

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Clingmans Dome Observation Tower

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, SW0119, and Sevier County, Tennessee,
Listed 8/15/2012

Nomination by Cynthia Walton, NPS, Southeast Regional Office

Photographs by Bruce McCamish NPS, August 2008



Aerial view to northwest



View to southeast, landing, ramp and observation platform

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 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 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 Clingmans Dome Observation Tower
Other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number At the Terminus of Clingmans Dome Road, Great Smoky N/A not for publication
Mountains National Park (GRSM)
city or town Bryson City x vicinity
State North Carolina/ code NC/ county Swain/Sevier code 173/ zip code 28786/
Tennessee TN 155 37862

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

See continuation sheet for State Historic Preservation Officers' signatures

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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)

- 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 incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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

0

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Other: Park Service Modern

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Concrete/ Stone

roof Concrete

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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)

ENTERTAINMENT/ RECREATION

POLITICS/ GOVERNMENT

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1959-1966

Significant Dates

1959-constructed

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bebb and Olson Architectural Firm

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property.) **SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.) **SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**

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 Engineering Record# _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.4 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

1	<input type="text" value="17"/> Zone	<input type="text" value="273562.3"/> Easting	<input type="text" value="3938339.0"/> Northing	3	<input type="text"/> Zone	<input type="text"/> Easting	<input type="text"/> Northing
2	<input type="text"/> Zone	<input type="text"/> Easting	<input type="text"/> Northing	4	<input type="text"/> Zone	<input type="text"/> Easting	<input type="text"/> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.) See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.) See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cynthia Walton, Historian
organization NPS, Southeast Regional Office date 10/26/09
street & number 100 Alabama St., SW, 1924 Building telephone (404) 507-5792
city or town Atlanta state GA zip code 30303

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name National Park Service
street & number 1201 Eye Street NW telephone _____
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20005

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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

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Description of Resources

Setting¹

Located atop Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains (6,643'), Clingmans Dome Tower is a prominent landmark and destination in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM). The park encompasses over 800 square miles and preserves a significant portion of the natural and cultural resources of the southern Appalachia region.

The Great Smoky Mountains are located in the Blue Ridge physiographic province of the Appalachian mountain chain. Although the mountains are located in the southern portion of the United States, their high elevation and the effects of past glacial activity have resulted in an environment similar to that of a Canadian forest. Within the Smokys, the vegetative community atop Clingmans Dome is distinctly classified as a Southern Appalachian spruce-fir forest, predominated by Fraser Fir (*Abies fraseri*) and Red Spruce (*Picea rubens*). Secondary tree species common to the spruce-fir forest include American Mountain-ash (*Sorbus americana*), Yellow Birch (*Betula allegheniensis*) and American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). A significant number of understory shrubs are often present, including the rare thornless blackberry bush (*Rubus fruticosus*) and Minnie-bush (*Menziesia pilosa*), and numerous wildflower species carpet the woodland floor including coneflower (*Echinacea*), bee balm (*Monardia fistulosa*), spring-beauty (*Siberian squill*), wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), pink turtlehead (*Chelone lyonina*), small purple-fringed orchid (*Platanthera psycodes*), mountain St. John's wort (*Hypericum graveolens*), Rugel's ragwort (*Cacalia rugelia*), skunk goldenrod (*Solidago glomerata*), thyme-leaved bluets (*Houstonia serpyllifolia*), asters (*Aster amellus*), Clingman's hedge-nettle (*Stachys clingmanii*), and tall rattlesnake root (*Prenanthes altissima*). At the peak of Clingmans Dome, where the tower sits, there is an almost pure stand of Fraser Firs. Unfortunately, the majority of the surrounding spruce-fir forest is in decline, as many trees on Clingmans Dome have been killed by the balsam wooly adelgid (*Adelges piceae*). This invasive insect feeds off the sap of trees and in doing so releases toxins which eventually kill the trees.

Located in the Tennessee River Watershed, Clingmans Dome is drained by Little River and Forney and Noland creeks. The tower straddles the North Carolina/Tennessee state line and is located in both Swain County, North Carolina, and Sevier County, Tennessee (fig. 1). From the top of the observation tower visitors can see distances of up to 100 miles, with views including the mountain ridges and valleys of Great Smoky Mountains NP and nearby Nantahala National Forest. Visitors traveling by car to the observation tower park in a lot at the terminus of Clingmans Dome Road, accessed via US Highway 441 (Newfound Gap Road), then walk a steep, .5-mile paved trail, rising 330 feet to the observation tower at the top of Clingmans Dome Mountain. Clingmans Dome Tower is also accessible by way of the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail, which follows the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains from Maine to Georgia, passes close by on the northwest side of the summit. Hikers on the trail can easily access the observation tower.

¹ This section is derived from Cantrell, Geoff. *Clingmans Dome*. (Gatlinburg, TN: Great Smoky Mountains Association in cooperation with the National Park Service, 2005).

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Structure Description²

Clingmans Dome Tower is an example of Park Service Modern architecture.³ The structure, constructed mainly of reinforced concrete, features a 45-foot tall, circular observation platform supported by a massive cylindrical concrete column. The platform, which is shaded by a circular canopy, is reached by a spiral concrete ramp supported by seven smaller cylindrical concrete columns. The diameter and height of each column changes along the course of the ramp.

Visitors approach Clingmans Dome Tower by way of a circular flagstone terrace where the ramp meets the ground. The terrace is 19 feet in diameter and is paved with irregularly shaped, light-grey flagstones. Flanking each side of the terrace are low stone walls, semicircular in plan, composed of two courses of dark-grey rusticated stone blocks capped with concrete coping which provides for visitor seating.

At the entrance to the ramp, the termination of the low walls forms a 90-degree angle with the ramp's concrete sidewalls which run the length of the ramp and eventually become the guard wall around the observation platform. An aluminum pipe handrail, 2 inches in diameter, is attached to square upright posts that curve slightly inward and are set in the top of the sidewalls and the guard wall. The 6-foot wide, 375-foot long ramp rises 45 feet in a clockwise spiral to the observation platform, with the 12% grade of the ramp approximating that of the mountain trail that leads to the tower. The consistent grade unites the ramp and the approach trail, making the ramp a continuation of the trail.

A storage room is located under the beginning portion of the ramp. This room is enclosed by three concrete-block walls faced in stone, with the sloping ramp serving as its roof. The stone is the same dark-grey rectangular rusticated stone used in the walls around the terrace. The sidewalls of the utility room are flush with the ramp's edges. An industrial steel door and frame, which is now badly rusted, is located on the end wall beneath the ramp. A single stone lintel is located above the door. The interior walls of the storage room are made of concrete masonry units.

Beyond the stone walls of the storage room, the ramp is supported by pre-cast sections of concrete pipe set upright on concrete footings that are approximately 3 feet below grade. The first four columns have diameters of 21 inches and heights of 17 feet, 21 feet 6 inches, 26 feet, and 30 feet 4 inches. The fifth column has a diameter of 24 inches and is 34 feet 10 inches tall; the sixth column has a diameter of 27 inches and is 39 feet 8 inches tall; the seventh column has a diameter of 30 inches and is 43 feet 9 inches tall. The central column that supports the observation platform has a diameter of 72 inches. All of these pipes, the lengths of which varied from column to column, were cast with male and female flanges so that they could be stacked upright. They were then tied together with iron reinforcing bars (rebar) attached to the inside of the column drums and running the length of each column. Except for the massive central column, all of the columns were then filled with

² Tommy Jones, NPS SERO Architectural Historian, made significant contributions to this section.

³ Sara Allaback defines "Park Service Modern" in Appendix III of *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type*.

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concrete to form a single monolithic unit. The central column remains hollow and through it runs the grounding line for the lightning protection system.

Set on the central column, the observation platform is 28 feet in diameter and is surmounted by a flat, circular, concrete canopy, 20 feet in diameter, supported by a 45-inch diameter, hollow, reinforced-concrete column like the others. A six-sided redwood bench with beveled edges encircles the column that supports the canopy. The bench is attached to the column by painted steel brackets.

All of the concrete elements of the tower were originally finished with a smooth parge coat, but in the 1970s a pebble-dash, shotcrete finish was applied to the inner face of the guard wall, to the underside of the observation tower canopy, and to the observation tower canopy's support column. This finish has begun to delaminate in some areas. Probably at the same time, a rough stucco-like finish was applied to the support columns. These finishes detract from the visual effect created by the original smooth concrete surface, but they do not significantly diminish the tower's overall aesthetic effect.

Three interpretive panels are mounted on the guard wall of the observation platform. The panels, which are bolted into the concrete wall, project beyond the edge of the observation platform and tilt upward. These panels are not original to the structure, but documentary evidence shows that "orientation panels" were installed as part of the original design.

