

An Archaeological-Historical Summary of the Fortwood Historic District

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"Fortwood" is the place-name of a historic district next to the University of Tennessee campus in downtown Chattanooga. In 1979 about half the structures in this neighborhood were included in a National Register of Historic Places district nomination, and in February of this year the City Commission approved Fortwood as a local historic district.¹ The historic district's name is derived from Fort Wood, a Union fortification built in the fall of 1863 following the Battle of Chickamauga. It was originally named Fort Creighton, after Col. William R. Creighton who died fighting in Ringold during November of that year.² Perhaps recognizing the inspirational utility of naming forts after live rather than dead military leaders, the fort was renamed in 1864 after brigadier General Thomas J. Wood. Fort Wood was part of a defensive line of forts, fortified breastworks, and artillery batteries stretching across the eastern and southern approaches to Chattanooga. It was described as being as large as a city block, with a surrounding moat and its own road. This description is confirmed in the 1864 Dorr map,³ which shows a large fortified structure labeled as Fort Creighton situated at the top of a small hill (Figure 1). The fort was demolished in 1888. This is in the same general vicinity as present day Fortwood.

The Dorr Map shown in Figure 1 can be used to more precisely determine the original location of Fort Wood/Creighton and its accompanying fortified breastworks. I have reduced this map onto a transparency at the same scale as the portion of the USGS Chattanooga quadrangle shown in Figure 2. When the transparency is overlaid on the USGS and matched up using Chattanooga Island and the two rail lines near the Fort, the location of the Fort with reference to the present day landscape is revealed. This indicates that the north bastion of the Fort and part of a breastwork extended onto the Erlanger property directly north of the UTC physical plant fronting Fifth Street. In addition to this documentary possibility, I have received reports that relic collectors have removed Civil War artifacts (Minnie balls and a belt buckle) from this same property since it was bulldozed. In all likelihood, the presence of Civil War artifacts and features--perhaps even the basal remains of Fortwood's original Fort--are buried at this site.

Given the archaeological potential of this property, I recommend a thorough professional archaeological survey be carried out prior to any construction activities. I would also note that if a state permitting process was carried out prior to the development of this site, an archaeological survey would be required by state law based on the evidence presented above. This property was included in the Historic District because it is a place possessing a history with special importance

to Chattanooga. I hope that the recent tragedy at this site will not be further compounded by the destruction of significant archaeological resources.

Notes

- 1 Chattanooga Times, 5-16-79, A1; 2-14-90, B3.
- 2 James L. McDonough, Chattanooga: Death Grip on the Confederacy. The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville.
- 3 F. W. Dorr, Chattanooga and It's Approaches, Showing the Union and Rebel works before and during the battles of the 23rd, 24th, and 25th November 1863. Tennessee Valley Authority, Mapping Services Division, Chattanooga.

