

## LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

**Context: Public and Private Institutional Development, 1850-1980**

**Sub-Context: Government Infrastructure and Services, 1850-1980**

**Theme: Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978**



*Prepared for:*

City of Los Angeles  
Department of City Planning  
Office of Historic Resources  
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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>PREFACE</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>HISTORIC CONTEXT</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| The Two Plazas, 1781-1885   | 6         |
| The Pleasure Ground, 1886-1903  | 7         |
| The Municipal Park, 1904-1931   | 11        |
| The Early Playgrounds, 1904-1925  | 18        |
| Playgrounds and Recreation, 1925-1931                                       | 22        |
| Origins of the Recreational Facility during the Great Depression, 1932-1945 | 25        |
| Early Postwar Recreational Facilities, 1945-1956                            | 29        |
| Late Postwar Recreational Facilities, 1957-1978                             | 36        |
| Postwar Golf Courses, 1945-1978   | 40        |
| Hard Time during the 1970s  | 43        |
| <b>CRITERIA FOR MUNICIPAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND LEISURE</b>                | <b>47</b> |
| SUB-THEME: PLEASURE GROUNDS, 1886-1903                                      | 47        |
| SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL PARKS, 1904-1931                                       | 50        |
| SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, 1932-1978                     | 53        |
| SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL PARK BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, AND FEATURES, 1886-1978    | 56        |
| <b>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>  | <b>58</b> |

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### **PREFACE**

This theme of Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure is a component of Los Angeles's historic context statement, and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to this category. Refer to [HistoricPlacesLA.org](http://HistoricPlacesLA.org) for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The theme's areas of significance include Recreation, Community Planning, Social History, and/or Landscape Architecture. Entire parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers may reflect trends in urban park design and/or City planning, and/or be important in the social history of Los Angeles. They may as well be the work of important landscape/golf course/park designers. Individual features may also be significant under the area of Architecture, as excellent examples of particular architectural styles and/or the works of noted architects.

The theme is divided into three sub-themes, in chronological order. Each was an approach to park design that was typical nationwide during a particular period of time.

The first sub-theme is the park as a pleasure ground, and extends from the later 1800s through the turn of the twentieth century. The goal of the pleasure-ground park was the provision of a natural environment, landscaped picturesquely, in which city dwellers could refresh themselves. The park setting on its own was enough to accomplish rejuvenation. Buildings within these pleasure grounds were typically limited to shelter pavilions and boat houses.

In Los Angeles the pleasure ground sub-theme starts in 1886 with the establishment of Elysian Park. Created during the next fifteen years were the city's best-known parks, including Westlake (now MacArthur), Eastlake (now Lincoln), Echo, Hollenbeck, Sunset (now Lafayette), and Griffith. It was also during this time that, in 1889, the City established its Department of Parks.

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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The second sub-theme, the era of the municipal park, begins around 1900 and is defined by a different attitude toward what the public needed. In place of a passive setting for citizens to refresh themselves, the municipal park provided a variety of activities. Within the municipal park officials placed facilities such as ball fields, tennis courts and golf courses, as well as structures for educational and cultural improvement.

The second sub-theme of the municipal park also includes the emergence of the playground. This concept was of a space, separate from the adult-oriented park, in which children could have their natural rowdiness directed in a positive manner under professional supervision. The City created its Playground Department in 1904 and completed its first playground a year later. By 1926, the City operated 44 such playgrounds.

The third sub-theme is the merging of the park and the playground into a hybrid known as the recreational facility. It began with some innovative installations during the 1930s, but was essentially a product of the decade after the Second World War. Its acceptance as the dominant idea was marked in 1947 by unification of the City's separate park and playground bureaus into a single Department of Recreation and Parks.

Funded by two bond issues, in 1947 and in 1957, these recreational facilities varied in scale, from small neighborhood establishments, not much larger than the old playgrounds, to expansive open spaces linked to flood control projects. But the essence of the postwar recreational facility was the belief that every neighborhood should have one and that it should serve all in the neighborhood, regardless of age.

There are several building types associated with parks, recreation, and leisure. They include such traditional structures as boat houses, picnic pavilions, and field houses for athletic events. But there are two that appeared early on and become, in somewhat standardized form, symbolic of parks and recreation in Los Angeles. The first is the club house. It began as a modest structure found in the first playground of 1905, and featured a large meeting space that could house community activities. It grew in size as the playground came to encompass more diverse activities, but its essence remained unchanged well into the postwar period.

The second was the swimming pool bath house. A municipal pool was increasingly a standard item in the larger playgrounds by the mid 1920s, and the accompanying bath house came to join the club house as a significant building type. Like the club house, its size and style varied over time and location, but its essential layout remained unchanged.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### Evaluation Considerations:

The theme of Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure may overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Properties significant for their architectural quality may also be eligible under themes within the Architecture and Engineering context such as Craftsman, Spanish Colonial Revival, Mid Century Modern, and other styles discussed in the narrative below.
- Parks developed in the WWII period may also be discussed in the Residential Development and Suburbanization context within the theme of Post-World War II Suburbanization, 1938-1975 and the sub-theme of Suburban Planning and Development.
- Properties constructed/designed under the WPA may also be significant within the theme of the WPA, 1935-1943, within the sub-context of New Deal Programs.
- Murals, sculptures, and fountains may be individually significant as works of Public Art. Park murals may also be referenced in the Latino Los Angeles Historic Context.  
<http://preservation.lacity.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20Los%20Angeles%20Historic%20Context%20FINAL%209-23-15.pdf>
- Municipal parks generally may also be referenced in the ethnic/cultural contexts developed for SurveyLA (<https://preservation.lacity.org/historic-context>).

### Note on Terms:

The terms park, playground, recreational facility, and recreation center are used in specific ways:

- A park is a public space in which the most important element is the landscape. It is relatively large and may also include fields for sports and other activities. The role of buildings is relatively minor, limited to picnic shelters and service structures. (In some cases, institutional buildings, such as conservatories, theaters, and observatories, were placed in parks, but these buildings are typically individually eligible.)
- A playground is a public space dedicated initially to activities for children. It is relatively small and the landscape is secondary to the built facilities. By the 1920s the term playground was also used for public spaces that contained built facilities used by adults as well as children, such as club houses and swimming pools.
- The recreational facility refers in a general way to a public space that combines elements of the park and the playground into a single entity. It is a term that became common after the Second World War and was used to identify a form that was national in its popularity.
- The recreation center is a precise term eventually used by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks to identify what it had previously called playgrounds. During the 1940s and 1950s both terms were used; by the 1960s recreation center was more common. For clarity the Historic Context uses recreation center when discussing the postwar period.

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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- The term recreation center has also been erroneously used in some sources as the name for the building type correctly referred to as a club house or, occasionally by the 1950s, a community center.

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### **Note on other Department of Recreation and Parks Properties:**

There are a number of unique properties of the Department of Recreation and Parks that are not represented by the sub-themes and resource types presented in this theme. These include designated historic parks and museums, and are listed at the end of the Historic Context.

## **HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Los Angeles, reflecting its Spanish and Mexican heritage, began with two plazas that served as its first public parks. But it soon followed national patterns in park development. From the mid-1880s through the early 1900s the City established parks as lushly landscaped pleasure grounds providing settings for physical relaxation and spiritual refreshment. Then, from the early 1900s through the early 1930s, it converted old and created new parks to give adults places for sports, educational programs, and other activities geared toward physical and social improvement. The City also created playgrounds as separate spaces for children to attain the same goals. Finally, beginning in the 1930s and accelerating after 1945, it combined the adult-oriented parks and child-based playgrounds into a new entity known as the recreational facility. This hybrid provided outdoor activities that served all age groups and could be found in all parts of the City.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### The Two Plazas, 1781-1885

Anglo-American Los Angeles began its life with two public open spaces that it inherited from its period under Spanish and Mexican rule. Both were rather small, in center city locations, and both were eventually treated as urban plazas. But both for a short period served as parks in the traditional sense.



*Plaza Park, photo circa 1890*

*Pico House Hotel on the left, Plaza Church on the right  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Plaza Park (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 64) was the first. It began with the founding of Los Angeles in 1781 as an open public space in the Spanish tradition. When the Anglo-Americans took control in 1848, it was surrounded by the Plaza Church (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 3), its cemetery (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 26), and a number of low adobe buildings.<sup>1</sup>

By 1859 a fence enclosed the open plaza and the private company supplying the city's water had placed an above-ground brick storage reservoir at its center. In 1870, as the Pico House Hotel opened on the south side of the space, the reservoir was removed and a circular formal park bordered by a decorative iron fence took its place. Landscaping consisted of lawns, plants, and four Moreton Bay fig trees.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gleye, *The Architecture of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981), pp. 25, 29; Landmark L.A.: *Historic-Cultural Monuments of Los Angeles*, edited by Jeffrey Herr (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, 2002), pp. 421, 423, 426. The current plaza is the third location. The first two were abandoned because of flooding.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Eventually, the plaza returned to a more urban form, with paving in place of the grass and a bandstand at its center. The fig trees remained.<sup>2</sup>

The other early public space was Central Park, originally known as the Lower Plaza and today's Pershing Square. It was the only remaining unsold parcel of original pueblo land in what was becoming a well-off residential district, and was declared a municipal park in 1866. By 1870 it had been fenced and planted with fruit and forest trees. But the neighborhood soon changed into one of commercial structures. In 1910 the park was transformed into an urban space with walkways and a central fountain.<sup>3</sup>

### The Pleasure Ground, 1886-1903

The park as a pleasure ground was a view common in all parts of the country during the last half of the 1800s. It followed from the nineteenth-century romantic view, expressed by the American Transcendentalist philosophers, that there was innate goodness to be found in a natural setting. Individuals, on their own, could be refreshed and improved simply by experiencing open spaces, well landscaped in an informal picturesque manner. This was particularly true if these individuals were urban dwellers, deprived of nature in their everyday surroundings.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, most of these urban pleasure grounds were artificial products rather than actual natural settings, designed by professional gardeners and planted with species not always native. A water feature was seen as a necessity, with the result that parks were often sited so as to transform a drainage problem into a lake. Within this Arcadian setting were placed pavilions and boat houses, initially in the Stick, Shingle, or Queen Anne styles. Here urbanites could amble, picnic, and perhaps row on the lake.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, there was a pragmatic business side to these pleasure ground parks. They were generally on land that had no profitable use. In some cases they were City property for which there were no buyers. In other cases they were donations of land which developers could not sell. Occasionally they were undesirable parcels surrounded by profitable properties. Developers hoped that a publicly-run park would eliminate what was an eyesore and in turn make their holdings more desirable. In still other cases, they were privately developed oases, originally created to entice potential buyers to adjacent lots, and then turned over to the City to maintain.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gleye, *The Architecture of Los Angeles*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Gleye, *The Architecture of Los Angeles*, pp. 33, 109-112.

