

Rocky Mountain Laboratories  
900 Block of South 4th Street  
Hamilton  
Ravalli County  
Montana

HABS  
MONT  
4-HAM,  
2-

**PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Rocky Mountain System Support Office  
National Park Service  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN LABORATORIES

HABS  
MONT  
41-HAM,  
2-

HABS No. MT-101

**Location:** 900 Block of South 4th Street  
Hamilton, Ravalli County, Montana

Boundary Coordinates  
USGS Hamilton South Montana Quadrant,  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
A. 11.719000.5124400 B. 11.719000.5124120  
C. 11.718810.5124100 D. 11.718820.5124360

**Present Owner:** National Institutes of Health

**Present Occupant:** National Institutes of Health

**Present Use:** Medical Research Laboratory

**Part I. HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION**

**A. Physical History:**

The Rocky Mountain Laboratories are comprised of over twenty buildings with functions ranging from laboratory work places to living spaces to animal holding shelters.

1. Date of erection:

The first building, Building One, was constructed at the site in 1927. Several building campaigns have taken place since 1927 and presently continue.

2. Architect:

Shanley and Baker constructed Building One for the State of Montana in 1927. After the Federal Government purchased the facility several building campaigns occurred under the Office of the Supervising Architect, Department of the Treasury under the direction of Louis A. Simon.

3. Original and Subsequent Owner:

The original owner was the state of Montana. In 1932, the Federal Government purchased the facility. Initially, it came under the direction of the Public Health Service then in 1937 it became part of the National Institutes of Health.

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Built by the State of Montana and the United States Department of the Treasury. No information concerning the contractor or suppliers has been found.

5. Original Plans and Construction:

Several site plans are housed with the Maintenance Department at Rocky Mountain Laboratory. Relevant drawings have been reviewed however they are in poor condition. If they can be reproduced photographically they will be submitted at a later date.

6. Alterations and Additions:

The buildings have undergone several periods of construction as outlined for each building.

## B. Historical Context:

*Rickettsia rickettsii* is the organism that causes Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Victims of the disease display variations of a closely related set of symptoms. A week or two after the patient has been infected by a tick, the disease begins to manifest itself. The first sign is often a severe headache accompanied by pains in the back, joints, and legs. In the next phase, eyes become sensitive to light and the neck stiffens. The victim is usually restless and often runs a temperature of 102-104 degrees which can make the individual somewhat delirious. In many cases, the stricken individual merely thinks a common cold is the culprit.

As the disease progresses, the rickettsial organisms multiply within the endothelial cells that line the victims capillaries. These cells eventually swell and burst causing the blood to seep through tiny holes in the capillary walls producing the characteristic spots of the disease. First appearing on the wrists and ankles, the spots later spread to the limbs, the trunk of the body, and eventually the face. If left untreated victims can recover from the illness within two weeks. However, in weaker individuals, such as older victims or those with other medical problems already weakening the body, the disease is often fatal.<sup>1</sup>

Cases of this disease in North America can be traced as far back as 1759. Numerous accounts exist of a mysterious disease plaguing the western pioneers of the United States throughout the mid 1800's. However, the disease was not identified until the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> By the 1920's, a major center for research concerning Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever had been created in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana.

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<sup>1</sup>The above description of the symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever was extracted from: Harden, Victoria A. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever: History of a Twentieth Century Disease. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 3-4. Mullen, Pierce C. "Bitterroot Enigma: Howard Taylor Ricketts and the Early Struggle Against Spotted Fever." Montana: The Magazine of Western History. Winter 1982, 32: 1, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Harden, 5.

As the population of the western regions of the United States grew, so too did the number of sicknesses related to strange and unidentified illness. With the discovery of Gold in Montana in the early 1860's, the population of the region greatly increased. As railroad tracks crossed Montana in the mid 1870's, the population further expanded in number. By 1889, the year Montana was granted Statehood, the lumber industry was drawing people to the state. It was the lumber industries' harvesting of timber and opening of the woodlands that allowed for greater tick infestation. This explains the sudden increase in the occurrence of a "strange fever causing spots" during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

It had been documented that many of the worst cases of this spotted fever were in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana.<sup>4</sup> The reason for this occurrence is unknown even today. However, it can be assumed that ticks in the Bitterroot area carry a more severe strain of the disease. The doctors in this region were educated at the best medical schools in the east, yet they could not understand the fever that occurred over and over again among the residents of the Bitterroot Valley.

In 1902, the Montana board of health launched its first investigations of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever under the direction of Louis B. Wright and William M. Chowning. It was Wilson and Chowning who discovered that all of the patients who exhibited symptoms of the Spotted Fever had been bitten by wood ticks several days before the disease began to appear. Thus, they concluded that the illness was transmitted to individuals via wood ticks.

Prior to this point in medical history, two classes of microorganisms had been classified as causing disease in humans: virus and bacteria. Few individuals were willing to believe that another microorganism could cause disease. The tick theory was rejected by one of America's leading entomologists. Dr. Charles W. Stiles wrote in 1904: "The tick theory has caused serious financial loss to the Bitterroot Valley and has produced an effect which in a few cases has bordered on hysteria."<sup>5</sup> Thus, issues of credibility were impairing the funding status of continued research into the tick theory.

