

A PROPOSAL
FOR
SIGNAL HILL PARK



A Report Prepared for the
Town of Manassas Park, Virginia
by
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Summary

The Town of Manassas Park proposes to acquire Signal Hill and adjacent protective property for a park for outdoor recreation use. The proposed Signal Hill Park consists of 433.15 acres. The core section for immediate acquisition consists of 106.44 acres estimated to cost \$560,000.

Signal Hill, a wooded ridge with 366' elevation, is a physical and historic landmark in the Manassas area. Located in gently undulating country which is fast developing into merging clusters of townhouses, apartments, houses and shopping centers, Signal Hill is a significant terrain feature visible from many points in the nearby area. Signal Hill, named for its famous Civil War signal station, today retains its Civil War trenches and fortifications in remarkably good condition.

A park at Signal Hill can provide a passive outdoor recreation area, protect the historic hill and its surroundings, and preserve the natural beauty of the rural environment disappearing at a rapid rate in one of the fastest growing areas in Prince William County and in the Washington metropolitan region.

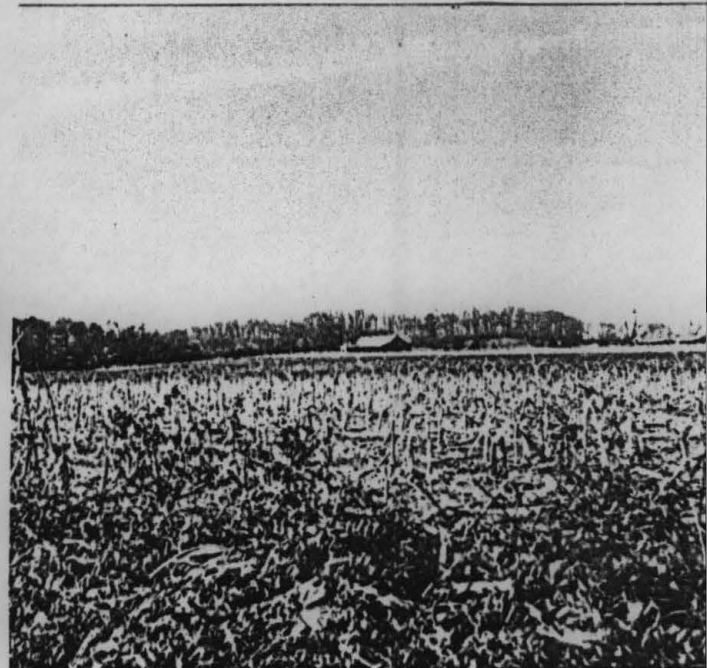
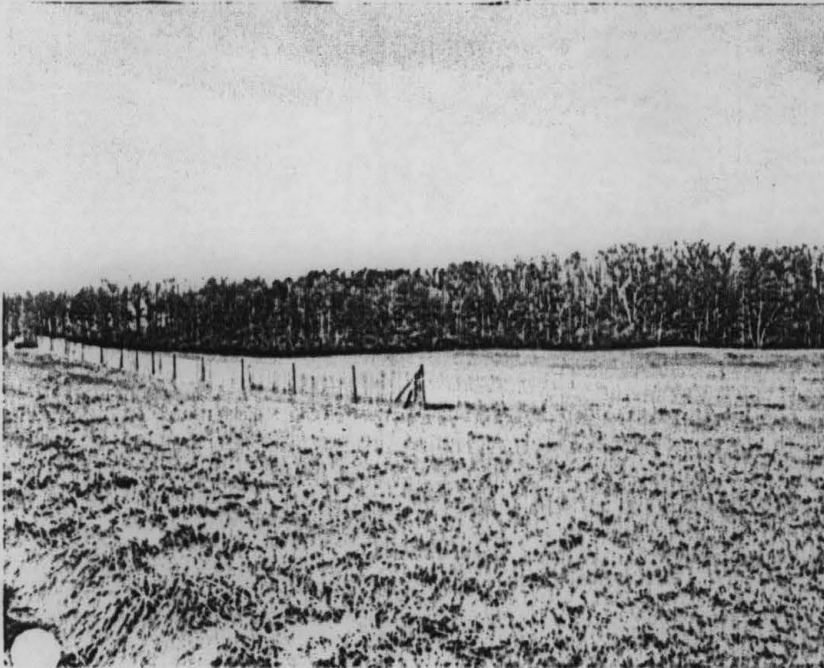
The Town of Manassas Park hopes that with its initiative and efforts, as well as with state and federal assistance, a park can be created at Signal Hill. Such a park can help meet the outdoor recreation needs of this part of Prince William County which is desperately short of public outdoor recreation areas today, and will be even more desperately short in the future.

Descriptive Background

The proposed Signal Hill Park is located west of Manassas Park in Prince William County, about two miles from both Manassas Park and Manassas, and 25 miles from Washington.