<sup>4</sup> Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 3-59.

<sup>5</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, pp. 3-59.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Eberts, "Recreation and Parks" in *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History, 1850-2000* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Historical Society, 2007), p. 590. By 1977 about one third of the parks were on donated land, one third on land first acquired by the City for other purposes, and one third on land purchased through bonds approved by the voters. See George Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks* (Los Angeles: Public Services Publications, 1977), p. VI.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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*Hollenbeck Park, photo circa 1900*

*Boyle Heights*

*(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Los Angeles had a number of these man-made pleasure ground parks, including Westlake (today's MacArthur), Eastlake (today's Lincoln), Hollenbeck, Echo, and Sunset (today's Lafayette). But the city also had a second type, the wilderness park. Two fit this category, Elysian and Griffith. Even though sections were eventually developed along the lines of the more traditional pleasure ground, these wilderness parks maintained sections that were actually nature as found.

Aside from the two inherited plazas, Elysian was the city's first park. It consisted of 550 acres located to the north of the historic city center. The acreage was part of the original pueblo grant but was considered too hilly to be of worth to developers. It officially became a municipal park in April of 1886. To make it accessible Buena Vista Street – now North Broadway – was extended to its southern edge.<sup>7</sup>

Elysian Park was also the site of the Buena Vista Reservoir, the construction of which began in 1870. This was the city's first reservoir placed at an elevation high enough so as to provide adequate pressure to propel water through a system of below-grade pipes. An intake along the river drew water and delivered it to the reservoir, originally by means of a water wheel and later by pumps. (The original reservoir no longer exists. But a subsidiary built in 1903 and named the Elysian Reservoir remains north of the Arroyo Seco Parkway).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 595-596.

<sup>8</sup> "Early Los Angeles Water Reservoirs" and "Water in Early Los Angeles," Water and Power Associates website, [www.waterandpower.org/museum](http://www.waterandpower.org/museum), accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Acquired in 1887, Westlake, now MacArthur, became the second of the city's parks (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 100). It also began as land seen as worthless to developers, due to its swamp-like character. It remained a City-owned parcel surrounded by subdivisions, the merchants of which were anxious to eliminate it as a drawback to sales. A number of leading citizens of the district offered to provide five thousand dollars. The City put in an equal amount, declared the swamp a park and created a lake to control the marsh-like conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Eastlake, now Lincoln, Park came two years later. It too was on land originally owned by the City, in this case turned over to the Southern Pacific Railroad which decided not to use it. In 1889 the City demanded the return of the acreage, and the railroad deeded it back to the City for use as a park. Eastlake Park, in what was then called East Los Angeles and is now Lincoln Heights, became the most popular of the city's early pleasure grounds because of its good streetcar connections. It soon had surrounding it private entertainments with rides and carnival attractions.<sup>10</sup>

As with Westlake Park, Eastlake had a lake, per the common practice for pleasure grounds. In addition to their scenic value, the two park lakes served as storage reservoirs for the city's zanja water distribution system. Under Spanish and Mexican rule water was delivered from the Los Angeles River to residents through zanjias, or open trenches. Anglo-American water companies replaced the zanjias with underground lines, first hollowed logs in the 1850s and then iron pipes in the late 1860s. But the zanjias remained in place until 1903 as a means of delivering non-potable water for irrigation.<sup>11</sup>

The zanjias system allowed the early parks to develop into picturesque landscapes. Maintaining the lawns and plantings in what is essentially a semi-desert environment required a great deal of water, and the zanjias supplied it. During the summer months, when zanja water was limited, the parks relied on their lakes which often reached alarmingly low levels during hot spells. It was not until the parks were connected to the newly municipalized water system in 1904 that a reliable source of irrigation was put in place.<sup>12</sup>

The next acquired was Echo Park (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 836), established in 1891 to the northwest of Downtown. It was the result of a failed private water delivery project. Its lake was created in 1870 by entrepreneurs who intended to use it as a source of domestic water for the adjacent lots they had developed. The entrepreneurs built an earthen dam across the Arroyo de los Reyes, dug a canal to

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<sup>9</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 593-594.

<sup>10</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 594-595; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Recreation and Parks Department, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> "Early Los Angeles Water Reservoirs," "Water in Early Los Angeles," "Zanja Madre – LA's Original Aqueduct," and "Zanjeros, 1781-1903," Water and Power Associates website, [www.waterandpower.org/museum](http://www.waterandpower.org/museum), accessed October 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, p. 81; *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1902, July 26, 1903, December 23, 1904.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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the Los Angeles River, and flooded the ravine. In 1891 the company donated the reservoir and land around it to the City.<sup>13</sup>

Two other landscaped pleasure grounds also came from donations. Hollenbeck Park in Boyle Heights was a gift from Elizabeth H. Hollenbeck and William H. Workman in honor of Hollenbeck's late husband John Edward Hollenbeck, an early developer of the district. It opened in 1892. Sunset, now Lafayette, Park on Wilshire Boulevard at the border between the Westlake and Wilshire districts, was donated to the City in 1895. At the time of the gift the site was covered with depleted oil wells and tar seeps and seen as worthless for private development.<sup>14</sup>

The true exception among these early parks – in size and remoteness – was Griffith (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942). The land consisted of a mountainous tract a mile outside the city limits and far from any streetcar service. Its primary advantage was its waterfront along the Los Angeles River. Colonel Griffith J. Griffith, a real estate investor who owned the land, tried various schemes to make it profitable, but ended up donating its 3015 acres to the City in December of 1896. The City Council deliberated for fifteen months before deciding to accept the gift as Griffith Park.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike many other cities, Los Angeles did not turn to well-known landscape architects to lay out its pleasure grounds. Instead, both design and management came from the City's Department of Parks, established in 1889. The Department was overseen by a Parks Commission that consisted of four appointed citizens, with the mayor as the fifth member and ex-officio president.<sup>16</sup>

Two individuals appear to have been particularly influential in matters of design. The first was William H. Workman, one of the donors of Hollenbeck Park. In addition to being a significant property developer, particularly in Boyle Heights, Workman was mayor from December 1886 through December 1888. It was under his administration that Westlake Park was acquired. Subsequently, Workman served during the 1890s as one of the Park Commissioners.<sup>17</sup>

The second was Louis Le Grande, who occupied the position of City Gardener and was, as well, periodically one of the Park Commissioners. Le Grande's association with the City continued until 1904.

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<sup>13</sup> "Early Los Angeles Water Reservoirs," Water and Power Associates website, [www.waterandpower.org/museum](http://www.waterandpower.org/museum), accessed October 2017; Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 597-598.

<sup>14</sup> Historic Resources Survey Report, Boyle Heights Community Plan Area, SurveyLA; "Lafayette Park," Los Angeles Conservancy web site, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/lafayette-park>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Los Angeles had to administer it through a special state law that allowed the City to control property beyond its borders. See Michael Eberts, *Griffith Park: A Centennial History* (Los Angeles: The Historical Society of Southern California, 1996), p. 70; Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 596-597; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 7. The only exception to in-house design was Holmby Park, given to the City in 1926 by the developers of nearby Westwood. The design has been attributed to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. See Historic Districts, Planning Districts, and Multi-Property Resources Report, Westwood, SurveyLA.

<sup>17</sup> James Strawn, "Who's Park: An Architectural History of Westlake-MacArthur Park" (Master of Historic Preservation Thesis, University of Southern California, 2008), pp. 2, 17.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Workman and Le Grande are known to be responsible for the layouts of Westlake, Eastlake, and Echo Parks. Given Workman's association with Hollenbeck Park, it is possible that the two are responsible for it as well.<sup>18</sup>

By 1903 the Department managed twelve parks. In addition to Plaza, Central, Westlake, Elysian, Eastlake, Hollenbeck, Echo, Sunset, and Griffith, they included Prospect Park, a small enclave in Boyle Heights; St. James Place, another small space south of Downtown; and South Park, a twenty-acre undeveloped space acquired in 1898 and bounded by San Pedro Street on the West, Avalon Boulevard on the east, 49<sup>th</sup> Street on the north and 51<sup>st</sup> Street on the south.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these twelve municipal parks, there was a thirteenth pleasure ground within the city limits. This was Exposition Park, located south of the central business district. Unlike the others, it was not owned by the City. It began as a private space known as Agricultural Park and contained functions, such as a racetrack, considered somewhat unseemly. It ended up under the control of a state agency and contains to this day many institutions thought of as part of the City, but most of which belong to other entities.<sup>20</sup>

### The Municipal Park, 1904-1931

The municipal park as a concept is the product of the Progressive Era reforms of the early 1900s. In place of the pleasure ground, with its passive enjoyment of the landscape, the municipal park was to be a place of activity. This could take the form of educational or cultural programs, in structures specifically designed to house them, or the provision of open spaces for outdoor activities, the practice of which would lead to better health and, it was hoped, more sportsmanlike behavior.<sup>21</sup>

In Los Angeles there were three types of facilities placed within the existing pleasure grounds, in an effort to transform them into more up-to-date municipal parks. The first were those cultural and educational institutions that were seen as required of any major metropolis. These ranged from the Eastlake Park Conservatory to the Griffith Park Zoo. The second were what can best be described as adult playgrounds, from horseshoe pitches to golf courses. The third were special facilities for which the wilderness parks supplied adequate space and an appropriately rugged landscape. These included the long gone Auto Tourist Camp in Elysian Park and the Boys and Girls Camps in Griffith Park, which still function.

The period of time during which these facilities were created is best divided into two segments. The first extends from the early 1900s to around 1920. It was during this period that the streetcar

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<sup>18</sup> Strawn, "Who's Park," pp. 2, 17, 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1903

<sup>20</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," pp. 598-600.

