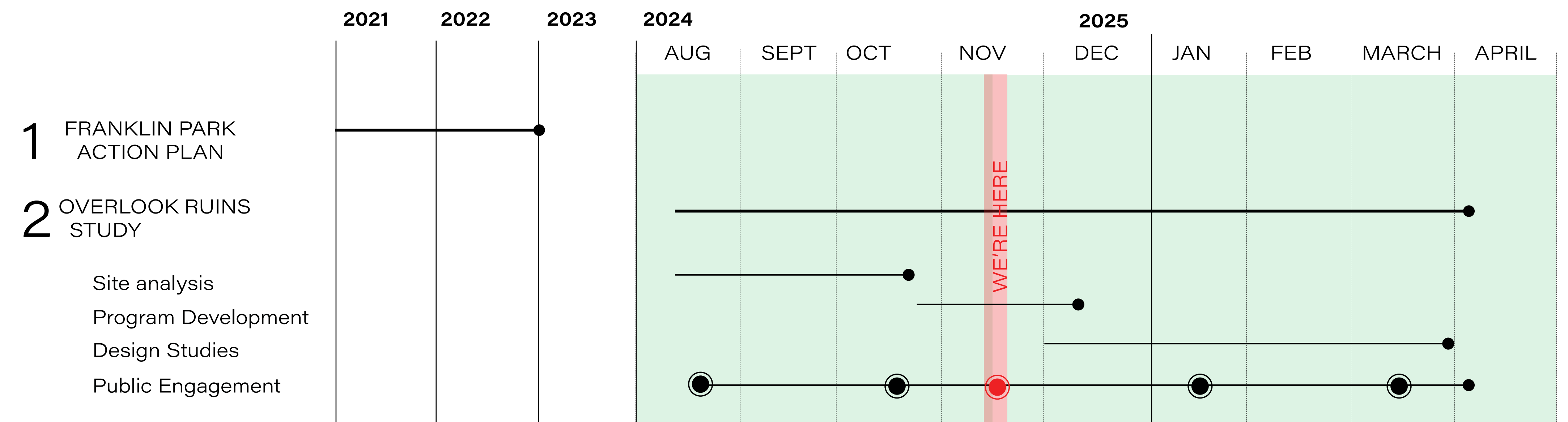


Franklin Park: Overlook Shelter Programming and Design Study



PROJECT SCHEDULE



FRANKLIN PARK ACTION PLAN, 2022

Honor Significant Legacies
Return the Elma Lewis Playhouse to The Overlook

The ruins of the Overlook Shelter, the only building ever designed by Olmsted, is an important piece of park history. Its remaining stone steps and walls hosted one of the park's most iconic programs — The Elma Lewis Playhouse — in the 1960s and 70s. Offering their musical education and performances for the surrounding African American community, The Playhouse continues performances in a temporary location under the guidance of the Franklin Park Coalition. Its important legacy of stewardship and arts education is deserving of a new and permanent home in its historic location at The Overlook.

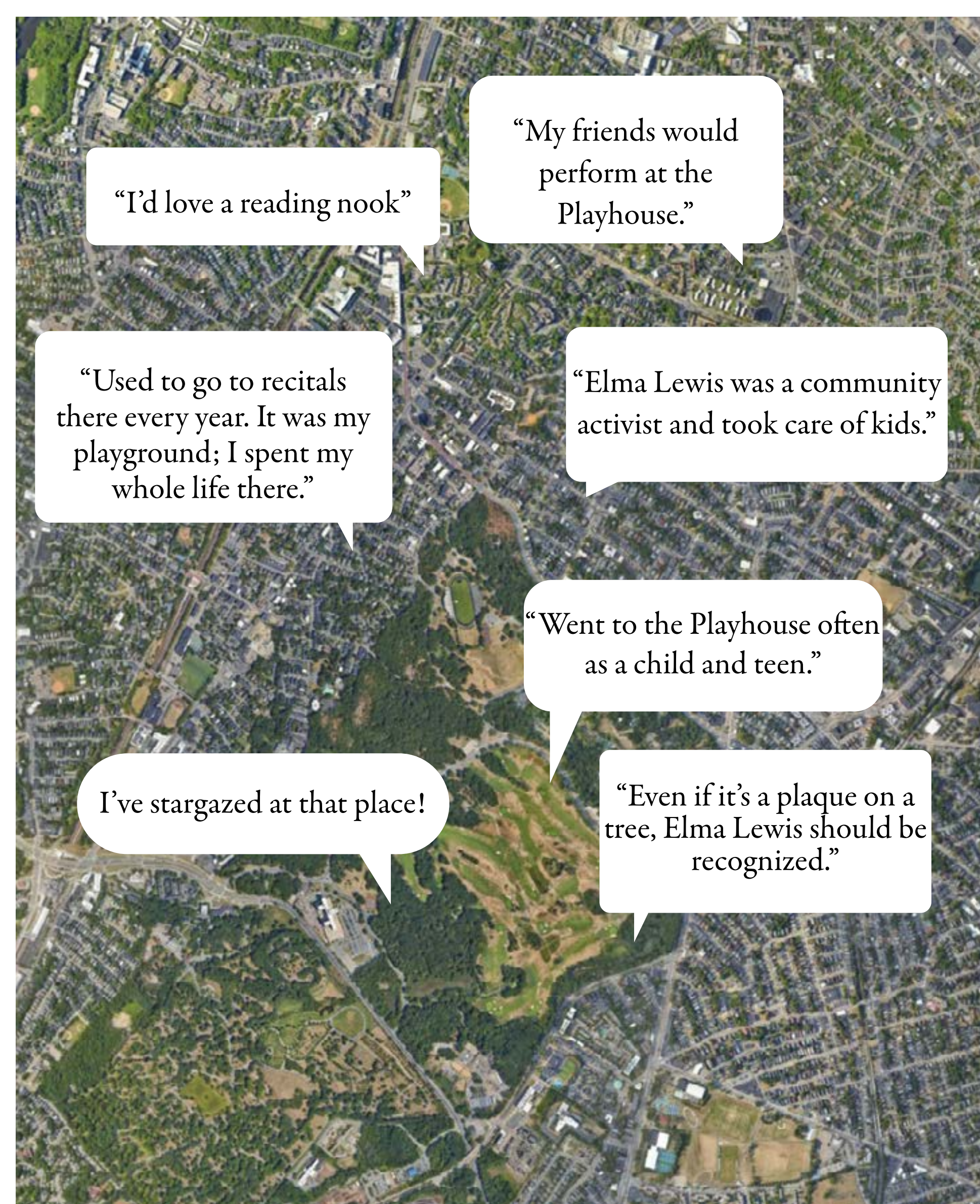
OVERLOOK STRATEGIES

- Build the Playhouse**
 - Design to protect essential elements like rock outcrops and retain canopy to establish historic vegetation patterns by opening up the ground plane and removing pioneer trees.
 - Restore historic and new masonry elements including walls, benches, and foundations; study the best treatment of the building-related landscape including the remaining stairs.
 - Reintroduce the specific architecture in the park with a range, scale, and use of stone, wood, and masonry, and potentially community space.
 - Restore original view to selectively clearing overgrown vegetation.
 - Clarify pedestrian circulation, provide ADA access.

PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK ENGAGEMENT, SUMMER 2024



STREET TEAM ENGAGEMENT OCT 2024



Major Takeaways

1. Elma Lewis' legacy is about making Black space
2. Community imagination for the Overlook extends beyond performance, and includes ideas about flexible and everyday use
3. The Overlook represents an opportunity to restore and memorialize Elma Lewis' legacy

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Franklin Park Action Plan established the priority of renewing Overlook as a “Magnet Destination.”

As a result, the City of Boston launched the Franklin Park Overlook Study to re-envision the Overlook Ruins in Franklin Park and establish a concept plan for potential implementation. The project seeks to

honor Elma Lewis' legacy as the site of the original Playhouse in the Park. This study is looking at the full area and potential of the Overlook, including the Shelter Ruins area - the locus of the Elma Lewis Playhouse, as well as the surrounding Overlook landscape, an elevated platform that bounds the Wilderness and provides views out to the Playstead.



The Overlook Defined the Edge of the Wilderness With Prospect to the Playstead

OLMSTED'S GENERAL PLAN OF FRANKLIN PARK

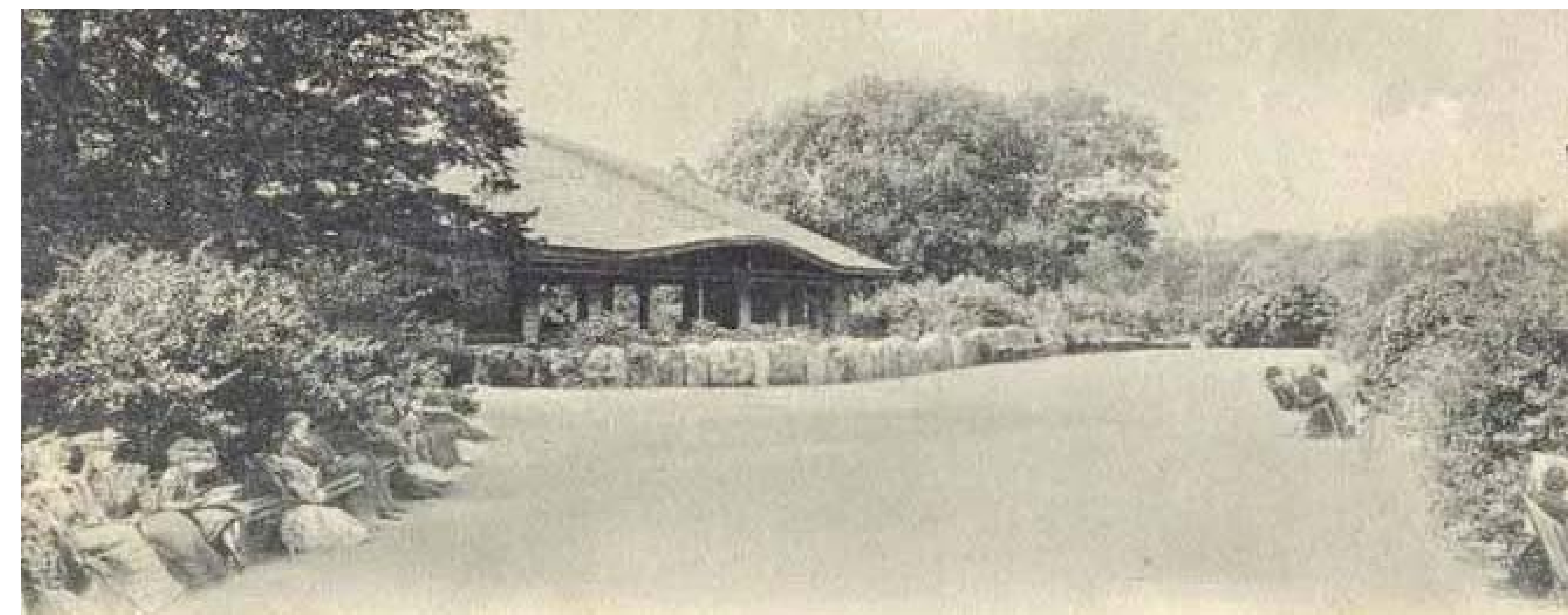


Olmsted's General Plan of Franklin Park was inspired by the puddingstone geology & pastoral character of the site.

HISTORIC IMAGES OF THE OVERLOOK



2 The Overlook Shelter, from across the Playstead.



3 The Overlook shelter from the upper level of the Overlook had seating and prospect oriented to the Playstead.



3 Puddingstone benches atop the Overlook.



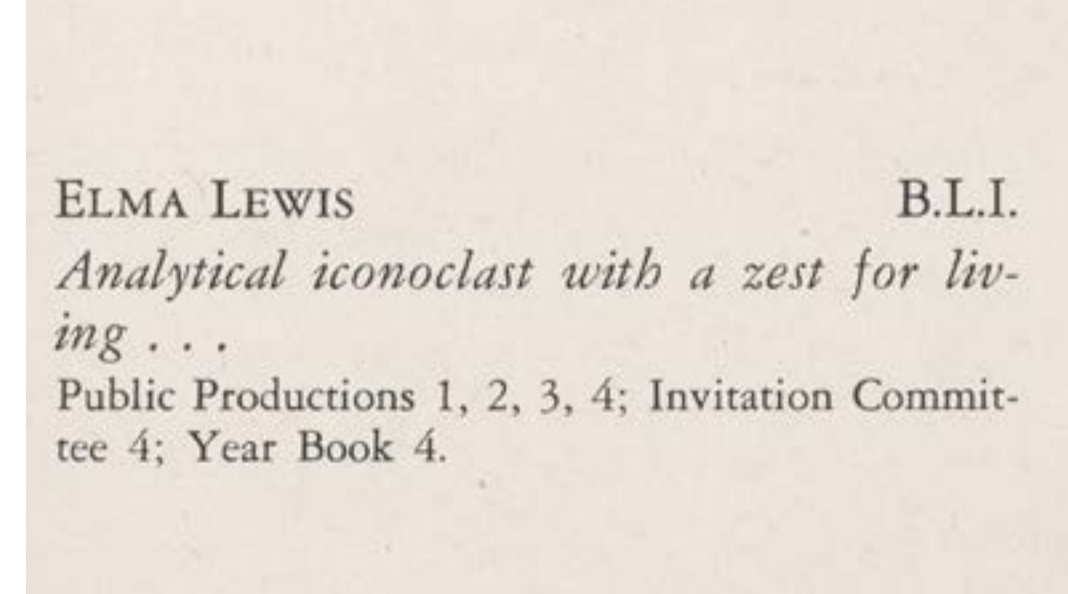
1 1887 construction of the Overlook.



5 Olmsted's Overlook shelter burned down in the 1940s, leaving stone ruins outlining the footprint of the building.

Making Black Space: Elma Lewis & the Elma Lewis Playhouse

ELMA LEWIS' ROXBURY AND DORCHESTER



Elma Lewis' senior yearbook page

Elma Lewis was born and raised in Roxbury. Her parents had recently emigrated from Barbados. From an early age she attended UNIA meetings at St. Cyprian's church. She credits these meetings and Marcus Garvey's teachings with her worldview. Ms. Lewis founded the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts in 1950 in Roxbury. The school became a community institution, and it is estimated that some 5,000 children were taught there over its three decades.