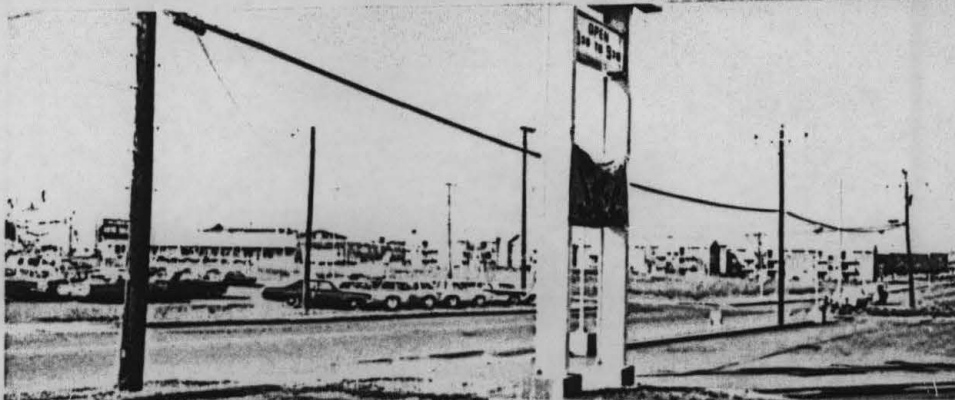
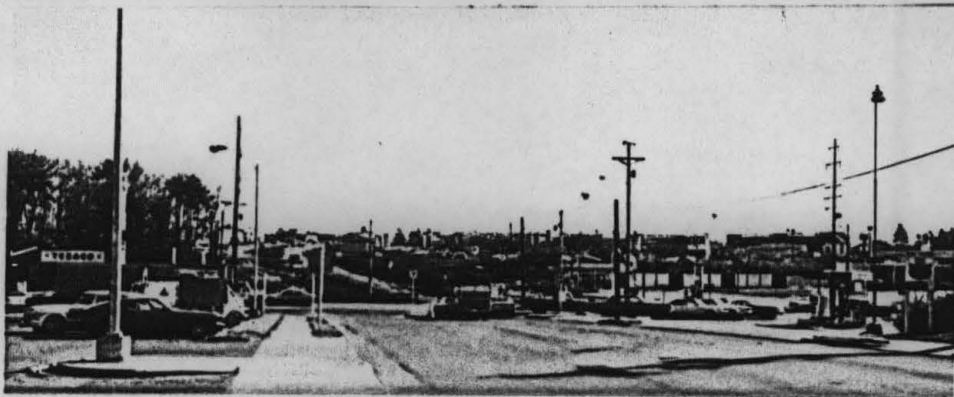
The proposed park area consists of a 433.2 acre area of rolling open fields, with occasional woods crowned by the ridge of Signal Hill. A dirt road, Route #616, currently traverses the site. It is a typical northern Virginia countryside -- pleasing, gentle, and well tended by past generations.



Its views, for which the Civil War signal station was sited, stretch past the nearby ridges to the distant Bull Run Mountains.

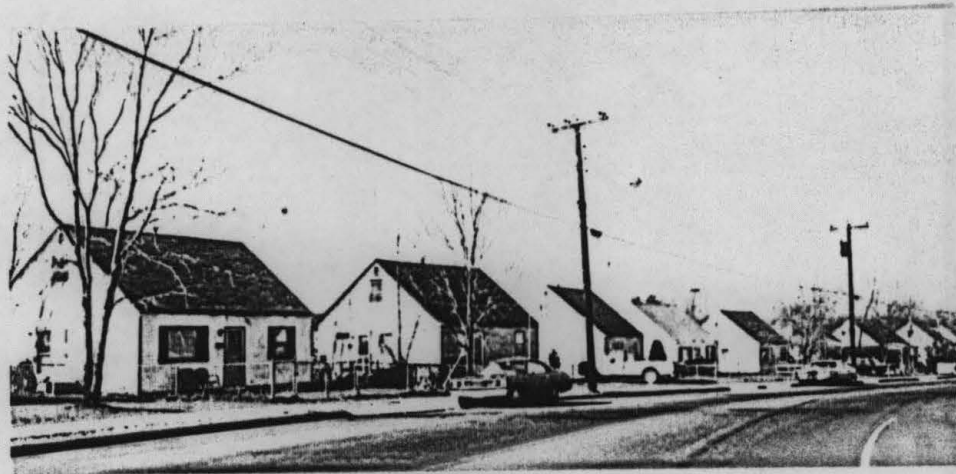


Although Signal Hill and its surrounding area represent typical northern Virginia countryside, this countryside is becoming part of history with the rapid pace of development. Prince William County's population doubled between 1960 and 1970, and is projected to more than triple between 1970 and 1990, reaching a population level of 430,000. In just five years -- from 1970-75 -- the Manassas planning area is expected to grow from 37,000 to 56,000, a 50 percent growth. The evidence of this burgeoning development can be seen near Manassas Park and Signal Hill.



To identify, plan and program outdoor recreation areas to meet the needs of such a changing area is a difficult task. The Prince William County Planning Department recognizes the recreation and open space needs of the Signal Hill area by designating it a low density zone and in its new draft Environmental Management Plan as a historic site, close to a major environmental area.