<sup>21</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, p. 61.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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dominated transportation within the City, and easy access to a trolley stop was necessary for a municipal park to flourish. The second covers the period from about 1920 through the Depression years of the 1930s. It was during this period that automobile ownership became widespread and parks distant from the streetcar lines were now accessible.

Eastlake was the first to be transformed into a municipal park, while Westlake, Echo, and Hollenbeck Parks remained closer to their original configurations as pleasure grounds. Eastlake was larger than the others. It had a good streetcar connection, as it was located at the end of what was called the Maple Avenue and Eastlake Park Line. This line traveled along North Main Street between Downtown and the park, and the trolley ran every seven minutes during regular hours. Also, by 1905, the City had plans to pave North Main Street from the Los Angeles River to the park, making the route suitable for both carriages and the still rare but increasingly numerous automobiles.<sup>22</sup>



*New conservatory, circa 1914  
Eastlake (Lincoln) Park  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

As early as 1903 the *Los Angeles Times* noted that two attractions, its conservatory and its zoo, set Eastlake apart from the other parks. Both had origins that predated the turn of the century. The conservatory began in 1892 as a modest wood-framed greenhouse structure. By 1899 the park had a menagerie of forty-four different species.<sup>23</sup>

Of these two attractions, the conservatory was in the end more successful. By 1904 the existing wood-framed greenhouse was called “utterly inadequate” and the City Council passed a resolution calling for a replacement.<sup>24</sup> But it took eight years of effort by supporters of an enlarged facility to succeed.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1910, the area of Eastlake was 56 acres, Westlake 35 acres, Echo 33 acres, and Hollenbeck 26 acres. On street improvement see *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1905. On streetcar schedule see “Young’s Los Angeles Cal. City Railway Directory,” 1904 edition.

<sup>23</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1899, August 19, 1901, May 17, 1903, July 17, 1904.

<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1904.

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1906, June 6, 1909.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Finally, in 1912, the Park Commission began work on an imposing three-winged brick, concrete and steel structure, with glass roofs, that the *Times* labeled “a plant palace.”<sup>26</sup> (The structure still exists but has been added to and extensively altered and no longer retains integrity.)

Along with the construction of the new conservatory came plans to move Eastlake Park away from its older emphasis on a picturesque landscape, and toward more space for activity. The length of the road through the park, created to allow for carriage drives, would be shortened. The lake was to be made smaller and its ornamental bridge removed. The picnic grounds and other open spaces would be doubled in size. Plans also called for the removal of the zoo.<sup>27</sup>

The menagerie, known by 1901 as the Eastlake Park Zoo, had been a problem from its beginning. Most of the animals had been donated to the City. The practice of containing these donations in cages within parks was apparently not limited to Eastlake, but its collection was the one that became permanent. As early as 1900 it had about 75 animals, including bears housed in a log cabin. A row of new cages was added and improvements made to the bear den in 1902.<sup>28</sup>

Within two years, in 1904, all this was judged inadequate and torn down. The “rickety, patched-up old cages that have disgraced Eastlake Park for a long time” were replaced by “orderly, new apartments that now circle an attractive enclosure.”<sup>29</sup> Yet within three years, in 1907, these new quarters were labeled “Torture Dens for Animals” and “an antiquated disgrace to the City.”<sup>30</sup> The *Times* advocated a move out of Eastlake. “If a zoological garden comparable to those maintained in other large cities is desirable, it must be elsewhere than in any of the smaller parks.”<sup>31</sup> But it took five more years before the move to Griffith Park began.<sup>32</sup>

Based on abundance of space and convenient access to a streetcar line, Elysian was also a logical choice for transformation into a municipal park. However it remained a difficult place to refashion. The shape of the park was such that its bulk lay far to the northwest of the North Broadway trolley line at its entrance. This odd shape combined with its rugged terrain to keep it primarily wilderness. In addition, according to the *Times*, people liked it the way it was and schemes to improve it beyond its “semi-wild

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<sup>26</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1912. Eastlake in addition obtained a notable carousel in 1914, two years after the proposed changes. Its site is L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 153. See *Landmark L.A.*, p. 433.

<sup>28</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1900; February 17, 1902; September 6, 1902; September 11, 1902. Note was made of caged animals kept in Westlake/MacArthur Park as well. See *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1901.

<sup>29</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1904.

<sup>30</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1907.

<sup>31</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1907.

<sup>32</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1912. What later became commonly known as the Lincoln Park Zoo was a different entity. It was a privately-owned facility adjacent to the park that was established as the Selig Zoo in 1915. It was renamed the Luna Park Zoo in 1925, the L.A. Wild Animal Farms in 1931, the California Zoological Gardens in 1932, and the Zoopark in 1936. It closed in 1940. Data from Historical Notes to “Zoopark arcades and plaza” photograph, order number 00098538, Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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state” met with political opposition.<sup>33</sup> Facilities were limited to a few picnic grounds accessed by unpaved roads and hiking trails. Apart from that it was best known as the location of the Park Department’s nursery for cultivating plants to be used throughout the system.<sup>34</sup>



*Auto Camp, photo circa 1926  
Elysian Park  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

But Elysian Park changed with the growing use of the passenger car. In 1920 it took on a specialized function as the site of the municipal automobile tourist camp. A publicly-owned camp ground for motorists was by then a fairly common facility, and several cities in California had established one. Los Angeles had allowed for overnight stays in Garvanza’s Sycamore Grove. But the Southern California Auto Club insisted that the city needed a better facility. The Auto Club proposed Elysian Park, because it was close to Downtown attractions while remote enough to provide a rustic experience.<sup>35</sup>

The camp opened in July of 1920. It contained about eighty campsites and provided facilities with running water and electricity. It also charged admission, a rarity for municipal camp grounds. Park officials maintained that the auto camp was self-sustaining, and in 1924 it supposedly made a profit.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1903.

<sup>34</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1903.

<sup>35</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1918; January 12, 1919; October 17, 1919. Los Angeles acquired Sycamore Grove as a park in 1904.

<sup>36</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1920; February 2, 1922; January 2, 1924.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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By the late 1920s, however, municipal auto camps everywhere were in decline. They faced increasing competition from private camps, which in the case of Los Angeles were clustered in Highland Park and Lincoln Heights, and later from tourist cabins within the private camps. Eventually the Elysian Park Auto Camp was abandoned and, in 1932, the site was turned over to the Boy Scouts.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to Elysian, Griffith Park offered enough relatively level land to serve as a site for municipal facilities. But the problem of its isolation remained. It was not until 1910 that the East Hollywood Annexation brought the district to the south of the park into the City. This allowed the City to improve the streets reaching it. It also made municipal water available.<sup>38</sup>



*Entrance at today's Crystal Springs and Griffith Park Drives, circa 1920*

*Griffith Park*

*(Los Angeles Public Library)*

But the development of Griffith Park remained slow for the next decade. Like Elysian, Griffith was primarily for those with automobiles. Streetcar service was too distant. Private bus and jitney service schemes were tried but none lasted. It was not until 1919 that the City established a municipal bus line that ran north on Vermont to reach the park entrance. By that time, the passenger car was common enough so as to render the public transit connection secondary.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1932. One of the private alternatives in Los Angeles was the Monterey Auto Camp, on the southern edge of Highland Park. It began as a campground in 1923 and eventually included cabins for rent. Later the site became the Monterey Trailer Park and under that name is L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 736.

<sup>38</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1919.

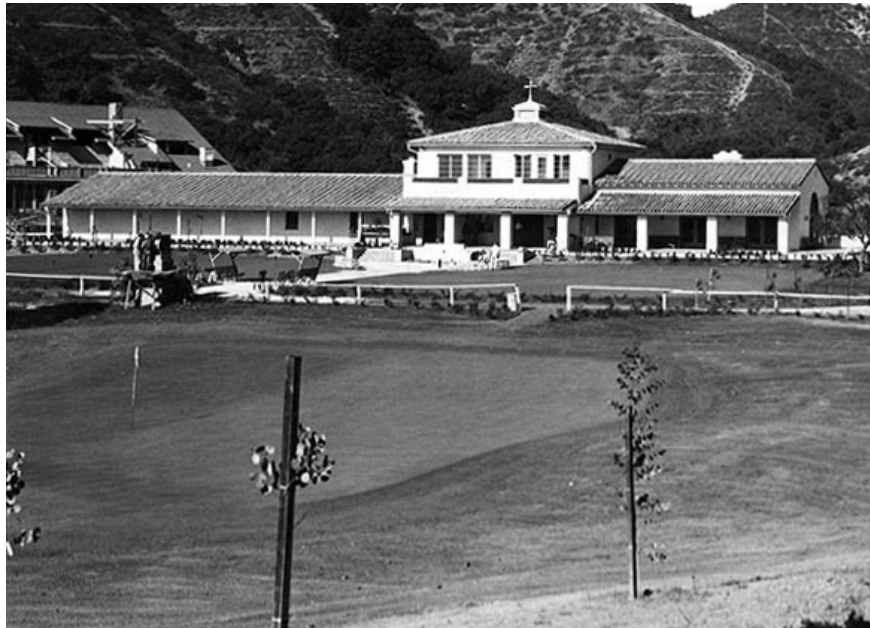
## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Aiding in this automobile access was improvement of the streets to the park. Rights of way for entrances at Vermont and Western Avenues were pursued in 1911, a year after annexation. The next year, 1912, Vermont was widened and paved from Sixth Street north to the park. But the park itself, including the roads within, remained primitive. The most used route into the park in the early years remained the eastern road that today consists of Crystal Springs and Griffith Park Drives.<sup>40</sup>

This eastern side of Griffith, with relatively level land along the riverside, was the first to receive two functions of the municipal park concept, the golf course and the zoo. The zoo's move from Eastlake Park began in 1912 and was completed in 1913, but its conditions remained unsatisfactory until the early 1920s. These improvements, however, were still below the standards of other municipal zoos. It was not until the Depression of the 1930s and the activities of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that the zoo was able to house itself in a respectable setting.<sup>41</sup>



*Franklin D. Roosevelt golf course and club house, photo circa 1937*

*Griffith Park*

*(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Unlike the zoo, which was unique, the Griffith Park golf course was a function that was later adopted for other sites throughout the City. The first course was a primitive affair that began as the Riverside

