

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Opus 40

other name/site number n/a

2. Location

street & town Fite Road not for publication

city or town Saugerties vicinity

state New York code NY county Ulster code 111 zip code 124776

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ang. Adams Dep. Comm'r for Hist. Preservation 3 December '00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- public-local
- private
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(check only one box)

- district
- building(s)
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
	3	buildings
		sites
1		structures
3		objects
4	3	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

n/a

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ Work of art

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ Work of art

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

n/a

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation n/a

walls n/a

roof n/a

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York

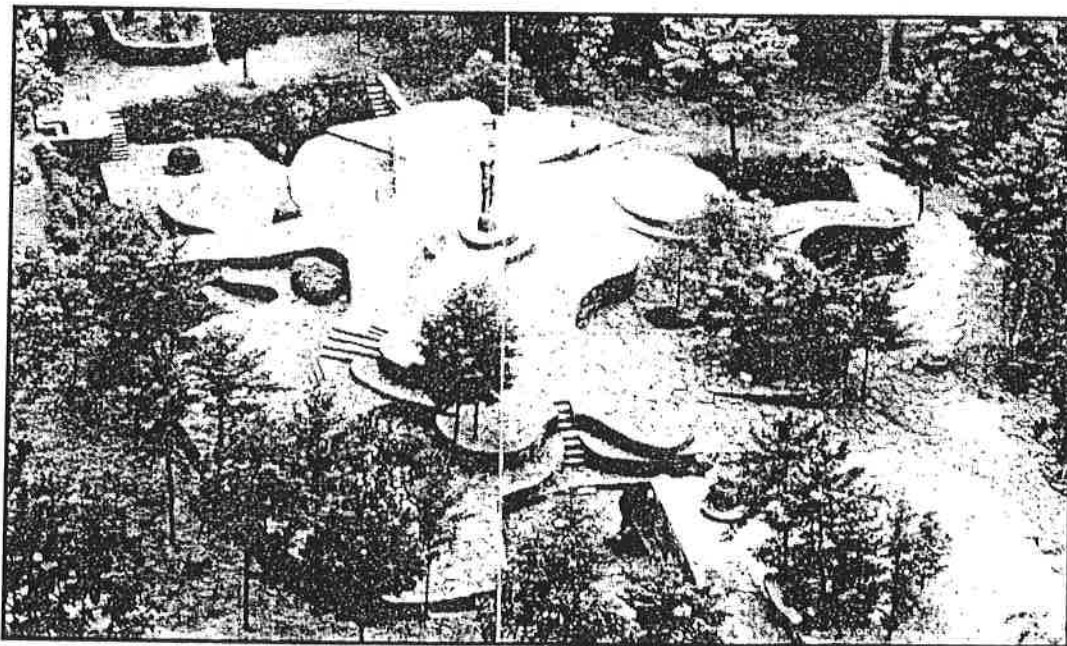
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 1

Opus 40 is an environmental sculpture situated in the town of Saugerties, which is located in the northeast section of Ulster County. The work is enclosed within the confines of an abandoned nineteenth century bluestone quarry. Dense woodlands and sparse residential development surround the work of art.

Situated within in the boundary of the nominated property is the work, entitled *Opus 40*, occupies the center of the property. Located on the adjoining grounds are three (contributing) sculptures created by Fite. These works include *Flame*, *Tomorrow* and *Quarry Family*. Also located on the nominated property are three buildings. These include Fite's home and two workshop buildings. Although all three of these buildings date from the early twentieth century, they are being classified as non-contributing due to the area of significance chosen for the nomination.

Opus 40 itself is a massive environmental sculpture, which rises more than two stories in some sections from the floor of an abandoned bluestone quarry. The large-scale work is composed of a series of undulating ramps, paths, platforms and stairs all constructed from millions of pieces of rubblestone from the quarry operation. Each small stone is painstakingly dry fitted into place creating a remarkably smooth and even surface, which creates the illusion of the entire work being sculpted from a single massive block. The serpentine paths and drumlins rise smoothly and effortlessly to the center of the work. At this epicenter is a series of round steps, which support a nine ton monolith. The entire work is set against a backdrop of the Overlook Mountain.