A lightning protection system that employs a single rod and a grounding cable that runs inside the central column currently protects the tower. Photographs dating from 1961 show a three rod system. It is unknown when the system was changed.

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Statement of Significance

Clingmans Dome Tower, constructed in 1959, is significant as a representation of the National Park Service's Mission 66 program, which resulted in a significant change in National Park Service planning, management, and architecture. As a result of these changes, the visitor experience in national parks —system-wide—was fundamentally altered. The Mission 66 program, which spanned from 1955 to 1966, resulted in the construction of hundreds of building and structures. Yet, of the many structures built during the program, only nine were towers.⁴ As one of the nine towers built during the program, Clingmans Dome Tower is an example of a comparatively rare Mission 66 structure type.

Furthermore, the tower merits special consideration by virtue of its precedent-setting design. The designs of two later National Park Service Mission 66 towers are based on Clingmans Dome Tower (Look Rock Tower in Great Smoky Mountains NP and Shark Valley Tower in Everglades NP).

Clingmans Dome Tower is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for national significance under National Register Criterion A for its association with the Mission 66 program, and National Register Criterion C as an example of mid-century modern (Park Service Modern) architecture. The structure's period of significance spans from its construction in 1959 to the end of the Mission 66 program in 1966.

Great Smoky Mountains NP Background

To the Cherokee, Clingmans Dome is known as *Kuwahi* (meaning mulberry place), a sacred site where bears gather to dance before hibernating in the winter. To European settlers of the 1800s, Clingmans Dome was known as "Smoky Dome," smoky referring to the fog, and dome referring to the rounded shape of the peak. In 1858 Smoky Dome was re-named after Thomas Lanier Clingman (1812-1897), an attorney, politician, and explorer from Asheville, North Carolina, who led a scientific investigation of the Great Smoky Mountains. The expedition included Arnold Guyot, a Princeton professor who applied the appellation "Clingmans Dome" to the mountain.

Today Clingmans Dome is within the boundary of Great Smoky Mountains NP. The park encompasses approximately 800 square miles, historically much of the area was occupied by the Cherokee, however, the combined effects of European settlement, war, disease, and actions by the Federal Government—culminating with the Indian Removal Act of 1830—decimated the Cherokee population.⁵ Following the removal of the Cherokee, the presence of settlers of European descent increased significantly in the area. Many of whom exploited the natural resources of the Great Smoky Mountains by logging. Piecemeal subsistence logging

⁴ National Park Service. *Mission 66 Progress Report*. (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 1966), 9. The report cites 9 as the number of "additional, replacement, reconstructed, or financed" fire lookout towers. Although Clingmans Dome Tower is thought of as an observation tower it was intended to function as an auxiliary fire tower. Since an observation tower category does not exist in the report it is assumed that Clingmans Dome Tower was recorded as a fire lookout tower.

⁵ Some Cherokees managed to remain in or later return to the area. In 1866 they were recognized as the Eastern Band of the Cherokee.

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evolved into a commercial undertaking by the early 20th century. Wood from the spruce-fir forest of Clingmans Dome was particularly desirable for paper making and airplane construction. In part, conservationists promoted establishment of GRSM to combat the effects of logging. Congress authorized GRSM in 1926 and the park was officially established in 1934 when sufficient land had been acquired. Early park development was aided by New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC created trails, campgrounds, and other facilities including a wood-framed tower at the summit of Clingmans Dome.

Mission 66 Overview

The United State's involvement in World War II caused the federal government to refocus its resources. New Deal programs ended and park budgets were reduced. Limited resources (economic and labor) resulted in a period of stagnation for the National Park Service. Conditions did not improve with the end of World War II. The National Park Service's ability to serve as the steward of America's cultural and natural resources continued to be threatened by a combination of aging park facilities, reduced funding as result of the Cold War and Korean conflict, and increased visitation.⁶ National Park facilities, which had been in a state of decline since the early 1940s when New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) ended, were unable to accommodate visitors of the 1950s and 60s. In addition to aging facilities, the demands on national parks were changing.

More people than ever— many of them in cars— were visiting national parks. Increased visitation was due to the growth of the American population and the booming post-war economy that afforded Americans more leisure time and greater disposable incomes. A recorded 11,990,000 people visited national parks in 1926; 21,752,000 in 1946; 50,000,000 in 1955; and National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth expected that by 1966 visitation would reach 80,000,000.⁷ In actuality, visitor use surpassed Wirth's predictions, and by 1966 visitor use exceeded 130,000,000.⁸ Park visitation was especially high at GRSM because of its location on the densely populated East Coast. GRSM received 1,310,101 visitors in 1941 and nearly 3,000,000 visitors in 1956. This made GRSM, at the time, the most visited national park.⁹

In a 1953 *Harper's* magazine article entitled, "Lets Close the National Parks" Bernard DeVoto suggested it would be better for National Parks to be closed until sufficient funding was available for their care. Following this article the National Park Service became the subject of growing public criticism for failing to properly care for the resources with which it was entrusted. Outdated park facilities were a systemic problem that confronted park managers. Changing visitor use patterns and visitor expectations compounded the problems created by aging facilities and increased visitation. As explained in the Mission 66 information booklet, *Our Heritage*:

⁶National Park Service, *Our Heritage, A Plan for Its Protection and Use: "MISSION 66"* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1956). And, Carr, Ethan. *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2007), 34.

⁷ Linda Flint McClelland. *Building the National Parks*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 463.

⁸ National Park Service. *Mission 66 Progress Report*. (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 1966), 13.

⁹ "Mission 66 for Great Smoky Mountains National Park," undated, box 18, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia

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These [preservation] problems multiply when travel includes more city-bred people unfamiliar with wilderness ways; more children and more older people requiring special attention; more people whose rising level of education demands more knowledge and guidance; and more citizens accustomed through the press, radio, television and motion pictures to the professional and graphic presentation of knowledge.¹⁰

To accommodate visitors of the 1950s and 60s, while simultaneously protecting park resources, the National Park Service needed to increase staffing levels and provide corresponding housing and administrative work spaces, create visitor use facilities, develop more sophisticated interpretive and educational programs, construct necessary infrastructure, and build the maintenance facilities required to support park operations. Wirth realized that in order to fund all necessary improvements, a major budget increase was required. Instead of petitioning for appropriations on a project-by-project basis, Wirth asked Congress to fund a ten-year program. Wirth titled the program— which was to be completed to coincide with the National Park Service's 50th anniversary in 1966— Mission 66.

Conrad L. Wirth (1900-1993) was a trained landscape architect who began working for the National Park Service in 1931. He first served as assistant director in charge of the Branch of Lands. Shortly after joining the service he was asked to administer CCC programs for state park systems, in this capacity Wirth influenced the design and planning of 560 state parks.¹¹ Later, Wirth would also be put in charge of overseeing the National Park Service CCC program. As a result of his work with the CCC program, in 1936 when congress passed the Park, Parkway, and Recreational-Area Study Act, Wirth had already established the infrastructures needed for effective, large-scale recreational planning.¹² Wirth was appointed Director of the National Park Service in 1951. When he proposed the Mission 66 program, he assembled a committee that was composed largely of National Park Service veterans who had worked for the National Park Service during the New Deal era. Wirth told those employees charged with designing the Mission 66 program to “disregard precedent, policy and present operating and management procedure,” and, “to remember only the fundamental purpose of national parks, and on this basis to develop operating and development plans that would best meet the problem of park use today and in the future.”¹³ The resulting program was thorough and far-reaching.

While Mission 66 is best remembered for capital developments inside National Parks, the scope of Mission 66 extended beyond the boundaries of existing park units. As part of the Mission 66 program, the National Park Service resumed the Historic American Buildings Survey program (HABS), which had been inactive since 1941, established a division of international affairs, encouraged development of state parks, worked to acquire

¹⁰ National Park Service, *Our Heritage, A Plan for Its Protection and Use: "MISSION 66"* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1956).

¹¹ Carr, *Mission 66*, 41.

¹² For more about Wirth see: Carr, *Mission 66*, pp. 39-63 and Conrad Wirth. *Parks, Politics, and the People*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

¹³ National Park Service, “Mission 66 for the National Park System,” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 1956) 9, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center.

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non-federal land within the boundaries of parks, and added 70 units to the National Park System. Central to all Mission 66 endeavors— both inside and outside parks— was the preservation and protection of America's heritage.

Throughout the Mission 66 program the National Park Service drew visitors' attention to park construction projects by posting signs that boasted, "This is a MISSION 66 project."¹⁴ In response to the question, "What is MISSION 66?" the National Park Service explained to visitors:

MISSION 66 is a forward-looking program for the National Park System intended to so develop and staff these priceless possessions of the American people as to permit their wisest possible use; maximum enjoyment for those who use them; and maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources that give them distinction.