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<sup>40</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 72, 135. The loop road within the park connecting the Vermont and Western entrances, with its tunnel, was not completed until the late 1920s. See Eberts, *Griffith Park*, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 136-138, 155. The WPA constructed zoo was eventually considered outmoded. It closed in 1965 and was replaced by the current Los Angeles Zoo in a different location. But the WPA facilities still exist as a set of ruins.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Course, consisting of dirt fairways and sand greens. It became the City's Griffith Park Golf Links in 1914.<sup>42</sup>

A more elegant course was completed in 1923, and a second course, built on the site of the original links, opened in 1927. The two courses were named for Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Warren Harding. They were both a full eighteen holes, complete with grass fairways and greens. The two were joined in the 1930s by the nine-hole Franklin D. Roosevelt Course, a WPA project, and a new club house, also by the WPA, which replaced an earlier structure.<sup>43</sup>

Both the Wilson and Harding courses were designed by George C. Thomas, Jr., one of the best-known golf course architects of the early twentieth century. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he began his career laying out courses for elite East Coast country clubs and eventually wrote *Golf Course Architecture in America*, which became the standard text for the profession. Thomas moved to California in 1919, and was responsible for, among others, the courses at the Los Angeles, Ojai, Bel-Air, and Fox Hills Country Clubs.<sup>44</sup>

The central section of Griffith Park, at the Vermont Avenue entrance, did not see development until the 1920s. In 1920 and 1921, Van Griffith, a Park Commissioner and son of the park's donor, proposed the creation of facilities in what was known as Vermont Canyon. These were to include picnic grounds and tennis courts. Along with them came improvements to the roads in the central and western parts of the park, in particular the completion in the late 1920s of the loop connecting the Vermont and Western Avenue entrances.<sup>45</sup>

But what most established Griffith as the city's premier municipal park was the construction of two institutions for education and culture, the Greek Theater, and the Observatory (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 168). Unlike other facilities, such as the golf courses and tennis courts, these were unique and not to be duplicated elsewhere. The Greek Theater was the first to be completed. Located in the Vermont Canyon just north of the picnic grounds and the tennis courts, it opened in 1930. Construction of the Observatory depended upon completion of the loop road and a spur leading to its site. It opened in 1935.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, p. 139. The dates for the completion of the courses and names of designers come from the Golf Course Section of the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks website at <http://www.laparks.org>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 141, 155 The nine-hole Roosevelt course has been relocated to a section of the park near the Greek Theater. The eighteen-hole Wilson and Harding courses still exist, as does the club house.

<sup>44</sup> "George C. Thomas, Jr.," [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_C.\\_Thomas\\_Jr.](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/George_C._Thomas_Jr.), accessed October 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 83-85. Tennis courts were also a function that could be found in the later playgrounds, such as the Griffith Park Playground of 1927. See Eberts, *Griffith Park*, p. 143.

<sup>46</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 89-111, 183-190.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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In addition to these typical elements of a municipal park, Griffith, with its many acres of unused land, became the location of various functions, including the city's prison farm and an airstrip. Also placed in Griffith Park was a pair of children's camps. They were co-operative efforts between the Parks Department and the separate Playground Commission, in which Parks provided the facilities and Playgrounds ran them. The Griffith Park Boys Camp opened in 1925 and the Hollywoodland Girls Camp one year later in 1926. Both continue to function.<sup>47</sup>

### The Early Playgrounds, 1904-1925

The playground as a concept, like that of the municipal park, is a product of the Progressive Era and its efforts at social reform. Reformers feared for children growing up in a setting which, they felt, failed to provide the correct upbringing needed for a successful life. The playground, together with the public school, was to substitute for the supervision not found in less well-off neighborhoods.<sup>48</sup> As George Hjelte, later the general manager of playgrounds and recreation, stated, the goal of the playground was the "prevention and control of juvenile delinquency."<sup>49</sup>

The playground was to be a specifically child-oriented environment, and so was physically separated from the park. In place of unsupervised activity, there was to be strict management by trained staff. Organized sports dominated. According to one historian, supervisors "should praise boys and girls for sacrificing themselves for the good of the team, enforce the rules of the game and insist on fair play."<sup>50</sup>

The Progressive faith in this approach was evident in a 1908 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled "To Make Girls and Boys Good." It reported the remarks of the featured speaker at the dedication of the Echo Park Playground club house. "Playgrounds stand for good citizens. They are little republics, and the training a child receives in them is effective throughout life." The speaker went on to talk about the nature of the young males who were a particular concern. "A boy is like a steam engine. He generates much energy that has to be used. The playground is the safety valve. In rubbing against his fellows under good conditions, the boy cultivates good judgment and self-control."<sup>51</sup>

Los Angeles was, in 1904, the first major city in the country to establish a separate Playground Commission. As with many of the Progressive innovations of the day, it came with support of upper- and

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<sup>47</sup> Eberts, *Griffith Park*, pp. 113-123; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 11. Both have been moved from their original sites. See Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, p. 62.

<sup>49</sup> George Hjelte, *The Development of a City's Public Recreation Service, 1904-1962* (Los Angeles: Public Services Publications, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, p. 67. On the separation of the adult-oriented park from the child-oriented playground in Los Angeles see Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, p. 103.

<sup>51</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1908.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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middle-class women's organizations. The most important advocate was Mrs. Arabella Rodman, with the backing of the Ebell Club and similar groups.<sup>52</sup>

The city's first playground was on Violet Street and officially known as Playground Number One. Opened in 1905, it was located in what was then a mixed industrial and low income residential district south of Seventh Street, between Alameda Street and Santa Fe Avenue. The *Los Angeles Times* was blunt in its description of the district. "The Violet-street playground was put down in the midst of the storm center of juvenile offense against the law. The rough, rowdy youths of the neighborhood left nothing undone which their febrile brains could devise to cause trouble to others and their own undoing."<sup>53</sup>

Playground Number One contained separate outdoor spaces for boys and girls, along with an open-sided gymnasium and a bungalow to house an on-site director. The resident director supervised sporting activities, maintained discipline, looked after the grounds, and provided security at night. The *Times* noted that, with this constant supervision, the playground functioned much like the settlement houses found in cities such as New York and Chicago.<sup>54</sup>



*Original Echo Park Playground club house (nearly identical to Violet Street Playground club house)*

*L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 950*

*(Office of Historic Resources)*

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<sup>52</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," p. 601; Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, pp. 102-103; Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 101.

<sup>53</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1906.

<sup>54</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," p. 601; *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1905; May 19, 1905.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Within two years Violet Street added a club house, the first of what became a standard feature of the city's playgrounds. The architectural image of the clubhouse was middle class residential. It was a rectangular single-story Craftsman-style structure, described by the *Times* as "a pretty little bungalow" designed by the firm of Hunt and Eager, which had laid out the playground.<sup>55</sup> The original Echo Park Playground club house (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 950) appears to be a nearly identical reproduction of the same design.<sup>56</sup>

The *Times* also made note of its main meeting room, in particular its link to the Los Angeles Public Library: "This hall is planned by Sumner P. Hunt, unique in its arrangement and designed as a branch library, with book shelves arranged in artistic fashion, and a hall for social diversions, for shelter in rainy weather, and for lectures, stereoptical entertainments and amateur theatricals."<sup>57</sup>



*Club house interior, photo circa 1907  
Violet Street Playground  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

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<sup>55</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1907.

<sup>56</sup> The Echo Park Playground club house differs from the Violet Street club house, as shown in a photograph in the *Los Angeles Times* article of April 3, 1907, only as to the side of the roof ridge through which the chimney extends. It extends upward on the left side on Violet Street and on the right side on Echo Park. The photo in *Times* may have been reversed in printing. There is no lettering on the photo to indicate that it was printed correctly.

<sup>57</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1907.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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An attempt to provide middle-class respectability in décor was evident in the description of this main space. “The interior revealed a little gem of architecture ,” with “burlap curtains in dull tones, walls in leather colors, low bookcases with cheerful windows above, artistic mission bells for lighting, and best of all a fireplace and chimney of brick at one end.” To accommodate presentations, “A raised platform runs across the opposite end of the long room.”<sup>58</sup>

The Violet Street Playground is unfortunately gone. But Playground Number Two in Echo Park remains, albeit in a highly altered form with the Hollywood Freeway (101) bisecting its grounds. Unlike the Violet Street neighborhood, Echo Park was a relatively new district still sparsely settled when construction began in 1908. Its location, adjacent to but separate from an existing park, was a pattern that would be followed elsewhere, most notably with the Griffith Park Playground.

The original plans, following those of Violet Street, called for a gymnasium, a club house, and a residence for the director. The club house, patterned after Violet Street’s, also contained a meeting space with a raised platform. (In 1925 the club house was moved to a new location nearby and later become L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 950.) Soon there followed similar playgrounds, such as the 1907 Solano Playground in Solano Canyon, the 1910 Slauson Playground in Southeast Los Angeles, and the 1911 Hazard Playground, between Boyle and Lincoln Heights.<sup>59</sup>

These early playgrounds were officially open to all, regardless of race or ethnicity. But the background of their users reflected the composition of the neighborhood. A census of playgrounds in 1918 showed that over half of the patrons of Violet Street were of Mexican or some other self-identified “Spanish” background, another quarter Italian, and thirteen percent African American. In contrast, the Echo Park Playground served a population of which sixty-five percent identified themselves as “American” and another fifteen percent as “Jewish.”<sup>60</sup>

Playgrounds soon became common in the denser parts of the city. By 1920 there were twenty-two and by 1925 twenty-seven. Seventeen new playgrounds were added in 1926. At the same time, many of the smaller early playgrounds did not survive. By 1926, half of the city’s first playgrounds had been abandoned, as their neighborhoods lost population and became, like the original Violet Street district, entirely commercial and industrial. A few of the early playgrounds that remained were incorporated into newer and larger entities. Slauson Playground is now part of the Slauson Multipurpose Center, and Hazard Playground is now part of the Hazard Recreation Center.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1907.

<sup>59</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1907; December 22, 1907; January 26, 1908; May 31, 1908; February 25, 1917. *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Wild, *Street Meeting*, p. 102. The numbers are as follows: Violet Street, 1660 total, 829 Mexican, 36 “Spanish,” 415 Italian, 217 African American; Echo Park, 1087 total, 706 “American,” 167 “Jewish.” See Wild, *Street Meeting*, p. 103.

