

Oregon Historic Site Record

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME					
address:	Eugene, Lane County	historic name:	Big O, The		
assoc addresses:		current/other names:	The 'O'; The 'O' on Skinners Butte		
location descr:		block/lot/tax lot:			
		twshp/rng/sect/qtr sect:	17S 14E 31		
PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS					
resource type:	Object	height (stories):		total elig resources:	1
elig evaluation:	eligible/significant			total inelig resources:	0
prim constr date:	1908	second date:		NR Status:	Individually Listed
				date indiv listed:	09/23/2010
primary orig use:	Monument/Marker	orig use comments:			
second orig use:		prim style comments:			
primary style:	Vernacular	sec style comments:			
secondary style:		siding comments:			
primary siding:	Steel	architect:			
secondary siding:		builder:			
plan type:		U Of Oregon			
comments/notes:					
Boundary of listed object includes the surrounding trail. See nomination.					
GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS					
Not associated with any surveys or groupings.					
SHPO INFORMATION FOR THIS PROPERTY					
NR date listed:	09/23/2010	106 Project(s):	None		
ILS survey date:		Special Assess Project(s):	None		
RLS survey date:		Federal Tax Project(s):	None		
ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION					
<i>(Includes expanded description of the building/property, setting, significant landscape features, outbuildings and alterations)</i>					
<p>Summary Paragraph Popularly known as the Big 'O', this historic collegiate hillside letter is located on the southern aspect of Skinner Butte in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon. The twenty by thirty foot (20'x30') object forms a giant collegiate block-letter 'O' made of steel normally painted yellow, although it is often vandalized with rival colors. The 'O' retains excellent integrity of feeling and association, both crucial components of the object's spirited history and significance. The 'O' also retains integrity of workmanship and design, both qualities which were historically modest and vernacular in nature. The object's setting has changed slightly since 1958 due to the continued growth of trees planted on the butte during the 1930s. Through the decades, this growth has gradually reduced the object's visibility from downtown along Willamette Street. Setting The Big 'O' is located at an altitude of six hundred and eighty-two feet (682'), just below two observation points and a parking lot at the crest of the southern aspect of Skinner Butte which has a rather steep grade. The parking lot is accessed by various hiking trails, as well as Skinner Butte Loop, a paved drive leading to the Butte's summit. The observation points provide views of the city of Eugene to the south, east and west, especially the downtown and the train station. Part of Skinner Butte Loop is also visible down below. The western observation point is the larger of the two and is also the closest to the Big 'O' (see site map). It is composed of a semicircular parapet wall as well as a flagpole flying the American flag. Immediately to the west of this observation point is a small dirt trail leading down the butte which joins a circular trail around the object. There is also a path leading from the eastern observation point to this circular trail (see site map). Although there is some grass both inside and immediately around the 'O', much of it has eroded due to foot traffic. When the 'O' was first constructed, the butte was bare until 1934, when the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) planted "hundreds of trees and shrubs... on the slopes of the hill." However, most of the larger trees, firs, are about twenty-five feet (25') away from the object. Much of the immediate landscape is composed of tall grasses, wild fennel, small ferns, blackberry vines and weeds, as well as a few saplings. This nomination includes the footprint of the 'O' as well as the circular trail around it, which comprises less than one acre (1 acre). The Object This object defies stylistic categorization as it normally applies to architecture or art. However, the object can be stylistically categorized according to its font, which is known as collegiate block lettering which was and is very commonly used for varsity letters and athletic logos. The 'O's footprint measures about thirty feet (30') long and twenty feet (20') wide resulting in an overall area of just under six hundred feet (600'). The object is composed of four forty-five degree (45') angular corners which suggest curves (see photos and site map). The angled corners measure an average of five feet nine inches (5'9") long. As the University of Oregon (UO) no longer officially employs block lettering, the 'O's style immediately evokes the athletic past. Form and function are completely unified as the symbolic "block letter" conveys its collegiate and athletic association effortlessly. It sits on top of concrete pylons of varying heights, connected by brackets which like the 'O' are made of steel. When first unveiled in May of 1958, the 'O' had four neatly welded seams. In December, 1962, it was dismantled and "kidnapped" by Oregon State University (OSU) students who returned it in pieces three years later in 1965. Donations of money and welding services reassembled (rather than replaced) the steel 'O' only now it had a total of