However, the steps to assure the protection of Signal Hill and the enhancement of its recreation and open space opportunities have been taken by the compact, working class town of Manassas Park.



Manassas Park is a proud, small community (one square mile and 6,844 people in 1970), composed of a young (17.9 median age) population, with 1970 median income of \$10,376 and 11.1 years of education, who live in 1,536 nearly identical houses on 75' by 175' lots, built mostly in the 1950s after World War

II. It is this town which has provided land for the first county public library building, swimming pool and active recreation program for its residents; maintained a high quality of environment; and now wants to provide broadened open space opportunities and new satisfying environmental amenities in acquisition of Signal Hill Park for present and future generations.

Recreation Needs and Potentials

Outdoor recreation is the primary purpose for the proposed Signal Hill Park.

Simple outdoor recreation activities like walking, picnicking and sight-seeing would be the primary activities at Signal Hill -- the very activities which the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation found to be the most popular outdoor recreation activities, regardless of income, education, age or occupation. And it is these simple outdoor recreation activities which ORRRC found to be most urgently needed near metropolitan areas. Picnicking with the family, walking in the open fields, following the signs of the nature trail, exploring the trenches, glimpsing at past history, looking across to the blue haze of the Bull Run Mountains -- these are the activities which Signal Hill Park can offer. They provide the escape, outlets and revigoration so needed in the urban world.

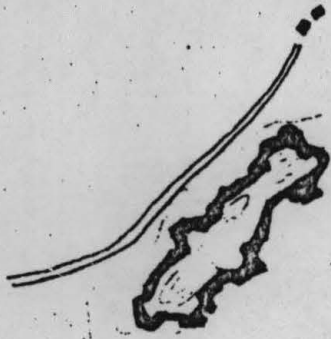
The provision of open space and these outdoor recreation opportunities at Signal Hill is especially significant because of the compelling recreation needs in that part of Prince William County. Signal Hill, located in the Manassas Planning Area, is in one of the largest and fastest growing areas in Prince William County -- which also has the largest park land deficit in the county, according to Open Space 1990: A Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan, a county park plan completed in 1970. The Manassas Planning Area in this plan has a 1970 population of 37,000, with a park land deficit of 555 acres and a projected 1975 population of 56,000, with a proportionately larger deficit. This deficit is not being met by Prince William County. The 1970 county park plan has not been approved by the county supervisors, nor has any comprehensive acquisition program been launched.

The Town of Manassas Park, therefore, recognizing the need for open space and outdoor recreation, has taken the initiative to assure adequate outdoor recreation in its vicinity. It has followed an important finding of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission: "Local government" according to the ORRRC Report, "has an important responsibility for providing adequate outdoor recreation opportunities. Almost every community has suitable resources: small parks, places where nature is not disturbed and where grass, trees and bushes grow, and people can walk, play or picnic. But many of these features are giving way to the big subdivision, the industrial plant, the highway, the airport, or the shopping center. The loss of natural assets narrows the opportunity for physical exercise or escape from tensions of urban living. But thoughtful and effective local land use planning, zoning and programming can often restore to a community, regardless of its size or location, the natural features that contribute so much to making an urban environment a better and healthier place."

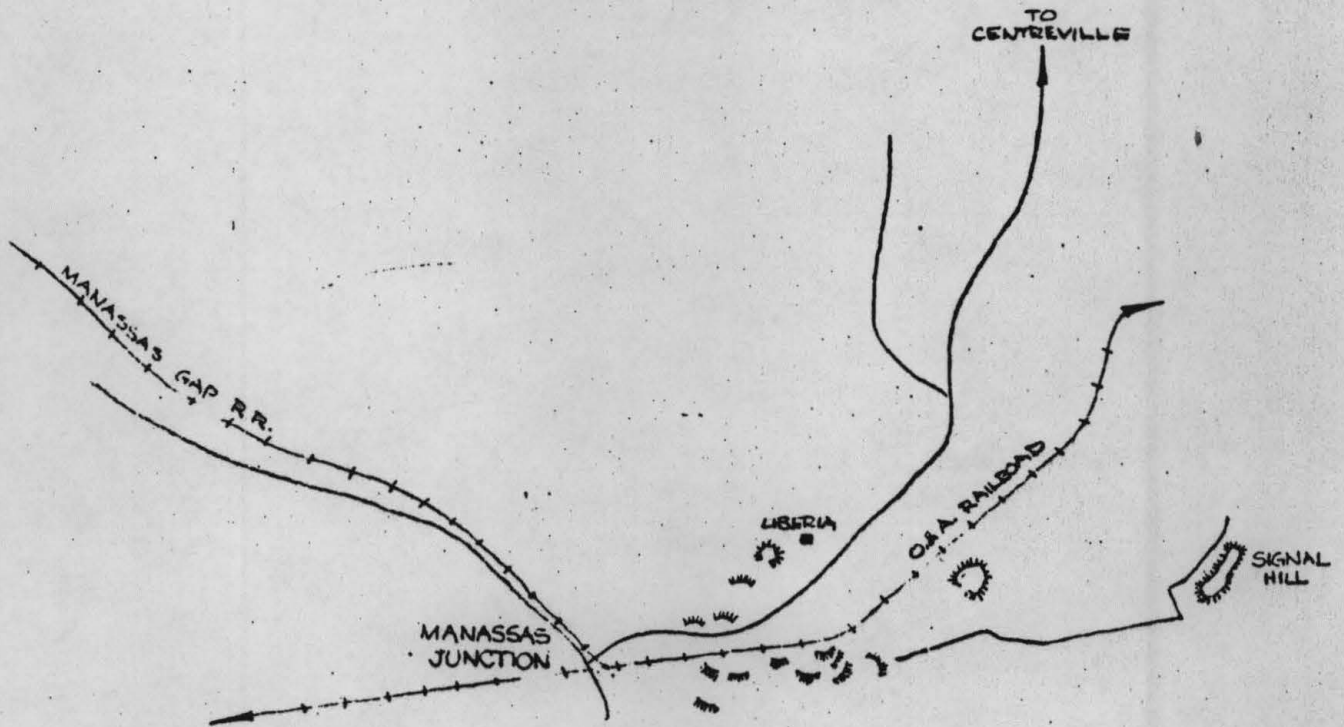
As Central Park is an island of open space in a dense urban city, so Signal Hill can be seen as a future island of open space amidst dense suburban development. Signal Hill, however, is not viewed as merely an isolated park, but rather a link in a system of open space and parks, as now envisioned by the Town of Manassas Park. The following map indicates this system and its relation to the Town of Manassas Park.