<sup>61</sup> Eberts, “Recreation and Parks,” p. 604; *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1926.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### Playgrounds and Recreation, 1925-1931

By the mid 1920s the focus of the Playground Commission had changed. Rather than look to amusement and improvement of children alone, it increasingly concerned itself with activities for adults as well. This concern had always been present in the programming provided in the club houses. But increasingly there was a desire to cater to the need of adults for outdoor activity, or as it was becoming known, recreation.

The commission acknowledged this enlarged mission by changing its name in 1925 to the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation. Aiding in the refocus was the passage of a bond issue for playground construction in 1923, amounting to one-and-one half million dollars. The increased concern for adult recreation, accompanied by greater financial resources, manifested itself in three ways. The first was the growing size and programmatic complexity of the club house. The second was the increasing number of municipal swimming pools. The third was the establishment of city beaches.<sup>62</sup>



*Playground and new club house from the southeast, photo circa 1937*

*Echo Park Playground  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The changing nature of the club house can be seen in the new facility for Echo Park. By 1924 the existing club house was considered inadequate. Echo Park residents, whose groups used its meeting space, petitioned the City Council for a new building. In June of that year the City approved the construction of a new club house and awarded the commission to the Allied Architects' Association, a cooperative that did a good deal of the City's work. The architects produced a design that the Playground Commission saw as the first of a series of similar structures.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1929; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1924; April 10, 1924; April 26, 1924; June 20, 1924; November 24, 1924; April 12, 1925.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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The new club house was completed in 1926 and still stands, if somewhat altered. It was described as “an attractive building” in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, and was “the first of several structures to be erected in various parts of the City.”<sup>64</sup> It is constructed of brick covered in stucco and topped by a clay tile roof. Because of the sloping site, it is single story facing Bellevue Avenue and two stories in the rear. The lower level, opening to the playground, contained separate lockers and shower rooms for men and women, while the upper floor had a large meeting room, complete with stage and surrounded by supporting spaces.<sup>65</sup>

As with the club house, the municipal swimming pool, or plunge as it was popularly known at that time, was a playground facility that served all ages. The first was actually an acquired private pool that opened in 1914 at Vignes and Ducommen Streets. By 1920 it had been joined by the North Broadway Playground Plunge in Lincoln Heights. Within nine years there were ten pools at various playgrounds, including Fernangeles in Sun Valley, Evergreen in Boyle Heights, Central in Southeast Los Angeles, and Yosemite in Eagle Rock. The North Hollywood Playground plunge from 1929, together with its bath house, is a generally intact example of these early pools.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1925.

<sup>65</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 16; 1925, November 22, 1925. See also Hjelte, *The Development of a City's Public Recreation Service*, pp. 5-8. Hjelte notes that an all-purpose room, rather than a larger and higher gymnasium space, was seen as appropriate in that nearby schools contained such facilities.

<sup>66</sup> “Background” at <http://www.laparks.org/aquatic/poolsReport04/background>, accessed October 2017; Eberts, “Recreation and Parks,” p. 604; *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1920, August 2, 1930. The North Broadway Playground is now the Downey Recreation Center. On the North Hollywood bath house see the North Hollywood Park entry in the Historic Districts, Planning and Multi-Property Resources, North Hollywood-Valley Community Plan Area, SurveyLA.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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*Swimming pool and bath house, photo circa 1939  
Griffith Park Playground  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The largest and best known was the plunge at the Griffith Park Playground. The playground itself was intended to be the city's finest. As early as 1925 the Allied Architects' Association was preparing plans for a twenty-two acre site the City had acquired adjacent to Griffith Park, southeast of the intersection of Los Feliz Boulevard and Riverside Drive.<sup>67</sup>

The playground was to include a pool and bath house, as well as a club house along the lines of that which the same architects were designing for the Echo Park Playground.<sup>68</sup> The plunge was to be "the largest outdoor pool in Southern California," accompanied by a bath house in what the *Times* described as the "Mediterranean architectural style."<sup>69</sup> Plans were completed in 1926 and the pool opened in 1927.<sup>70</sup>

As a result of this program of pool construction, the bath house joined the club house as a building type typical of the city's playgrounds. Regardless of size, the bath house generally followed a common layout. It consisted of a long, narrow symmetric structure, parallel to the pool, which served as a portal. At the center was an entrance space or hall. On either side, extending out from the hall, were wings housing

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<sup>67</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1925; August 16, 1925.

<sup>68</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1925; August 16, 1925.

<sup>69</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1926.

<sup>70</sup> "Background" at <http://www.laparks.org/aquatic/poolsReport04/background>, accessed October 2017; *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1925. The club house and a section of the structure surrounding the pool were demolished to make way for the Golden State (5) Freeway in the 1950s.

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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men's and women's facilities. This layout appeared at the earliest pools and continued to be used for the bath houses of the Depression era and the postwar period.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike the swimming pools, which were extensions of the older playgrounds, the municipal beaches were separate entities. Venice Beach was acquired as a result of the 1925 consolidation of the once independent city of Venice with Los Angeles. Cabrillo Beach, on the other hand, was an innovative project that the Playgrounds and Recreation Department began on its own.<sup>72</sup>

The 1923 bond issue specified a quarter of a million dollars for the development of a new municipal beach. The site chosen was to the east of Point Fermin in San Pedro, where the breakwater sheltering the Los Angeles Harbor meets land. The City used sand dredged from the channel to create two beaches, one facing northeast into the harbor and the other facing south onto the ocean. Cabrillo opened in 1928. To provide for users the Playground and Recreation Department constructed a boat house and a bath house. The bath house, completed in 1932 and in Spanish Colonial Revival style, survives as L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 571.<sup>73</sup>

### **Origins of the Recreational Facility during the Great Depression, 1932-1945**

The concept of the recreational facility was a logical combination of what both the parks and the playgrounds had become by the early 1930s. The park had evolved from the bucolic landscape of the pleasure ground into what had become essentially an adult activity center, while the child-oriented playground had taken on elements, specifically enlarged club houses and swimming pools, which increasingly served an adult population.

The result was the idea of the recreational facility to serve all ages. It took the structures of the playground and combined them with the outdoor amenities of the park. Sacrificed was landscaping for its own sake. Site layout was shaped by the activities to be provided and, inevitably given the increasingly suburban location of the centers, by the need for parking.

One of the pioneers in this development was George Hjelte. Hjelte became the City's first general manager of the Playground and Recreation Department in 1926, a year after it was created out of the old City Playground Commission. He had previously been the superintendent for Berkeley's playgrounds and was chosen for Los Angeles after a nation-wide search. Hjelte remained general manager, first for

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<sup>71</sup> The footprints provided on the Sanborn Maps show the common layout. For the footprint of the North Broadway bath house see 1920 Sanborn Map 1356. For the footprint of the Evergreen bath house see 1921/1949 Sanborn Map 1434. For the footprint of the Yosemite bath house see 1930/1950 Sanborn Map 3845. For the footprint of the North Hollywood bath house see 1927/1948 North Hollywood Sanborn Map 8.

<sup>72</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1925; December 11, 1927.

<sup>73</sup> *Landmark L.A.*, p. 467; *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1928. The bath house is irregular rather than symmetrical in form, but it follows the same program as the pool bath houses, with separate facilities for men and women on either side of a central space. See 1921/1950 Sanborn Map 1974.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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the Playground and Recreation Department and then for the combined Recreation and Parks Department, until 1962.<sup>74</sup>

During his tenure the City adopted the idea of the recreational facility. The larger parks, Hjelte believed, were fine for day-long excursions, generally taken on weekends or holidays and reached by automobile. But he believed that every neighborhood needed a recreational facility for convenient bouts of regular exercise. In terms of space, three acres of open space for every one thousand inhabitants was a good ratio, with one of those three dedicated to active recreation such as basketball and tennis.<sup>75</sup>

The concept of the recreational facility was also becoming popular among city planners. It had been proposed for Los Angeles as early as 1930 by the landscape architects Olmsted Brothers and Harland Bartholomew Associates. The traditional playground, they believed, should be limited to schools and intended for student use alone. In its place, Olmsted and Bartholomew specified two types of recreational entities, the neighborhood center and the regional or district center.<sup>76</sup>

The neighborhood recreation center “should provide for people of all ages.” It would include “sand piles and wading pools for the little tots” and playground equipment for older children, as well as tennis courts, ball fields and perhaps a swimming pool for everyone. A club house would provide space for community meetings.<sup>77</sup>

It would also require parking. Olmsted and Bartholomew held that the traditional neighborhood playground, small and closely spaced in its distribution, might be appropriate for the older cities of the East and Midwest. But it made no sense in Los Angeles. “Nearly universal use of automobiles” meant that the centers, larger and containing parking, could be spread further apart.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to these neighborhood centers, there should be regional or district centers. These would focus on team athletic contests. In justifying the cost of these “sports parks,” Olmsted and Bartholomew used the language of the earlier playground advocates. “The highly important social need for healthful outlets for the energies of youths of ‘the dangerous age’” could be served by such a center “instead of forcing them in pernicious channels.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, p. 1; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 17. Hjelte’s time in Los Angeles was interrupted from 1930 to 1933, when served in a similar position in Westchester County, New York. Hjelte was also one of the first, in 1940, to write a textbook for the new profession. See George Hjelte, *The Administration of Public Recreation* (Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1940/1971), *passim*; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> George Hjelte, “Facilities for Recreation,” in *Los Angeles: Preface to a Master Plan*, edited by George W. Robbins and L. Deming Tilton (Los Angeles: The Pacific Southwest Academy, 1941), pp. 218-219, 222.

<sup>76</sup> This was done in a report entitled *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, prepared for a self-selected citizens committee consisting primarily of members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. See Greg Hise and William Deverell, *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1-2, 88-89.