nine seams, some of which are rather rough. With the exception of countless layers of paint, the new seams, and other minor forms of vandalism, the 'O' remains in the same physical condition and built of the same historic fabric as in May, 1958. The "foundation" of the object is composed of approximately twenty rectangular reinforced concrete pylons painted forest green, although drips and patches of lighter Kelly-green paint are also visible. There is moss growing at the base of several pylons. The pylons vary in height, with those on the west side higher than those on the east, most likely a means of mitigating the topography of the slope for the purpose of increasing visibility from downtown. There is no evidence to suggest the 'O' was ever visible from campus. Pylons on the west average approximately three feet (3') high, while those on the east average approximately one foot (1') high. The pylons on the top and east of the 'O' average approximately one foot nine inches (1'-9") high, while those on the top and west average approximately two feet two inches (2'-2") high. Pylons on the bottom and east average approximately two feet three inches (2'-3") high while those on the bottom and west average approximately two feet nine inches (2'-9") high. The pylons measure ten and a half (10 1/2) inches wide. They are all spalling, especially at the corners, and it is obvious that the aggregate is largely composed of small stones. The 'O' itself attaches to the pylons by L-shaped green steel brackets embedded in the pylons which they are painted to match. They are also of varying heights with those on the west higher than those on the east. The 'O' is currently a bright lemon yellow, although evidence of orange, forest green and warm yellow layers are visible. It is important to note here that UO's colors are green and yellow while those of OSU are orange and black. As will be discussed later, the object has been defaced with rival colors repeatedly, as well as ritually repainted. As a result of countless poorly executed paint jobs, the surface of the 'O' is very bumpy. There are also rust stains along some of the welded seams in the steel, particularly along the bottom. The sheet metal used for the 'O' measures two and a half (2 1/2) inches thick. The width of the lettering averages two feet eight inches (2'-8") although it is slightly thinner at the corners. The growth of trees on the butte as well as the temporary removal of the 'O' in the 1960s present losses to integrity although the 'O' still retains historic significance. The butte was originally bare and therefore provided visibility of the letter from downtown. As previously mentioned, trees were planted by the CCC in 1934 and now have grown enough to obscure the letter entirely outside of the butte. These same trees would have been present as small trees in 1958, the period of significance. They are now themselves of arguable historic importance and unlikely to be removed. Due to a kidnapping, the 'O' was temporarily absent from the butte from 1962 to 1965 and again in 1968. However, as the narrative description will elaborate, kidnapping has featured prominently in the history and significance of the letter. As an institutional symbol, the 'O' was assaulted by rivals regularly and violently. The kidnappings after the</p>					

period of significance did not destroy any historic fabric and have contributed to the clandestine customs strongly associated with the letter. Summary The Big 'O' is an object so simple that its nickname alone is almost enough to describe it. Located on Skinner Butte, and once visible from along Willamette Street, the object is a large steel 'O' attached by brackets to reinforced concrete pylons.

HISTORY

(Chronological, descriptive history of the property from its construction through at least the historic period - preferably to the present)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph The Big 'O' on Skinner Butte in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon is an outdoor object with a lively and boisterous history tied to multigenerational traditions and athletic rivalry at University of Oregon (UO). It is being nominated under Criterion A for its local significance as an education related resource. The 'O' was also a visual representation of Eugene's important relationship with UO. The period of significance is 1958 representing the construction of the extant letter, although it is tied to a much older, ongoing tradition of maintaining a hillside 'O'. That tradition began in 1908 when an 'O' was first built as part of a 1905-1915 regional trend of collegiate hillside letters in the western United States. The current letter is located in the same position as the very first incarnation of the 'O', built in 1908. Activities continuously associated with the letter include both vandalism by rivals and maintenance by UO students, demonstrating its strong association to both athletics and school spirit. Narrative Statement of Significance Campus pride took material form when the 'O' was constructed and dedicated on University Day, May 17, 1958. The period of significance is 1958 when the extant object was built and represents the earliest date applicable to the intact historic fabric. However, as a historic resource the 'O' is unique in that it was the final of several reincarnations of a campus and community tradition. In order