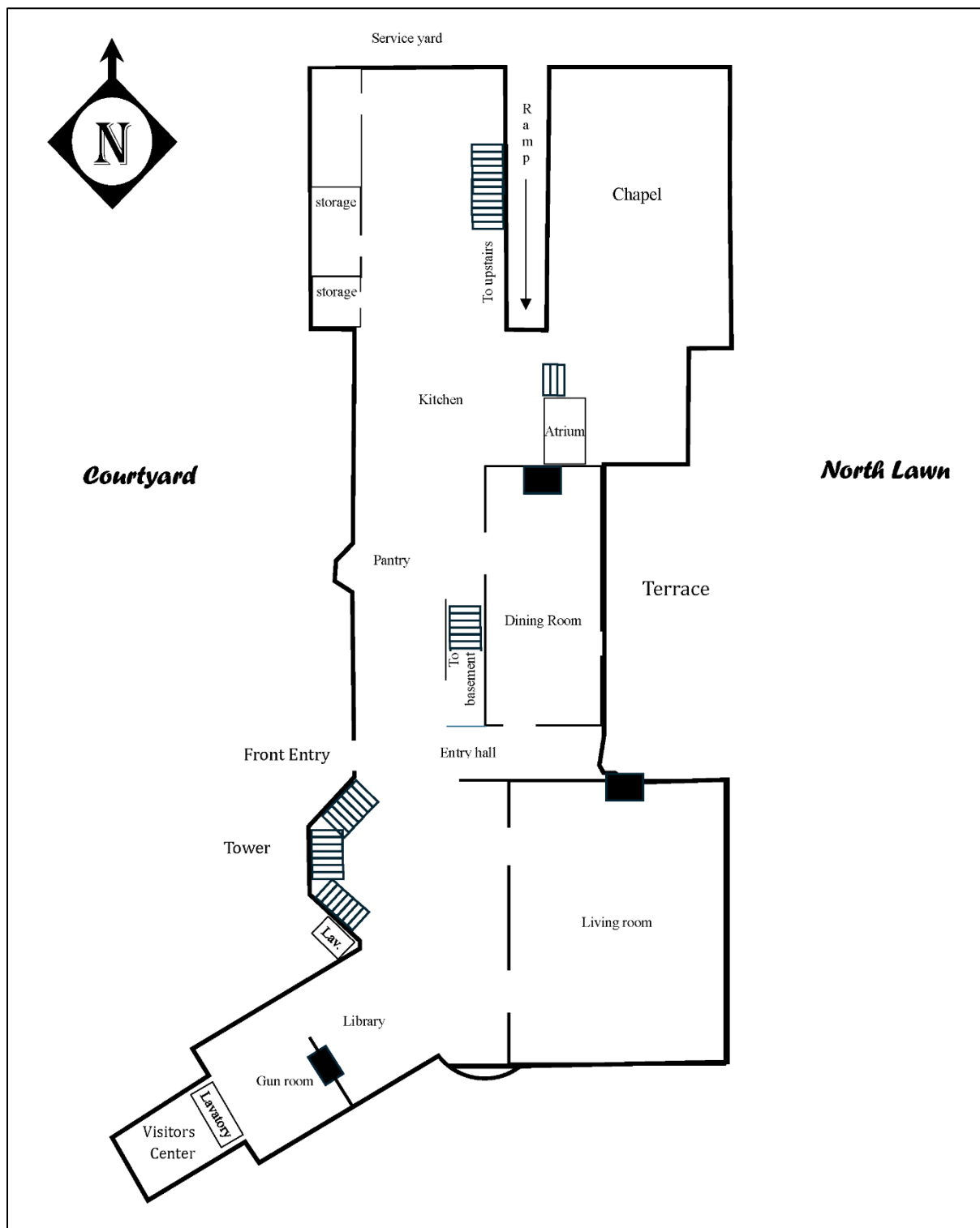
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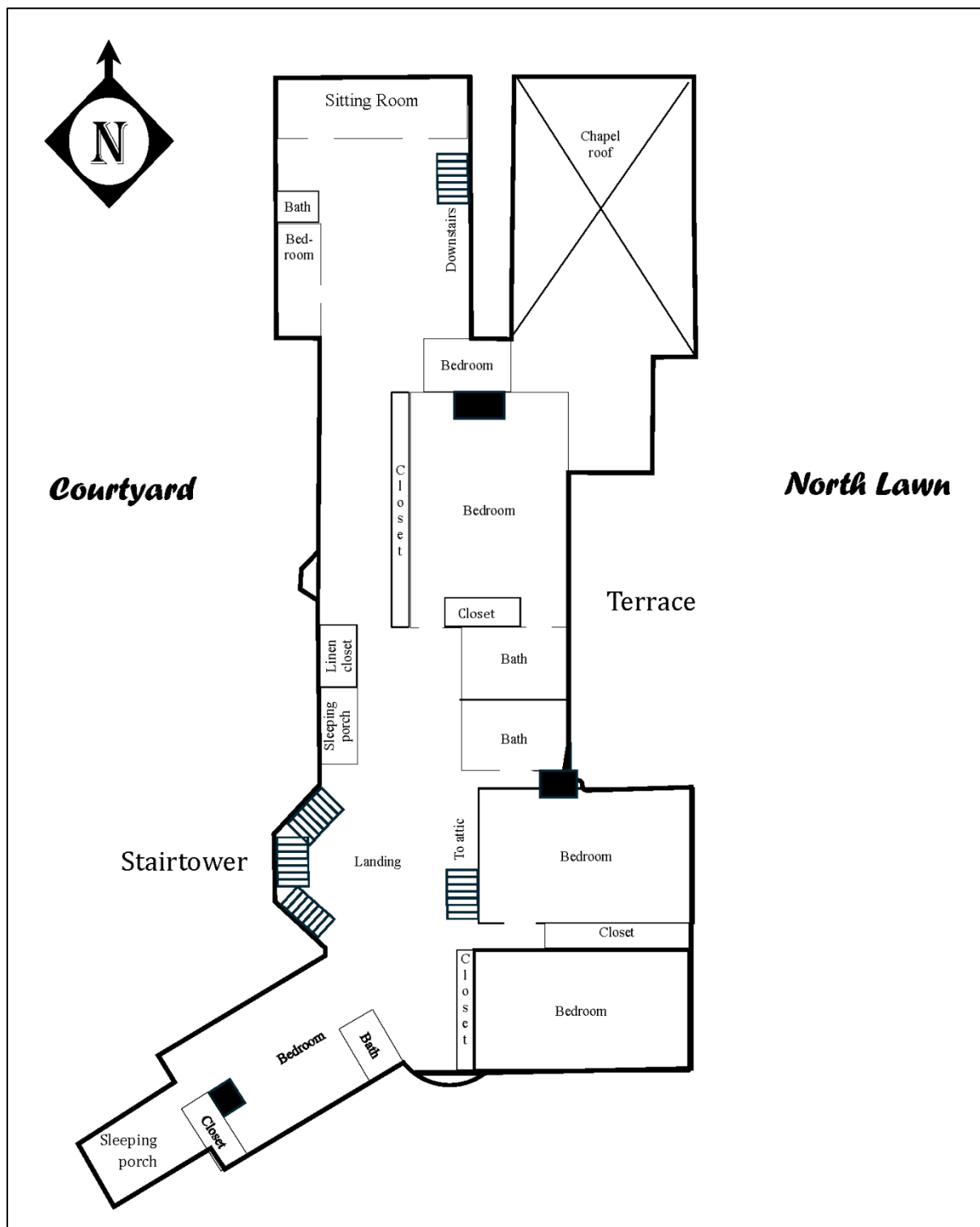
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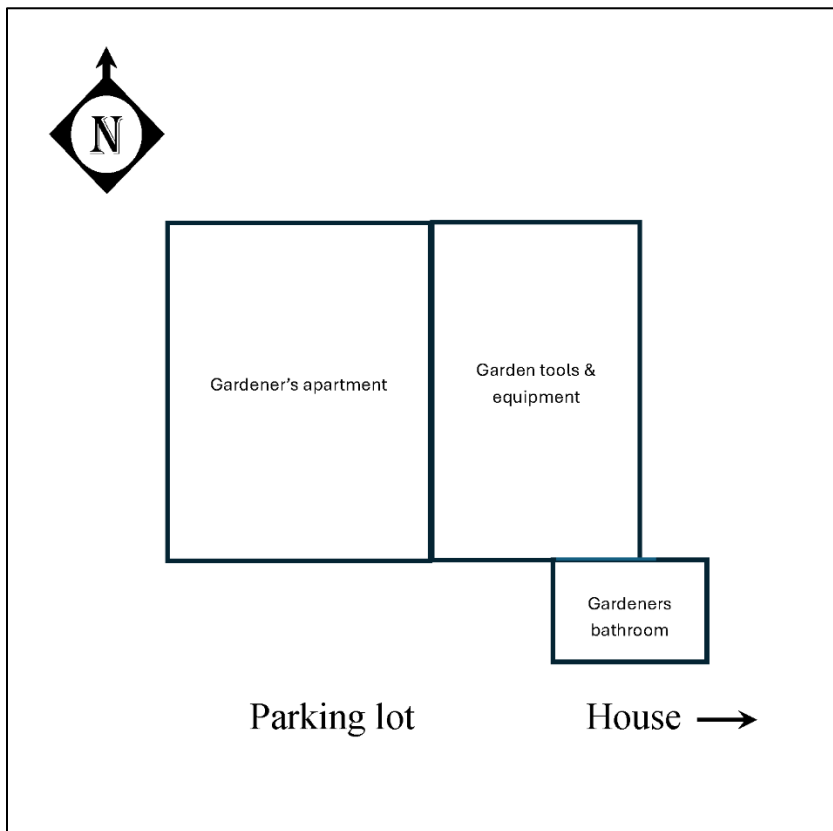
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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 5, folder 3, neg.1115, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 5, folder 3, neg.2138, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 4, folder 8, neg.1418. Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 4, folder 4, neg. 128, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 1, folder 18, neg.172, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 4, folder 6, neg.1759, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Photo taken February 2026, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 6, folder 18, neg. 799, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Collection Newton Stewart Historical Museum, June 2007.