<sup>77</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, p. 91.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Here too Olmsted and Bartholomew were specific as to requirements. These regional centers needed large plots of nearly level land. Included were to be fields for baseball, football, and track events. Also to be included were tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a field house with locker and shower facilities.<sup>80</sup>

Olmsted and Bartholomew were willing to impose their vision on existing parks. They ruled out Elysian and Griffith as too rugged and isolated. But Lincoln Park was fair game. They proposed incorporating a portion of the existing park together with adjacent land currently occupied by privately-owned uses considered undesirable, such as the Ascot Racetrack and an auto camp, in order to create a larger parcel.<sup>81</sup>

Many of the proposals of Olmsted and Bartholomew were overlooked as the Depression took hold. But versions of their ideas were incorporated into the playground projects of the Works Progress Administration during the mid and late 1930s. Playground improvements, along with park landscaping, were ideal for the WPA and its program of government funded jobs for the unemployed. A great number could be put to work on construction, with club houses, bath houses, and swimming pools added to the more common landscape projects.<sup>82</sup>

There are two extant structures that are typical of the WPA work within the setting of the traditional playground. The first is the pool and bath house at the rear of the 109<sup>th</sup> Street Playground. They were completed in 1939. The bath house, a single-story stucco-on-wood-frame structure, followed the standard format of central hall and wings with separate facilities for men and women.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, p. 92

<sup>81</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, pp. 29, 176, 177, 232.

<sup>82</sup> Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, pp. 4-5; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 19. To the WPA expenditures were added funds from a bond issue passed in 1931 for acquisition and construction of parks and playgrounds as a means of providing work for the unemployed. See Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Southeast Los Angeles Individual Resources Report, SurveyLA. For its footprint see 1927/1950 Sanborn Map 2798.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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*Bath house, circa 1939  
109<sup>th</sup> Street Playground  
(Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks)*

The second extant WPA building is the Sunland Playground club house of 1941. The playground, itself a WPA project of the same year, followed the earlier practice of locating itself next to the existing Sunland Park. (The two are now combined together as the Sunland Recreation Center.) The club house, like the 109<sup>th</sup> Street bath house, is a single-story stucco-on-wood-frame structure. Smaller than the 1920s-era club house of Echo Park, it features a higher central meeting space flanked by lower service wings.<sup>84</sup>



*Club house, circa 1941  
Sunland Playground  
(Photo by author)*

There was, however, one WPA project that provided a preview of the large postwar recreational facility. This was the Rancho Cienega Playground (now the Rancho Cienega Sports Center Park), completed in 1938. It came close to fulfilling Olmsted and Bartholomew's requirements for a regional athletic venue. It is located just to the west of Dorsey High School, between Exposition Boulevard and Rodeo Road, to

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<sup>84</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1941.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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the east of La Brea Boulevard. Ground was broken in November of 1936 for what was to become the city's largest municipal recreation and athletic center. The WPA built the playground while the City funded the adjoining school.<sup>85</sup>

"Forerunner of the great regional recreation center of the future" was the description given in a 1938 report from the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation. Rancho Cienega included baseball diamonds and tennis courts, as well as a football field encircled by a running track, an archery range, and facilities for basketball, volleyball, croquet, and horseshoes. The most important element was a stadium seating six thousand, as well as a number of support buildings. Along with general landscaping and fencing, the WPA also constructed a large parking lot.<sup>86</sup>

The athletic facilities at Rancho Cienega have been altered, but still consist of a stadium and field, four baseball diamonds, tennis courts, a running track around a second field, and a parking lot. Several major buildings have subsequently been added, including a gymnasium and a swimming complex. (The only building that apparently survives from the WPA period is a small, single-story structure just to the northwest of the stadium.)<sup>87</sup>

### Early Postwar Recreational Facilities, 1945-1956

In the orthodoxy of postwar urban planners, the recreational facility, particularly its neighborhood form, became a necessary requirement for a complete community. Such a facility was a public service, as important as fire and police protection and a local school. All citizens, regardless of class or age, were entitled to a publicly-funded place to play.<sup>88</sup>

At the same time, during the early postwar years, recreation professionals continued to justify their projects with the older language of social work. Hjelte stressed the continued need for supervised play, particularly among young males. Once the war ended he extended this concern to young returning veterans.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1936. A center by the same name had been proposed by the Olmsted and Bartholomew report. It was to be located on a 125-acre site to the south of Exposition Boulevard and east of Angeles Mesa Drive, which is today's Crenshaw Boulevard. It could well be that the report got the north-south street wrong. Hise and Deverell, *Eden by Design*, 176.

<sup>86</sup> "Rancho Cienega Playground – Los Angeles" entry, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>87</sup> An aerial photo from 1938, illustrated in *Living New Deal* (see note 86) shows the small, single story building just to the northwest of the stadium. The later swimming pool complex, built in 1960, is called out in the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Liemert Community Plan Area, Individual Resources Report, SurveyLA.

<sup>88</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, pp. 101-109, 233.

<sup>89</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1944; November 6, 1945. As late as 1977 Hjelte maintained that "a playground without professional supervision was worse than no playground at all." See Hjelte, *Footprints in the Parks*, p. 105

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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In April of 1946, Hjelte presented a capital improvements program in excess of twelve million dollars. It included thirty new neighborhood recreation centers, thirteen district centers with swimming pools, a major sports center, and improvements to existing sites. This program became the basis of a bond issue that was placed on the ballot for May of 1947.<sup>90</sup>



*Ideal neighborhood recreation center, published in 1946  
Department of Playgrounds and Recreation  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

That May, Hjelte was more specific as to the different types of facilities. New neighborhood recreation centers were to be from three to seven acres in size. Each would have a community club house, consisting of a meeting hall, smaller club rooms, and a kitchen. The new district centers were to cover ten to twenty acres, and to have swimming pools, athletic fields, and recreational buildings large enough for indoor sports.<sup>91</sup>

In campaigning for the measure, Hjelte continued to stress the importance of recreation as a means to “curb juvenile delinquency.” At the same time, he promised new parks and playgrounds in all parts of the City, middle class as well as poor. With residential development expanding into previously empty land, “now is the time for the City to acquire more playgrounds if it is ever to get them.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1946.

<sup>91</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1947.

<sup>92</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1947.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Comparatively good economic times and rapid population growth combined to encourage voters to approve the May 1947 bond issue. The issue was not limited to parks and recreation, but addressed the needs of all the City's departments. Hjelte received the more than 12.5 million dollars he requested. At the same time, the fire department received 4.6 million dollars, while 6.5 million dollars went for health centers, 10 million dollars for sewers, and more than 18 million dollars for police buildings and jails.<sup>93</sup>

Along with additional funds came reorganization. In 1947, the Parks Department merged with the Department of Recreation and Playgrounds to form a single Department of Recreation and Parks. Hjelte became the general manager of the new agency. He maintained, after the merger, that this move combined the expertise of the two agencies. "Employees formerly in the park service acquired added motivation from the consciousness that their work was oriented more toward people than before, while recreation personnel acquired ecological and horticultural sensitivity." He also maintained that all benefited. "In time, the playgrounds tended to become more park like, and the parks more functional for recreational activities."<sup>94</sup>

By 1950, once the expansion program was well under way, Hjelte placed less emphasis on preventing juvenile delinquency and more on the benefits of City-supported recreation for all citizens. "Today recreation is recognized as a morale and efficiency measure." It is a "means of developing among Los Angeles' more than 2,000,000 citizens stronger community and family ties." In bringing the good life to all, "adequate recreation servicing is a prime factor socially, psychologically and culturally."<sup>95</sup>

In August of 1952, Parks and Recreation provided a progress report. Twenty-six new recreational sites had been acquired, along with additional land for nine existing facilities. On these plots were constructed thirty-one new club houses, nine swimming pools, and seven field houses adjacent to athletic fields.<sup>96</sup>

As in the prewar playgrounds, the club house and the bath house were the two most common building types in the postwar recreation centers. The postwar club house, or community building as it was often now called, drew from prewar precedents. Its program can be traced to the club houses of the earlier playgrounds, beginning with Violet Street, and followed the layout proposed by Hjelte in May of 1947. Its primary space was a meeting hall, the measurements of which varied from 30 to 50 feet wide and from 60 to 75 feet long. At one end was a stage. Off the main room were at least one smaller meeting room and a kitchen. There were in addition restrooms, storage and mechanical spaces, and an office for the on-site recreational director.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1947, May 29, 1947; *100 Years of Recreation and Parks*, p. 21.

<sup>94</sup> Eberts, "Recreation and Parks," p. 607.

<sup>95</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1950.

<sup>96</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1952.

<sup>97</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1948.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Five of the early club houses, dating from 1948, were of a similar design by the architectural firm of Gable and Wyant, best known for their residential work during the 1920s. The firm's club houses were rather modest structures, with "attractive contemporary architecture, of frame and stucco with fieldstone trim." The main all-purpose hall measured 37 ½ feet by 69 feet. The stage was 16 by 18 feet and had a folding door separating it from the hall that allowed it to serve as a separate room. There were two smaller club rooms, each 16 ½ by 18 feet, with a removable partition dividing them. These public spaces were supported by a kitchen, restrooms, and an office for the recreational director.<sup>98</sup>



*Club House, circa 1949  
Robertson Recreation Center, Wilshire  
(SurveyLA)*

The five club houses by Gable and Wyant were in the Parkview, Sepulveda, Robertson, Andrews, and Victory-Vanowen Recreation Centers. The resource at the Robertson Recreation Center remains as a good example. Other club houses that followed the same program were those of El Sereno, built in 1949; Queen Anne, in 1949; and Rose Hill, in 1954. The Queen Anne Recreation Center club house, located in the Wilshire District, was said to have a "two-way stage," featuring an exterior wall that could be opened to an outdoor amphitheater.<sup>99</sup>

Another historically significant club house design was used twice in 1954. The architect was Frederick Emmons, who was a partner with A. Quincy Jones in the firm of Jones and Emmons. The design followed the same program as the Gable and Wyant structures, with a main hall, stage, smaller meeting rooms,

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<sup>98</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1948. On the background of Gable and Wynant see David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, 2003), p. 55.