to fully understand the extant object's significance, both to its historic creators and to its modern observers, one must frame the Big 'O' within a larger context of a continuum of tradition. School spirit and athletic rivalry fueled this tradition of maintaining a hillside letter since 1908. The extant 'O's design was informed by trends and events associated with this continuum. Defacement and vandalism had become long-standing, albeit clandestine, activities associated with the letter. Previous incarnations of the letter made of concrete became hazards due to frequent detonations. As a result, in 1958 the 'O' was purposely "embedded in reinforced concrete" to keep parts of the object "from flying" should it have been dynamited again (it was). Wooden incarnations from the 1940s and early 50s also proved too flammable a target for rivals, and so sheet steel was chosen as a superior alternative by those who organized the construction effort. The monogram was planned, built and dedicated by Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity with support from local business leaders. Ken Opager from Eugene Truck and Machinery Co. "donated his time to do the welding," while Eugene Sand and Gravel Co. donated "half" the cement needed for the concrete base. The collaborative construction of the 'O' demonstrated its function as a symbol of Eugene's connection to the University. Maintaining the actual physical presence of the letter was a tradition being preserved by the campus and local community when they built and dedicated the 'O' in 1958. Painting the letter had become an important component of the hillside letter tradition for generations of students prior to 1958. The practice of using pant seats rather than paintbrushes, dating to the 1910s, formed an important rite of passage for freshmen. This long-standing tradition was so important to the extant object's creators, the 'O' was purposely "inclined so that painters could slide more easily." The 'O' as it stands is an incarnation of the indomitable school spirit of the UO student body of 1958. After 1958, traditions associated with the letter continued, but began to wane after its final iteration. During the 1960s, painting the letter remained a homecoming tradition. The letter was also subject to further kidnapping and dynamite, but campus excitement for the letter dropped by the mid-1970s although assaults by paint always continued. Although campus-wide maintenance of the 'O' is no longer a ritual, a new generation of students has become involved with the letter, seeking to revive its former glory. The monogram's continued presence on the butte through decades of abuse represents the resilience of UO tradition and pride in the face of ongoing rivalry. A Brief History of Skinner Butte Skinner Butte has always hosted significant structures and objects, starting with the original (now non-extant) 1846 cabin of Eugene Skinner, the city's founder, as well as its subsequent 1971 interpolated reconstruction. In 1908, the City of Eugene purchased the butte for "the development of a municipal water and light department" and built a reservoir on the property that same year. However, in 1914 the Eugene Water Board determined it needed "only their reservoir on top of the butte" and sold the remainder of the land to the City of Eugene for use as a park. Originally encompassing sixty-seven acres (67 ac), subsequent purchases increased the acreage of the park to 92.85 acres. In addition to the 'O', the park includes significant objects and structures, including the Fred Lamb Cottage and a giant 'E' constructed by Eugene High School inspired by the 'O' to be discussed later. The 1934 CCC planting of trees on the originally bare butte changed the landscape through the decades. The Butte also served the city in an exceptional capacity as a site which reflected the bond between Eugene and the University of Oregon. A Brief History of the University of Oregon In Eugene, "town and gown" always had a strong relationship that was manifested on the Butte. It was prominent community members from the city and Lane County who pushed for the creation of a state university in Eugene, as they realized it would increase the city's prospects. Founded in 1876, the University of Oregon quickly grew from its original class of 177 students. According to University historian Walter Wentz, by 1958 the student population numbered 6000. As early as 1888, the Butte already displayed the growing importance of UO when Mr. and Mrs. T.W. Shelton, one of Eugene's most famous families, gave the school "a small segment of land on top of the butte... for educational purposes." This donation resulted in University-owned property within a city park, blurring the boundary between "town and gown". The location of the 'O' was highly metaphoric as it was intended to be seen from downtown—the "giant cement 'O', prominent in Oregon tradition and campus life, ... looked down Willamette street from its perch on Skinner's Butte [sic]". The 'O' was a constant reminder to Eugene's citizens of UO's permanent role in their lives. The Giant Letter Craze The decade-long collegiate letter trend was a distinctly Western phenomena often associated with campus pride and heated rivalry. Although there is a letter as far east as New York and even in other countries, these monograms "are primarily a phenomenon of the American West" due to