The fight over funding continued throughout the 1910's as it became apparent that politics played a role in scientific research. Indeed, residents of the area had become panicked, as the disease had killed approximately 65 people in a seven year period.<sup>6</sup> Included in this controversy were numerous political overtones as real estate investors did not want to admit that the area was potentially dangerous. Developers in the Bitterroot Valley wanted to make use of or sell off the vast expanses of land in which they had invested. Investors from all over the country had come to this part of Montana. In fact, the prestigious Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright was involved in the design of a community in the Bitterroot Valley.<sup>7</sup> Many individuals were threatened with the loss a great deal of money if

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<sup>3</sup>Harden, 13-15. Philips, Robert N. "Historical Ruminations: Rickettsiae and the Rocky Mountain Laboratory." Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences: Volume 590. Rickettsiology: Current Issues and Perspectives. June 26, 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Harden, 16-17.

<sup>5</sup>Charles W. Stiles, 1904, as reprinted in Mullen, 6.

<sup>6</sup>Harden, 23-46. Bear in mind this statistic is a rough estimate and it only represents the deaths in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. The disease was active all over the western United States.

<sup>7</sup>Johnson, Donald Leslie. "Frank Lloyd Wright's Architectural Projects in the Bitterroot Valley,

the area was considered unsafe and a threat to public health. However, it seemed likely that these investors had even more to lose if a cure was not found.

By 1906, a University of Chicago scientist by the name of Dr. Howard Taylor Ricketts (1871-1910) had begun research on the problem of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Ricketts received his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska. He then moved to Northwestern Medical School, graduating in 1897. From 1898 to 1899, he was an intern at Cook County hospital near Chicago. During the year 1902 he traveled to Europe where he studied in Vienna and at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. He was appointed to the Faculty of the University of Chicago in 1907 as a professor of Pathology and Bacteriology.<sup>8</sup>

Ricketts arrived in Missoula to study Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever in April of 1906. He worked trying to verify the earlier studies of Wright and Chowning. It was Ricketts who experimented and first demonstrated conclusively that Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever was transmitted to humans by wood ticks. He identified the actual microorganism that causes the disease. These organisms and other microorganisms of the same family were later named Rickettsia in his honor.

Ricketts died in 1910 while investigating an epidemic of typhus in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> However, the research he had pioneered continued. From 1910-1920 research was conducted to eradicate the threat of the infectious ticks in the Bitterroot Valley by eliminating the tick from livestock herds. This research was conducted by Dr. Robert A. Cooley. A measure of dipping the cattle in baths of an arsenical solution to kill the attached ticks was begun by 1913. Several years of testing determined the solution that best worked to eliminate ticks from cattle herds. However, this procedure did not stop the disease from becoming active in humans.<sup>10</sup> Tick control was one possible solution to the overwhelming problem, however the goal was to eliminate the threat via vaccine.

Dr. Thomas B. McClintic was active during the 1910's researching Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. He and Dr. Lunsford D. Fricks of the United States Public Health Service opened a laboratory in Victor, Montana to conduct research from 1911-1916. Near the end of 1912, McClintic became infected with Spotted Fever and died. He was the first of many scientists to become ill and subsequently die of the disease he or she was researching.<sup>11</sup>

In 1914, Dr. Ralph R. Parker arrived on the scene to pursue tick control research. With his wife, he set up a rudimentary laboratory in a small log cabin. One scholar noted of their working relationship: "theirs was a scientific honeymoon, dedicated to the conquest of spotted fever."<sup>12</sup> Soon it became obvious that this modest space was inadequate as a research facility. In 1921, Montana state government agencies agreed to sponsor a laboratory for research pertaining to the development of a vaccine for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. The Lost Horse

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1909-10." Montana: The Magazine of Western History. Summer, 1987 37: 3, 12-25.

<sup>8</sup>Mullen, 5-6.

<sup>9</sup>Harden, 47-71. Howard Taylor Ricketts Scrapbook. Price, 73.

<sup>10</sup>Harden, 88-100.

<sup>11</sup>Harden, 81-87.

<sup>12</sup>Price, Esther Gaskins. Fighting Spotted Fever in the Rockies. Published by the author, Marblehead, Mass, Printed in Helena, 1948, 124.

Creek school house, near Hamilton, was converted to a laboratory shortly after allocation of the money.<sup>13</sup>

State Senator Tyler Worden and his wife, Carrie, died in 1921 of tick bites inflicted during a walk on their summer property near Lolo in the Bitterroot Valley.<sup>14</sup> This event only increased the political debate over research for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. In the spring of 1922, Dr. Roscoe Spencer was recruited to head this public health research now perceived as important. During the years 1921-27 these two men, Spencer and Parker, developed an effective vaccine for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Their method for developing the vaccine involved grinding up the ticks and injecting the tick tissue into test animals.<sup>15</sup>

During this period, 1921-27, several of the researchers at the lab contracted Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and died. A young graduate of Montana State College, William E. Gettinger, died in June of 1922 and later in 1924, G. Henry Cowan died from the fever he contracted while participating in tick rearing experiments.<sup>16</sup> Cowan had rejected inoculation with the vaccine several times.