Construction is an important element of the program. Modern roads, well planned trails, utilities, camp and picnic grounds, and many kinds of structures needed for public use or administration, to meet the requirements of an expected 80 million visitors in 1966, are necessary; but they are simply one means by which 'enjoyment-without-impairment' is to be provided.¹⁵

Preservation through Facility Development

Facility development was—and continues to be—the most visible expression of the Mission 66 program. Mission 66 planners saw facility development as directly related to interpretation and preservation. Mission 66 staff consistently stated that Mission 66 was a preservation program which sought to protect resources by managing and controlling visitor use. In the eyes of Mission 66 planners, an essential tool in controlling visitor use was the construction of carefully planned facilities. In an article in *National Parks Magazine*, Wirth expressed the Mission 66 philosophy of the relationship between visitor use, facility development, and preservation:

Substantial public use, benefit and enjoyment remain the best means of protecting the areas from threats of adverse use; but to achieve specific protection goals, use must be controlled or guided. Proper development is the best way to do this.¹⁶

Wirth's statement expresses an underlying philosophy of Mission 66: engaged and informed visitors were to become stewards and advocates of the parks, but in order to protect resources from overuse, visitor flow needed to be controlled and guided. Facility development was seen as a means to direct visitor use. The visitor center

¹⁴ National Park Service. *Mission 66 Progress Report*. (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 1966), 1.

¹⁵ "Mission 66 for Great Smoky Mountains National Park," undated, box 18, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia

¹⁶ Quoted in: Jonathan Searle Monroe. "Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66." (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 64.

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was crucial to Mission 66 efforts to channel visitor use; the visitor center helped to direct visitor use by providing a central location for visitors to learn about park resources and plan their visits.

Preservation through Interpretation

*Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection*¹⁷

Mission 66 philosophy held that interpretation was integral to preservation. The National Park Service aimed to inspire stewardship by instilling in visitors an understanding and appreciation of natural and historic resources. As result of this philosophy the professionalization of interpretive services was a major component of Mission 66. Park service leaders recognized that, even with additional personnel, the ratio of visitors to staff would continue to be unbalanced. To augment the efforts of uniformed park rangers, naturalists, and historians, the National Park Service introduced more forms of self-service interpretation. On Clingmans Dome Tower, a self-service “orientation device” that identified features of the landscape was built into the structure.¹⁸ Other visitor information facilities central to the Mission 66 interpretive program included: visitor centers, campfire circle developments, informational and interpretive displays and devices, outdoor exhibits and signs and markers.¹⁹

*Mission 66 Architecture: Park Service Modern*²⁰

Buildings are the most obvious vestiges of the Mission 66 program and the architectural aesthetic which has come to be known as Park Service Modern unites Mission 66 structures. The change in architectural styles of National Park Service buildings and facilities was one of the most visible (and to some disturbing) aspects of the Mission 66 program. For the most part, National Park Service facilities date to either the New Deal era or the Mission 66 era. Each period of construction displays a distinctive architectural idiom.

New Deal era construction is often described as traditional park architecture or as “parkitecture.” National Park Service architecture of the New Deal era followed design tenets articulated in Albert H. Good’s 1935 publication, *Park Structures and Facilities*. Good’s canonical text promotes architecture sympathetic with the surrounding environment, the use of local materials, and deference to local architectural precedents. By building hundreds of rustic wooden and stone structures, the National Park Service inculcated the public to expect a consistent and traditional building style. To some, “parkitecture” was an architectural expression of the values and spirit of the National Park Service.

¹⁷ NPS administrative manual quoted in Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957) 38.

¹⁸ Mr. Beatty to File, memorandum, dated July 2, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

¹⁹ National Park Service, *Our Heritage, A Plan for Its Protection and Use: “MISSION 66”* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1956).

²⁰ Sara Allaback defines “park service modern” in Appendix III of *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type*.

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The structures built during the Mission 66 program, including Clingmans Dome Tower, broke away from the long-standing Rustic style of NPS “parkitecture” in favor of modern materials (especially concrete) and designs. Whereas New Deal era programs like the CCC and PWA had strived to employ the greatest number of people by creating labor-intensive projects, the aim of the Mission 66 program was to produce cost-effective facilities. In order to modernize the National Park System within a budget architects needed to use the same labor and cost saving techniques that were being employed by architects across America.

No official Mission 66 design guidelines were ever issued. Park Service Modern developed in response to the attitudes of the time and the ambitious development plans and limited budget of Mission 66. As Cecil Doty, a NPS architect responsible for New Deal and Mission 66 era buildings, explained:

There was a change in philosophy—yes, because architects had all studied the magazines, the Chicago World’s Fair... When you get rid of that overwhelming cheap labor, you have to start paying for things, things changed. That’s why you started seeing [concrete] block in a lot of things. We couldn’t help but change... I can’t understand how anyone could think otherwise, how it could keep from changing.²¹

During Mission 66 Congress provided the National Park Service with a generous budget but would have resented the appearance of wasteful or extravagant projects. This necessitated the use of modern materials and centralized design offices; two factors which contributed to a modern and consistent aesthetic. As defined by Sara Allaback, Park Service Modern Architecture is characterized by free plans, flat roofs, use of concrete construction and prefabricated components, and unusual fenestration. Allaback observes that Mission 66 visitor Centers were generally stripped of decorative elements, and that architects employed low profiles, textured concrete with panels of stone veneer, painted steel columns, flat roofs with projecting overhangs, and terraces or covered walks. According to Allaback, Park Service Modern “reinterpreted the long-standing commitment to ‘harmonize’ architecture with park landscapes...”²² Earlier architects blended Rustic architecture with the environment by employing natural materials; Park Service Modern architecture was designed to be similarly inconspicuous. Mission 66 was a “forward-looking” program,²³ it therefore follows that during Mission 66 the National Park Service would embrace modern material—seeing in them a partial solution to the maintenance backlogs of the time. Modern materials are celebrated in *Grist*, a Mission 66 era NPS publication that addressed maintenance and operational issues. Fiberglass panels are touted in *Grist* as “the modern way to achieve beauty and comfort in park buildings with freedom from maintenance.” Aluminum is described as “unique among metals because it has the ability to commune harmoniously with the natural surroundings yet at the same time resist the destructive forces of nature.” And concrete (the primary material of Clingmans Dome Tower) is described as a “low-cost, long-lasting beauty treatment for parks...”²⁴ Clearly the use of modern

²¹ Jonathan Searle Monroe. "Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66." (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 82.

²² Allaback, 272.

²³ Mission 66 publications often described Mission 66 as a forward-looking program.

²⁴ As part of efforts to renew relations with state and local parks, NPS began to publish three periodicals which each dealt with a separate issue of park management: *Park Practice: Guidelines*, *Grist*, and *Design*. The above quotes are taken from Jonathan Searle

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materials in parks was *not* seen as a compromise. Modern materials are described as compatible with both the utilitarian needs and aesthetic desires of the National Park Service.

National Park Service architects were overwhelmed by, and unable to handle, the amount of work generated by Mission 66. The politics of the appropriations process encouraged the use of contract architects by limiting hiring funds and providing construction funds. Construction funds, which could be used to hire contract architects, were more liberally granted because they resulted in visible results.²⁵ The National Park Service attracted contractors by offering them large projects that generated substantial fees and higher public profiles.²⁶ Consequently, private architectural firms designed many Mission 66 projects—including Clingmans Dome Tower. But contractors did not have full authority over their designs.

Scholarly Study of Mission 66

The Mission 66 program has been the subject of several scholarly works. From its inception, Mission 66 was recognized as a significant National Park Service program. In 1958 NPS historian Roy E. Appleman chronicled the origins of the program in “A History of the National Park Service Mission 66 Program.” Appleman’s role as a member of the Mission 66 planning team and his training as a professional historian make his unpublished report particularly valuable. An important and early analysis of Mission 66 architecture is Jonathan Searle Monroe’s 1986 Master thesis, “Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66.” Monroe’s work is exceptional for its use of primary sources, especially his interview with Cecil Doty, one of the National Park Service’s principal Mission 66 era architects. Architectural historian Sarah Allaback examined visitor centers, a new building type introduced to National Parks during the Mission 66 program. In her 2000 publication, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type*, Allaback creates an historic context for Mission 66 visitor centers and establishes a definition for “Park Service Modern,” the architectural style employed by the National Park Service during the Mission 66 period. Ethan Carr’s 2007 book, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*, is the broadest of all the Mission 66 histories; it provides a detailed and substantial account of the program’s origins, development, and implementation.