WILCOXSON



SIGNAL HILL
CIRCA
1862



 FORTIFICATION

J.S. Bell



CURVE DATA	
STATION	DATA
1+00	100.00
1+10	110.00
1+20	120.00
1+30	130.00
1+40	140.00
1+50	150.00
1+60	160.00
1+70	170.00
1+80	180.00
1+90	190.00
2+00	200.00
2+10	210.00
2+20	220.00
2+30	230.00
2+40	240.00
2+50	250.00
2+60	260.00
2+70	270.00
2+80	280.00
2+90	290.00
3+00	300.00
3+10	310.00
3+20	320.00
3+30	330.00
3+40	340.00
3+50	350.00
3+60	360.00
3+70	370.00
3+80	380.00
3+90	390.00
4+00	400.00
4+10	410.00
4+20	420.00
4+30	430.00
4+40	440.00
4+50	450.00
4+60	460.00
4+70	470.00
4+80	480.00
4+90	490.00
5+00	500.00
5+10	510.00
5+20	520.00
5+30	530.00
5+40	540.00
5+50	550.00
5+60	560.00
5+70	570.00
5+80	580.00
5+90	590.00
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6+40	640.00
6+50	650.00
6+60	660.00
6+70	670.00
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6+90	690.00
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8+50	850.00
8+60	860.00
8+70	870.00
8+80	880.00
8+90	890.00
9+00	900.00
9+10	910.00
9+20	920.00
9+30	930.00
9+40	940.00
9+50	950.00
9+60	960.00
9+70	970.00
9+80	980.00
9+90	990.00
10+00	1000.00

MAP NO. 2
 SIGNAL HILL
 WITH TRENCHES

The historical significance of Signal Hill has not always been respected, as can be seen in Map #3, showing the plat for Signal Hill and adjacent land prepared in 1892 and still valid today.

A park at Signal Hill cannot only preserve the historic hill, but also can provide opportunities for historic interpretation and restoration. Despite the fact that Signal Hill is an integral part of Civil War history in northern Virginia, the National Park Service cannot acquire Signal Hill. "Because this area is far beyond our Congressionally authorized boundary," says Richard E. Hoffman, Superintendent of Manassas National Battlefield Park, "we have no authority or possibility of authority to preserve this historical resource. Despite our deep interest in seeing it protected, we could only hope that local action would be initiated. . . The National Park Service is pleased that the local community is taking steps to preserve Signal Hill. . . Our local community should be congratulated for their efforts to insure that this resource is preserved, and we would lend our encouragement and moral support to this worthy cause."

TABLE OF METERS & SQUARE METERS

NO.	AREA	SQ. METERS
1	100.00	100.00
2	100.00	100.00
3	100.00	100.00
4	100.00	100.00
5	100.00	100.00
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100	100.00	100.00

CURVE DATA

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99	100.00	90.00	100.00
100	100.00	90.00	100.00

AREA TABULATION
 PARCEL X 32,533 AC.
 PARCEL Y 13,496 AC.
 TOTAL AREA 46,029 AC.