In 1927, the State of Montana legislature approved \$60,000 in funding for construction of a new laboratory. The Great Falls architectural firm of Shanley and Baker constructed the new building located at the edge of town in Hamilton.<sup>17</sup> Initially, there was opposition to the construction of a full scale laboratory as Hamilton residents feared that ticks would escape from the research laboratory and infect townspeople with the disease.<sup>18</sup> To prevent this from occurring, a tick moat was constructed around the new buildings. The ticks would be unable to swim across the moat and, thus theoretically could not escape from the facility.<sup>19</sup>

By 1932, the United States Federal Government had purchased the property. They paid the state of Montana \$68,757 on February 3, 1932 for the buildings and land.<sup>20</sup> The facility came under the direction of the Public Health Service and then in 1937 became a division of the National Institutes of Health. The federal government funded building campaigns at the site in 1932-34, 1936-37, and 1938-40 as the facility expanded.

In 1938, Dr. Harold Cox developed an improved method for the Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever vaccine. Research continued at the Laboratory and during World War II the facility served as a production center for vaccines for overseas troops. Vaccines for typhus and yellow fever were the most widely produced with the Laboratory distributing 3,360,000 doses at a peak period in 1945.

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<sup>13</sup>Price, 171.

<sup>14</sup>Price, 168-70. High ranking officials were losing their lives and this was causing more alarm. Kalisch, Philip A. "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever: The Sickness and the Triumph." Montana: The Magazine of Western History. 1973 23: 2, 51.

<sup>15</sup>Price, 173-74

<sup>16</sup>Philips, "Historical Ruminations," 3.

<sup>17</sup>Price, 205. Unfortunately, the information requested from the Montana State Historic Preservation Office concerning this architectural firm has not yet arrived for study.

<sup>18</sup>Price, 207-208.

<sup>19</sup>National Register Nomination Form. Rocky Mountain Laboratory Historic District.

<sup>20</sup>Price, 227.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN LABORATORIES

HABS No. MT-101

Page 6

Today, the Rocky Mountain Laboratories are unique within the National Institutes of Health system because it is the only western center for the agency. Research concerning AIDS and rabies, as well as other infectious diseases takes place at the facility today. Attesting to the importance of the facility is the National Institutes of Health commitment to upgrade the buildings in 1995, continuing the tradition of excellence in pioneering research. A rich history of scientific research under its belt, the facility is entering a new phase of history in the 1990's.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

#### 1. Architectural Character:

As noted above, the first permanent laboratory for the study of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever was in an old school house. Determined to be inadequate, the State of Montana allocated \$60,000 for the construction of a new complex in 1927. Shanley and Baker were then selected to draw the plans and Hamilton was chosen as the site.<sup>21</sup>

Shanley and Baker were a Great Falls firm<sup>22</sup>. George H. Shanley was born in Vermont in 1875 and was educated at the University of Vermont. After Graduation he worked for several architects and then went with his contractor-father to Fargo, North Dakota to build St. Mary's Cathedral. He opened an office in Great Falls in 1907. Shanley became one of Great Falls most well known architects and enjoyed a prolific career. Shanley died in November of 1960.

Charles H. Baker graduated from Columbia University and worked with George Shanley during the 1920's. Their designs included the Gymnasium (1921) and the Biology Building (1921) at Montana State University.

The first building, Building One, at the Rocky Mountain Laboratory, designed by Shanley and Baker was a simple brick building. Later additions to the complex gave the original building a Collegiate Gothic character. The term Collegiate Gothic came to refer to University buildings that were basically patternbook Gothic, referencing buildings at Oxford and Cambridge. The first example of Collegiate Gothic was at Bryn Mawr College in New England. These buildings were designed by the firm of Cope and Stewardson. From Bryn Mawr the Gothic moved to Princeton where it flourished under the direction of Ralph Adams Cram. Cram was a partner in the firm Cram and Goodhue (1892-1913) and later Cram and Ferguson until his death in 1942. Cram, an advocate of the Medieval culture, felt it was the most remarkable way to live a life of principle. The buildings at West Point in upstate New York are another example of the Gothic Revival work of Cram and his colleagues.<sup>23</sup>

The Collegiate Gothic Style was appropriate for the buildings at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories because many research facilities were located at universities and the style had such academic associations. The buildings at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories are somewhat understated compared to

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<sup>21</sup>Price, 205.

<sup>22</sup> All information on Shanley and Baker was found in an architects file in the Montana Office of Historic Preservation.

<sup>23</sup>Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969, 173-177. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Penguin Books, 1989 revised, 543-546.

buildings at some larger academic institutions, however they reference the Gothic and imply an academic setting.