Elma Lewis cleared the Overlook Ruins with her School of Fine Arts Students in the summer of 1968. She explained that she was not content to have her students perform in small spaces that were not publicly accessible. In addition to a beloved performance venue, the space also served as an important gathering place for the community. During the civil rights movement rallies and other events were held at the Playhouse.

ELMA LEWIS SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS



ELMA LEWIS PLAYHOUSE



ELMA LEWIS AND DUKE ELLINGTON



ELMA LEWIS PLAYHOUSE EVENTS

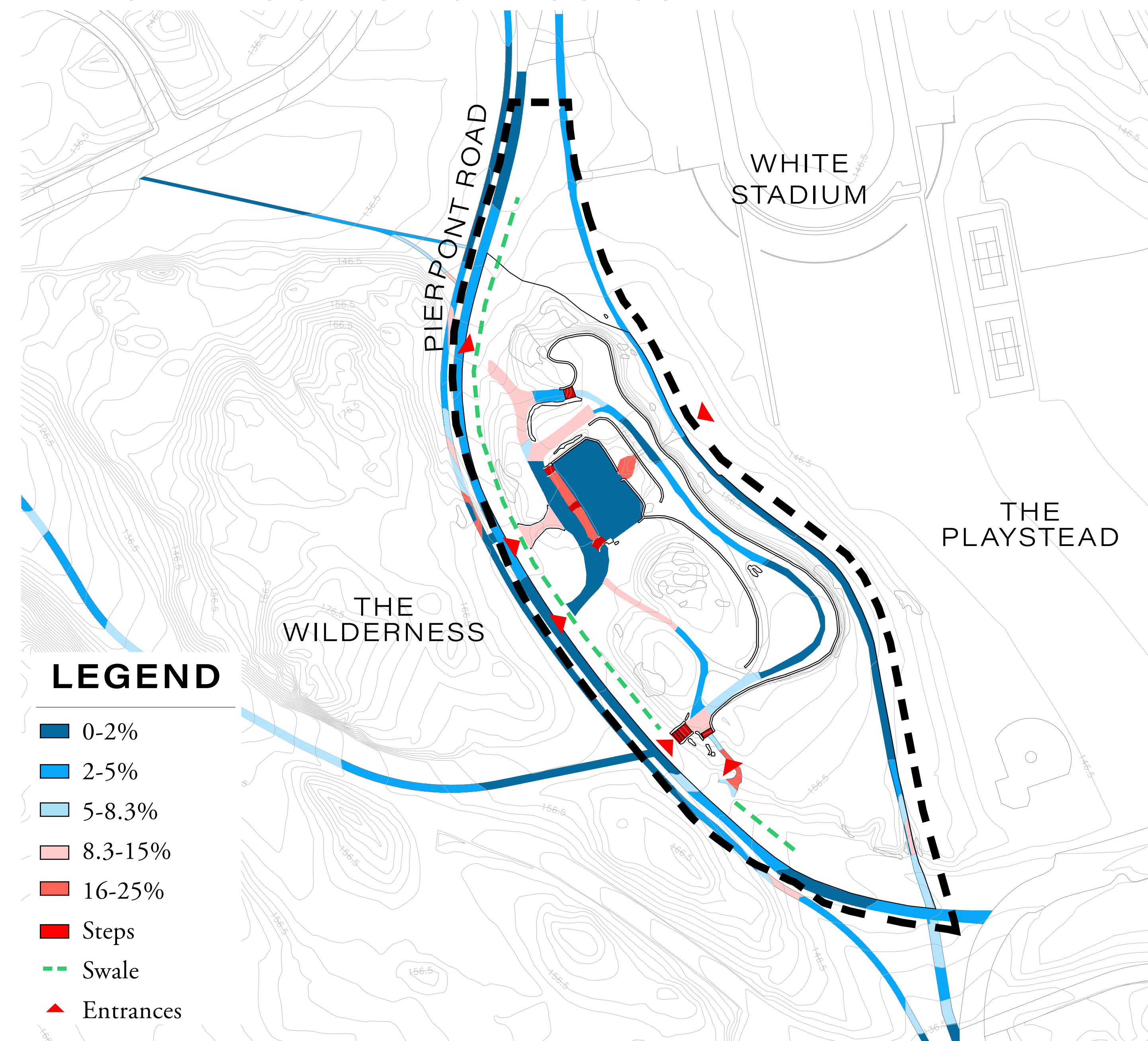


CIVIL RIGHTS RALLY

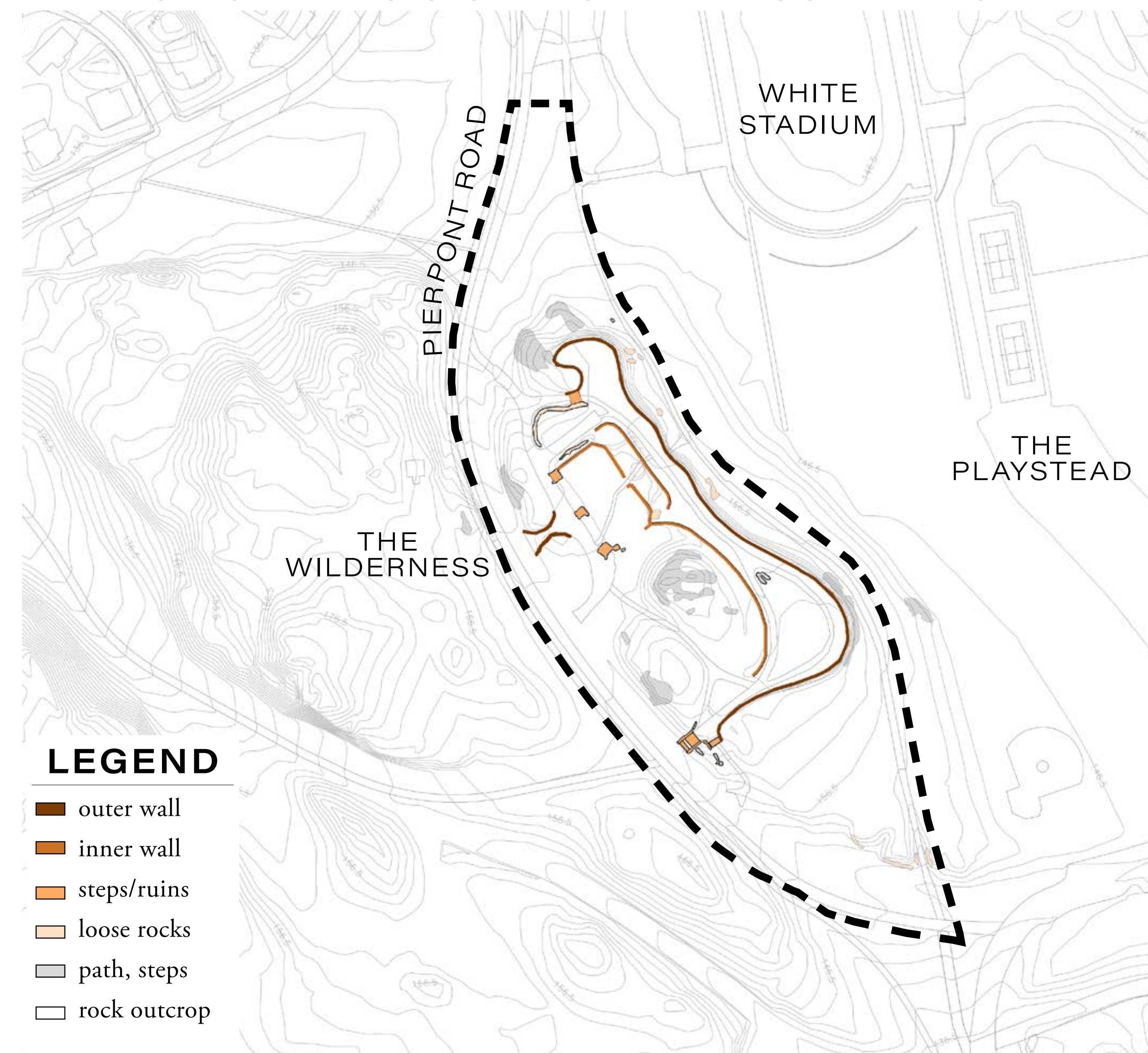


The Overlook Today: Franklin Park Overlook Analysis

TAKEAWAY 1:
THE OVERLOOK IS NOT ACCESSIBLE



TAKEAWAY 2:
THE RUINS NEEDS SIGNIFICANT MASONRY WORK



TAKEAWAY 3:
THE OVERLOOK FEELS FOUND



Disconnected entries, steep slopes, and stairs limit the accessibility of the Overlook.



The puddingstone walls and ruins define the Overlook. The walls and ruins are in need of stabilization in some areas as many stones have become loose or dislodged.



The Overlook has open spaces with mature and emergent woodland. To the south, the Overlook has prospect out to the Playstead.

Telling the Story of the Overlook: Historic Photographs

OLMSTED'S FRANKLIN PARK & OVERLOOK (1895-1940s)

