

Vanport Interpretive Signage Project Spring/Summer 1999

Partners: City of Portland's Bureau of Parks & Recreation and Kaiser Permanente

Description: Students participating in two senior capstone courses (spring and summer, 1999) did historical research, the conceptualization, and graphic design of four Vanport interpretive signs that were to be located at the historic site of Vanport at today's Heron Lakes Golf Course.

Files for this project are no longer available but the following pages include a photograph of a typical sign and two maps that illustrate the types of research and GIS analysis that were done to develop the "Then & Now" maps used in the signs.

For further information, contact Meg Merrick at the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies, PSU: merrickm@pdx.edu; 503.725.8291



KAISER PERMANENTE



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Portland State University Senior Capstone Students

Research Students

- Jason Brown
- Daniel Conover
- Derrick Creecy
- Andrew Dorsey
- Kelli Edner
- Katie Markusen
- Jonathan Marty
- Tyrone Ploch
- Sonja Taylor
- Anop Vixathep
- Edward Waits

Design Students

- Sarah Bagley
- Colin Barey
- Jennifer Combs
- Joshua Hartinger
- Sandra Robert
- John Sbait

Cartographer

Kathy Schneider

“Remember: Dikes are safe at present”

Housing Authority of Portland, Memorial Day, 1948.

A late-melting mountain snowpack caused the rivers of the Northwest to rise dangerously during the spring of 1948. By Memorial Day, Vanport was a full 15 feet below the level of the Columbia River, its “impervious dike” besieged on nearly every side, with the railroad dike in front of you bearing the brunt.

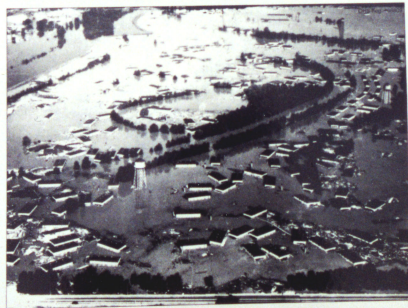
“A City Which Has Everything But a Future”

-Superintendent of Schools, James T. Hamilton

A statement released by the Housing Authority early on Memorial Day stated, “Dikes are safe...don’t get excited.” At 4:17pm that day a break appeared in the western dike, and the flood that would obliterate Vanport began. The force of the flood’s waters swept many of the buildings east to Denver Avenue. Many of Vanport’s residents climbed to the top of the dike before their city disappeared forever beneath the turbid waters of the Columbia. Those who were left stranded on the roofs of their floating apartments were evacuated by human chains and boats.

The vast majority escaped the flood unscathed. The official death toll was 13 people, with seven missing and unaccounted for. The toll on the city was catastrophic. Vanport was completely destroyed, leaving its residents homeless. They were housed temporarily in other areas of Portland. Eventually, many returned to their places of origin. Chief among those who elected to stay were Vanport’s African Americans.

A city that rushed into existence by the necessity of war was destroyed in an instant by the irresistible force of the engorged river.

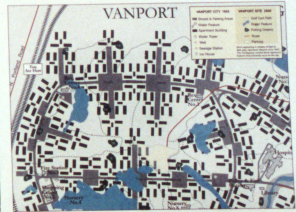


Neighbors help neighbors as they watched their belongings float away.

CHS neg. #6550

A family takes refuge in a Red Cross shelter during the Memorial Day flood.