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Photo taken 2011, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Clipping from unknown publication, ca. 1913-15. Ellis Lawrence collection, Ax56, Box 3, University of Oregon Research Library, Eugene, Oregon.



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Photo taken 2011, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Photo taken February 2026, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Photo taken February 2026, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 4, folder 13, neg.1650, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 4, folder 24, neg.1643, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Adolph Meyer project photobook, courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2004.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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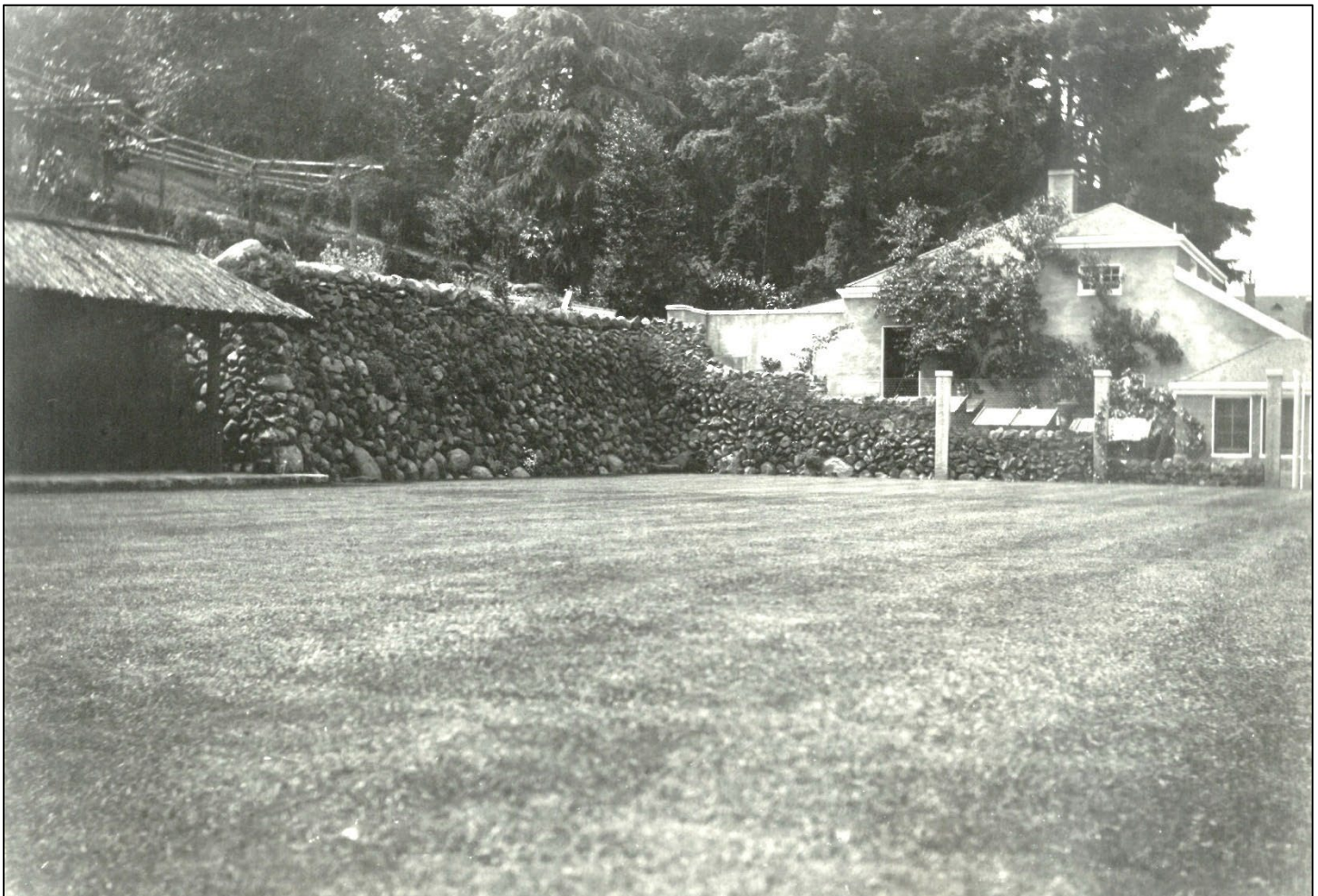
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Figure 33: Tennis court wall with viewing niche, designed by Adolph Meyer, looking northwest ca. 1922.

Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Autochrome, Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 8, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Photo taken February 2026 by Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Kerr family collection, Coll 74, Box 1, folder 20, neg.1275, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



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Adolph Meyer project photobook, courtesy of Paul Meyer, 2004.



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Figure 38: Front entry of house (western façade) looking south, 1960.

Photo by Louise Hoyt, Collection of Elk Rock Garden Foundation.



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Figure 39: Wisteria in bloom, above viewing niche of former tennis court (now visitor parking lot,), looking west.

Photo taken May 2024, Eileen G. Fitzsimons.



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Photo taken by Eileen G. Fitzsimons, February 2026.



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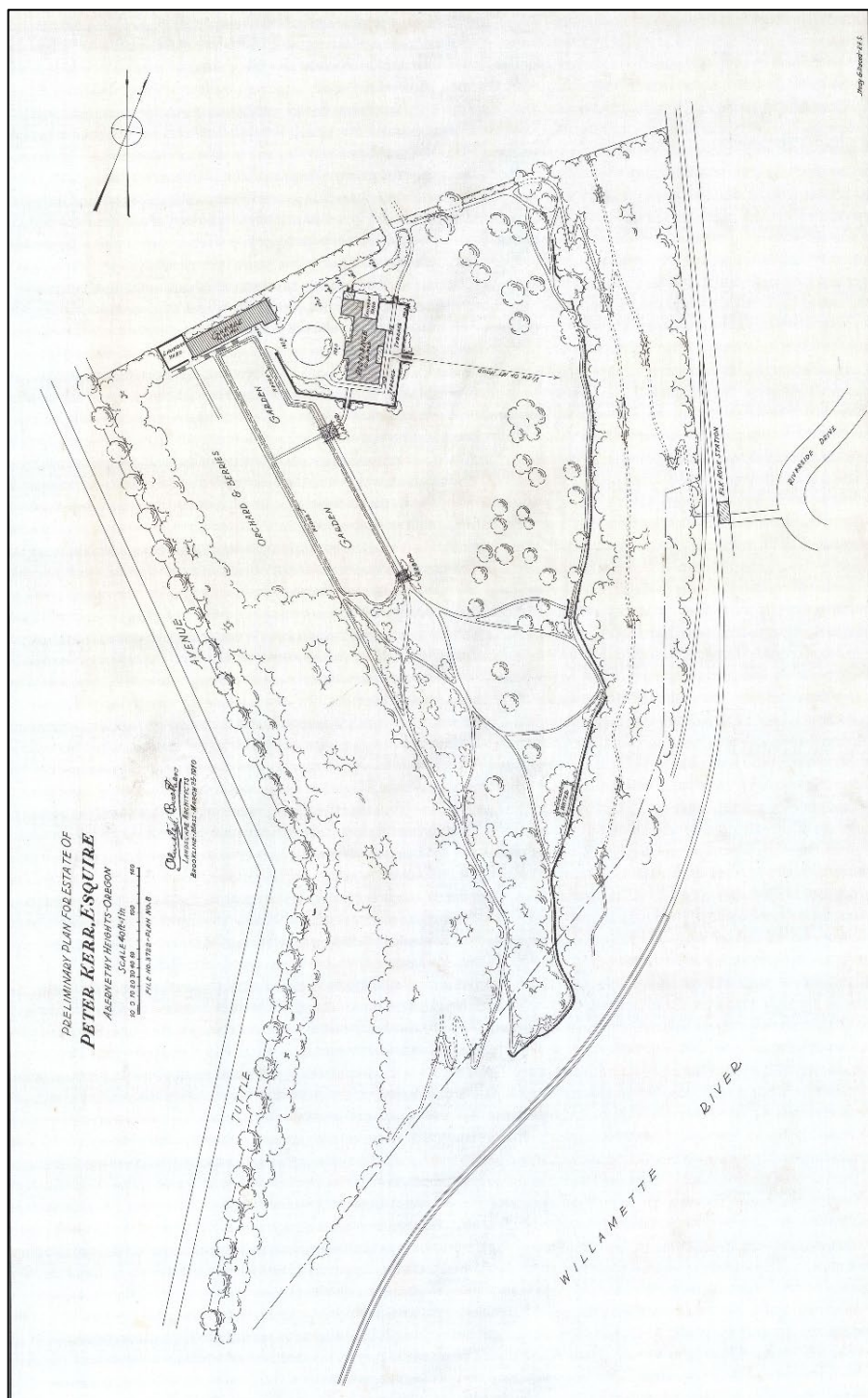
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Figure 41. Preliminary Plan for Estate of Peter Kerr, Esq. by Olmsted Brothers, March 25, 1910.

Tracing of January 1910 survey of Elk Rock property by R.S. Greenleaf. Copy from Olmsted Archives, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2025.