the regions abundance of sparsely vegetated mountains. Of the estimated 400 hillside letters which now exist in America, "all but a handful are located in fourteen western states." These letters were generally "rare on the forested coast of the Pacific Northwest" The Big 'O' was part of a larger and "surprisingly respectable history... traced to a single decade, 1905-1915." The first of these letters was the Big 'C' at UC Berkeley in 1905, followed by a 'Y' at Brigham Young and a 'U' at the University of Utah in 1906. Three giant letters were constructed in 1908 in the following order: an 'M' at the Colorado School of Mines at Golden; an 'A' at Colorado A&M (now Colorado State University); and the Big 'O'. Afterwards, from 1909 through 1915, eleven other collegiate letters were constructed in Montana, New Mexico, California, South Dakota, Nevada, Wyoming, and Arizona. The 'O's tradition is therefore the seventh oldest amongst letters in America and the third oldest of vowels. The letters built from 1905 through 1915 generally originated as agents of campus unity. Parsons observed the frequency with which maintenance of these hillside objects was ritualized as a campus event, no doubt in order to "defuse... interclass rivalries" by uniting the entire school towards a common ~~characteristic~~ characteristic of hometown letters was "the collective commitment, enthusiasm, ... grassroots support" and "youthful energy and idealism" responsible for their construction and maintenance. All these qualities were typified by the "resourceful students" so often in charge of these hillside landmarks. According to the pioneer of hillside letter scholarship, James Parsons, these "cultural signatures" "serve[d] as conspicuous symbols of community and institutional identity" which announced the pride of their creators and guardians. The original collegiate letter, the Big 'C' typified the patterns typical of giant letters. Despite some local protest, the UC "freshman and sophomore classes" dedicated the concrete letter on the annual "Charter Day celebration," an event created to replace the "traditional brawl between the two classes [which] had [almost] degenerated into... guerilla warfare." The Big 'C's role in uniting the students made it "one of the central symbols of the spirit of the Berkeley campus." Not only was the construction of letters usually a group effort, their "painting... [was] often a class activity that is part of an annual tradition" such as Homecoming. As a result, both their construction and maintenance were "important ritual[s] in campus life." At the Colorado School of Mines at Golden, "engineering students and faculty" came together in 1908 to build their own letter declaring the day "a school holiday." Students at the South Dakota School of Mines, Rapid City and the University of Nevada, Reno declared their cooperative construction efforts school holidays as well. At the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, the "annual painting of the letter [M] [was] a traditional event on St. Patrick's Day" as he was the patron saint of engineering. Meanwhile, the 1907 construction of the 'U' at the University of Utah was integrated into an already existing school improvement day. The collaborative effort responsible for the maintenance of these letters was indicative of the school spirit they represented and generated. As obvious icons of campus pride, the letters sometimes became sacrificial lambs at the altar of inter-collegiate rivalry. As a result of its significance, the Big 'C' "was immediately seized as a target by rival schools." Most notable of these assaults included dynamiting the 'C' merely months after it was first built. In 1976 a team of Cal students peeled off each layer of paint on the 'C' and counted "about 120 coats" many of them Stanford University's red and conservationists' green. Students at Brigham Young went to the trouble of "plastic-wrapp[ing] the school's 1906 Y to prevent nighttime attacks" by athletic rivals. One attempt in 1919 by rivals to deface the Colorado School of Mines' beloved 'M' escalated into violence and kidnapping. "The Miners discovered [the intentions]" of a vehicle of students from the University of Denver to paint the 'M' crimson and so "barricaded the road and stopped the taxi at gunpoint... gunfire was exchanged but no one was hurt." The Miners then kidnapped and shaved their rivals' heads and "painted the letter M on [their foreheads]... using silver nitrate." The 'O's local influence inspired the construction of the nearby Big 'E'. In 1915, Eugene High School (now called South Eugene High School) "requested the formal sanction of the University" to build their own monogram on Skinner Butte. Oregon's student council approved construction of the Big 'E' so long as it was built on the "other end" of the Butte "away from [the] O so it won't look like Oregon Electric." Starting in 1915 and extending through the late 50s, many "high schools... followed the collegiate example" by building letters of their own. Institutions of primary education followed suite, resulting in a second wave of hillside letters within the western United States which lasted through the 1950s. Like many other high school and collegiate letters, the Big 'E's construction was a cooperative effort. It was also a target for both EHS and UO rivals who splattered it with paint. However, the proximity