From 1938-40, a major building campaign was undertaken at the Laboratory. Surviving construction drawings from November of 1938 by the Public Buildings Branch of the United States Treasury Department indicate that Louis A. Simon was the Supervising Architect and Neal A. Melick was the Supervising Engineer. Simon served as the Supervising Architect from 1934 to 1941 at which time he retired with 45 years of service to the federal government.<sup>24</sup>

Born in Baltimore in 1867, Louis A. Simon received his degree in Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1891. He traveled to Europe then returned to Baltimore to open an architecture practice in 1894. Simon began working for the Supervising Architect's Office of the Treasury Department in 1896. From 1904 to 1934, he was Chief of the Architectural Division. Simon served as Supervising Architect for seven years and under his supervision the agency constructed numerous projects.

The Supervising Architect's Office was the office responsible for any government buildings constructed. This agency was responsible for innumerable buildings constructed in Washington and across the country, such as post offices, judicial buildings, U.S. Mint buildings, Presidential library buildings, etc. The year 1938 brought construction of another medical facility the National Cancer Institute building in Bethesda, Maryland. This project was also supervised by Louis A. Simon indicating the importance of government medical centers.<sup>25</sup>

"Under Simon's guiding hand came more the subdued, more sentimental architecture of the Italian Renaissance and the Colonial."<sup>26</sup> Since the two Colonial style houses at Rocky Mountain Laboratory were added during Simon's tenure it is possible this comment could relate to the construction of the residences at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories.

There was always considerable controversy over the need for a federal department of architecture which was the primary purpose of the Supervising Architect's office. Involvement of private architects in government design projects was called for by many individuals. "Under Louis A. Simon, the buildings designed by the Office received praise, however reluctantly, from the private practitioners."<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Condition of Fabric:

Today, the buildings are generally in good condition. The Laboratories are in the process of upgrading their facilities. The architectural firm of Erlich-Rominger of Boise, Idaho has been contracted to upgrade the facility.

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<sup>24</sup>Lee, Antoinette J. Architects to the Nation: History of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury Department. Unpublished Manuscript for the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

<sup>25</sup>Embury, Aymar. "Louis A. Simon: A Great Public Servant." The Federal Architect. January 1939, 19.

<sup>26</sup>Lee, 27. As quoted from "The Simon Era in the Supervising Architect's Office." The Federal Architect.

<sup>27</sup>Lee, 38.

## B. Building Descriptions

The complex of buildings at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories consists of more than twenty buildings on thirty-three acres. Ten of these buildings are located in the National Register of Historic Places Historic District which has set boundaries. Buildings One through Seven are located on the west side of Fourth Street. The residences, Buildings Eight and Nine, and the shared garage, Building Eleven, are on the east side of Fourth Street. Building Ten is a small wood frame structure, housing the glass wash, located to the south side of Building Three, which was not included in the National Register District nomination.

The laboratory buildings form a cohesive group within the town. Though the two residences are of an entirely different style of architecture, they are harmonious with the brick buildings across the street.

Several interior features are common to the laboratory complex such as the bathroom finishes, interior exposed brick, lighting fixtures, linoleum, an elevator system with decorative detailing in the elevator cars, remnants of the original heating system, and original stairways. The common exterior features include cast stone window surrounds, as well as other cast stone decorative features, and a consistent use of red brick on the main buildings of the complex.

As this report is organized as a complex each individual building will be described separately.

## C. Site:

### 1. General setting and orientation:

The site is located at the south edge of Hamilton, Montana.

### 2. Historic landscape design:

The landscape does not appear to have been altered dramatically over time, aside from the construction of the buildings themselves. As noted above, the tick moat was constructed around the buildings after concern was expressed that the ticks might escape and infect the townspeople. A remnant of this feature remains on the east side of Building One. The original sidewalks and paving appears to be maintained in fair condition. Several historic streetlights are located on Fourth Street.

Hamilton is a small, rural community in central Montana. It is located in the Bitterroot Valley between two national forest lands. The dramatic landscape of the Valley was first explored by the famous Louis and Clark expedition in 1804-05.

### Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Original Architectural Drawings

Several original architectural drawings are available at the Maintenance Department at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories.

#### B. Early Views

The Rocky Mountain Laboratories has a large collection of historic photographs. Several have been reproduced as part of this HABS report.

#### C. Interviews

No interviews were conducted for this documentation.