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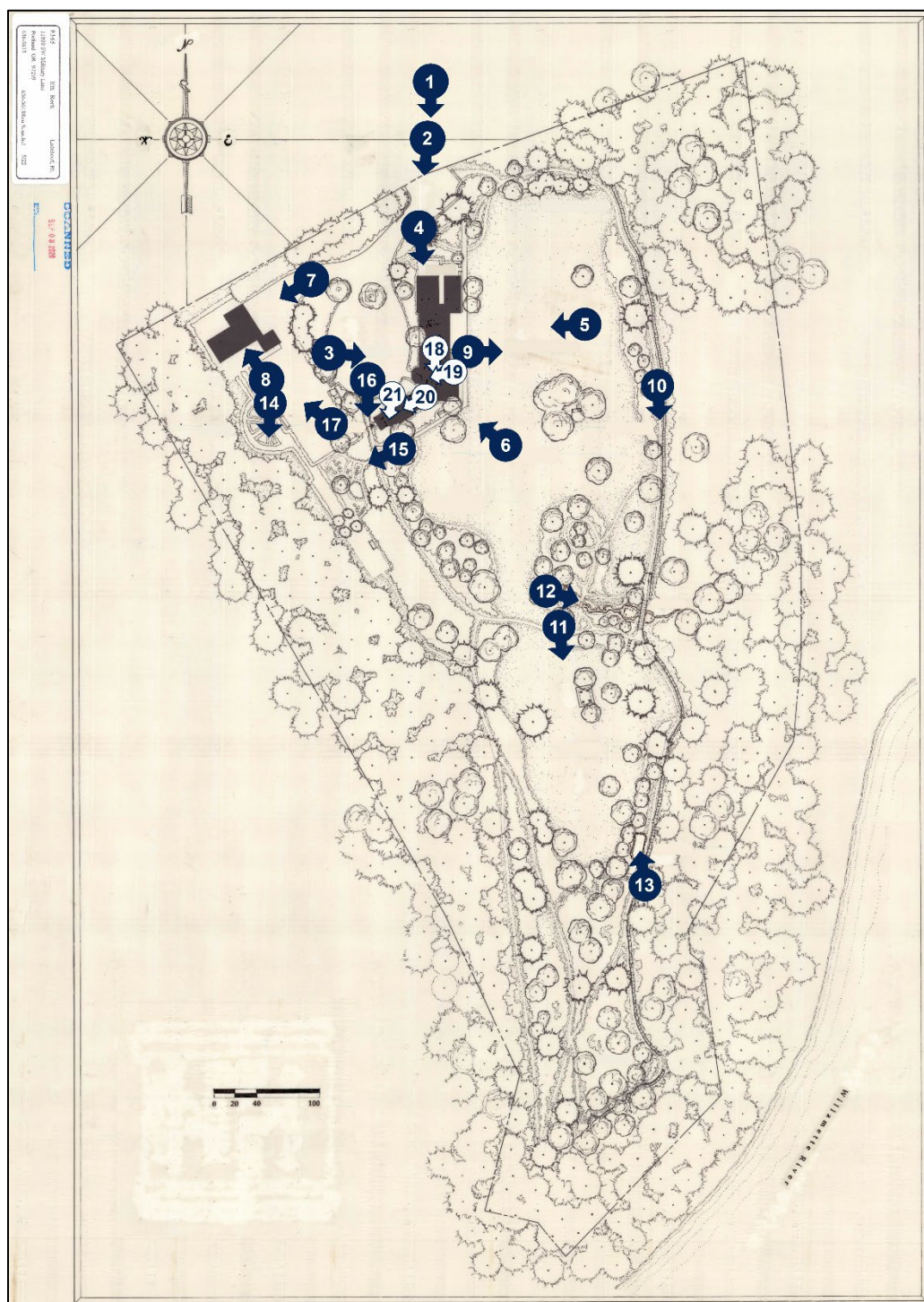
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Figure 42: Photograph location map.
Huntington and Kiest Landscape Architects, December 1992 (accurate to 2026);
annotated by Eileen Fitzsimons.





Photograph 1 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0001
End of Military Lane, estate entry, camera facing south.



Photograph 2 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0002
Entry gates, camera facing southwest.



Photograph 3 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0003
West (main) elevation of house, camera facing northeast.



Photograph 4 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0004
North elevation of house, camera facing south.

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Photograph 5 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0005
East elevation of house, camera facing west.



Photograph 6 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0006
South elevation of house, camera facing northwest.



Photograph 7 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0007
East elevation of garage, camera facing west.



Photograph 8 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0008
South elevation of garage across visitor parking lot, camera facing north.



Photograph 9 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0009
View from terrace across North Lawn toward Mt. Hood, camera facing east.



Photograph 10 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0010
Path along Spring Walk, wall on left marks eastern edge of garden, camera facing south.



Photograph 11 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0011
View across South Lawn, altar in center, camera facing south.



Photograph 12 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0012
The Cascades and bridge, camera facing east.



Photograph 13 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0013
Pond, camera facing north.



Photograph 14 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0014
Boxwood hedging of Cut Flower Garden in parterre, camera facing south.



Photograph 15 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0015
Foot of Rock Garden, camera facing southwest.



Photograph 16 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0016
Visitor center, site of former greenhouse, camera facing south.



Photograph 17 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0017
Former tennis court, now visitor parking, camera facing northwest.



Photograph 18 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0018
Interior of house, first-floor hallway, camera facing south.



Photograph 19 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0019
Interior of house, top of primary staircase, second floor, camera facing west.



Photograph 20 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0020
Interior of house, second-floor bedroom, camera facing southwest toward sleeping porch.



Photograph 21 of 21: OR_MultnomahCounty_KerrPeterandLaurieKingEstate_0021
Interior of house, sleeping porch at west end of house, second floor, camera facing south.