Clingmans Dome Tower: “This is a MISSION 66 Project”

Clingmans Dome Tower was part of the National Park Service’s effort to allow for “enjoyment-without-impairment,” and, the history of Clingmans Dome Tower is illustrative of the Mission 66 program. Clingmans Dome Tower was built to replace a 1930s wood-framed observation tower that was torn down in 1950 after it

Monroe. "Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66." (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 66.

²⁵ Jonathan Searle Monroe. "Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66." (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 67.

²⁶ Jonathan Searle Monroe. "Architecture in the National Parks: Cecil Doty and Mission 66." (Master of Architecture thesis, University of Washington, 1986), 83.

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had become a safety hazard.²⁷ National Park Service planners saw Clingmans Dome, the highest point in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as an ideal location to build an observation tower. An NPS press release explained that from the advantageous height of 6,688 feet (the combined height of the tower and the mountain) visitors would “have the opportunity to compare the variety of changes in mountain scenery, and to clearly observe the famed smoke-like haze...”²⁸ The press release went on to say that Clingmans Dome Tower was being built as part of the “MISSION 66” program.

Clingmans Dome Tower was built chiefly as a visitor—as opposed to fire— observation tower. This distinction underscores the interpretive function of the tower and the visitor-orientated nature of the Mission 66 program. The tower aids in the understanding of the Great Smoky Mountains by offering visitors a 360-degree view from above the tree line. Visitors to the tower can see distances of up to 100 miles. The extensive viewshed makes the tower an excellent venue for interpretive talks. From atop the tower rangers can refer directly to the extensive surrounding landscape (fig. 2). Both the observation platform and the spiral ramp provide visitors with an opportunity to view the surrounding landscape. Although the .5-mile path leading to the tower is steep, a nearby road and parking lot make it easily accessible to motorists.²⁹

Clingmans Dome Tower is an excellent example of Park Service Modern architecture. Departing from previous Rustic designs, it is characterized by its unconcealed use of concrete, geometric delineation of space, asymmetry, and lack of ornamentation. The qualities which would later be derided— the tower’s sense of motion and speed, its urbanity, and its display of mechanical and engineering prowess— are the qualities which define it as a modern structure. The Gatlinburg, Tennessee architectural firm of Hubert Bebb and Raymond I. Olson designed Clingmans Dome Tower. Hubert Bebb, the principal architect, explained that the tower’s unprecedented design resulted from the architects’ desire to create a site-appropriate structure that could provide access for a growing number of visitors and be built using low-cost, readily available materials.³⁰

Hubert Bebb, the architect of Clingmans Dome Tower, was issued “project directives” which determined some aspects of the tower, such as the platform height and visitor load capacity.³¹ Designs were subject to review and approval by the National Park Service’s Washington DC office, regional offices, park superintendents, and regional architectural offices. During Mission 66 there were two regional architectural offices: the Eastern Office of Design and Construction (EODC) located in Philadelphia and the Western Office of Design and

²⁷ The 1930s observation tower is cited as a safety hazard in public response letters in the archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box. The demolition date of 1950 comes from: “National Park Service Press Release,” for release December 10, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

²⁸ “National Park Service Press Release,” for release December 10, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

²⁹ The road and parking lot and nearby comfort station were an earlier development. Although they facilitate visitation to Clingmans Dome tower, they are not part of GRSM Mission 66 development and are not included in the boundary.

³⁰ Hubert Bebb, "The Architect's Rebuttal," *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 139 (1959): 16.

³¹ A complete copy of the “project directives” was not found during the course of research, but, various project directives were discussed in correspondence. See for example, Chief of Eastern Office of Design and Construction (Edward S. Zimmer) to Superintendent, Great Smoky Mountains NP, “Clingmans Dome” memorandum, dated August 14, 1957, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

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Construction (WODC) located in San Francisco. The EODC was the NPS office responsible for coordinating the design and construction of Clingmans Dome Tower.

Design of Clingmans Dome Tower

The design of Clingmans Dome Tower was contracted by the National Park Service to Hubert Bebb. Bebb had graduated from Cornell University's College of Architecture in 1928. His classmate and lifelong friend, Nathaniel Owings, class of 1927, was a founding partner of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, a Chicago based architectural firm known for their work in the International Style. Bebb began his career at the Chicago architectural firm of Armstrong, Furst and Tilton before moving to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, in 1950, where he became a locally prominent architect. In 1970, he received an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects for his design of the Emma Harper Turner Building at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg. Perhaps his most well-known design was for the 1982 Knoxville World's Fair where he created one of Knoxville's most recognizable landmarks, a steel tower topped by a golden sphere, which is commonly called the Sunsphere. Clingmans Dome Tower was one of Bebb's first major commissions.³² After his death in 1985 his ashes were scattered from the tower, suggesting that it was one of his most personally significant works.³³

Hubert Bebb's original plans for Clingmans Dome Tower vary considerably from the final design. Preliminary plans submitted by Bebb to the National Park Service's Eastern Office of Design and Construction (EODC) feature a massive central cylinder built of uncoursed masonry and approached by a ramp of the same style (fig. 3).³⁴ A passageway leads from the stone ramp, through the central tower, and onto a concrete ramp that spirals up to the top of the stone tower. An enclosed fire lookout cab is mounted on top of the stone tower. The EODC liked the ramp, John B. Cabot, Acting Chief of the EODC remarked, "...the entire concept [of the ramp] has rather a playful, even romantic, feeling, which would be liked by a great many visitors." The EODC also liked Bebb's use of stone, calling it an "expected" material, but they objected to the use of stone *and* concrete, which they saw as contrasting materials. But, Bebb argued that the contrast of materials was intentional, and the EODC acquiesced. The ensuing correspondence, which involved the EODC, the superintendent of GRSM, and the acting regional chief of the Branch of Park Forest and Wildlife Protection, centered on the fire lookout cab.

Fred H. Arnold, acting chief, Branch of Park Forest and Wildlife Protection, made a strong case against inclusion of the fire lookout cab. He argued that, although Clingmans Dome was the highest point in the park,

³² Knowles, Susan W. "Hubert Bebb." *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. 2002. Middle Tennessee State University. June 2008 <<http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=B020b>>.

³³ "Clingman's Dome." *Art and Science: the Community Tectonics Quarterly* 1 no. 3 (1999): 1, via <http://www.communitytectonics.com/newsletters/v1_n3_spring99.pdf>

³⁴ November 5, 1957 plan is located in the archives of Community Tectonics Incorporated, a Knoxville based architectural firm founded by Hubert Bebb.

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it did not follow that it was a strategic location for fire detection. He noted that during the planning of the park's fire detection system, Clingmans Dome had been eliminated as a useful site and that in the past 20 years the former observation tower was rarely used for fire detection purposes. Furthermore, he pointed out that the elimination of the fire lookout cab did not preclude the use of the tower for fire detection purposes. The Washington, DC Design and Construction Office echoed this sentiment. In a memo dated April 16, 1958, Dick Sutton, the acting chief of Design and Construction, stated that "The observation platform should be combined with the fire lookout so that visitors may observe the functions of fire protection in the park." Consequently the fire-cab was eliminated from the final design.

Sutton also reported in the April 16, 1958, memo that National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth "objected to the ramp." Instead of the ramp, Wirth favored a spiral staircase on the outside of the stone tower.³⁵ Wirth's proposal that the ramp be eliminated changed the entire character of the structure. His suggestion was not welcomed by John B. Cabot, an architect and acting chief of the EODC. On May 6, 1958, Cabot visited Washington, DC, and was able to personally meet with Director Wirth and defend Bebb's design, particularly Bebb's use of a ramp.³⁶ Before meeting with Wirth, Cabot met with Tom Vint, chief of the Design and Construction Division, and Chief Architect Dick Sutton. Cabot was able to convince Vint and Sutton of the ramp's worth. As Cabot described: "After casually listening, Tom Vint strongly endorsed the ramp. With this strong expression, the doubts, created by the thoughts the director had placed in Dick's mind, evaporated."³⁷ The three men were then able to meet with the director and present a case for the ramp's inclusion.

The substantive changes that resulted from the meeting between Wirth, Cabot, Vint and Sutton transformed Bebb's initial design into the design of the current tower. Wirth was convinced of the ramp's value, but, having made a decision to support the ramp, Wirth re-thought the need for a stone tower. In his opinion, "there was no justification for a heavy masonry tower merely to support a platform."³⁸ Instead of the massive stone tower, "a single column [with] a mushroom type cap" was suggested—a suggestion which is reflected in the final design. Although Wirth rejected the stone tower, the final design does retain some stonework. A stone faced wall, similar in appearance to the approach ramp of the earlier design, supports the initial rise of the ramp and the low seating wall. Wirth approved of stonework under the low portion of the ramp, "feeling that it might prevent children, animals, and debris from gathering..." Having won approval for the ramp from the highest level of the National Park Service, Cabot communicated Director Wirth's wishes, along with his rendering of "a single column [with] a mushroom type cap," to the superintendent of GRSM.³⁹

Debate over Clingmans Dome Tower

³⁵ Acting Chief of Design and Construction [Dick Sutton] to Acting Chief of Design and Construction, "Preliminary Drawing" memorandum, dated April 16, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

³⁶ Cabot later recounted the meeting in a memo to the superintendent GRSM, "Clingmans Dome Observation Tower" memorandum, dated May 8, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Acting Chief, EODC (John Cabot) to Superintendent, GRSM, "Clingmans Dome Observation Tower" memorandum, dated May 8, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

³⁹ Ibid.