Opus 40, Ariel View, Undated ca.1980

8. Description

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Art

Period of Significance

1939-1976

Significant Dates

1939-1976

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Fite, Harvey

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Fite, Harvey

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Primary location of additional data:

- 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 # _____

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other Name of repository: _____

Opus 40
Kingston, Ulster County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1

Opus 40 achieves the level of exceptional significance within New York State as an important and unique example of large-scale environmental art. Executed between 1939 and 1976, the massive work covers several acres of land and rises nearly three stories. Begun as a setting for art, the work slowly evolved into the artwork itself. Its fine craftsmanship, massive scale, organic form, dramatic setting and the artistic tension created by the use of millions of small stones precisely fitted to create a seamless form makes *Opus 40* one of New York State's finest example of the environmental art movement. The work derives additional significance through its association with artist and creator, Harvey Fite.

Opus 40 is situated in northeastern Ulster County, New York in the remnants of a nineteenth century stone quarry. The quarry lies in a rock formation called the Hamilton Bench, which runs for approximately 50 miles along the eastern foot of the Catskill Mountains, with an average width of about 5 miles, and a depth of nearly half a mile. The quarry walls and bedrock floor contain the markings of millions of years of history, from the geological age known as the Upper Devonian period.

The hardness of the bluestone found in this region made it ideal for city sidewalks and curbstones, and during the nineteenth century this area was the site of an active quarrying industry to supply the paving needs of New York City. The marketable stone normally begins from six to ten feet below the surface, where the pressure has forced the needed degree of hardness. The stone was quarried in flat slabs; the thinner layers being used for paving stones and the thicker ones for curbstones. The quarrymen used drills and wedges to remove the stone and the drill marks and layers are still visible in many of the quarry walls of *Opus 40*. As they moved ahead into the rock walls, the quarrymen would throw the broken and unusable pieces behind them, leaving huge mounds of bluestone rubble. When the turn of the century brought the advent of the automobile and the introduction of reinforced concrete for paving, the quarry industry died, and these rubble-piled quarries were left behind. It is this abandoned quarry littered with tons of bluestone debris that Fite's creation would take shape.

Harvey Fite was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Christmas Day of 1903. When he was three years old his family moved to Texas. At the age of twenty, he entered Houston Law School. He studied law for three years before deciding it was not what he wanted to do with his life. Next, under the guidance of his bishop, he headed east to St. Stephen's college, a small Episcopal institution on the Hudson River. There he was to study for the ministry. But St. Stephen's had a theater, and Fite found himself more intrigued by the stage than the altar. At the end of his third year, he left to join a traveling troupe of actors. Fite soon left the group to focus his artistic energies in a more individualist form. It is at this juncture in his life he turned to sculpture as his medium of expression.

By 1933, four years after he had left St. Stephen's, Fite had earned enough recognition as a sculptor to be hired by his alma mater to organize the new Fine Arts Division. The college, now affiliated with Columbia University, had been renamed Bard College. Fite took the job,

Opus 40
Kingston, Ulster County, New York

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 2

which he would hold until his retirement in 1969, and settled in the nearby Maverick artists' colony in Woodstock, N.Y.

Harvey Fite was a sculptor of wood and stone. In May of 1938 he purchased an abandoned bluestone quarry in the middle of the woods in the tiny hamlet of High Woods (Saugerties, Ulster County, New York). The property, which he acquired from the widow of the last Quarrymaster, included twelve acres and the former quarry site. On the rim of the quarry he constructed his house and studio

In that same summer, he received an invitation from the Carnegie Institute to do restoration work on ancient Mayan sculpture in Copan, Honduras. He was deeply impressed by the philosophical strength and understanding of materials that emerged from the art of the Maya. The following spring he began clearing away the rubble in his quarry; and quietly, without even being aware of it himself at the time, Fite had begun his *Opus 40*.