<sup>99</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1948; May 24, 1949; December 5, 1949; January 18, 1954. The building permit for the Robertson club house, noting Gable and Wyant as the architects, describes the structure as a "community center." See records for "TR 12534 Lot 1" on Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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kitchen, restrooms, service areas, and staff offices. But the exterior walls were of brick masonry rather than stucco on wood frame. Both buildings are generally still intact.<sup>100</sup>

The two locations for the Emmons' design were very different. One was the Westchester Recreation Center at 7000 West Manchester Boulevard, just north of the Los Angeles International Airport and a few blocks south of Loyola (now Loyola-Marymount) University. Westchester was a new facility, with its outdoor areas opening in September of 1952. The surrounding middle-class residential neighborhood was a product of the defense-related construction boom that began in the late 1930s and extended into the early 1950s.<sup>101</sup>



*Rendering of Emmons' designed club house  
Built at both Westchester and 109<sup>th</sup> Street Recreation Centers  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

The other location was the long established 109<sup>th</sup> Street Playground, later renamed the 190<sup>th</sup> Street Recreation Center. Just to the west of the Watts community in southeast Los Angeles, it had been created to serve precisely the population seen as most in need of municipal recreation space. It had expanded once, by taking over adjoining residential property, in order to construct its pool and bath

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<sup>100</sup> Building Permits and Certificates of Occupancy, "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017; *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1954. Jones and Emmons began working together in 1951. See Projects List in *A. Quincy Jones: Building for a Better Living*, edited by Brooke Hodge (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 2013), p. 218. But the architect of record for the club houses is Emmons alone.

<sup>101</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 4 and August 16, 1953. The Westchester club house was badly damaged by fire in May of 1976. See *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1976.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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house during the late 1930s. It expanded again in order to provide space for the new club house. The result was a site that was twice the size of the original.<sup>102</sup>

There is also a club house from the early postwar period which is a designated resource. The Eagle Rock Recreation Center building (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 536) is a good example of institutional Mid-Century Modernism. It is notable both for its architect, Richard Neutra, and for its setting, on an elevated eighteen-acre site with a view of the valley to the southwest. Completed in 1954, it is a rare two-story club house of masonry on steel frame.



*Club house (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 536), 1954*

*Eagle Rock Recreational Center  
(Office of Historic Resources)*

It is also larger than the typical playground club house. In addition to the standard meeting hall – a generous 51 by 75 feet – stage, club rooms, kitchen, offices, and support spaces, it also contained showers and dressing rooms. This, together with the generous site, allowed the Eagle Rock Recreation Center to serve as a smaller version of the district facility described in Hjelte's 1947 proposal.<sup>103</sup>

Like the club house, the postwar bath house generally followed prewar precedent. This was the tripartite form of central entry space flanked by symmetrical wings housing separate facilities for men and women. A good extant example is the bath house for the Highland Park Recreation Center, completed in 1949.

The single-story wood-frame structure was designed by George Lindsey, who was best known for the Glendale Post Office and East Hollywood's John Marshall High School, both completed in the early

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<sup>102</sup> For the size of original playground plot see 1927 Sanborn Map 2798. For the plot after the construction of the pool and bath house see 1927/1950 Sanborn Map 2798. For the plot after construction of the club house see Los Angeles County Assessors Map, at <http://www.maps.assessor.lacounty.gov>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>103</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1954.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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1930s. The exterior of the bath house is a simplified American Colonial Revival. It combines stucco with clapboard siding, a wood shingle roof (since replaced), and louvers designed to resemble shutters flanking the attic window of the central gabled mass.<sup>104</sup>



*Bath house, 1949  
South Park Recreation Center  
(Photo by author)*

Among the larger recreational facilities containing swimming pools, two indicate the range of neighborhoods in which they were located. The first is Cheviot Hills. It is located on Motor Avenue south of Pico Boulevard and surrounded by two golf courses, the private Hillcrest Country Club to the east and the public Rancho Park course, discussed below, to the west. To the north is today's Century City. Completed in 1950 and containing a club house, bath house and swimming pool, Cheviot Hills was an example of the City providing recreational facilities for the well-off middle class.<sup>105</sup>

The other is South Park, in Southeast Los Angeles. It is located on the site originally acquired in 1898 for the construction of a pleasure ground, bounded by San Pedro Street on the West, Avalon Boulevard on the east, 49<sup>th</sup> Street on the north and 51<sup>st</sup> Street on the south. South Park was identified in 1949 as one of the larger recreation centers that would combine a swimming pool and bath house together with a club house and athletic facilities.<sup>106</sup>

By 1950, Parks and Recreation had completed a number of these buildings, notable in that several were designed by Paul Williams, the foremost African American architect of the era. (Williams is listed on the

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<sup>104</sup> The footprint of the bath house is shown on the 1920/1950 Sanborn Map 1165. Information on the date, architect, and materials comes from "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October. Data on Lindsey's other work came from Gebhard and Winter, *Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, pp. 197, 333. 2017. The Building Permit was issued in 1948 and the Certificate of Occupancy in 1949.

<sup>105</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1950.

<sup>106</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1949



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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1949 permits for repairs to an existing playground building, for a new playground building, and for the swimming pool. He may have been responsible for other buildings for which the permits are not available. The buildings have been added to and altered. Further research is needed as to their provenance and integrity.)<sup>107</sup>



*Current view of facilities  
South Park Recreation Center  
(Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks)*

### Late Postwar Recreational Facilities, 1957-1978

By the mid-1950s, the Department of Recreation and Parks needed additional funds to maintain its construction program. In 1955 Hjelte placed a thirty-five million dollar bond issue on the June ballot. It managed to get a majority, but failed to reach the necessary two-thirds. He returned again in 1957 with a request for 39.5 million dollars and this time won the needed super majority.<sup>108</sup>

One of the significant aspects of the work done under the 1957 bond issue was an explicit parking requirement, which fit the suburban nature of most of the new sites. All new recreational facilities had to provide one space for every five patrons. The patron count was based on the fire marshal's ruling as to the occupancy allowed in club house meeting rooms, bath houses, bleachers and other such entities.<sup>109</sup>

By the end of 1959 Recreation and Parks had completed thirty-five projects and had an additional twenty-one underway. There were new swimming pools at the Northridge, Mar Vista, Sepulveda, Van Ness, and Orcutt Recreation Centers. Also constructed were parking lots at ten existing facilities.

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<sup>107</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1950. See "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>108</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1955; May 30, 1957; June 9, 1957.

<sup>109</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1962.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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Building projects at older sites ranged from a senior citizens center addition to the existing club house at the Yosemite Recreation Center in Eagle Rock to a new club house at the Sunland Recreation Center.<sup>110</sup>

There were a few new projects that resembled the older compact playgrounds set in densely populated areas. One such was the Lemon Grove Recreation Center in Hollywood. Completed in 1959, it was a small site of 2.47 acres on a triangular piece of land bordered by Lemon Grove Avenue, Hobart Boulevard, and the 101 Freeway.

Lemon Grove consists of a standard club house – with multi-purpose meeting room, stage, kitchen, office and restrooms – together with a play area for small children, a softball field, and the now required parking lot. The club house, still intact, is a single story concrete block structure topped by a slow-sloped gabled roof with extended beams, similar in style to the Sepulveda bath house discussed below. There is no architect of record on the building permit indicating that Recreation and Parks staff may have been responsible for the design.<sup>111</sup>



*Swimming pool and bath house (showing central pavilion and one of two side pavilions), circa 1959  
Sepulveda Recreation Center, Panorama City  
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

But most new facilities were larger and located in suburban areas. Typical was the swimming pool and bath house at the Sepulveda Recreation Center in Panorama City. The Sepulveda center dates from the

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<sup>110</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1959; January 4, 1960; May 14, 1961; March 4, 1962. The new Sunland building took over the function of the 1940 club house built by the WPA but the older building still stands.

<sup>111</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1959. Information on lack of an architect-of-record and on construction materials is from "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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early postwar period and has one of the five 1948 club houses designed Gable and Wyant. It is similar to that at the Roberson Recreation Center discussed above and also appears to be generally intact.

Completed in 1959, the Sepulveda bath house is a good example of residential Mid-Century Modernism applied to an institutional building. The low-sloped gabled roofs of the concrete block building, complete with extended beams, are characteristic of the ranch houses of the era. It follows the standard bath house form of a central mass and side wings housing men's and women's facilities. But by breaking the building into three separate pavilions, the architects, H. L. Kahn and Edward Farrell, were able to maintain a domestic scale appropriate to the neighborhood.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to recreational facilities, the City created some new parks that followed more traditional forms. Instead of focusing on serving a neighborhood with buildings such as club houses and swimming pools, they emphasized the older concept of the park as a place to experience nature. At the same time, they provide space for outdoor activities, thus resembling the Municipal Parks of the 1904 to 1931 period.



*Service building, circa 1963  
Chatsworth Park North  
(Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks)*

Representative is Chatsworth Park, now Chatsworth Park North, located at the western end of Chatsworth Street. It sits at the base of the Santa Susanna Mountains in the far northwest of the San Fernando Valley. Opened in 1963, it is divided into two sections, with athletic fields to the east and a

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<sup>112</sup> Information on date of construction, materials, and architects comes from Building Permits and Certificates of Occupancy, "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017. Kahn also designed Fire Station 92 at 10556 West Pico Boulevard in West Los Angeles, completed as well in 1959. Other than that, little is known about the architects.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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natural area containing native trees and plants to the west. In the center is a Mid-Century Modern service building with a folded plate roof.<sup>113</sup>

Recreation and Parks called upon the expertise of an outside landscape designer for Chatsworth Park. The firm responsible for the work was Cornell, Bridges and Troller. Ralph Cornell was one of the first professional landscape architects in the Los Angeles area. He worked on the development of the UCLA campus grounds, beginning in 1937. The firm of Cornell, Bridges and Troller was involved in designing the landscaping on such major works as Century City, the Los Angeles Civic Center, and the Music Center.<sup>114</sup>

Chatsworth Park was part of the City's effort to bring recreational facilities to the newer sections of the San Fernando Valley. In terms of size, the most significant park, or more accurately system of parks, in the western Valley was Porter Ranch. Developed in the late 1960s, its origins were much like those of the city's early parks. It was a case of a real estate developer, in the interest of promoting his investment, providing citizens with open space.