#### D. Bibliography

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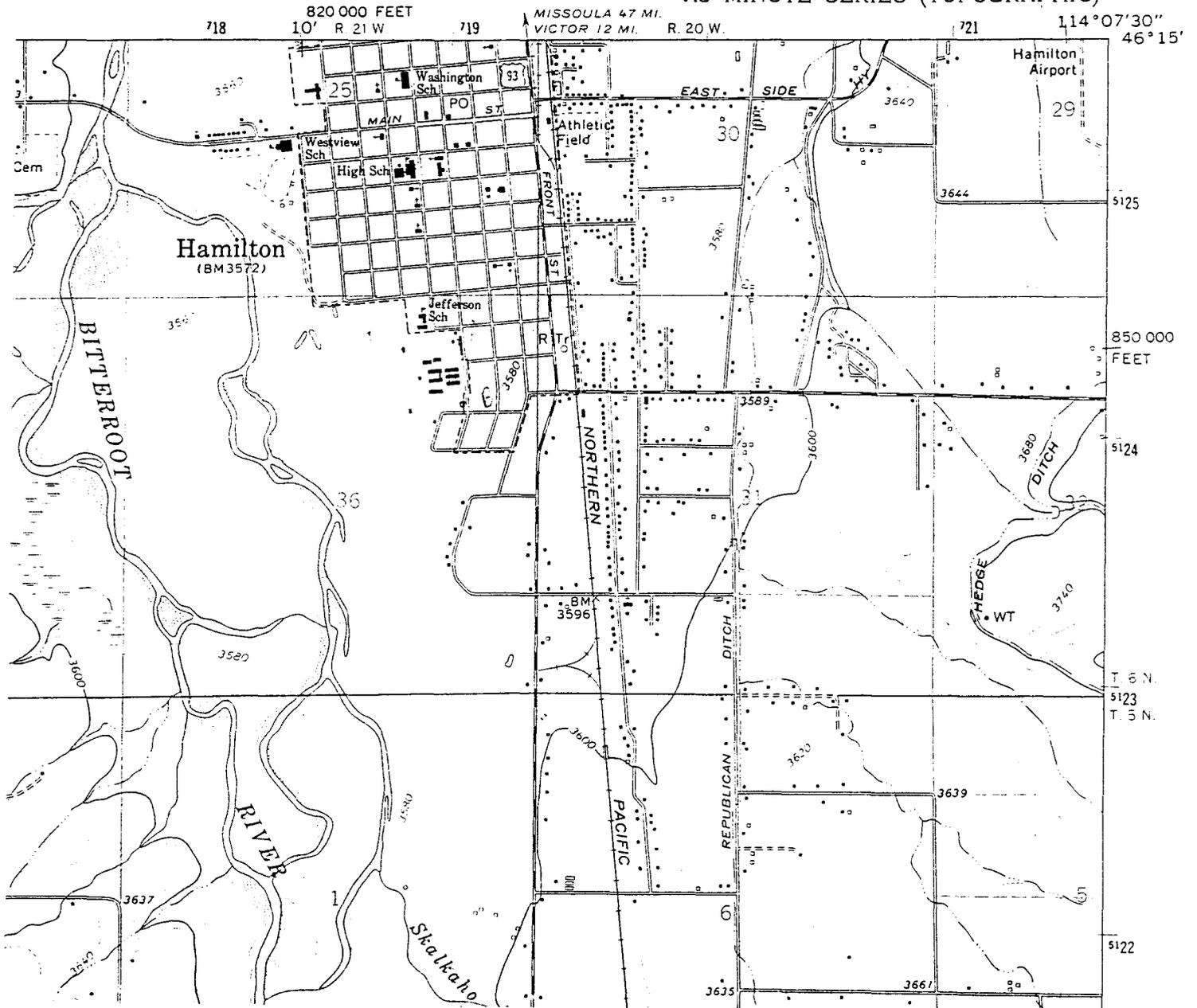
Wilson, Richard Guy. "Ralph Adams Cram and the Idea of a Medieval Culture in America." *Medievalism in American Culture*. ed. by Rosenthal and Szarmach. Binghamton: SUNY, 1989: 193-214.