Opus 40 refers to the 40 years Fite expects to put into the construction of the massive sculpture. But as he began moving those first stones back in 1939, he had no such dream. A quarry in the middle of the woods that has been standing idle for 30 years is nothing to inspire visions. It is a pile of rubble, grown over with brush. When Harvey Fite first stood there on its edge, he was not thinking of it as the raw material for one great monumental sculpture, but as an endless source of stone for works of a more conventional size.

Opus 40 began to emerge as a setting to display those works. Fite cleared away the brush and surface rubble, and at the high points of the quarry began to construct pedestals for his larger pieces. Then he built ramps to lead up to and between the pedestals. As he worked, it became apparent to him that what he was building was not a simple series of pedestals for sculpture, but a sculptured environment to set off a collection of work, a total expression in which the carved pieces would serve as individual statements.

With this concept in mind, he began to shape the sweeping rhythmic terraces, with the accents of steps and pools that compose *Opus 40*. The technique he used is an ancient method called "dry keying", which relies on the careful fitting of stone upon stone, and the pressure of the mass, for its stability. The "keys" are large stones placed at intervals throughout the wall, which support and are held in place by the smaller surrounding stones. There is no mortar or cement anywhere in the construction; as a result, it is not susceptible to the ravages of erosion.

As the major work grew, the smaller pieces seemed to shrink into it. The two-ton *Tomorrow*, the four-ton *Quarry Family* and the central figure (a half ton carving) *Flame*, were slowly being dwarfed by Fite's opus. It is at this point that Harvey Fite decides to culminate his massive work with a single expression of nature conforming to his vision.

Opus 40
Kingston, Ulster County, New YorkNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 3

In a creek bed a few miles away was a huge stone, Fite had first spotted the monolith in 1952, and knew it was the stone he needed to establish the central focus of Opus 40. It would take Fite the next twelve years to secure ownership of the colossal nine-ton block of stone. Raising the monolith into position was the single most challenging problem in the construction of *Opus 40*. The method Fite chose derives from principles used by the ancient Egyptians to raise massive obelisks. He removed *Flame* and its base, and dug a hole four feet deep in the spot where the monolith was to stand. Then he brought the stone in to rest horizontally with the tapered end over the hole. The stone was then tipped into the hole, raising the larger end, and a crib of heavy wooden blocks was inserted beneath it. Jacking up the heavy end a few inches at a time, Fite built up the crib until the stone was resting at approximately a 45-degree angle. It was then pulled into an upright position by guy wires attached to a winch in a pick-up truck, and held in place by countering wires.

A huge A-frame was then constructed out of 30-foot timbers, and raised over the monolith in the same fashion. A chain hoist with a half-ton capacity was fitted to the top of the A-frame in order to haul up the ten-ton capacity chain hoist that was needed to lift the stone. The monolith was then raised, and the base was built up beneath it, topped by a three-quarter ton capstone. The monolith, its bottom trimmed perpendicular to the center of gravity for maximum purchase, was finally lowered into place, held there entirely by its own weight and balance. Fite had a rough plan for carving it, but once the monolith was in its place on the central pedestal, he realized that it was perfect as it was. *Opus 40* had become a work of art that had nothing to do with his traditional sculptures. He removed the other statues to the surrounding woods, and allowed the main work to express itself in its own terms.