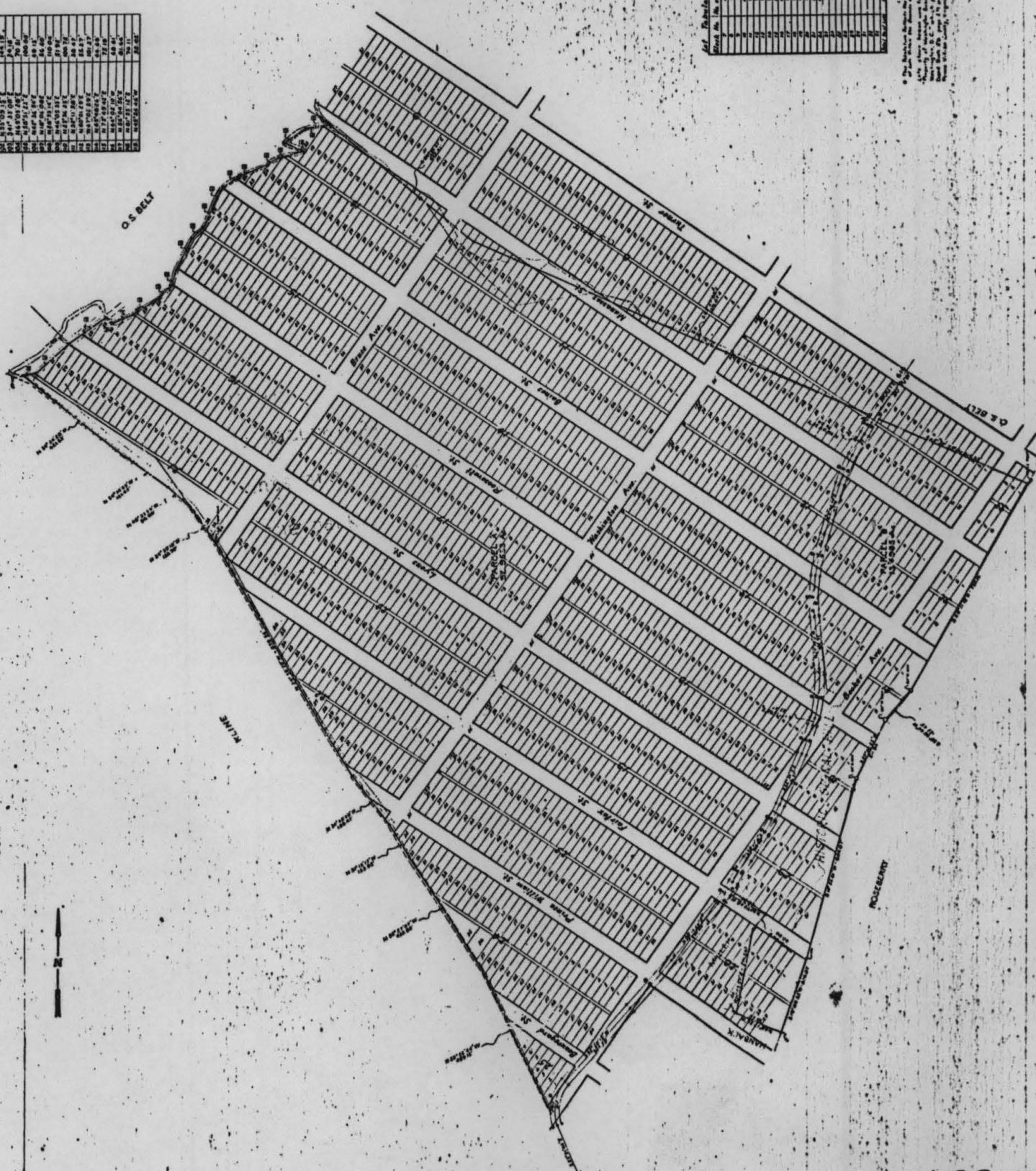
Area Tabulation

Block No.	No. of Lots	Total Area
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4	10	100.00
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94	10	100.00
95	10	100.00
96	10	100.00
97	10	100.00
98	10	100.00
99	10	100.00
100	10	100.00

The boundaries shown on this map are those of the original survey and are not to be construed as a warranty of accuracy by the Surveyor. The Surveyor is not responsible for any errors or omissions in this map or for any consequences arising therefrom.



Survey of ...
 State of ...
 Date: ...



TRAP NO.

Historical Significance

Although other ridges offering opportunities for outdoor recreation and environmental enhancement exist in northern Virginia, the historical significance of Signal Hill makes it a unique park site.

Signal Hill was the site of the Confederate signal station from which the first message ever spelled out by flag communication on a battlefield was sent during the Battle of First Manassas. Signalling between sites had been in use since the Trojan Wars, but at Signal Hill signalling in a field situation was tried for the first time in history -- and successfully.