of the two letters does not diminish the relative rarity of the Big 'O'. Only the university's monogram can testify to the spirited collegiate trend lasting from 1905 through 1915. The letters of "high schools, ... junior colleges and grade schools" now "vastly outnumber college letters," particularly those of the 'O's vintage. The 'O's status as one of the very first hillside letters is that much more significant when the object is compared to Oregon's second two oldest collegiate letters. The youthful enthusiasm and energy required to build all these letters, as well as to assault them, resulted in rowdy, boisterous, and amusing pasts. The Big 'O' represented perhaps the most exciting, impassioned, and explosive of these histories due in no small part to UO's violent interclass rivalry. Framing the 'O's Period of Significance within the Larger Continuum of Tradition The period of significance, 1958, represents a crucial and identifiable moment within the context of a longstanding tradition of maintaining a hillside letter at UO. The extant object is a direct link to this moment. The true meaning of the period of significance and the extant object are derived from ongoing trends and events which led up to the construction of the Big 'O' in 1958. Before launching into the 'O's continuum of tradition, it is important to first address the distinction between the extant letter, built in 1958, and the tradition of maintaining a hillside letter 'O' which dates back to 1908. One might refer to the tradition of the 'O' as the underlying spirit behind the

very first construction of the letter and its subsequent five reincarnations. While the extant object's period of significance is limited to its year of construction, it is in fact the continuing tradition of the 'O' which has made the extant object historically significant. As this tradition and associated activities have been virtually ongoing for over a century, they do not provide opening and closing dates of significance. By understanding a tradition which began in 1908 and in many ways persists to the present, one can understand why in 1958 the campus and local community built the extant object. Through decades of customs and rituals, by 1958 the 'O' had become a conspicuous symbol of enduring campus pride and competitive spirit. What stands from 1958 is the embodiment of years of activities focused on athletic rivalry and school unity inherited by generations of students. Therefore, it is vital to examine what kinds of events and trends shaped the meaning of the 'O' to its community in 1958. These trends included vandalism, destruction and ritualized maintenance. The design considerations of the 1958 construction responded to consistent vandalism and ritual painting. This focus demonstrated that the Big 'O's creators considered these long-standing trends central to the object's function and importance. In order to fully appreciate this significance, the modern day observer must be equally as sensitive to the entire continuum of tradition associated with the Big 'O'. Inter-class and Inter-University Rivalry at the University of Oregon One must briefly examine the history and importance of both interclass and athletic rivalry at UO in order to understand how the tradition of the 'O' began and how it came to function as a symbol of institutional identity. By the early 1900s, inter-class rivalry at UO included hazing so brutal that school administrators had to intervene. As will be discussed later, it was these efforts to soothe interclass violence which ultimately gave rise to the construction of the Big 'O'. As inter-class tensions dispelled through the letter's very first incarnation in 1908, it was redirected towards rival athletic teams. The letter represented campus unity, and therefore it quickly became the focal point of aggressions between rival institutions. By 1895, "the Oregon-Oregon State rivalry" which literally marked the 'O's history "was well on its way to [its] current levels of intensity." The level of competitiveness was so great that the annual football game between the Ducks (UO) and the Beavers (Oregon State University (OSU)) came to be known as the "Civil War" game. As this nomination will prove, the 'O's history was characterized by offensive and defensive tactics much like those used in football. The continued growth of UO-OSU rivalry through the twentieth century provided the perfect social atmosphere for trends associated with the letter to develop and continue. The Continuum of Tradition The tradition of maintaining the Big 'O's could be described as having two sides, one official and one unofficial. As an official symbol of school pride, the 'O' was associated with multi-generational customs. However, the 'O' was equally tied to its strong involvement with vandalism and destruction as a symbol of athletic rivalry. As a symbol of campus community, the traditions associated with the 'O' quickly became rites of passage that took the place of hazing. The conception and construction of the 'O' started with the University's first Junior Weekend in 1908. The Junior Weekend formed to incorporate University Day and alleviate its interclass violence through campus wide projects intended to foster community. The program from the first annual Junior Weekend in 1908 listed construction of the concrete 'O' amongst its events. As with its location, the construction