As sculpted by Harvey Fite, Opus 40 stands as one of New York State's most significant examples of environmental art. This 20th-century art form was intended to involve and even encompass the viewer rather than merely to face them; the form developed as part of a larger artistic current that sought to break down the historical dichotomy between life and art. The environmental sculptor can utilize virtually any medium, from mud and stone to light and sound. The works of the American sculptor George Segal are among the best-known self-contained sculptural environments; his characteristic white plaster figures situated in mundane, authentically detailed settings evoke feelings of hermetic alienation and suspension in time. The larger context of the natural and urban outdoors has preoccupied another group of environmental artists. The controversial "earthworks" of Robert Smithson and others frequently have entailed large-scale alterations of the Earth's surface; in one notable example, Smithson used earth-moving equipment to extend a rock and dirt spiral, 1,500 feet (460 m) long, into Great Salt Lake in Utah ("Spiral Jetty"; 1970). The Bulgarian-born artist Christo has involved large numbers of people in the planning and construction of such mammoth alfresco art projects as "Valley Curtain" (1972; Rifle Gap, Colo.). Christo's numerous "wrapped buildings" have been notable among urban environmental works of the last decades of the twentieth century.

Within this artistic movement, Harvey Fite's *Opus 40* stands as an early experiment into this mid-twentieth century art movement. As his work evolved, Fite consciously chose views to

Opus 40
Kingston, Ulster County, New York

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 4

present to the viewer. These planned elements provided a paradox for the spectator who was faced with the sensuous undulating forms of the overall composition, which are sharply contrasted by the hard, unforgiving nature of its millions of individual components. In his review of *Opus 40* in the March, 1989 edition of *Architectural Digest*, noted art and architecture critic Brendan Gill proclaimed it:

One of the most beguiling works of art on the entire continent.

In May of 1976, Harvey Fite was killed in an accidental fall onto the rocks of the quarry sculpture to which he had devoted the last thirty-seven years of his life. He was seventy-two years old. There is an unfinished wall, and there are piles of bluestone where he would have created more ramps and terraces as he extended his design. But *Opus 40* is finished, and in a way it is as complete as it would ever have been. It was the product of Fite's ceaseless vision, and could only have been stopped with his death.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 14.1 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 580168 4655742
Zone Easting Northing

2 18 580096 4655541
Zone Easting Northing

3 18 579844 4655626
Zone Easting Northing

4 18 579906 4655837
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John A. Bonafide, Historic Preservation Program Analyst

organization NYSOPRHP

date October, 2000

street & number P.O. 189

telephone (518) 237-8643

city or town Waterford

state NY zip code 12188-0189

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and **white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Opus 40

street & number High Woods

telephone n/a

city or town Saugerties

state NY zip code 12477

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Schoonmaker, Marius. The History of Kingston, New York. New York: Burr Publishing House. 1888.

Gill, Brendan. Architectural Digest. "OPUS 40: A Sculptor's Obsession in Upstate New York." March, 1989.

Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number Photographs

OPUS 40

Saugerties, Ulster County

Photo by: John A. Bonafide, 2000

NYSOPRHP, PO Box 189

Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Neg. at: NYSOPRHP, PO Box 189

Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Photographs

1. View north east to Overlook Mountain
2. Detail of stonework
3. View north
4. Detail of terraces
5. Quarry floor and detail of stonework
6. "Quarry Family"
7. n/c Work shed
8. n/c Fite home

Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 10 page 1

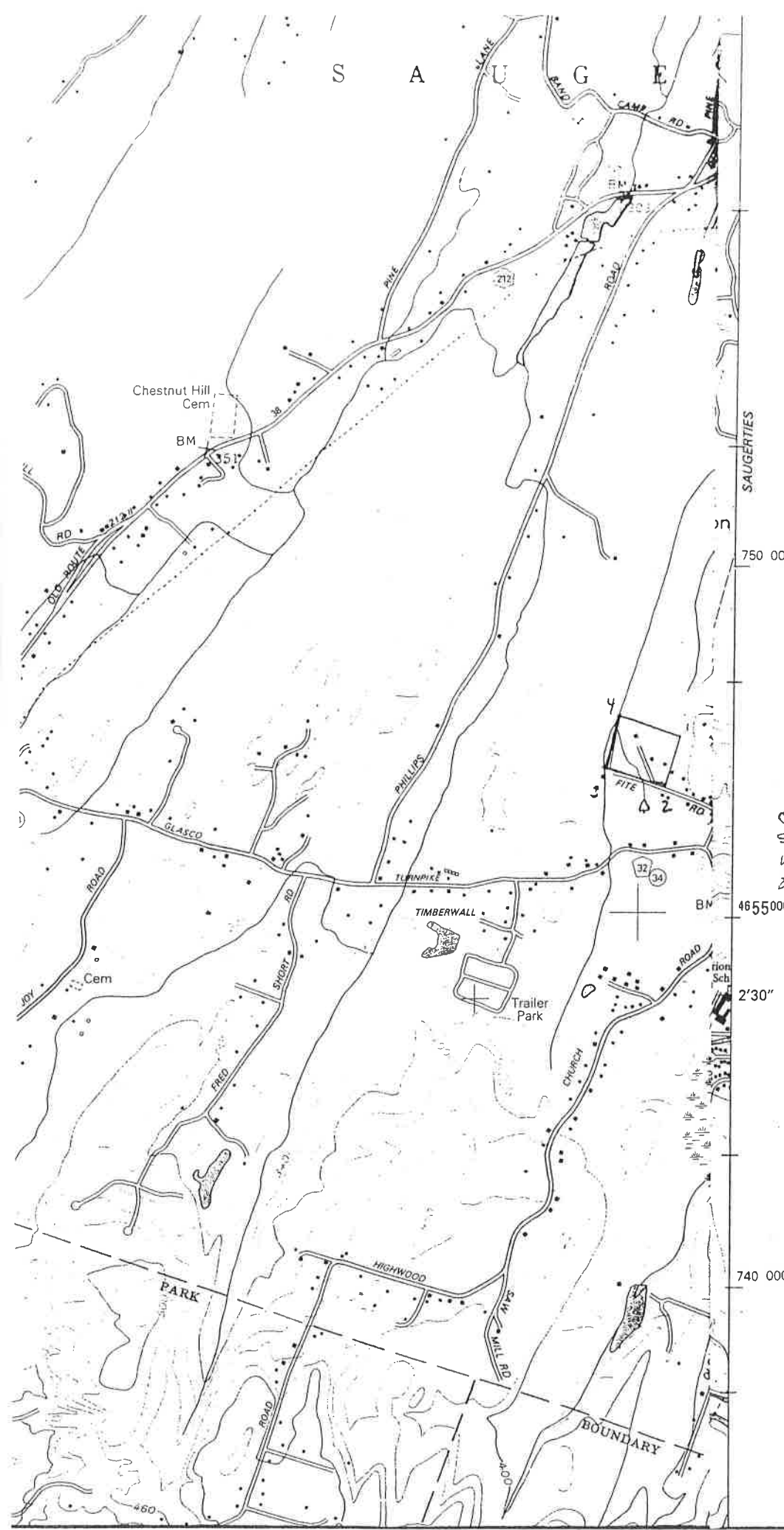
10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the nominated property is shown as the heavy black outline on the accompanying map entitled "Opus 40, Saugerties, Ulster County, New York."

Boundary justification

The boundary for the nomination has been drawn to coincide with the current legal lot for the property.



OPUS 40
 SAUGERTIES, ULSTER CO.
 WOODSTOCK QUAD
 ZONE 18 SCALE 1/24,000
 4655000m. N.