Signal Hill, known as Wilcoxon Signal Station, was one of three stations set up early in July, 1861, behind the Bull Run Defense Line by Captain E. P. Alexander, an ordnance officer assigned to signal duty, later to be a brigadier general and then chief of artillery for Longstreet's Corps. Captain Alexander, in his memoirs, described Signal Hill, his own headquarters and base station in the Battle of Manassas:

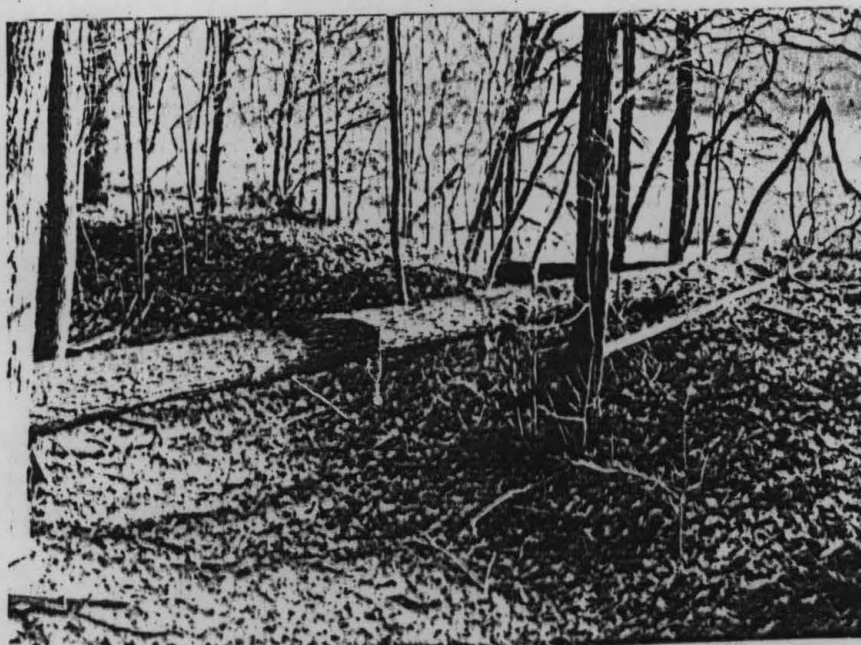
"About a mile east of Manassas, on a farm of a Mr. Wilcoxon, was a high, rocky point having a good outlook over a valley to the North and West. I made this point a central station and by a little clearing here and there, got two straight six mile ranges. One was Northwest to a bluff over Bull Run valley on the extreme line of battle -- one in rear of McLean's Ford and one near Van Ness's house on a bluff a few hundred yards to the left and rear of Stone Bridge. Beyond the latter station, the broad level valley of Bull Run for some miles with its fields and pastures, as seen through the glass, was foreshortened into a narrow band of green."

Peering through his telescope at this view from Signal Hill, Captain Alexander, on the morning of July 21, 1861, was able to see the main Union attack sweeping around the Confederate flank. He quickly sent a message to the Van Pelt Tower, "Look out for your left, you are turned." This warning

enabled Colonel Nathan Evans, commander at Van Pelt Hill-Stone Bridge, to shift his men to meet the Union attack head on.

Thus, Signal Hill played a pivotal role in the Battle of First Manassas. "Had it not been for the alert work of an officer stationed at Signal Hill, the Union flanking attack may not have been discovered and the outcome of the battle would almost certainly have been different," according to Richard Hoffman, the current Superintendent of the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Today, Signal Hill is well preserved, with its trenches and fortifications in good condition.



Schematic Plan

The focus of the schematic plan for the proposed Signal Hill Park is the 106.44 acres in the first acquisition phase of the park. This represents the core of the park for active use as it contains most of Signal Hill and key land immediately to the west of Signal Hill. The only other land for active park use is the backside of Signal Hill, which is proposed for purchase in the second acquisition phase. Most of the other acquisition proposals are for protective land secured by easements.

The priorities for the schematic plan follow the purposes for which the park is to be established. These purposes are:

1. Provide open space and passive outdoor recreation.
2. Protect the historic hill.
3. Preserve the natural beauty of the rural environment.
4. Enhance the ecological and natural functions.

This calls for a natural park with simple developments. As Map #4 indicates, the developments are limited to unobtrusive parking areas at the north and south ends of the park, adjacent to Route #616; picnic areas; nature trails and lookouts; restoration of trenches and fortifications; and interpretive information on the hill.

Several aspects of the plan should be stressed:

1. To maintain the natural amenities of the park and preserve its historic integrity, the existing Route #616 should be closed to vehicular traffic through the park. The roadway within the park should be maintained as a pedestrian way since Civil War records seem to indicate the road to Wilcoxon's farm was located near the alignment of Route #616. Route #616, if allowed to remain a vehicular road, presents safety hazards, as well as a jarring intrusion to the pastoral amenities of the park. Route #616 can be rerouted southeast to Route #689 if an extension is considered necessary.

2. Clearing of trees in critical areas within the park can provide better and historically accurate vistas. By clearing trees in some of the lower sections of the land west of Signal Hill, the vistas which Captain Alexander saw in 1861 can be opened up. Although Signal Hill, itself, was partially wooded, according to Captain Alexander's memoirs, selective clearing of trees, especially at the lookout areas, should be undertaken.
3. Some restoration work will be necessary on the trenches and fortifications to assure historic accuracy.
4. The open lands should be kept open and farmed, if possible.
5. The entire park and all trails, in particular, should be considered for nature education. The school system should be involved and advice should be sought from National Audubon.