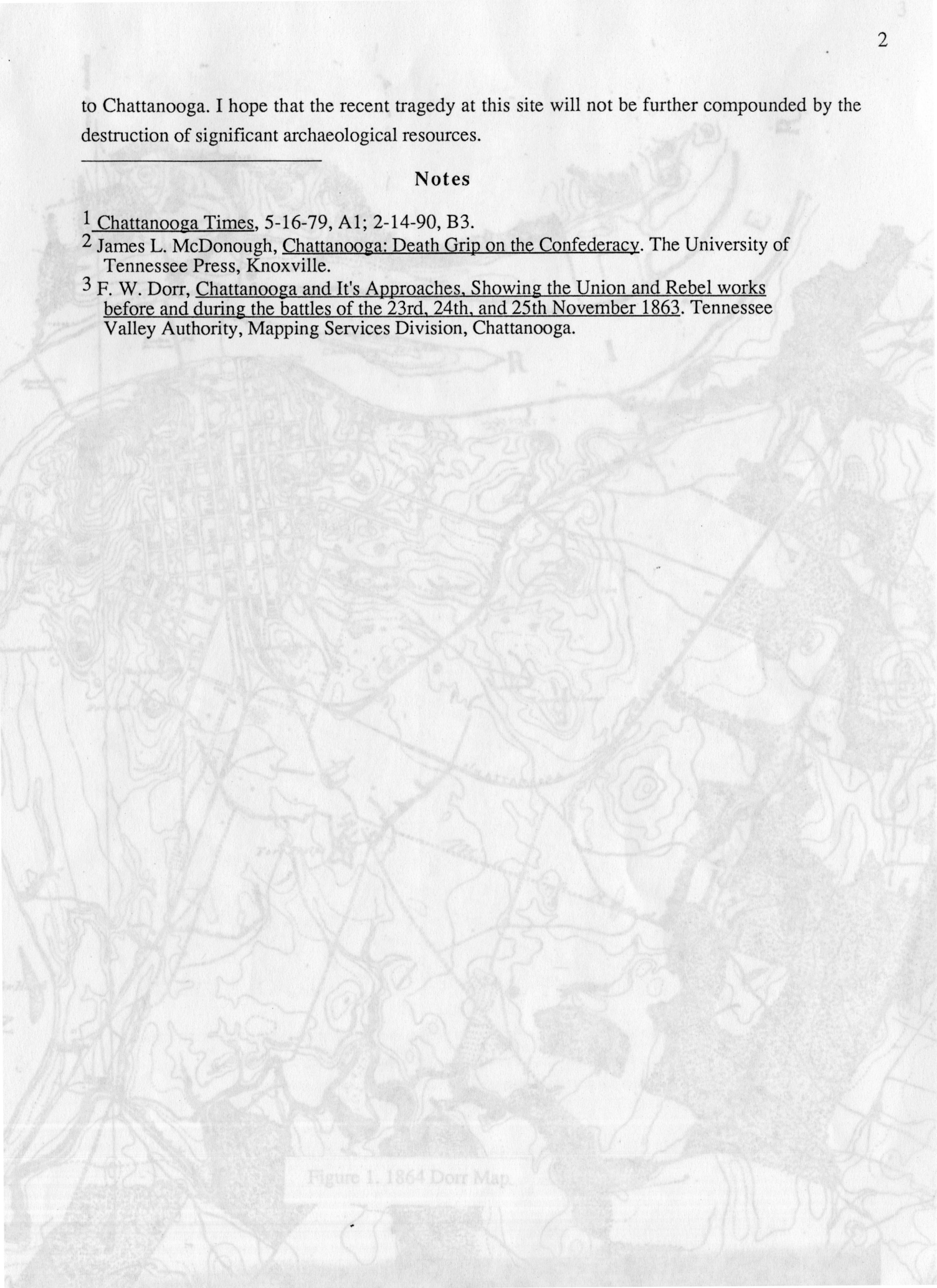


Figure 1. 1864 Dorr Map.