PUDDINGSTONE



PASTORAL BEGINNINGS: PARK LAND IN 1890



BUILDING THE OVERLOOK, 1887



OVERLOOK SHELTER AND PLAYSTEAD



PUDDINGSTONE BENCHES



FINISHED OVERLOOK SHELTER, 1895



OVERLOOK STEPS FROM PIERMONT ROAD OVERLOOK SHELTER, 1920



AFTER THE FIRE, 1940s



ELMA LEWIS' PLAYHOUSE 1966-1978

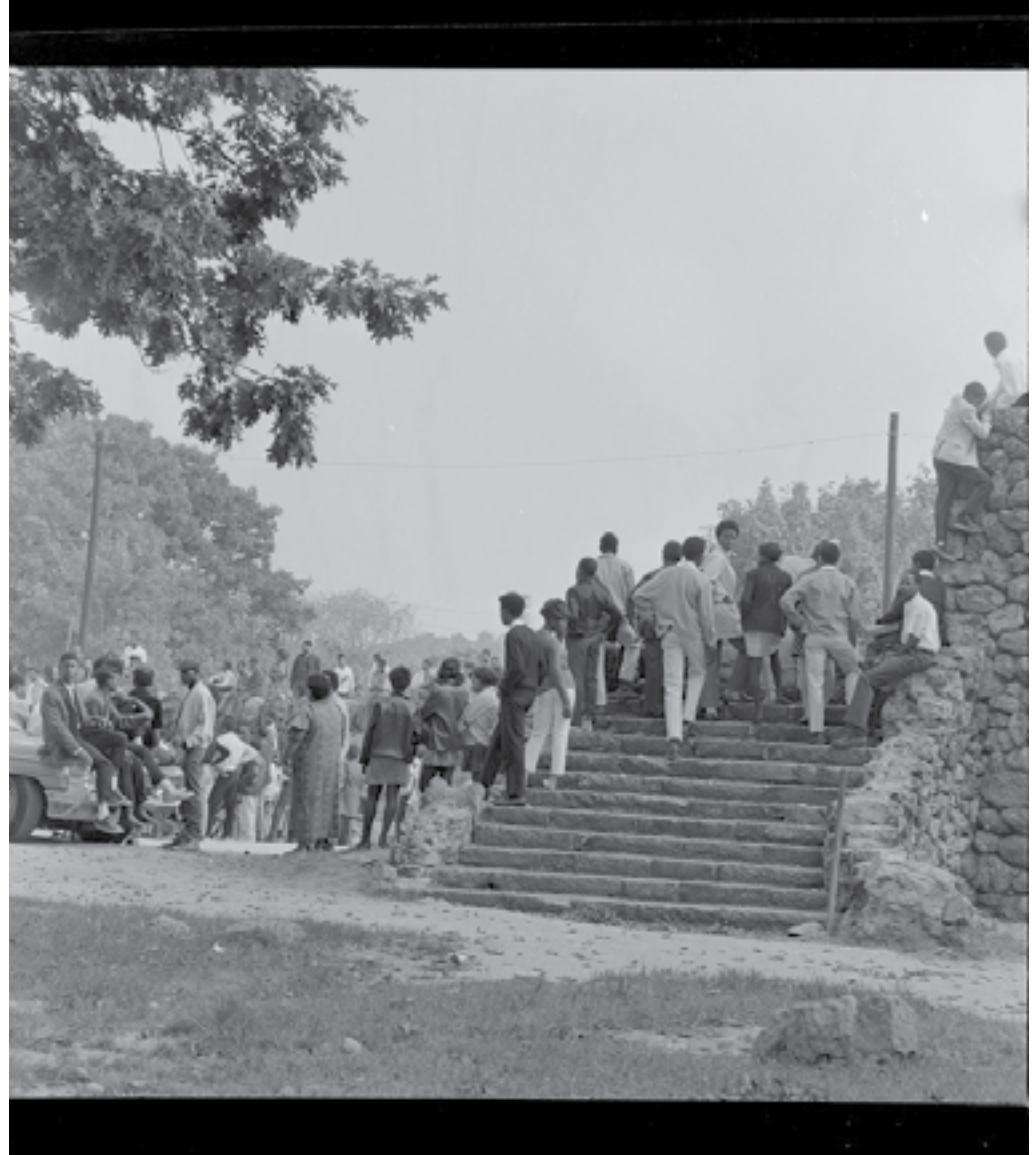
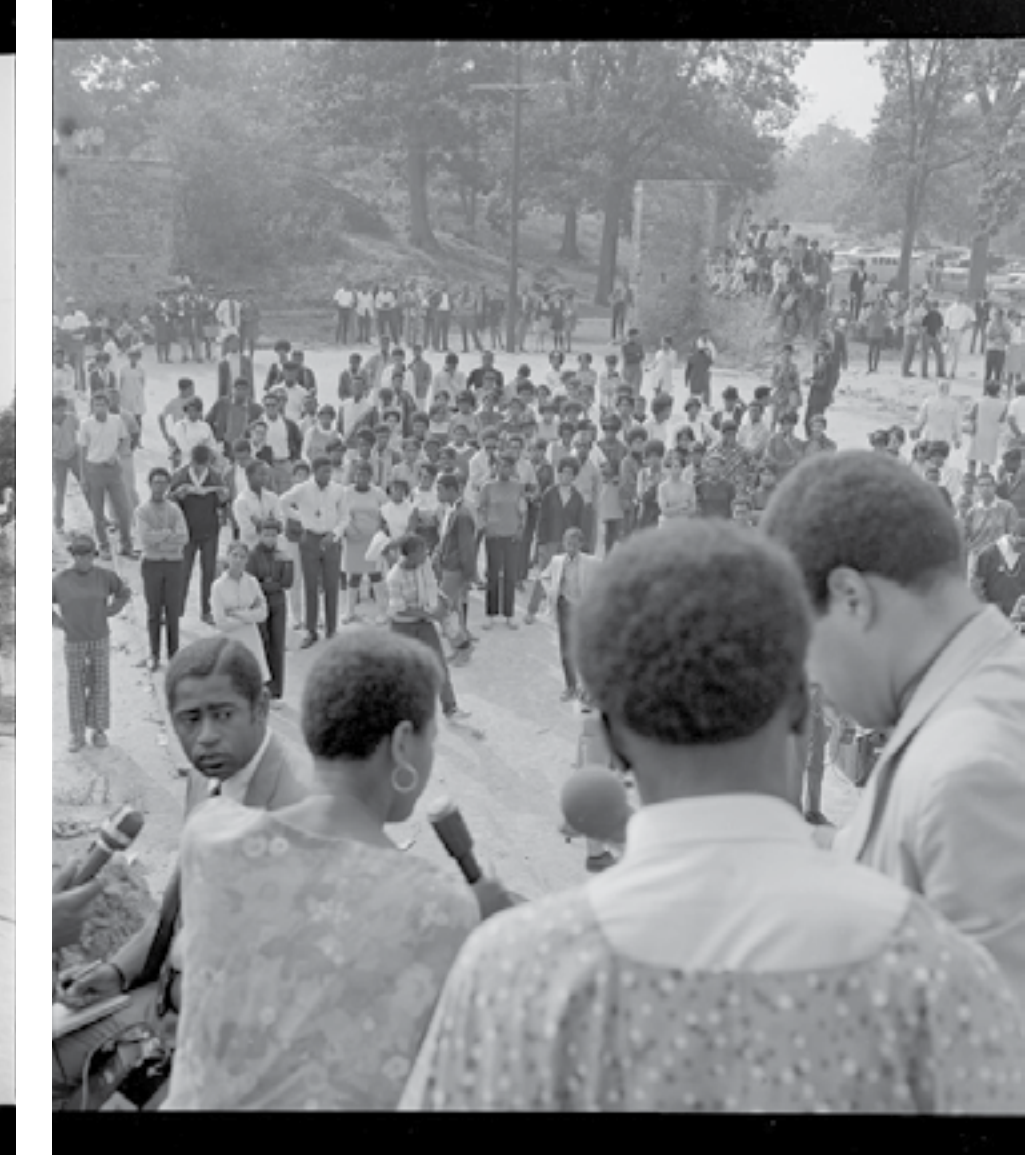
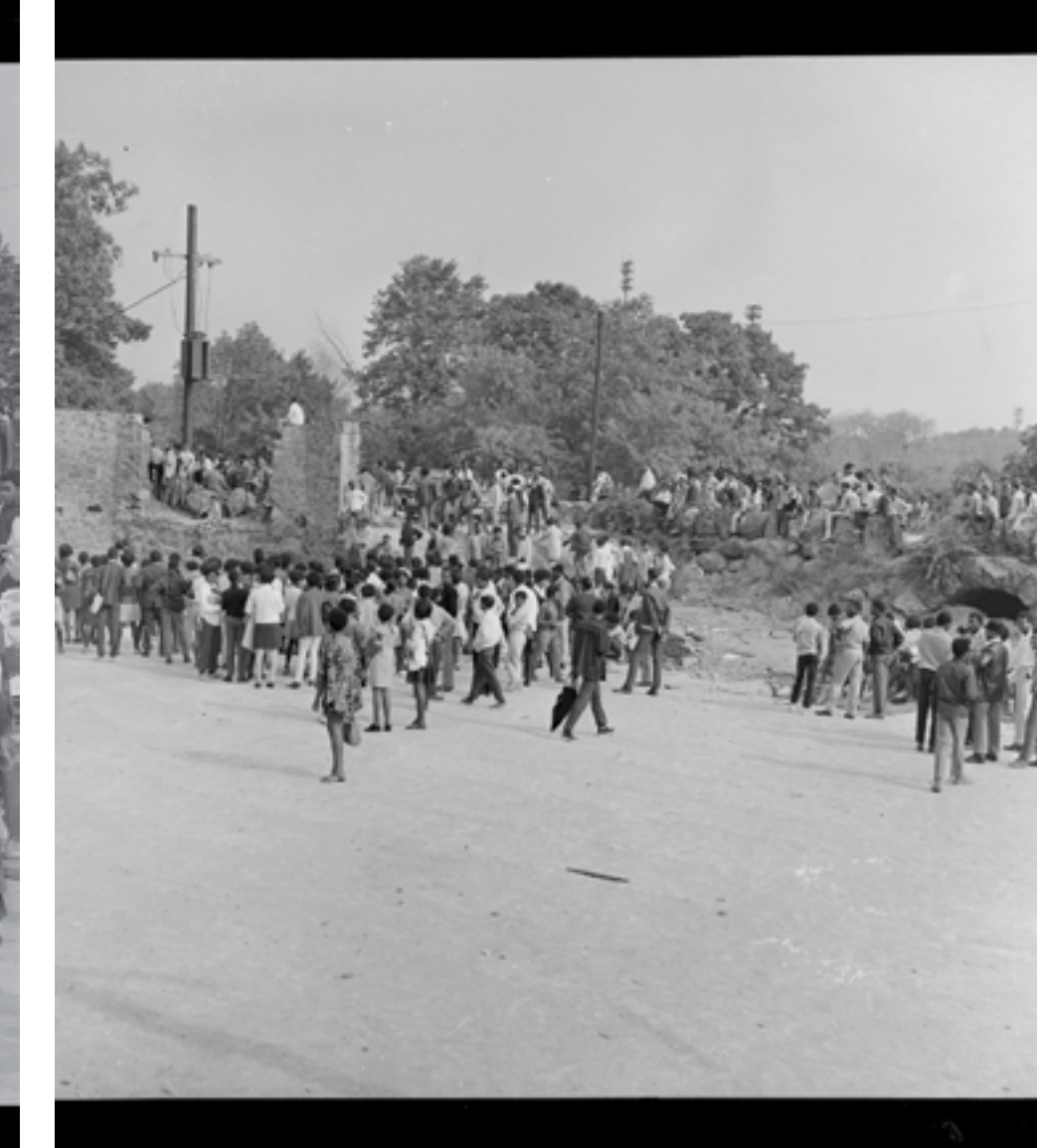
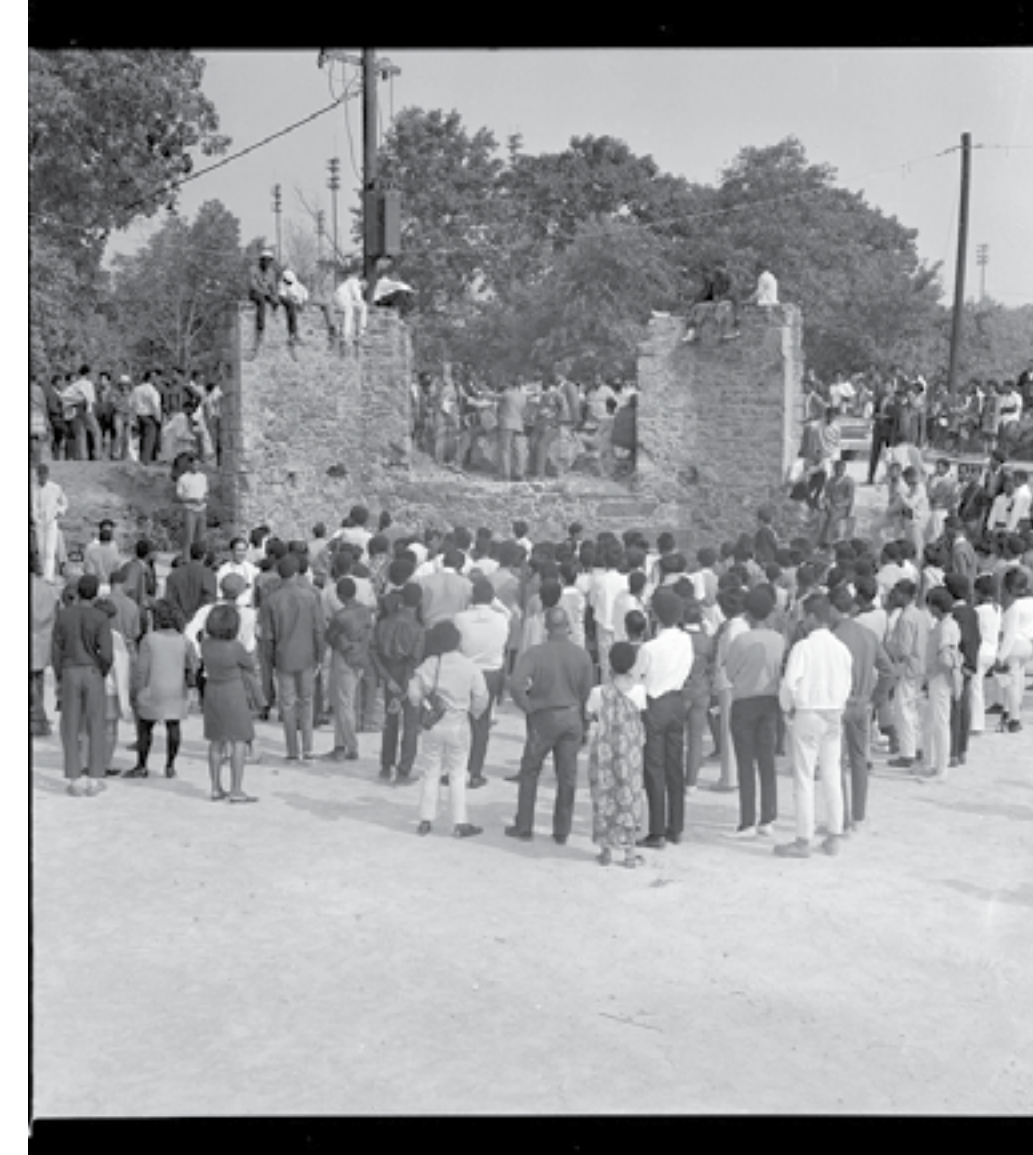
ELMA LEWIS' PLAYHOUSE STAGE SETUP, 1966-1978