- 1) 580168 4655712
- 2) 580096 4655541
- 3) 579844 4655626
- 4) 579906 4655837

SAUGERTIES

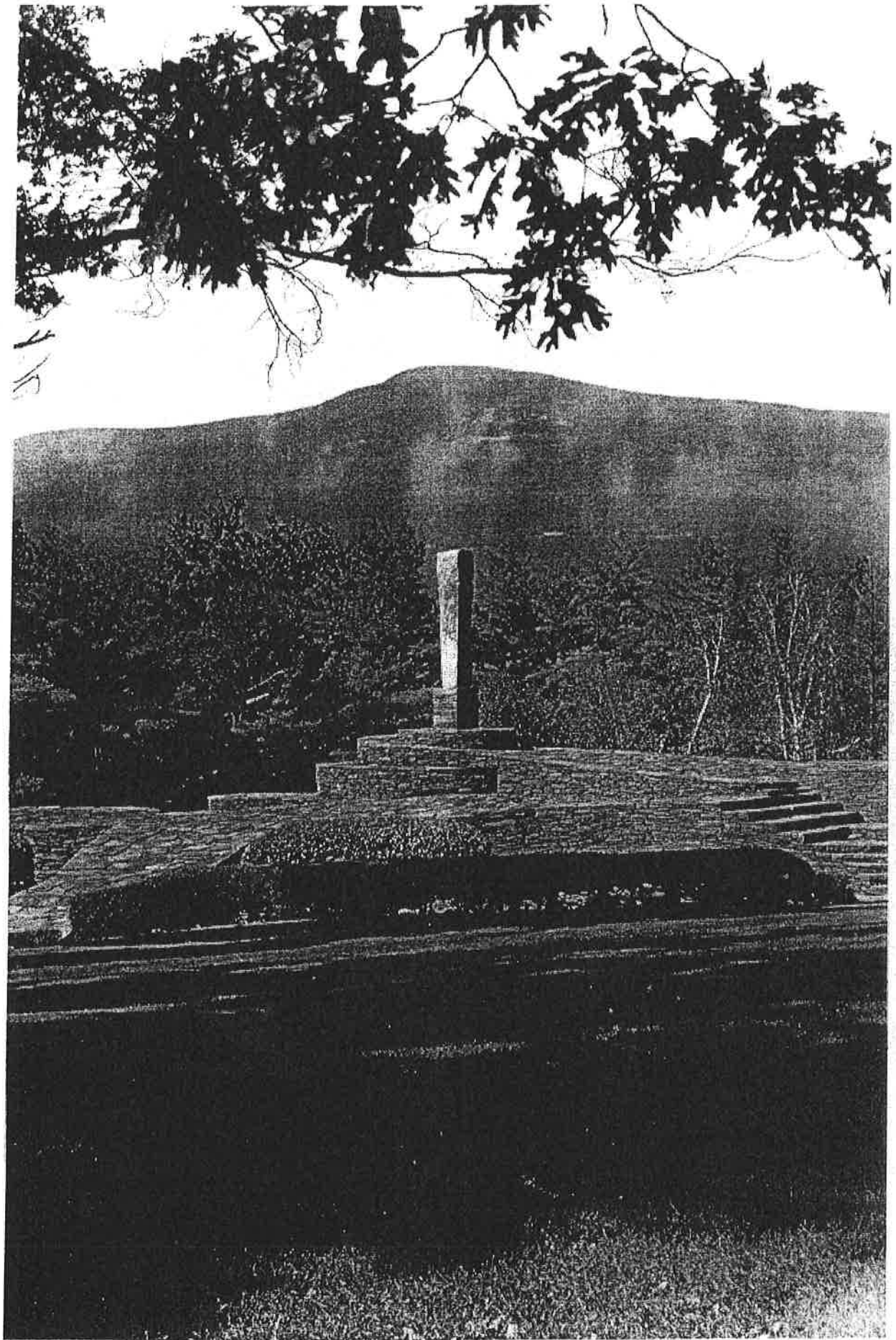
750 000

4655000m. N.