CHS neg. #6119

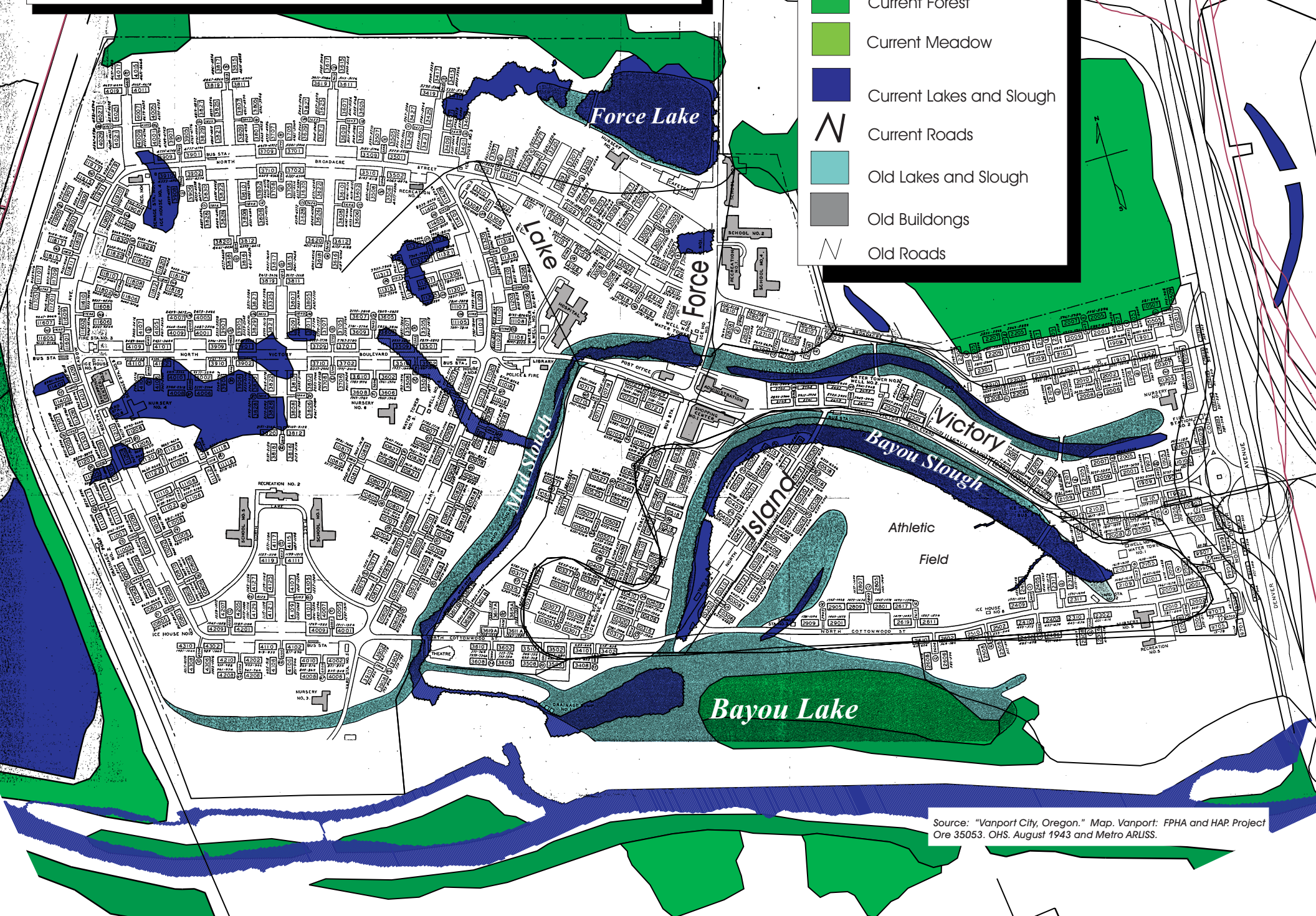


Vanport Past and Present

An overlay of the current area in 1999 on Vanport in 1943

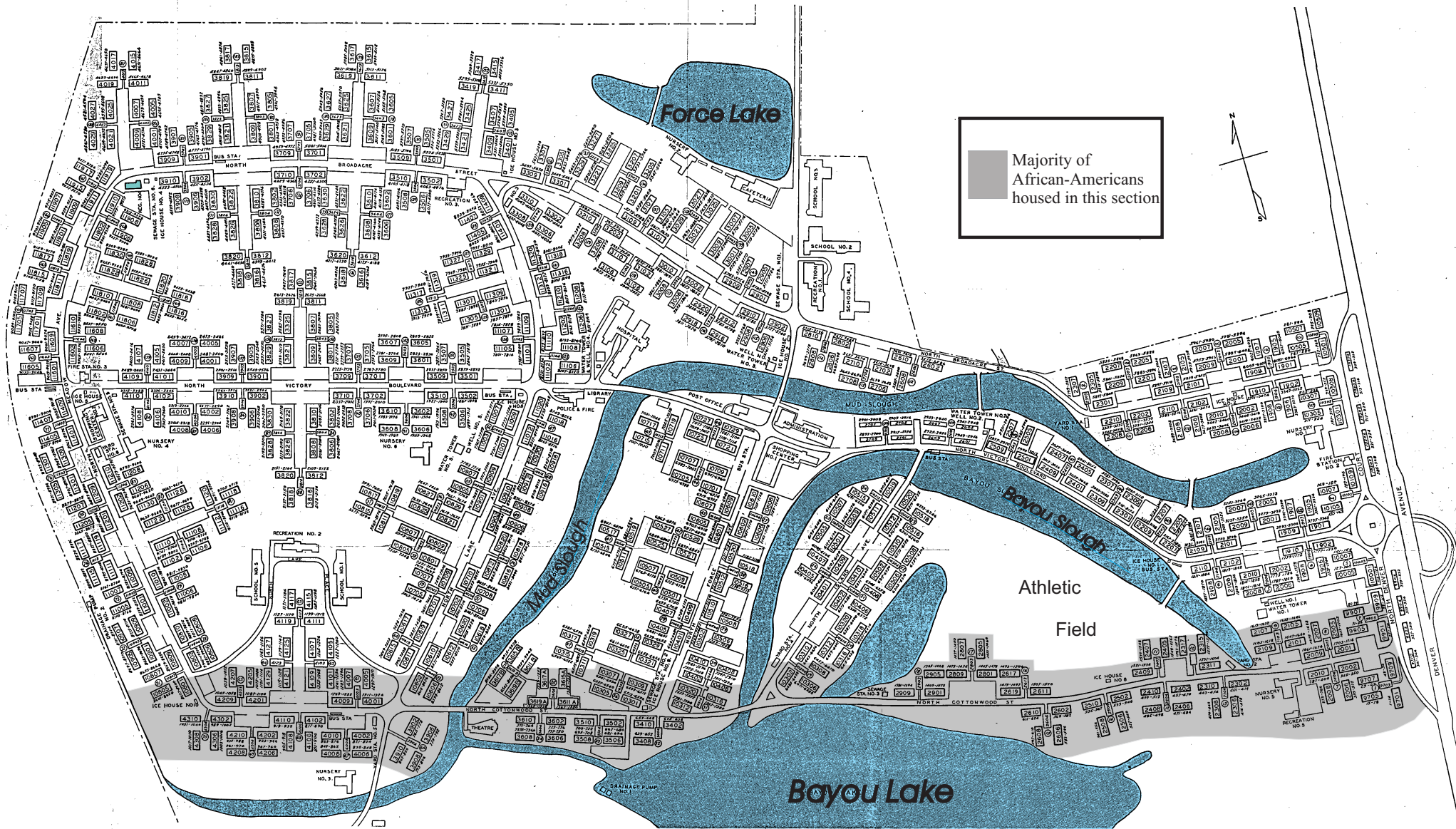
Map Legend

- Current Forest
- Current Meadow
- Current Lakes and Slough
- Current Roads
- Old Lakes and Slough
- Old Buildings
- Old Roads



Source: "Vanport City, Oregon." Map. Vanport: FPHA and HAP. Project Ore 35053. OHS. August 1943 and Metro ARLSS.

Concentration of African-American Housing in Vanport



Note: According to Manly Maben most of the black population was clustered around Recreation Center 5 and on Cottonwood St. There was considerable debate if HAP planned this section. Maben explains, "There was definitely difacto segregation, and in some of the police reports there was mention of "colored section" (Maben, 92).