AUDIENCE WATCHING A PERFORMANCE



CIVIL RIGHTS RALLY AT PLAYHOUSE, 1968



The Entry Into the Overlook Was Legible

1968



ACCESS TO THE OVERLOOK WAS CLEAR

ENTRY HAD CLEAR SIGHTLINES

TODAY



THE OVERLOOK IS NOT CONNECTED BY ADA PATHS

UNDERSTORY VEGETATION HAS GROWN UP

PEOPLE PASS BY THE OVERLOOK

HOW DO WE CONNECT TO THE OVERLOOK?

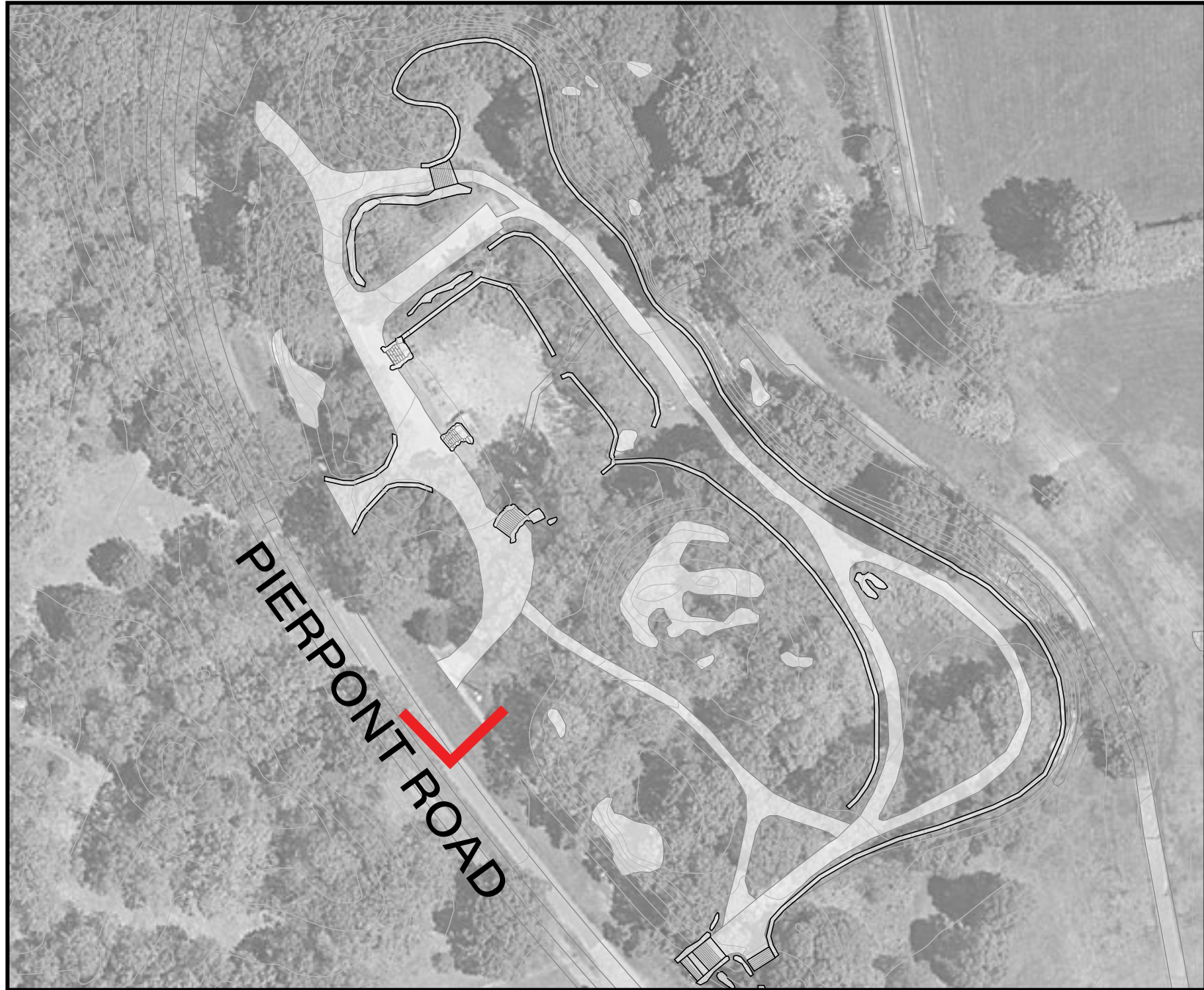


NOT THE DESIGN: FOR GENERATING IDEAS

POTENTIAL SELECTIVE REMOVALS IN UNDERSTORY TO CLEAR VIEW INTO OVERLOOK

AN ACCESSIBLE PATH INTO THE OVERLOOK CONNECTS TO PIERPONT

AN ACCESSIBLE CONNECTION TO PIERPONT RD



The Ruins Were Used as Viewing Platforms

1968



STAIRS WERE USED AS PLATFORMS

TODAY



RUINS ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE AND HAVE FALL ZONES
MASONRY IS IN NEED OF RESTORATION & REPAIR

HOW CAN THE OVERLOOK RUINS BE SAFELY OCCUPIED?