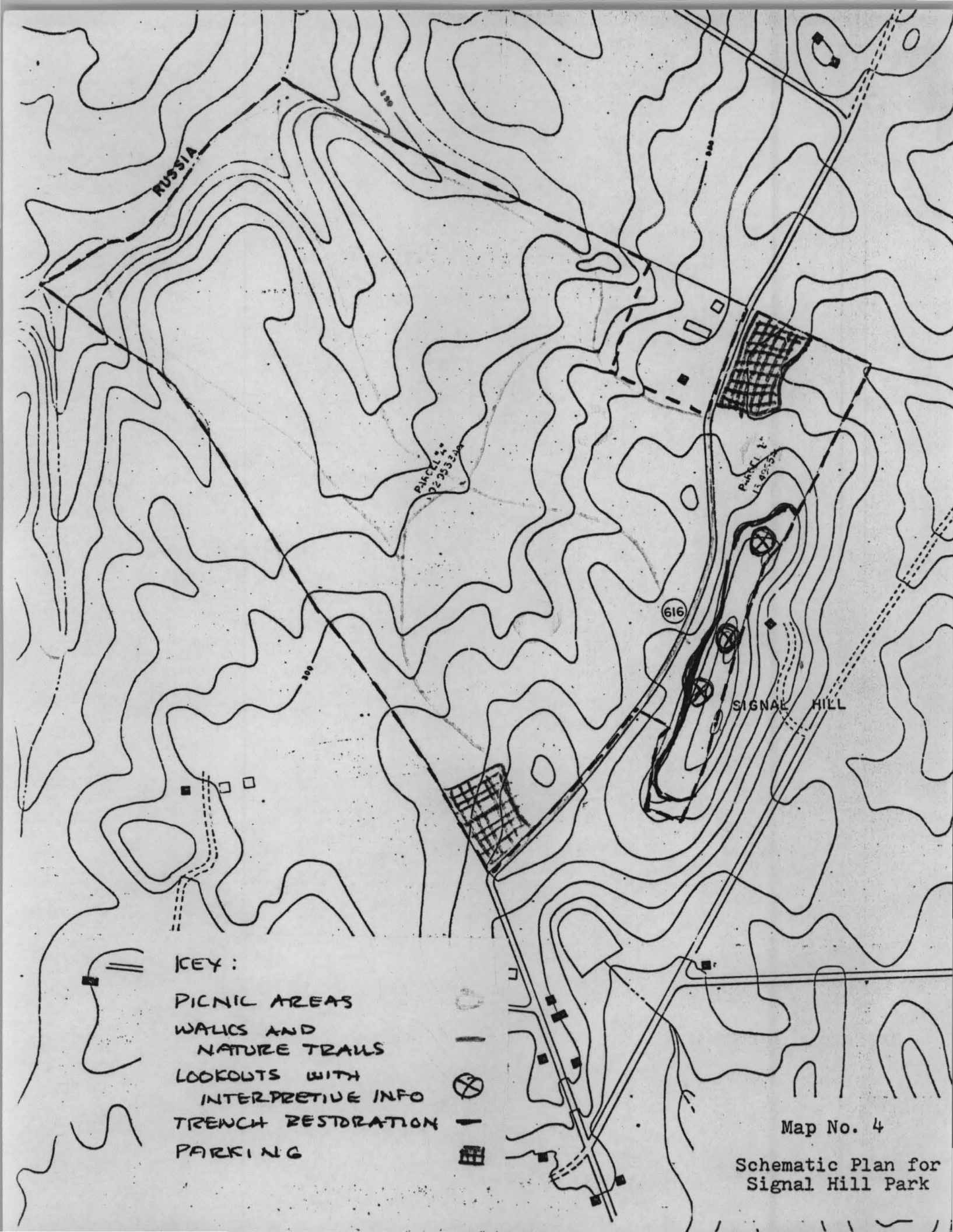
To assure the enhancement of the park's environmental and historic amenities and to maintain a quality passive outdoor recreation area, some protective public actions should be taken.

The Signal Hill park area should be designated a critical environmental area by the county and state, and a historic district by the county, state and federal governments. The precedent of Green Springs should be followed.

Route #616 should be made a scenic road. It provides a scenic approach to the park.



All federally funded projects in the vicinity of Signal Hill Park which could have an impact on Signal Hill should have environmental impact statements.



KEY:

- PICNIC AREAS
- WALKS AND NATURE TRAILS
- LOOKOUTS WITH INTERPRETIVE INFO
- TRENCH RESTORATION
- PARKING



Map No. 4

Schematic Plan for Signal Hill Park

Acquisition and Development Program

The proposed Signal Hill Park encompasses 433.15 acres. The acquisition program, however, is broken into three phases, determined by priority of recreation need, degree of threat, and availability of financial resources.