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Should we build like Daniel Boone built or build like Daniel would build if he were alive today?
—Hubert Bebb⁴⁰

Bebb's revisions, based on the comments of National Park Service staff, resulted in the final design (figs. 4-5).⁴¹ On September 28, 1958, GRSM publicly revealed plans for Clingmans Dome Tower.⁴² Upon seeing the proposed design, the National Parks Association (NPA)⁴³ launched an attack against what they saw as a "flashy and conspicuous" architectural intrusion upon the Appalachian landscape.⁴⁴ The group publicly expressed their outrage in an article in *National Parks Magazine*, and in a letter, also published in *National Parks Magazine*, to National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth.⁴⁵ As a consequence of the NPA's disapproval, Clingmans Dome Tower became the subject of magazine and newspaper articles, as well as numerous letters.⁴⁶ National Park Service communications that resulted from the debate provide a greater understanding of the motivations and attitudes of Mission 66 planners.

Soon after it began, the Mission 66 program became the subject of criticism. Generally criticism came from conservation groups who were wary of any development in wilderness areas. The most prominent and organized of all Mission 66 critics was the NPA. According to Director Wirth, criticism of Mission 66 revolved around two projects: Tioga Road in Yosemite NP and Clingmans Dome Tower in GRSM.⁴⁷

Primarily, the NPA was displeased with the modern design and materials of the tower, but it was also clear that the NPA felt betrayed by the National Park Service. In their view, Clingmans Dome Tower—and Mission 66 in general—represented an unwelcome shift in the tenor of NPS planning and design. Additionally, they felt it had been presented as a *fait accompli*. Failure by the National Park Service to provide an "opportunity for adequate public consideration"⁴⁸ was particularly irritating to the NPA because it was formed specifically to work in concert with the National Park Service. Despite sharing common interests and goals, the two groups did not always agree.

⁴⁰ Hubert Bebb, "The Architect's Rebuttal," *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 139 (1959): 16.

⁴¹ Notes on a review sheet indicate that the design was not universally accepted by NPS region one staff, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia

⁴² Dr. Dan Hale, Chairman of the National Parks Association's Action Group for the Great Smoky Mountains, compiled a chronology of Clingmans Dome Observation Tower for an article he submitted to the [Knoxville] *News Sentinel*. GRSM Superintendent Fred Overly requested a copy of the article from Dr. Hale. A typewritten copy of the text is found in the archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box.

⁴³ Later called the National Parks and Conservation Association

⁴⁴ Smith, Anthony Wayne. "Clingman's Dome" *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 137 (1959).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Letters are housed in the archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box and in box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

⁴⁷ Letter from NPS Director Conrad L. Wirth to William R. Traum, Director, Department of Public Relations American Automobile Association (AAA), dated March 27, 1958, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ Smith, Anthony Wayne. "Clingman's Dome" *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 137 (1959).

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The enabling legislation of the National Park Service compelled the agency to give equal weight to visitor use and resource preservation, while the NPA prioritized resource preservation over the “enjoyment” of the public. Nuanced differences in the ideologies of the two organizations were magnified during the Mission 66 program. Although the National Park Service insisted that Mission 66 was a conservation program, the NPA objected to what they perceived as “the present trend toward artificial and incompatible amusements, toward wholly unsuitable architecture, and other developments in the national parks and monuments inconsistent with accepted national park standards.”⁴⁹ The NPA resented development in national parks and, in particular, the introduction of modernist trends, which they saw as inconsistent with the character of national parks.⁵⁰

The NPA launched their public campaign against Clingmans Dome Tower with an article and editorial in the NPA publication, *National Parks Magazine*.⁵¹ Lamenting the fact that they had been blindsided by the tower proposal, the NPA criticized the National Park Service for abandoning principals that had previously guided NPS design. To the NPA, Clingmans Dome Tower seemed incongruous with the surrounding landscape and in opposition to the values of the National Park Service, while the National Park Service viewed the tower as a means to fulfill their mission by providing for visitor access.

Although staff of the National Park Service influenced the final design, Bebb embraced the concept, and publicly took ownership of the design. Bebb combated attacks from the NPA by responding with a letter of his own. In a letter to *National Parks Magazine* Bebb described how, after multiple visits to the site, he developed the idea of a “ramp approximately the gradient of the trail supported on vertical ‘trunks’ of concrete.” He argued that his tower was a “simple, direct solution using today’s materials...”⁵² Bebb attempted to engender professional support by appealing to the editors of *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and *Architectural Forum*. In a memo to the editors, which accompanied an article outlining the controversy, Bebb expressed concern that the small but ill-advised and vocal group would derail the Mission 66 program. Bebb believed that structures built as part of the Mission 66 program were necessary for the “health and pleasure” of the growing number of visitors to national parks.⁵³

Bebb’s confidence that the architectural community would support the tower was shared by Cabot: “I believe,” Cabot wrote in a memo to NPS Landscape Architect and Clingmans Dome project supervisor R.A. Wilhelm that “if the architects or architectural magazines would look into this matter, the effect might easily be enough ridicule so that this sort of thing might not happen again.” Cabot, who worked in EODC headquarters in Philadelphia, had been “deluged with correspondence” following the publication of the negative article in *National Parks Magazine* and he supposed Wilhelm, working from GRSM, had been too.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Executive Committee, National Parks Association, May 23, 1957. NPCA Papers, quoted in Miles, 193.

⁵⁰ For NPA opinions of Mission 66 architecture see Carr 2007, 132-135, 158

⁵¹ "A 'Sky-Post' for the Smokies," *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 137 (1959). And Smith, Anthony Wayne. “Clingman’s Dome” *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 137 (1959).

⁵² Hubert Bebb, "The Architect's Rebuttal," *National Parks Magazine* 33, no. 139 (1959): 16.

⁵³ Memorandum by Bebb to the editors of *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and *Architectural Forum*. February 27, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

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Cabot was angered by the controversy created by the NPA. In his opinion, the issue was “raised purely for the purpose of controversy, and that there was no element of good faith shown by either the executive secretary or the editor [of *National Parks Magazine*].” His memo was intended to reassure Wilhelm of the project’s validity. Although Cabot had been “cautioned by Washington not to take the cudgel in hand and provide a suitable rebuttal” he made sure Wilhelm was clear on his position. In his one-page memo, Cabot threw his full support behind the design, writing that “there is no doubt in my mind that the design is sound and that Hubert Bebb has produced, not a monster, but a tower of pleasing and lasting significance.” He took the staff of *National Parks Magazine* to task for attempting “to live in cocoons and to close their eyes to progress, and in particular to machine-made and manufactured products.” Cabot closed his memo by telling Wilhelm that the National Park Service was in the right: “Don’t let the blarney upset you,” he advised, “The controversy is unfortunate, but, as conservationists, I am sure we far outshine those who sit behind the shiny desks and create the editorial policy of the National Parks Magazine.”⁵⁴ Although Washington had prohibited Cabot from launching a public campaign in defense of the tower, the National Park Service did, in some measure, respond to the criticism.

In March of 1959, the regional office circulated an “Item from the Regional Director’s ‘In Box’” to Region One staff. The communication summarized the controversy raised by the NPA and was accompanied by a copy of a letter stating the National Park Service’s position on the issue that the Acting Director had sent to Senator Joseph S. Clark.⁵⁵ Variations of this letter, which outlined and justified the project, would eventually be sent in reply to numerous persons inquiring about the project.⁵⁶ In some cases a sketch prepared by Wilhelm was sent with the letter. Wilhelm’s sketch depicts the tower behind a curtain of trees with large sections of the ramp and tower completely hidden from view. Wilhelm’s sketch was a response to what NPS staff called “the highly distorted sketch which appeared in the National Parks Magazine.”⁵⁷ The sketch printed by *National Parks Magazine* had shown the tower without the benefit of the surrounding landscape. Wilhelm’s sketch intended to emphasize how the tower’s elements could blend with the natural environment and offered nothing more than glimpses of the tower through the trees. Furthermore, Wilhelm depicted trunks of trees in the same manner as he did columns of the ramp, a drawing technique that reinforced Bebb’s claim that the ramp’s columns were like concrete tree trunks.