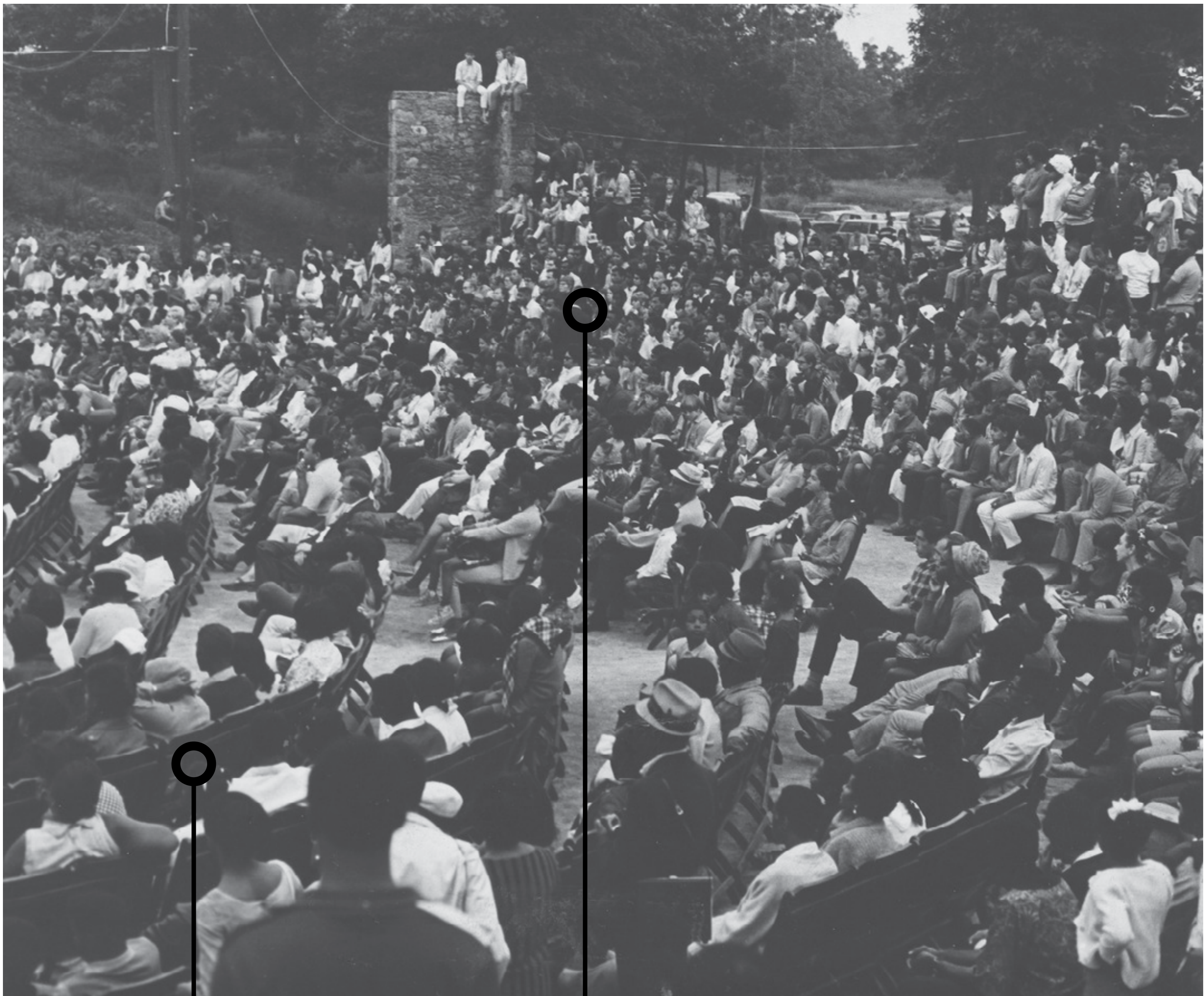
NOT THE DESIGN: FOR GENERATING IDEAS

STABILIZE & RESTORE RUINS?
POSSIBLE STAIR PROVIDING ACCESS
GUARDRAIL SHARING ELMA LEWIS' LEGACY



The Overlook Ruins Accommodated Large Elma Lewis Playhouse Performances

1966-1978



BLEACHER STYLE SEATING

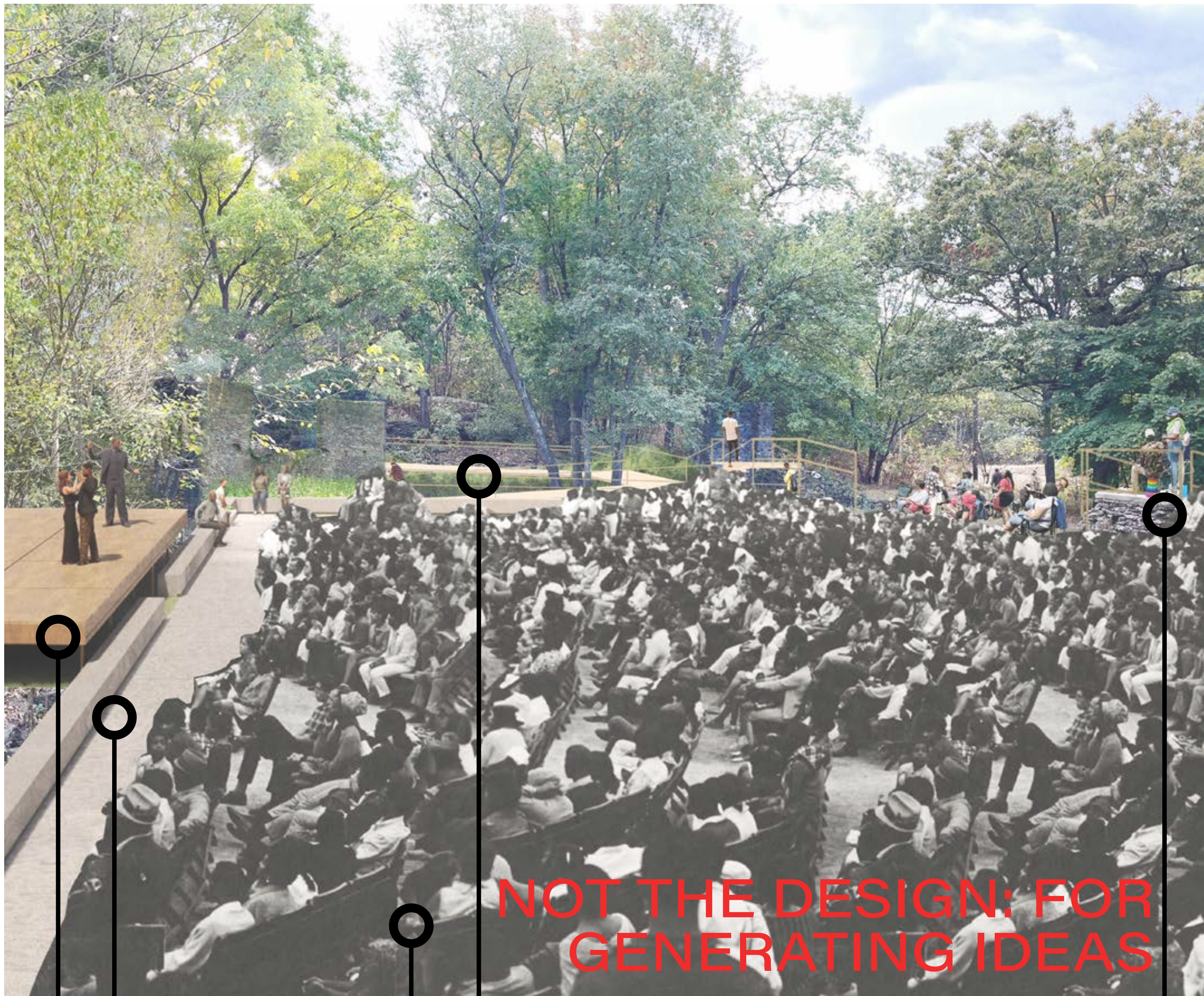
TEMPORARY SEATING FACING EAST

TODAY



A CLEARING REMAINS OPEN
RECENTLY TREATED FOR INVASIVE
SPECIES AND CLEARED

WHAT EVENTS SHOULD THE SPACE ACCOMMODATE?



NOT THE DESIGN FOR GENERATING IDEAS

AS OVERLOOK PLATFORMS?

POTENTIAL STABILIZATION OF
RUINS AND ACCESS RAMP

CLEARING FOR
TEMPORARY SEATING?

POTENTIAL BENCHES
BUILT IN ALONG EDGES

TEMPORARY STAGE?



Elma Lewis Playhouse Capacity Analysis, 1968-1980

Total Area	8,237 SF
Folding Seating Capacity	412 Seats
Bleacher Seating Capacity	120 Seats
Total Seating Capacity	532 Seats