PHASE I. 1974

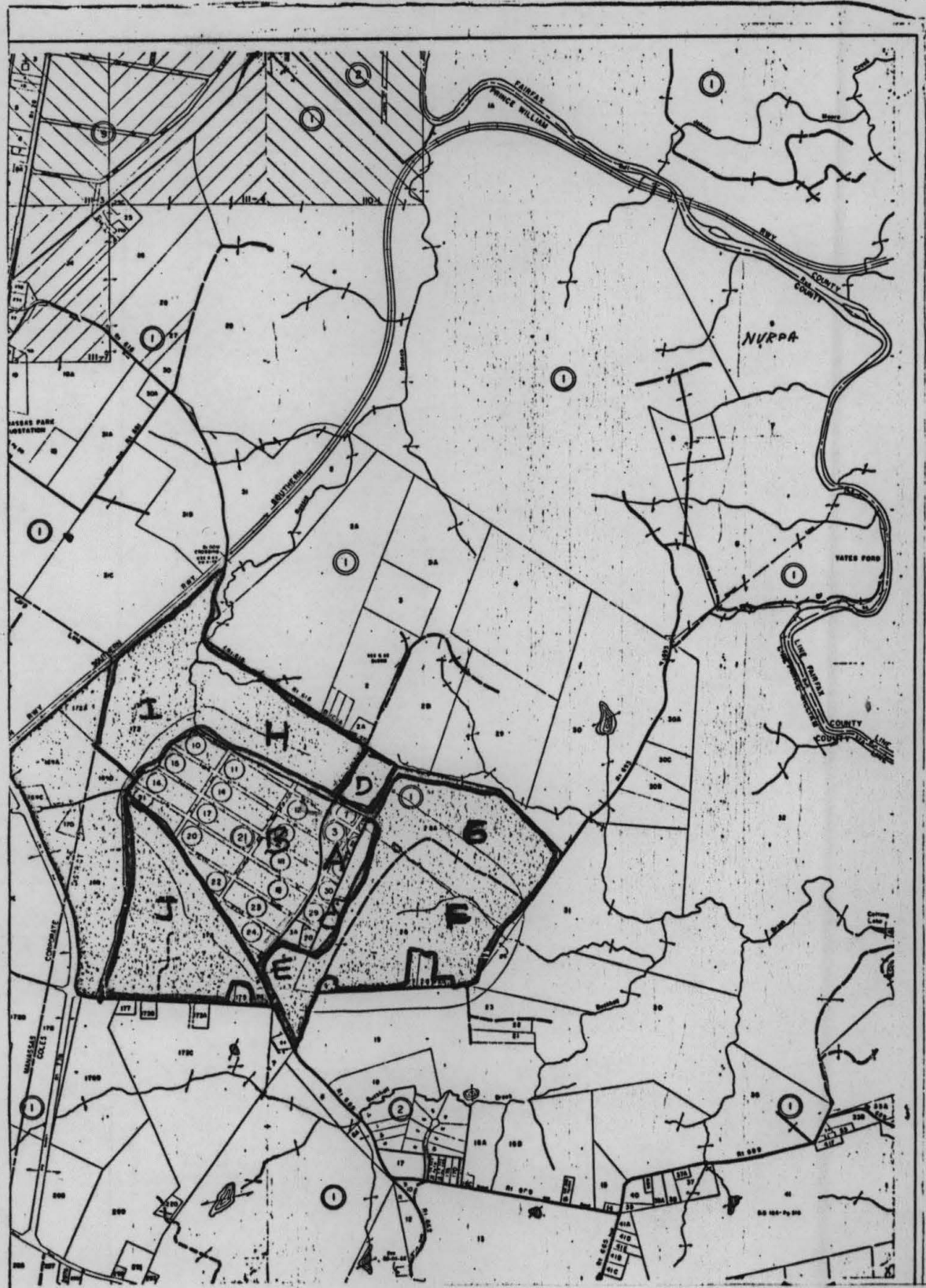
<u>Lot Code on Map #5</u>	<u>Lot Description</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Estimated Cost</u>	<u>Proposed Type of Purchase</u>
A	Signal Hill	13.49	\$110,000	Fee simple, under option
B	Signal Hill West	92.95	450,000	Fee simple, under option
TOTAL		106.44	\$560,000	

PHASE II. 1975

C	Backside of Signal Hill not in A	10.00	\$ 60,000	Fee simple
D	North of Signal Hill	8.50	27,500	Fee simple
TOTAL		18.50	\$ 87,500	

PHASE III. 1976-9

E	South of Signal Hill	13.35		Fee simple
F	East Protective	58.86		Easement
G	East Protective	63.00		Easement
H	Northeast Protective	48.00		Easement
I	Northwest Protective	58.00		Easement
J	Southwest Protective	67.00		Easement
TOTAL		308.21		



MAP NO. 5
 PHASE ONE ———
 PHASE TWO ———
 PHASE THREE ———

The development program will be focussed primarily on the land to be purchased in Phase I as it contains the core of the park. The ten acres of the backside of Signal Hill, to be purchased in Phase II, has trenches and fortifications which will require some development work.

As the park is planned as a passive outdoor recreation area, no expensive facilities are programmed at this time. Parking areas, picnic tables, fireplaces, trails, trench and fortification restoration, tree clearing, interpretative information and signs will be the bulk of the development program. The estimated cost is \$50,000.

Appendix

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Department

Prince William County Public Library Reference Division

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