The National Park Service claimed that not only would the final design be harmoniously incorporated with the surrounding landscape, but also that the construction techniques used would cause little damage to the surrounding environment: “The tower and ramp are designed for use of precast and prefabricated sections which will permit their construction elsewhere reducing to the minimum the site work with its consequent

⁵⁴ Memorandum by Cabot to R.A. Wilhelm. March 10, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

⁵⁵ Note from Region One regional office to staff of Region One. March 6, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

⁵⁶ Copies of letters are in Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box.

⁵⁷ Letter from NPS Acting Director E.T. Scoyen to Thomas M. Woodward. March 2, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

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damage to the trees and shrubbery” (fig. 5).⁵⁸ Wilhelm prioritized the preservation of trees in the vicinity of the tower. He noted that there were 16 trees inside the ramp spiral and that the tower was laid out so “...that large trees will also border the ramp on the outside.”⁵⁹ His ability to preserve extant trees was largely due to the tower’s design and material which allowed for large sections to be built offsite and then installed on the mountain top (fig. 6-7).

Despite the NPA’s concerted efforts, it appears that local public opinion leaned in favor of the tower. A poll by the *Gatlinburg Press* returned a vote of 15 to 2 in favor of the tower. The low number of responses (17) led reporter Bill Postlewaite to conclude, “...many people just don’t care enough to express an opinion one way or another.”⁶⁰ Several groups took a decidedly supportive stance. Letters of support from the following organizations are in NPS archives of Region One: the Great Smoky Mountain Conservation Association; the Board of Directors of the Blue Ridge Parkway Association; the Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains NP Commission; the Western North Carolina Associated Communities; the North Carolina National Park, Parkway and Forest Development Commission; the Gatlinburg, TN Chamber of Commerce; the Mayor of Gatlinburg; and various state and federal congressional representatives. In the end the National Park Service built the tower according to plan. W.C. Norris of Waynesville, NC was the low bidder who executed the contract.⁶¹ Weather slightly delayed the project but it was completed by October 23, 1959.⁶²

Influence of Clingmans Dome Tower

The tower was well received by the EODC and the Washington Office of Design and Construction. Two subsequent NPS towers strongly resemble Clingmans Dome Tower: the Look Rock Tower in Great Smoky Mountains NP (1965) and the Shark Valley Tower in Everglades NP (1964) (figs. 8-9). The two later towers are both built of reinforced concrete and employ variations of Clingmans Dome Tower’s most prominent feature, its dramatic, 375 feet long ramp. The proportions of the two later towers also reference Clingmans Dome Tower—the length of their ramps, height of the guard walls, and size of the observation platforms and canopies recall those of Clingmans Dome Tower. In contrast to Clingmans Dome Tower, the Look Rock and Shark Valley towers have fire watch cabs separate from the viewing platform. The two later towers are supported by four legs that gradually taper out from their cylindrical fire watch cabs. The observation platform of the two later towers is located underneath the fire cab. Also in contrast with Clingmans Dome Tower the two later structures do not feature any stonework

⁵⁸ Letter from NPS Associate Director Jackson E. Price to [North Carolina Congressman] David M. Hall. March 9, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

⁵⁹ Letter from R.A. Wilhelm to Carlos Campball. February 23, 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library, Clingmans Dome Observation Tower correspondence box).

⁶⁰ Gatlinburg Press News clippings, February 19, 1959 and February 26, 1959, box 26, RG 79, National Archives, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

⁶¹ Superintendent’s Monthly Report, December 1958. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library).

⁶² Superintendent’s Monthly Report, October 1959. (Archives of Great Smoky Mountains NP, Sugarlands Library).

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The settings of the towers also vary. Like Clingmans Dome Tower, Look Rock Tower is located in GRSM. Therefore the two towers share similar settings. But it appears that the topography surrounding the Look Rock Tower resulted in a design change. The Look Rock Tower employs a switchback ramp in place of a spiral ramp—this change is likely because Look Rock is built on a narrow ridge. The setting of the Shark Valley Tower is far different than that of the Clingmans Dome and Look Rock Towers. Shark Valley Tower's setting is flat and characterized by seasonally flooded sawgrass prairie, marl soil, and exposed limestone bedrock.⁶³

Plans for the two later towers credit the design to EODC architect Ben Bidermen.⁶⁴ More research is needed to fully articulate the relationship between the three towers, but, based on physical similarities, it is clear that the two later towers were derived from Clingmans Dome Tower.

Conclusion

Numerous National Park Service visitor centers, restrooms, maintenance areas, campgrounds, staff residences, roads, and other facilities like Clingmans Dome Tower are products of the Mission 66 program. The impact of these facilities—which visitors to National Parks continue to use today—is inescapable. Mission 66 forever changed the National Park visitor experience. Of the many buildings constructed during Mission 66 only nine were towers.⁶⁵ Clingmans Dome Tower is, therefore, an example of a relatively rare Mission 66 structure type. Clingmans Dome Tower is particularly important because it influenced the design of two subsequent Mission 66 towers.

Clingmans Dome Tower is significant as a representation of the ideas and methods of the Mission 66 program. It was built to accommodate a growing number of post-war visitors and was constructed by efficient and modern means. The tower directs and guides visitor use in order to prevent overuse. The tower's main purpose is as an interpretive tool, indicative of the professionalization of interpretive services instituted by Mission 66. The tower's purpose is to engage and inspire visitors by allowing them to view, unobstructed, the landscape of the Great Smoky Mountains.

Clingmans Dome Tower's design, which employs modern materials and construction techniques, places it firmly in the context of Park Service Modern architecture. Park Service Modern developed as architects began to incorporate elements of contemporary modern design into National Park Service structures. Clingmans Dome Tower exhibits characteristically modern features: mass raised off the ground by pilotis (columns), planed progression through space, horizontal banding of viewing space, fluid plan, and geometric massing. Both Clingmans Dome Tower's function and design are illustrative of the Mission 66 program and Park Service Modern Architecture.

⁶³ Dalrymple, George H. "Growth of American Alligators in the Shark Valley Region of Everglades National Park." *Copeia*. Feb. 2, 1996: 212-216.

⁶⁴ Plans for the Look Rock Tower and the Shark Valley Tower are housed at the National Park Service's Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center.

⁶⁵ Nine towers are cited in the 1966 Mission 66 Progress Report, more research is needed to identify the towers. National Park Service. *Mission 66 Progress Report*. (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 1966), 9.

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Geographical Data

Boundary Description

The boundary of Clingmans Dome Observation Tower is shown on Map 1, entitled "Map of Clingmans Dome Tower with National Register Boundary."

Boundary Justification

The contour line that is closest to the tower from the Clingmans Dome USGS topographical was chosen as the boundary for this property. This boundary encloses 1.4 acres encompassing both the tower and a representative portion of the surrounding landscape of the top of Clingmans Dome. The boundary was chosen to include enough of the surrounding landscape to enhance the qualities of setting, feeling, and association. There is no historic boundary associated with the tower, nor are there nearby roads or natural features which could serve as boundaries.

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Photograph 1

Address: Clingmans Dome Observation Tower
Terminus of Clingmans Dome Road, GRSM.
Swain County, North Carolina / Sevier County, Tennessee

Photographer: Bruce McCamish

Date: 4 August 2008

Location of Negative: NPS Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta GA

1 of 4: Aerial view to the Northwest showing entire tower

Photographs 2-4

Address: Clingmans Dome Observation Tower
Terminus of Clingmans Dome Road, GRSM.
Swain County, North Carolina / Sevier County, Tennessee

Photographer: Cynthia Walton

Date: 20 August 2008

Location of Negative: NPS Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta GA

2 of 4: View to the Southeast showing landing, ramp, and observation platform

3 of 4: View to the Northeast showing ramp, aluminum handrails, and observation platform

4 of 4: View to the West showing ramp and utility room

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Documents

Documents

- Figure 1: State Line Location—Vicinity of Clingmans Dome. Date unknown.
- Figure 2: “Naturalist Reid addressing group at top of Tower” NPS photograph by Jack Boucher, 1961. Archives of GRSM.
- Figure 3: 5 November 1957 plans for the Clingmans Dome Observation Tower. Archives of Community Tectonics Incorporated, a Knoxville based architectural firm founded by Hubert Bebb.
- Figure 4: Bebb and Olson. *Clingmans Dome*. 1958. NPS Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (DSC TIC), Denver. *ETIC*. National Park Service. via <http://etic.nps.gov/> accessed July, 2008.
- Figure 5: Bebb and Olson. *Clingmans Dome*. 1958. NPS Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (DSC TIC), Denver. *ETIC*. National Park Service. via <http://etic.nps.gov/> accessed July, 2008.
- Figure 6: “Portion of Ramp Showing Forms and Supports” Showing the proximity of trees to the ramp and the protective casings given to several trees. NPS photograph by R.A. Wilhelm, 1959. Archives of GRSM.
- Figure 7: “Loading Sections of Main Column at Clingmans Dome” NPS photograph by R.A. Wilhelm, 1959. Archives of GRSM.
- Figure 8: Look Rock Observation Tower (1964). Great Smoky Mountains NP.
- Figure 9: Shark Valley Observation Tower (1964). Everglades National Park, Florida.
- Map 1: Detail of USGS Topographic Map Showing Boundary and UTM Reference Point. Area included in Clingmans Dome Observation Tower Boundary is shaded. UTM reference point is indicated by a dot.