#### **Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

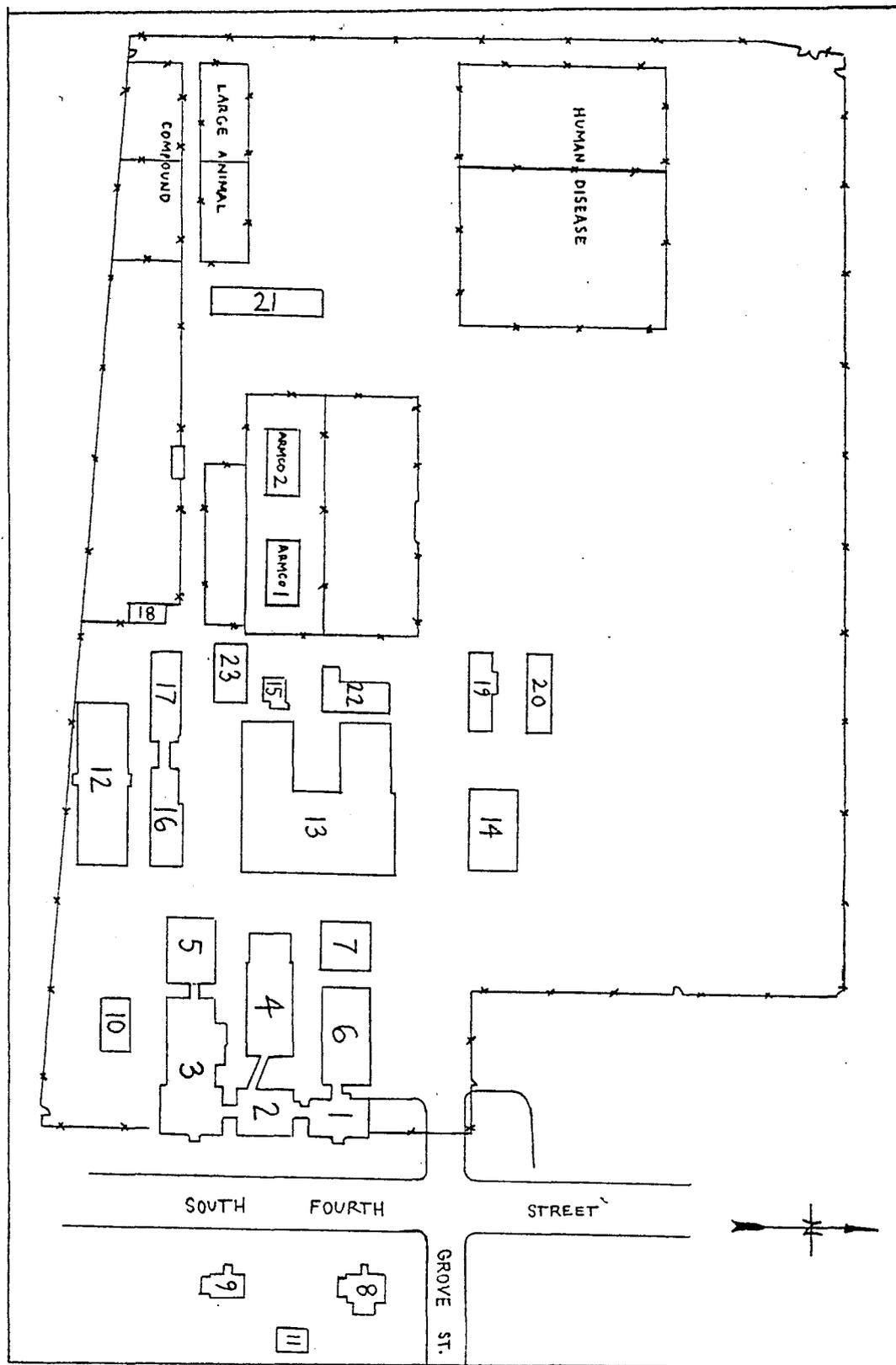
Architectural Resources Group was contracted by Ehrlich-Rominger Architects and the National Institutes of Health to prepare this HABS documentation. Bruce D. Judd, FAIA was the principal-in-charge and photographer. John Ashe of the John Ashe Group, Los Angeles, was an additional photographer. Bridget Maley, architectural historian, prepared the written documentation from a pre-design report compiled for the National Institutes of Health. Ann Huppert and Chris Coffee of Architectural Resources Group were technical assistants for the project.

The HABS documentation was stipulated in a Memorandum Of Agreement signed by the National Institutes of Health and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation through the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act.

HAMILTON SOUTH QUADRANGLE  
MONTANA - RAVALLI CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Location Map