of the object brought together campus and the local community. While the actual construction was completed and supervised by junior men, "the monogram [was] sponsored by the Eugene Commercial Club." Established in tradition on the fifth University Day, the annual "painting of the 'O' was undertaken by junior men until 1912 when they determined it "too messy a job" and therefore "forced the freshman men to do the honors." By 1922, these honors were reserved for "those men having won frosh athletic numerals." Supervision of the task also became more exclusive in 1925 when juniors were replaced by members of the Order of the "O," an organization that recognized athletic achievement since 1898. The deliberate choice of athletically gifted students reflected the 'O's strong and early association with sports at UO. Although this task was normally completed by men, women "painted [the 'O'] numerous times" during World War II. Until 1952 this ritual occurred "twice a year—at Homecoming and during Junior Weekend," both events central to raising school spirit. The tradition of the letter, therefore, represented campus unity and belonging. This image defined the letter through and beyond 1958. The actual "initiation" itself was both memorable and messy. Rather than bother with paintbrushes, students in 1912 decided using their bottoms would be "a faster and more convenient way of redecorating the 'O'" The Junior Day weekend guide from 1918 cheekily described the "ceremony" in which "freshmen 'lettermen' are used... —at least they will be lettermen when they return, for they are sure to win their letters before leaving Skinner Butte. Yellow paint and trousers stretched tight make good places to place the 'letter' they have so recently won." Yearbook photos evidenced the continuation of this tradition into the 70s. With this particular method, "paint [was] poured from the top [of the 'O'] with the hapless victims forced to slide down" until the entire letter was lemon yellow. Helping to preserve the letter and its appearance became part of students' connection to an institutional identity which spanned generations. The student body of 1958 saw this initiation into community as a vital function of the tradition. The extant object's design reflected the perception of the 'O' as an object central to an annual community ritual. Because the 'O' and its color represented school spirit, it was targeted by rival teams armed with paint cans. As a result, the object also elicited the need for defense providing additional opportunities for UO students. By 1910 the 'O' was marred by "foreign intrusion" when the "Cal baseball team repainted the letter to form a 'C.'" By 1917 it was already customary for UO "freshmen... [to] keep the mammoth O [sic] on Skinner Butte bright yellow [and] watch it" before big games to prevent defacement. Despite frosh "vigilance" the 'O' was regularly assaulted with pigments and tar, predominantly by OSU students. Occasionally, an unruly UO fraternity would deface the 'O' with paint as well. In 1938 the Junior Weekend program referred to "painting the 'C' by frosh" no doubt as a response to a rival team's transformation of the 'O' into a 'C' yet again. By the early 50s, the "townspeople [of Eugene] became accustomed to the ever-changing color the 'O'" An article from the 1960s "estimated that the 'O' ha[d] been splattered with paint more than 200 times," and by 2010 the object has changed color too many times to be counted. The letter was painted orange as recently as December 2, 2009 only to be returned to its golden glory within the week. As wild as these pranks appeared, the 'O' was marked with more than just paint and tar throughout its history. The hillside letter had an explosive past characterized by a pattern of destruction and reconstruction. This cycle of destruction, repair, and reconstruction formed "almost a tradition in the life of the University's symbol." The extant object is but one of five "reincarnations" in the 'O's cycle of "death and rebirth." In 1929 the first explosion of the 1908 historic fabric of the 'O' sent a "piece of concrete, weighing about 25 pounds through the roof of a [nearby] building." The 'O' was soon rebuilt of concrete and maintained a relatively low profile, despite its ever-changing shade, until 1937, "the year of the 'Great War.' Looking at the 'O's' layer of paint for that year, one... [could] even discern some blood that [bore] mute testimony to the greatest battle ever" between UO and OSU students. The Beavers painted the 'O' after having won the "annual Pigskin Punchbowl three days" prior, and then "invaded the [UO] campus... and hand-to-hand combat broke out between... the rivals. The invaders [OSU students] were... led to off to Skinner's butte" and used as human paintbrushes to return the 'O' to its lemony hue. The next major attack in 1949 began a series of frequent detonations, repairs and reconstructions of the 'O' until the period of significance closed. "A large chunk of a lower corner" of the 'O' was annihilated after unknown persons "planted [a] charge" in 1949. The next blast in 1952 coincided with the passing of an aircraft over Eugene. Somewhat hilariously, many confused citizens wrongly concluded there was an air raid and in their panic jammed up the police switchboards. The three suspected OSU students were arrested and released for the explosion which left "the landmark... [in] a jagged 'C' shape." Oddly enough, in 1954 it was two UO students who confessed to the crime and were fined fifty dollars each. UO students demonstrated their pride in the effort to repair the 'O' in time for Junior Weekend the next spring in 1953. Members of Delta Upsilon poured the concrete while the Order of the 'O' was in charge of compelling "tradition violators" to paint the 'O'. Merely a week later, the 'O' was transformed into "an upside down 'U'" by an explosion which "destroyed part of the old 'O' and park of the [repair] work." The intention, most likely by OSU students, was apparently to completely annihilate the 'O' as the police found "21 dynamite sticks [beneath what survived of the object] which had failed to explode after two earlier blasts went off." This explosion also set off many local tempers. These violent assaults on the letter generated local controversy as well as student resolve and community support. A public safety meeting was the result of a petition to remove the 'O' signed by "123 indignant citizens" some of whose laws were "scattered [with] cement and stone" due to the explosion. Nevertheless, UO students' determination and ingenuity, combined with compromise and local support which ensured the symbol persevered. An emphatic member of Delta Upsilon expressed the students' "willing[ness] to keep rebuilding the thing as often as they blow it up." So as to be safe, the object was rebuilt "entirely of lumber" and relocated to "a site... about 50 feet west" of the original in order to minimize the consequences of any further attacks. The entire campus came together to rebuild as fraternities lent tools and labor, the physical plant "provided the trucks" and "nails were purchased by... freshman." Support from outside the campus made the project financially possible as the Star Lumber and Jack O'Neil Lumber companies donated the necessary wood. While its materials and location may have changed, the 'O's status as a ritual object and target did not. As the aforementioned "britches not brushes" tradition of painting the 'O' continued, it appeared that the object itself provided the hazing so common to rites of passage. Unlike the more merciful concrete 'O', the wooden letter posed "a vexing problem to countless frosh who painted with the seats of their paints, only to come away with... quill-like splinters" in their young behinds. The wood's flammable nature also propagated the cycle of destruction, "this time... by fire." For a couple years, the 'O' was "bothered only by several repaint jobs and an occasional burning." Then in 1955, the 'O' "was blasted" yet again, despite its "less dynamitable [sic] material. The culprits escaped, but luckily, "damage was slight and no windows... were broken" nearby. Then, in the fall of 1957, the 'O' was at the center of a series of events resembling the plot of a comedic teen blockbuster. These events ultimately resulted in the construction effort of 1958. On the morning of October 30, "only a few battered boards remained... to indicate that the... O... was ever" present after it had been "dismantled on the hillside and carried away." The next day, Halloween no less, the remnants of "the 20 by 40 letter" were confirmed to have been taken hostage on the OSU campus in Corvallis. Apparently jealous of the iconic landmark, the perpetrators' spokesperson suggested the two schools "establish the O [sic] as a 'Little Brown Jug' type of revolving trophy" "depending on the outcome of the annual 'Civil War' football game." The criminals did, however, promise not to burn or destroy the letter. The ducks retaliated by taking the OSU "Homecoming Queen and two of her court" hostage for several hours. Nearly a month passed until "Oregon's famous 'O' was returned" although it did not survive much longer. Although "no major [physical] damage had been done" to the 'O', as an almost sacred symbol of UO pride, its function as a ritual object was ruined. The "much beaten but still sentimental keepsake" was "burned by University students" on the grounds that it was "too contaminated by OS[U] possession." The burning itself became another rite of passage as "the crowd of about 200 [were] mostly freshman" led by none other than the ASUO President "soaked the remains of the letter in gasoline" while chanting "yells and fight songs." The campus-wide significance of the 'O' was manifested by the "real reaction from the student body" at its absence and the desire to rebuild which occurred the following spring. The extant object represents the desire of the 1958 construction effort to preserve a resilient tradition which stood for school spirit. Traditions Linger into the Twenty-first Century Many of the sanctioned and illicit activities associated with the 'O' endured well beyond the period of significance but have greatly diminished. An image from the 1968 yearbook demonstrated that the britches not brushes method of painting continued vigorously, only now students were in coed groups. The Oregoniana evidenced the persistence of this rite of passage into the early 1970s. By the 1980s, however, painting the letter yellow was the responsibility of the Rotary Club, not the students. Hillside letter historian Evelyn Corning erroneously stated in her book that "the last time anyone at UO can remember seeing the their 'O' was 1972". That her research led her to this conclusion illustrates the diminished role the 'O' played after its period of significance. While the 'O' may not have the notorious profile it did in 1958, it's almost costmary vandalism has persisted to the present day. The 1960s witnessed notable assaults on the letter. In 1962, the 'O' was