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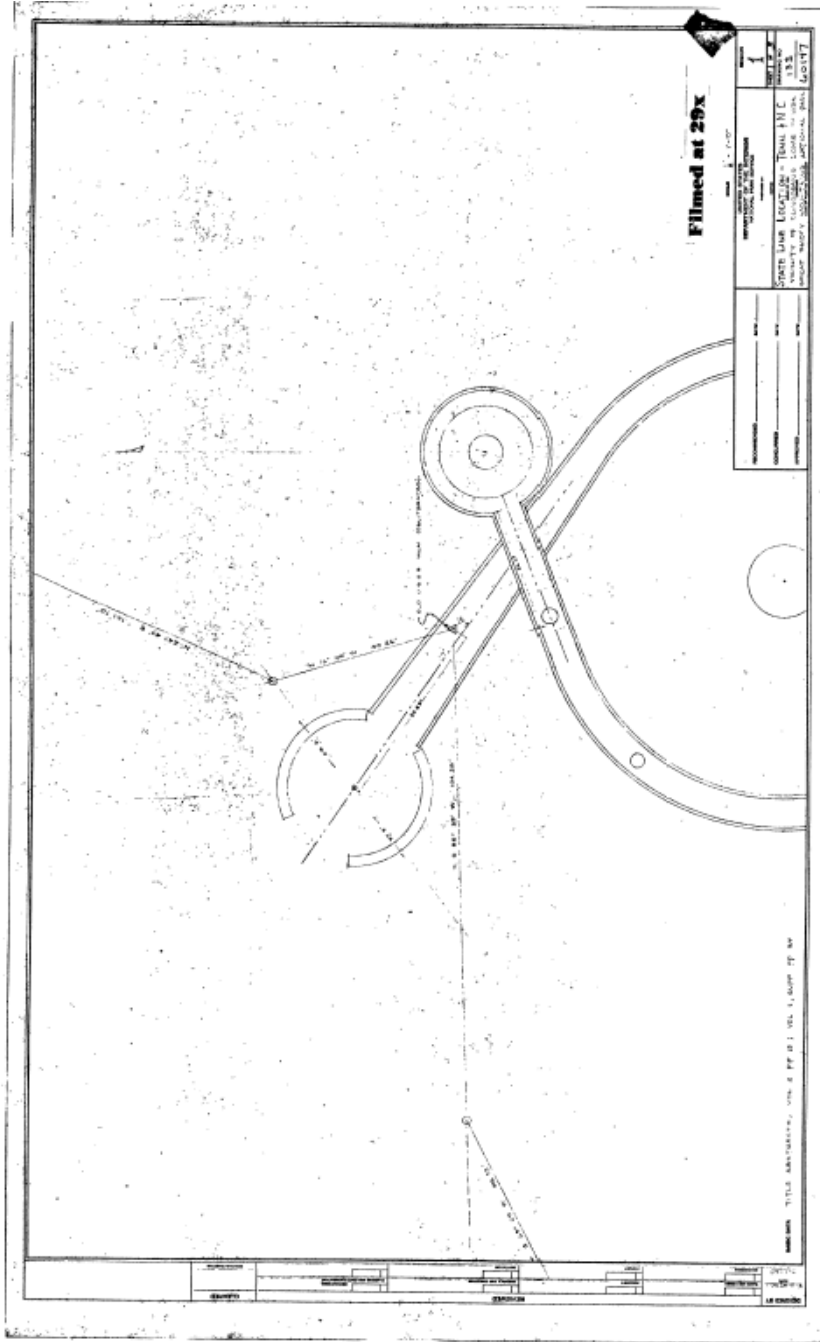


Fig. 1 State Line Location—Vicinity of Clingmans Dome. Date unknown. Archives of NPS Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (DSC TIC), Denver.

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Fig. 2 "Naturalist Reid addressing group at top of Tower" NPS photograph by Jack Boucher, 1961. Archives of GRSM.

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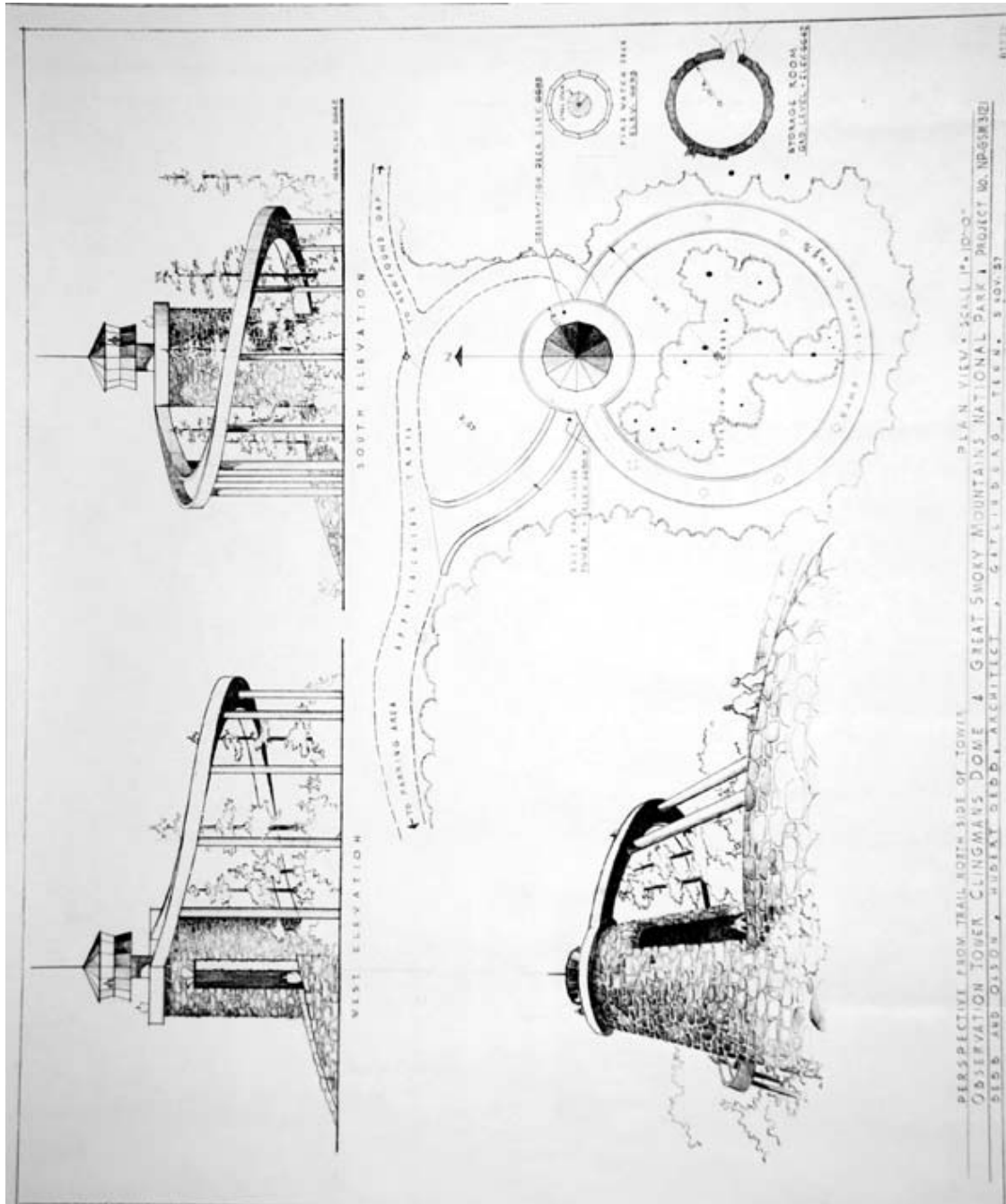


Fig. 3 November 5, 1957 plans for the Clingmans Dome Observation Tower. Archives of Community Tectonics Incorporated, a Knoxville based architectural firm founded by Hubert Bebb.