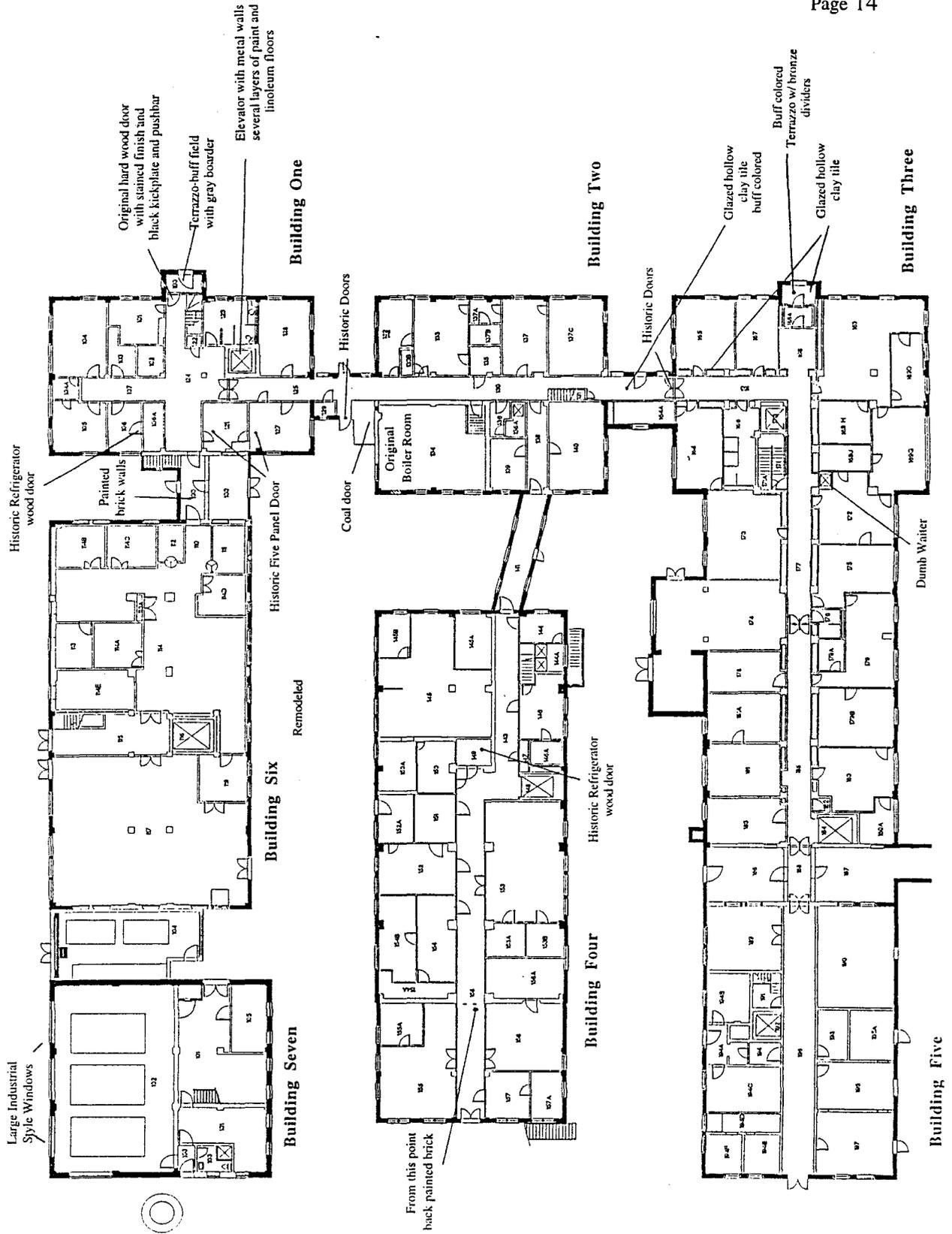


Site Plan

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN LABORATORIES

HABS No. MT-101

Page 14

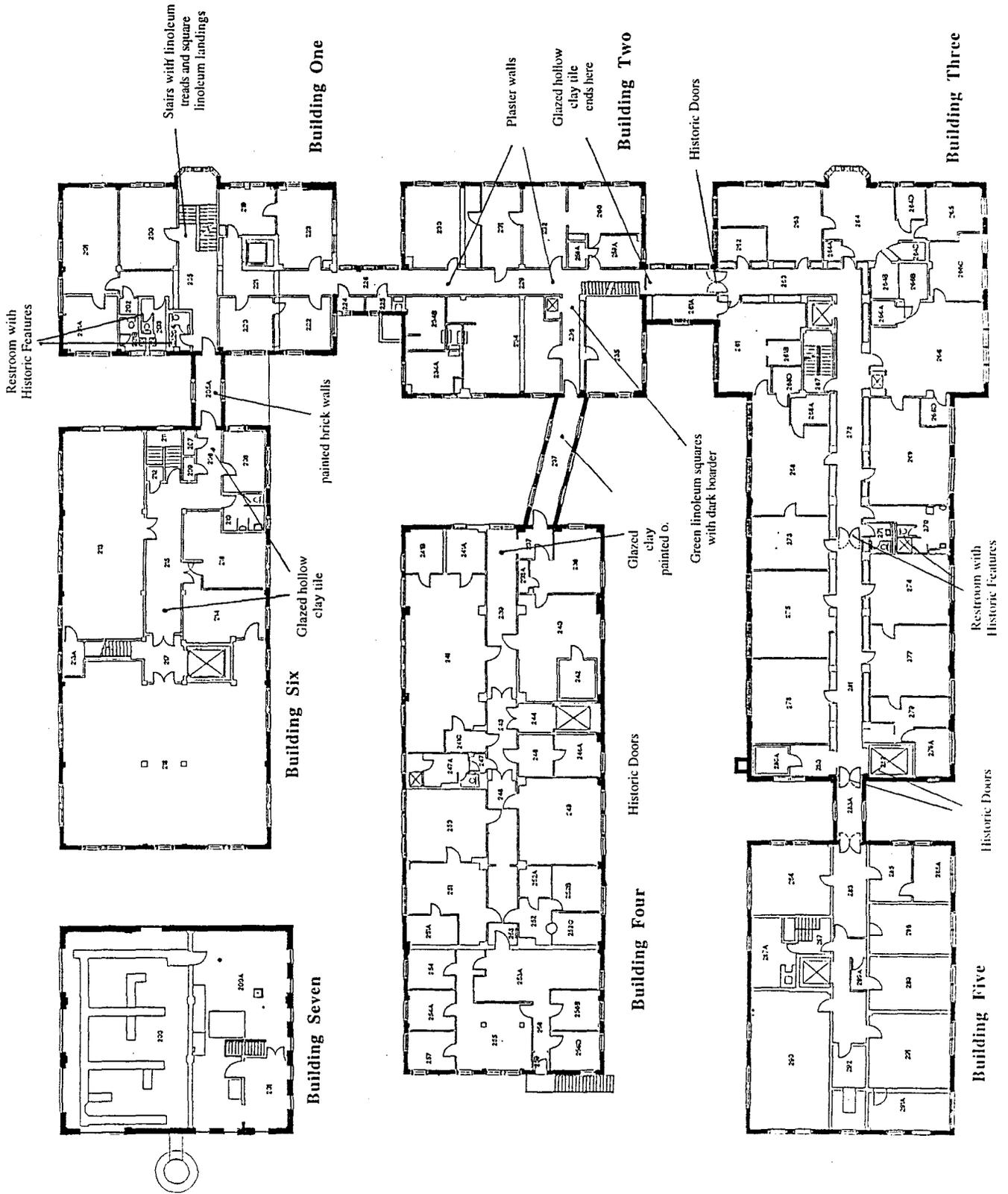