dismantled with blow-torches and then "disappeared" off the butte, presumably by OSU students. Students debated until 1964 whether or not the letter was important enough to rebuild, until December of that year when the 'O' mysteriously reappeared in five pieces. The community was again instrumental in repairing the letter and restoring it to its original position atop the butte. Jack Foster, local head of the Coca Cola Bottling Company, along with other area businessmen, "organized the... effort" because he in "an 'attempt to promote spirit for the college and the town.'" The letter's symbolism of Eugene's vibrant town-and-gown relationship obviously persisted through the decade. Mischief directed at the 'O' also continued. In 1969 dynamite by rivals struck once more, this time only "nick[ing]" a corner and easily repaired. It should be noted that the 'O' today retains its 1958 historic fabric and original position. While vandalism of the 'O' ceased to occur with such violence and frequency, it did not entirely go away. Rivals never stopped assaulting the letter with paint. In December of 2009, the 'O' was attacked with orange paint once more. It was restored to its yellow hue within the week, but this time it was done by UO students, members of the Student Alumni Association (SAA), a group that seeks to promote school spirit. As part of the new club's mission, the SAA seeks to restore the tradition of painting the 'O' before homecoming and after vandalism. It would seem that since the early 1970s, the 'O' has nearly been forgotten by campus tradition but certainly not by athletic rivals. Although the letter still gains attention, its true significance lies in its past and the meaning it held for the class and community who chose to reiterate the giant letter tradition. As a new generation of students yet again reconsiders the importance of the symbolic monogram, its story stands out as an exemplar of passionate school spirit and zealous rivalry perpetuated through time. Conclusion The Big 'O' is a delight to study and visit because its history demonstrates the commonalities between students today and those from fifty to one hundred years ago. While campus life has changed dramatically since the tradition of the 'O' first began, the nature of the events surrounding the object feel rather contemporary. The UO football team is now nationally famous and the UO-OSU rivalry continues to divide students and sports fans throughout the state. Students are still known for their sometimes rowdy behavior as well as their loyalty to the University and its teams. This lively, youthful and even mischievous aspect of the local community is represented by the physical properties of the 'O'. Its telltale marks of vandalism and changing paint scheme communicate the object's unique history. Though it is an unusual resource with an unusual history, it fits a larger historic pa

RESEARCH INFORMATION

✓ Title Records	Census Records	Property Tax Records	✓ Local Histories
✓ Sanborn Maps	Biographical Sources	SHPO Files	✓ Interviews
Obituaries	✓ Newspapers	State Archives	✓ Historic Photographs
City Directories	Building Permits	State Library	

Local Library:	University Library:	University of Oregon
Historical Society:	Other Respository:	

Bibliography:

City of Eugene. "Park History Information: Skinner Butte." 1 May 1985. City of Eugene. "Statement of Significance: The Big 'E.'" Oregon Cultural Resource Inventory, by H Miloe and M. Post, 1995. City of Eugene. "Statement of Significance: The Big 'O'." Oregon Cultural Resource Inventory by S. Mynatt and D. Singer. 1995. Corning, Evelyn. Hillside Letters A to Z: a Guide to Hometown Landmarks. Missoula, MO: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2007. Custer, Chuck. "Hectic History of the 'O'," Old Oregon. October-November, 1960. Finacom, Steven. "Building the Big C" California Alumni Association www.aluni.berkeley.edu/Alumni/Cal_Monthly/November (adapted from "West of Eden: the University and the Environment" Chronicle of the University of California no. 3) accessed on 3 November 2009. "Junior Class Weekend Program 1908-1958." Alphabetical Single Archives, collection number UA REF 3. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. The Light that Leads to Junior Weekend. Oregon Beacon: No. 1, 10 May 1923. Oregon Daily Emerald. Eugene, Various Dates. Parsons, James J.. "Hillside Letters in the Western Landscape." Landscape. Vol. 30, No. 1, 1988. "Pranksters Dynamite Butte 'O' In Convincing Mock Air Raid." Eugene Register Guard, 7 June 1952. Sheldon, Henry D. History of the University of Oregon. Portland: Binfords and Mort, Publishers, 1940. Wentz, Walter. "The School on the Hill (1876-1900)," Pioneers Scholars and Rogues: a Spirited History of the University of Oregon. Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 2002. Wentz, Walter. "The Rowdy Ragtime Years (1900-1929)," Pioneers Scholars and Rogues: a Spirited History of the University of Oregon. Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 2002. University of Oregon. Oregana. Eugene. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.