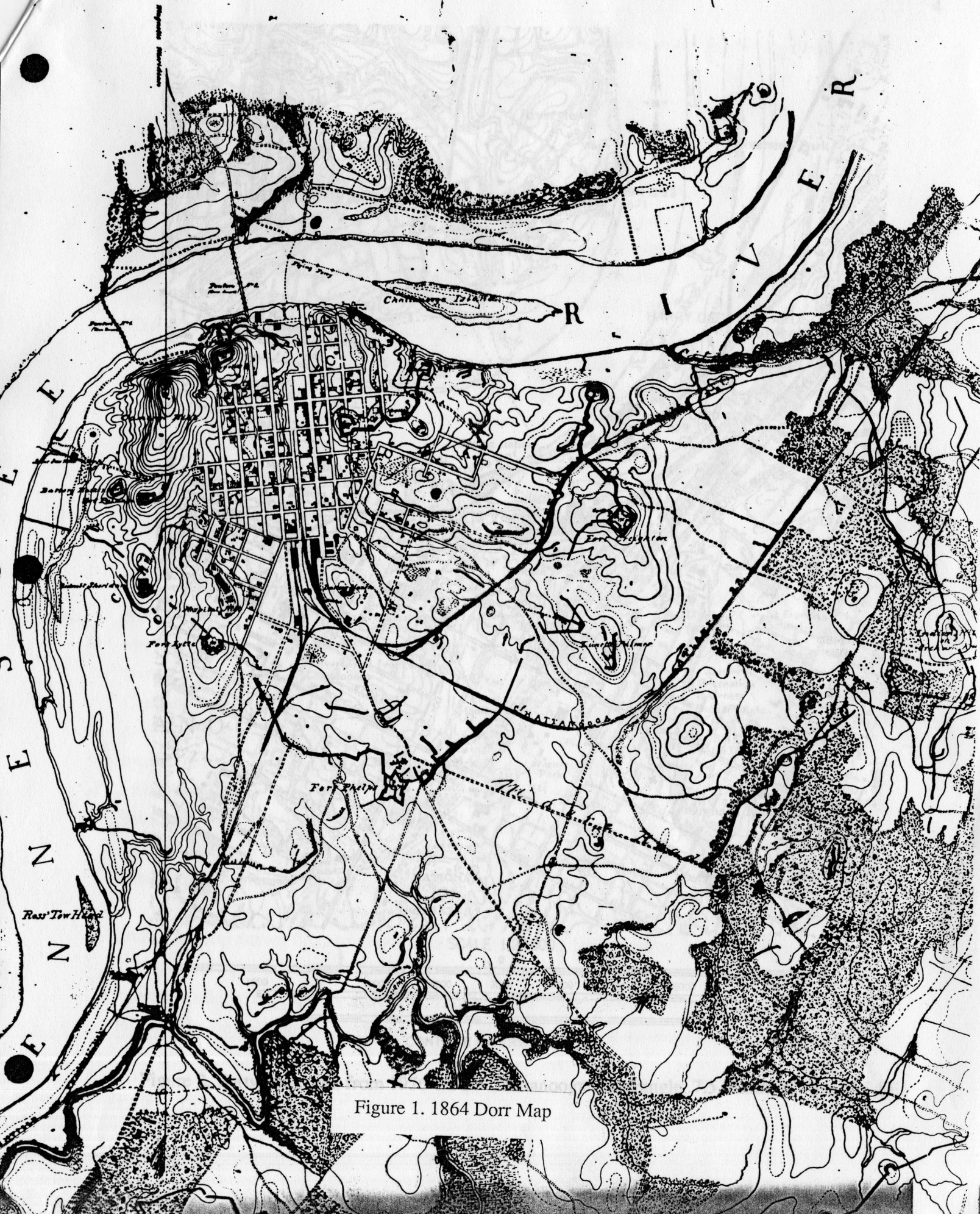


Figure 1. 1864 Dorr Map

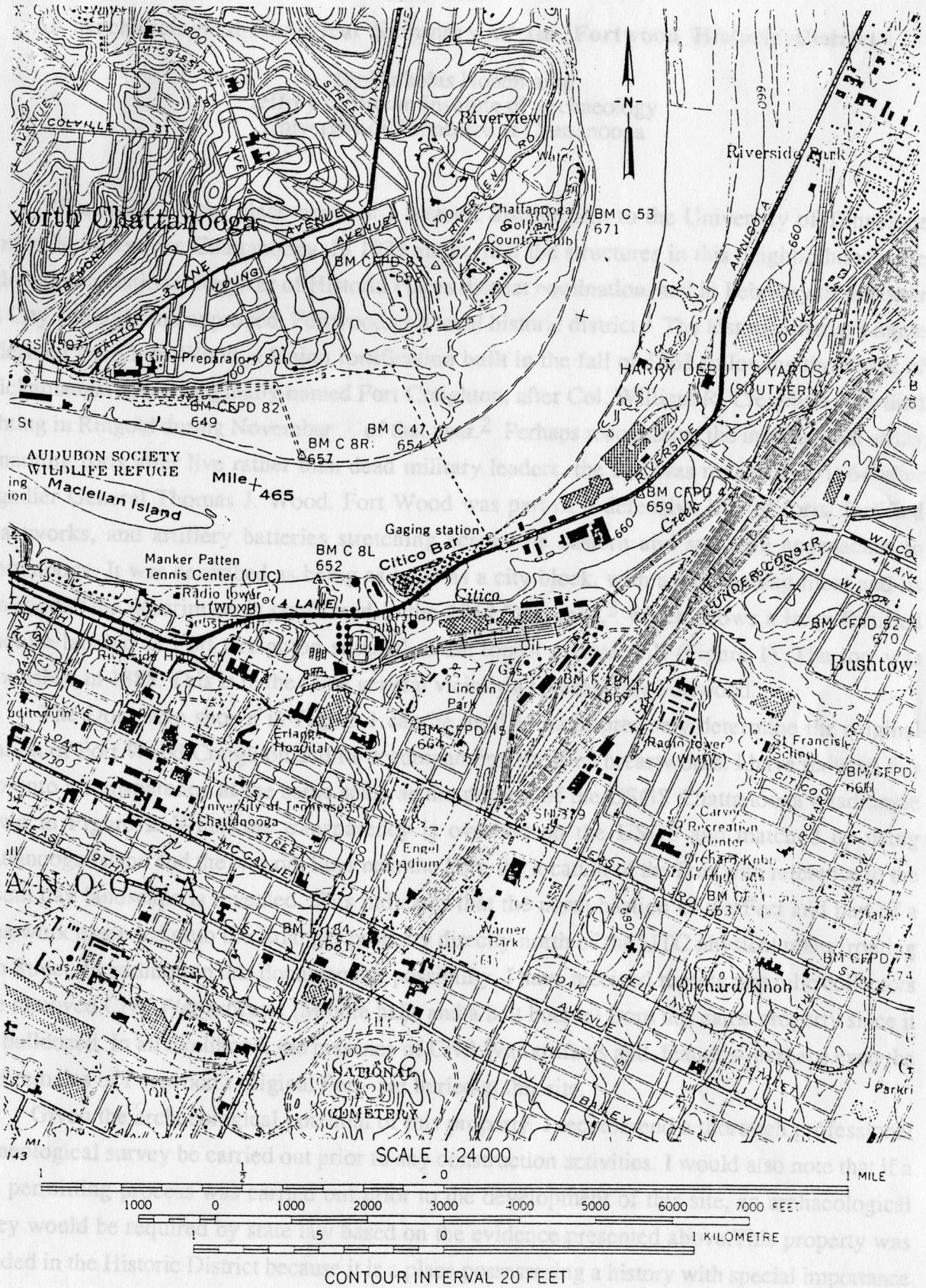


Figure 2. Fortwood Area, from 1976 USGS Chattanooga Quadrangle, 7.5 Minute Series, 105-SE.