2'30"

740 000

BOUNDARY

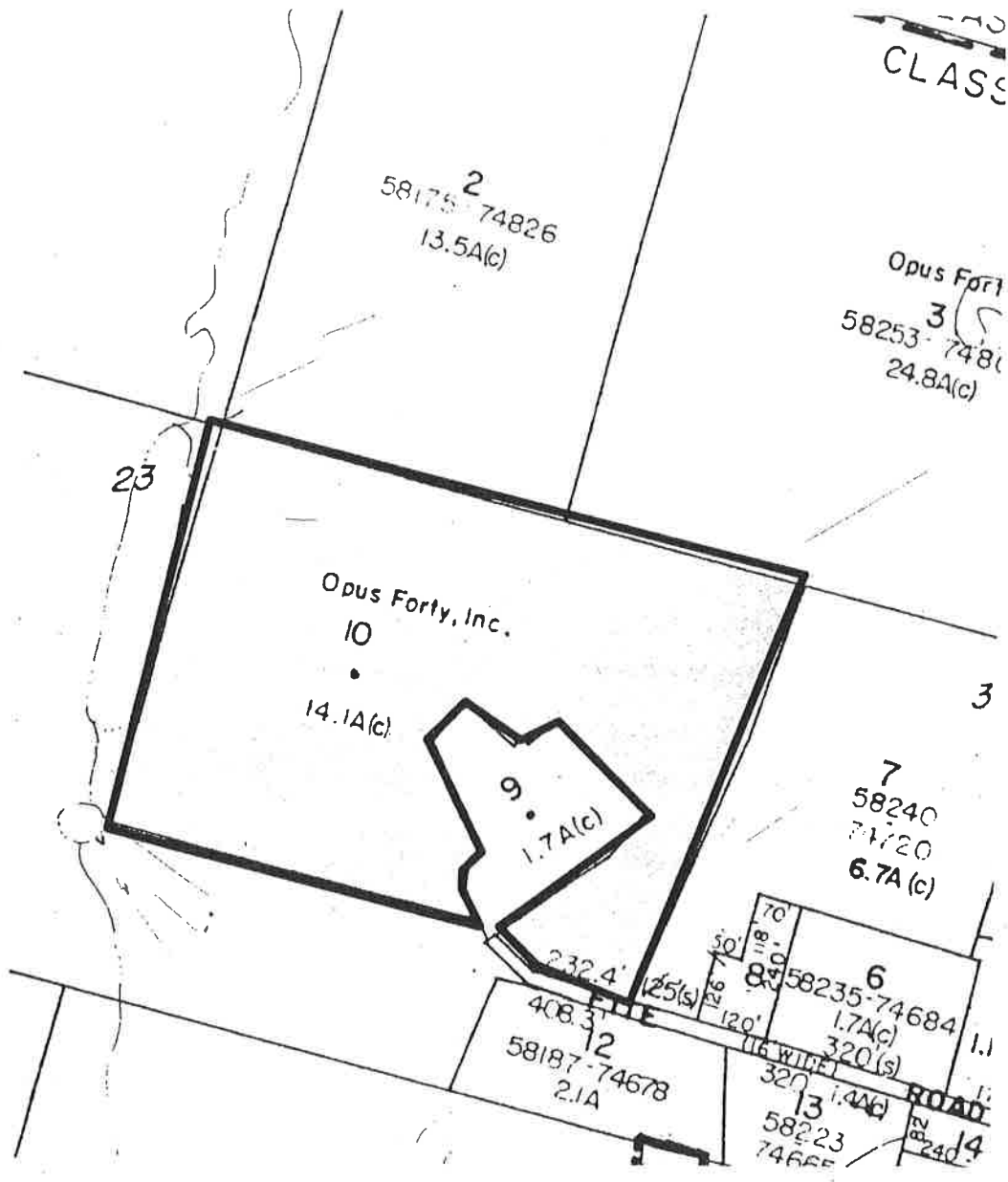


Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number Map

Opus 40
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York



CLASS

2
58175-74826
13.5A(c)

Opus Fort
3
58253-7480
24.8A(c)

23

Opus Forty, Inc.
10
14.1A(c)

9
1.7A(c)

7
58240
74720
6.7A(c)


6
58235-74684
1.7A(c)
320(s)

12
408.3
58187-74678
2.1A

13
320
58223
74665

14
240



scale 1 inch equals 320 feet
boundary 
photo key 