Elma Lewis Also Created Open Space for Other Activities

1968



PEOPLE SAT ON THE EDGES

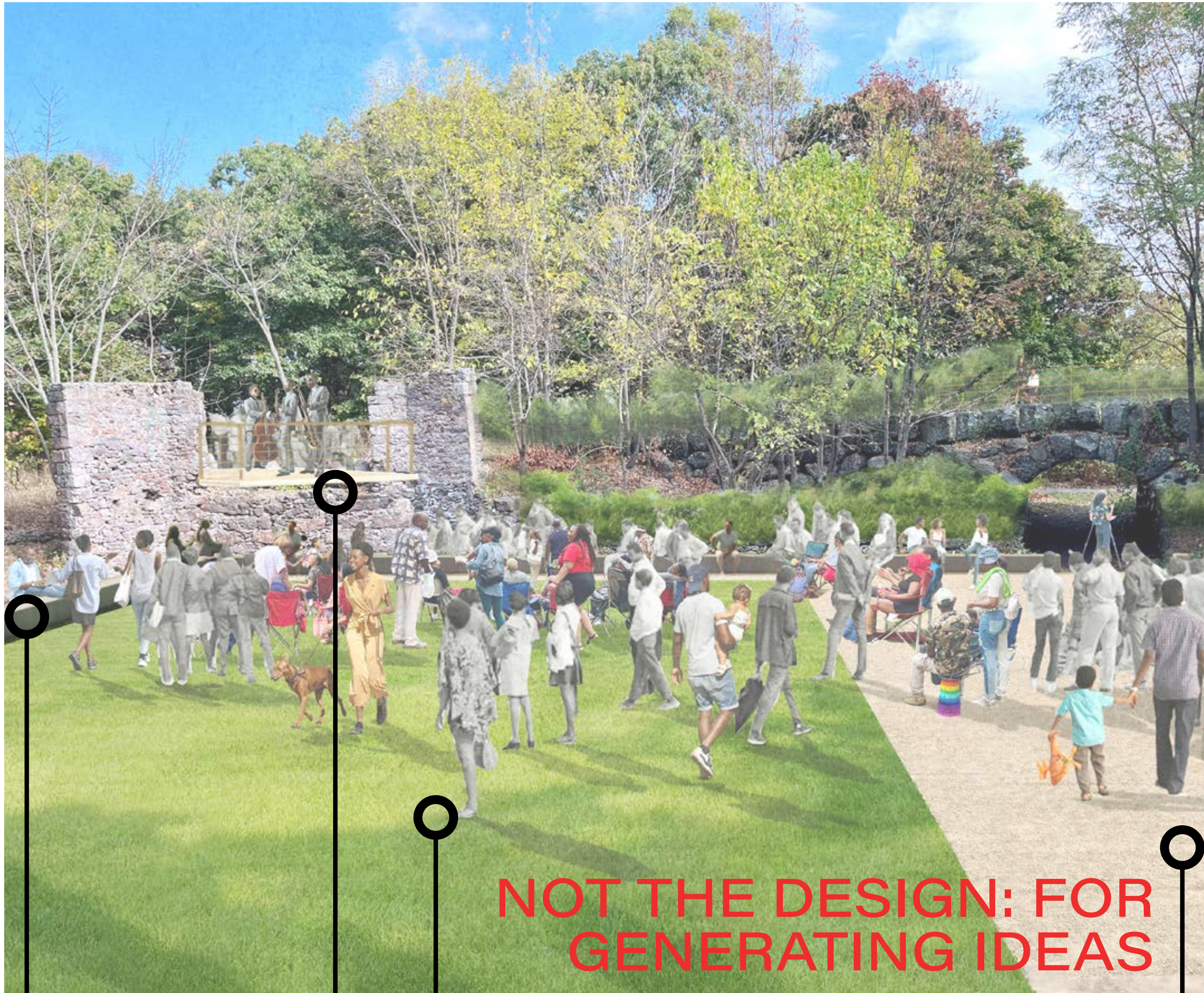
USING THE RUINS TO FRAME PEOPLE

TODAY



MASONRY IS IN NEED OF STABILIZATION

WHAT OTHER ACTIVITIES SHOULD THIS SPACE SUPPORT?



NOT THE DESIGN: FOR GENERATING IDEAS

SOME ADA SURFACING?

SELECT AREAS OF OPEN LAWN?

USE THE RUINS TO FRAME SMALL OVERLOOK?

POTENTIAL BUILT IN SEATING ALONG EDGES



Views Oriented Towards the Playstead

1895-1940s



The Overlook, Franklin Park, Mass.

THE OVERLOOK SHELTER

PUDDINGSTONE BENCHES, ORIENTED TO THE PLAYSTEAD

TODAY



A NARROW PATH REMAINS

PUDDINGSTONE REMAINS, WOOD BENCHES ARE GONE

HOW CAN WE ORIENT VIEWS TO THE PLAYSTEAD?



NOT THE DESIGN: FOR GENERATING IDEAS

AN ADA SURFACE?

KEEP SELECTIVE VEGETATION?

RESTORED SEATING, ORIENTED TO THE PLAYSTEAD?