*Ground Floor Plan of Complex*

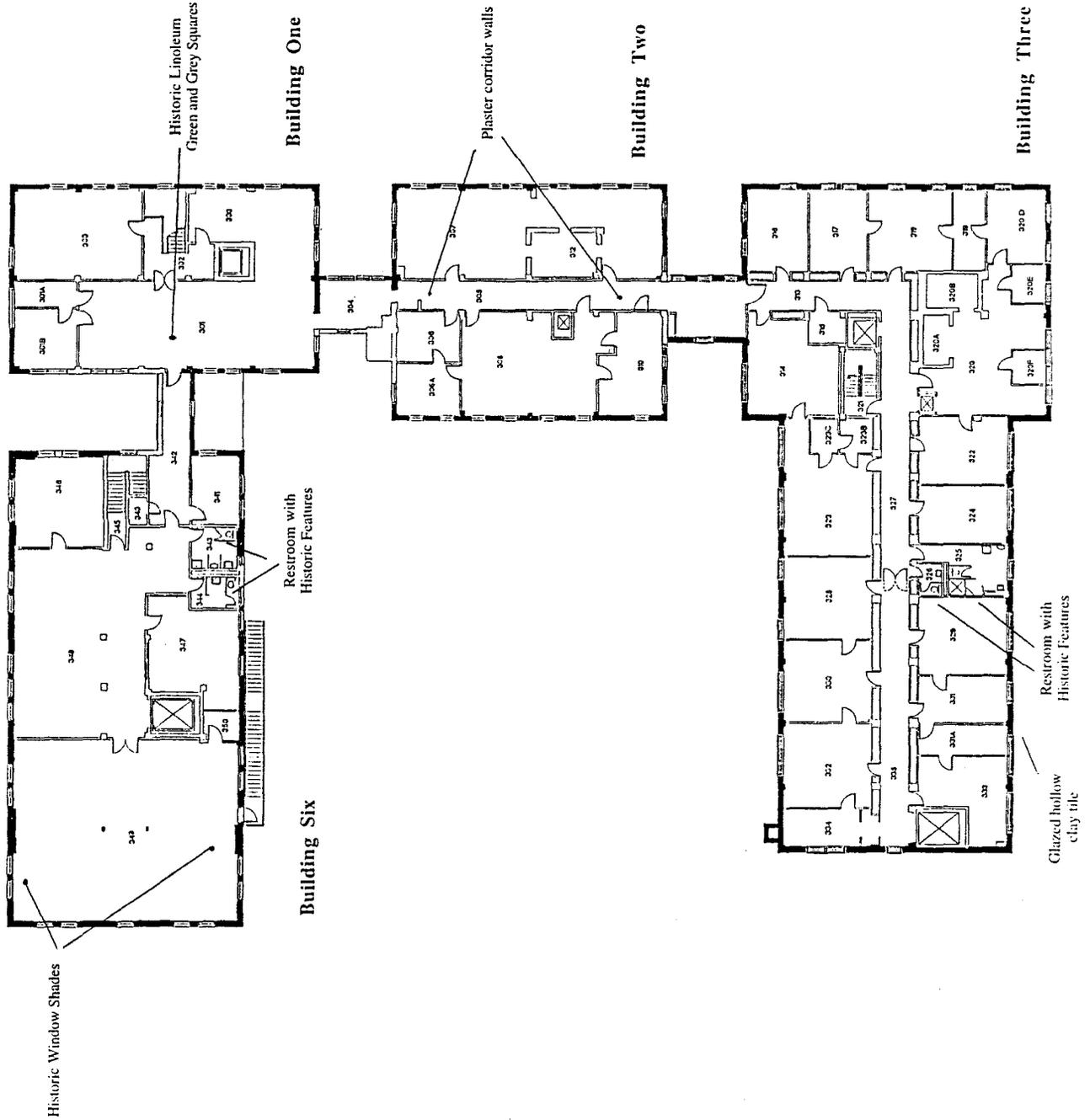
ROCKY MOUNTAIN LABORATORIES

HABS No. MT-101

Page 15



Second Floor Plan of Complex



*Third Floor Plan of Complex*