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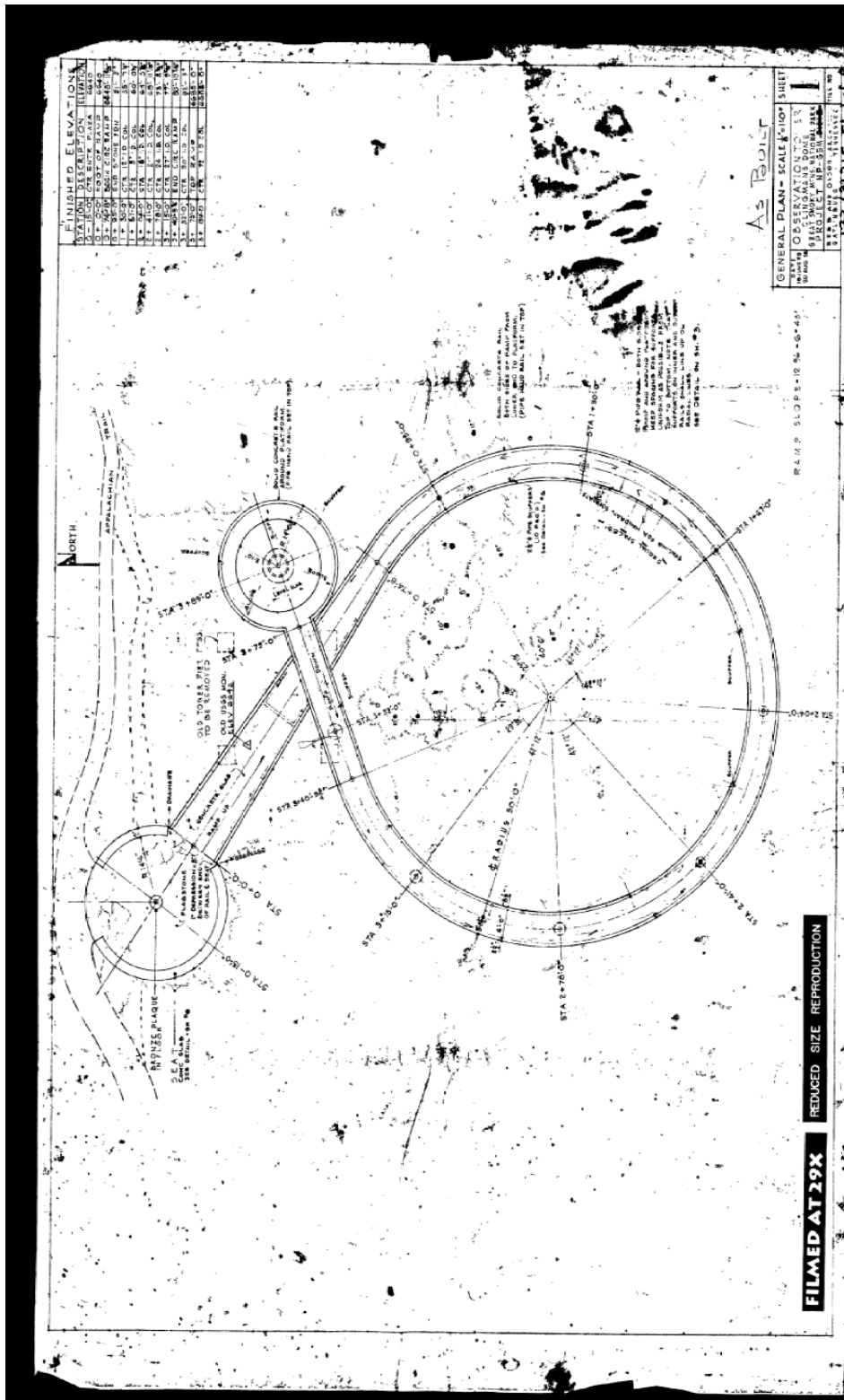


Fig. 4 Bebb and Olson. *Clingmans Dome*. 1958. NPS Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (DSC TIC), Denver. *ETIC*. National Park Service. via <http://etic.nps.gov/> accessed July, 2008.

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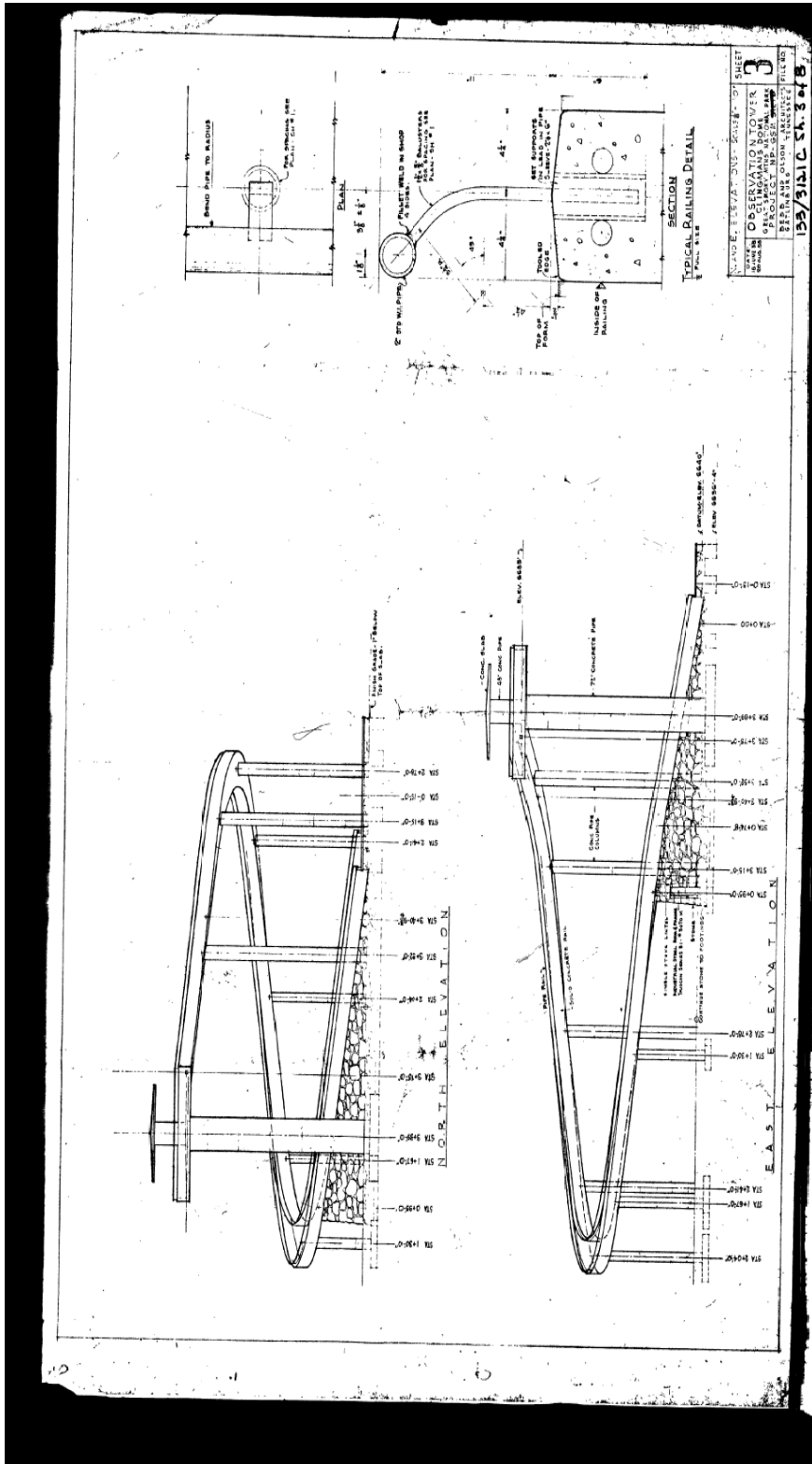


Fig. 5 Bebb and Olson. *Clingmans Dome*. 1958. NPS Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (DSC TIC), Denver. ETIC. National Park Service. via <http://etic.nps.gov/> accessed July, 2008.

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Fig. 6 "Portion of Ramp Showing Forms and Supports" Showing the proximity of trees to the ramp and the protective casings given to several trees. NPS photograph by R.A. Wilhelm, 1959. Archives of GRSM.

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Fig. 7 "Loading Sections of Main Column at Clingmans Dome" NPS photograph by R.A. Wilhelm, 1959. Archives of GRSM.

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Fig. 8 Look Rock Observation Tower (1964). Great Smoky Mountains NP.

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Fig. 9 Shark Valley Observation Tower (1964). Everglades National Park, Florida.

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Map 1 Map of Clingmans Dome Tower with National Register Boundary. This map was created in ArcGIS. A shapefile was created by tracing the contour line closest to the tower on the Clingmans Dome USGS topographical map. This shapefile was then overlaid on a georeferenced aerial image of Clingmans Dome Tower.