The initial Porter Ranch development covered a 6.5 square mile area that extended from Reseda Boulevard on the east to Topanga Canyon Boulevard on the west and from Devonshire Street on the south into the mountains. The Macco Realty Company bought the property in 1962 and laid out a series of subdivisions based on a master plan that called for a 423-acre complex of parks and golf courses. The proposed ten thousand single-family homes surrounding these open spaces were marketed to the managerial and professional upper-middle class.<sup>115</sup>

The original park within the larger setting was a sixty-three acre parcel donated by Macco Realty to the City and opened in 1966. A year later Macco approached the City with a proposition. The developer still owed 1.3 million dollars of the annexation fee, dating from the City's incorporation of the property. Macco offered to donate 403 acres of its green space in lieu of paying the balance. In March of 1967 the City Council approved the deal. The result is a chain of parks, including Aliso Creek (or Aliso Canyon), Eddleston, Limekiln Canyon, Porter Ridge, and Wilber-Tampa.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Historic Districts, Planning Districts, and Multi-Property Resources Report, Chatsworth-Porter Ranch Community Plan Area, SurveyLA. Information on date of the building is from the Certificate of Occupancy, "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017. There is no record of a Building Permit, so it may be assumed that the Department of Recreation and Parks designed it in-house. This needs further research.

<sup>114</sup> "Landscapes for Living: Post War Landscape Architecture in Los Angeles," at <https://tclf.org/news/pressroom>, accessed October 2017); Los Angeles Civic Center Historic District, Built Environment Resources Technical Report, Regional Connector Transit Corridor Project, Los Angeles County, California (SWCA Environmental Consultants, 2009), p.13, at <https://planninglacity.org>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>115</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1966.

<sup>116</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1966, February 19, 1967, March 6, 1967. Names of parks within the open space are from Department of Recreation and Parks website, <http://www.laparks.org/parks>, accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### Postwar Golf Courses, 1945-1978

While often adjacent to other recreational facilities, the postwar municipal golf course was significantly different in one way. It was for the most part a self-financing entity, relying on the fees paid by players, rather than a facility funded by the general public. It took two forms. One was the full-length eighteen-hole course, which provided an environment much like that of a private country club. The other was the shorter nine-hole course, which required less land and could be placed in older sections of the city.<sup>117</sup>

The concept of the full-length eighteen-hole golf course as a kind of public country club was evident in the 1930s-era club house serving the Griffith Park courses. Although built by the WPA, its interior featured vaulted beamed ceilings and hand-pegged wood floors. This same image was carried out in the facilities for the first postwar golf course, at Rancho Park in the Cheviot Hills section of West Los Angeles.<sup>118</sup>

Opened in 1949, the Rancho Park Golf Course was originally a private country club that ran into tax problems and was taken over by the federal government. The City acquired it in 1945. The southeast portion became the current Cheviot Hills Recreation Center. The remainder of the original 200-acre site became the city's first full-length golf course outside of Griffith Park.<sup>119</sup>



*Club house, circa 1948  
Rancho Park Golf Course  
(Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation)*

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<sup>117</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1948. One exception to the self-financing rule was the allocation of \$300,000 in the 1957 bond issue that was used to create the Penmar Golf Course, discussed below. See Historic Districts, Planning Districts, and Multi-Property Resources Report, Venice Community Plan Area, SurveyLA.

<sup>118</sup> "Griffith Park Clubhouse – Los Angeles" entry, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Wikipedia entry for "Rancho Park Golf Course," at <https://en.wikipedia.org>, accessed October 2017. The Armand Hammer/Holmby Park pitch-and-put course was in existence when the City took possession of the park in 1926. It was redesigned in 1940. See "Holmby Park Pony Gold Course is 87 Years Old Today," by the Golf Historical Society, at <http://www.golfhistoricalsociety.org>, accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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The layout of Rancho Park was a collaborative effort between William P. Bell, a noted golf course architect, and William Johnson, at that time the manager of the City's municipal courses. Bell began his career as an associate of George C. Thomas, Jr., the designer of the Wilson and Harding Courses in Griffith Park. Bell had collaborated with Thomas on the courses for the Los Angeles, Bel-Air, and Fox Hills Country Clubs. By the end of his career, Bell had more than fifty courses to his own name, including, together with Johnson, the renovation of the Wilson and Harding courses in Griffith Park.<sup>120</sup>

Recreation and Parks also constructed a new club house. Completed in September of 1948, before the course officially opened, it is a design by George M. Lindsey, the architect for the bath house at the Highland Park Recreation Center. With walls of reinforced brick and a clay-tile low-sloped gabled roof, the style is a simplified Spanish Colonial Revival. It is set well back from the intersection, surrounded by landscaping and with parking in the front.<sup>121</sup>

But the acquisition of the Rancho Park course was unique. Creating new eighteen-hole courses required vast amounts of relatively inexpensive undeveloped land. The San Fernando Valley was the logical place to look. In addition to open space, it was seen as lacking in existing courses. In 1948 Recreation and Parks noted that there were only two – Lakeside, a private course, and San Fernando, a one-time public course that had become private. The Valley also had the large and still growing middle-class population with automobiles, which would provide patronage.<sup>122</sup>

Space for the new courses came in the basins created by two flood control projects, the Sepulveda, and the Hansen Dams. The Sepulveda basin received the first new courses. In April of 1951 the City acquired a fifty-year lease from the Corps of Engineers on 1700 acres, and proposed the construction of two golf courses, along with park and recreation facilities. It also proposed the creation of a bird and wildlife refuge in the wetland section.<sup>123</sup>

Eventually three eighteen-hole courses came to occupy the Sepulveda basin. The first to be completed was the North (now the Balboa), opened in 1954 and considered a short-length course. The second was the Encino, opened in 1957 and described as a medium length course. The final was the Woodley Lakes, open in 1975. Balboa and Encino provided club house facilities similar to those found in private country clubs, including a lounge, dining room, banquet hall, pro shop, and golf cart rental.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "The Rancho Golf Course Opening (1949)," <http://golfhistoricalsociety.org/ghswordpress/category/california>, accessed October 2017; "William P. Bell," [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_P.\\_Bell](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William_P._Bell), accessed October 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Information on the building's date of construction, materials, and architect came from "Search Online Building Records," at <http://www.ladbs.org>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>122</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1948.

<sup>123</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1948; April 13, 1951.

<sup>124</sup> Names of course designers, dates of completion, and facilities provided came from the Department of Recreation and Parks website, <http://www.laparks.org>, accessed October 2017.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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The Encino and Balboa courses were designed by William P. Bell and Sons, the successor firm to the architect who had laid out the Rancho Park course. William P. Bell died in 1953. His place was taken by his son, William F. Bell, who had trained under his father and joined the company as a partner after the Second World War.<sup>125</sup>

The course at Hansen Dam came later, even though the City took control of the land three years before the Sepulveda acquisition. In October of 1948, Recreation and Parks signed a forty-year lease with the federal government for 1550 acres in the flood control basin around the dam and the lake it created. The Department then advanced an ambitious plan for development, which included a swimming pool, bath house, boathouse, and beach along the lake. Below the dam was to be the golf course. The original course design was by David Kent, with later additions by Ray Goates, who also designed the course at Woodley Lakes.<sup>126</sup>

Despite quick action in acquiring the land, the Department was slow to develop the course. It was not started until the summer of 1962. In April of 1964 the first nine holes opened for play. Even then, the facilities were limited to temporary restrooms. It was not until October of 1977 that the Hansen course was considered complete, when a 9,500 square foot club house opened. Designed by the firm of Armet, Davis and Newlove, known for their Google-style coffee shops, it included a restaurant, lounge, and banquet facility, as well as a pro shop and golf cart rental.<sup>127</sup>



*Harbor Park Golf Course, 1958*  
*Wilmington*  
*(Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks)*

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<sup>125</sup> "William P. Bell," [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_P.\\_Bell](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William_P._Bell), accessed October 2007.

<sup>126</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1948.

<sup>127</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1962; April 11, 1964; October 30, 1977. On Armet and Davis's Google work see Gebhard and Winter, *An Architectural Guide to Los Angeles*, p. 201.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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There are three free-standing nine-hole municipal courses, Los Feliz, Penmar, and Harbor Park. (Two others are associated with eighteen-hole courses. One is the relocated Roosevelt Course in Griffith Park. The other is a short par-three course adjacent to Rancho Encino.) Two of the free-standing courses were placed on undeveloped sites in older neighborhoods. In 1947 a long and narrow plot of land along the eastern bank of the Los Angeles River in Atwater Village became the short three-par Los Feliz Course. It was designed by William Johnson, who was also working at the same time with John P. Ball on the Rancho Park course. In 1962 the Penmar Course, laid out by David Kent, opened in Venice, on a narrow strip of strip of land east of Lincoln Boulevard along the border with Santa Monica.

The third free-standing nine-hole course is closer in its setting to the eighteen-hole courses. It is the Harbor Park Course, completed in 1958. It is located on a former wetland in Wilmington, to the west of the Harbor (110) Freeway. The wetland was converted into a lake, a regional park, and the golf course, all surrounding Los Angeles Harbor College. It was laid out by William F. Bell, who had also worked on the Encino and Balboa courses.<sup>128</sup>

### Hard Time during the 1970s

The latter postwar period saw a nationwide decline of the traditional park, particularly of those located near populations without automobiles. As the middle class moved to the suburbs, inner city parks were increasingly patronized by the less well off. In the eye of the suburban middle class, the older parks were sites for political demonstrations and criminal activity, and so to be avoided.<sup>129</sup>

For Los Angeles, the optimistic period of postwar expansion came to a symbolic end in the summer of 1962 when George Hjelte retired as general manager of Recreation and Parks. He was 69 years old and had served the City since 1926. His successor was William Frederickson, Junior, a longtime employee who began as the part-time director of the picnic bureau in 1930 and was the superintendent of recreation at the time of his appointment. Hjelte was retained as a consultant for long-range planning.<sup>130</sup>

By the 1970s Los Angeles began to experience the problems common to other cities. In May of 1973 Frederickson made public what the *Los Angeles Times* described as a “grim report,” which noted that the increasing level of violence and vandalism in the parks was a “major concern.” In sending a copy to the Police Department, he hoped to make clear “the tremendous magnitude of the problem and the operating handicaps resulting from it.” He reported 241 incidents of potential or actual violence during

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<sup>128</sup> “William P. Bell,” [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_P.\\_Bell](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/William_P._Bell), accessed October 2007. Dates on courses from the Department of Recreation and Parks website, <http://www.laparks.org>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, pp. 142-143, 186.

<sup>130</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1962. Frederickson retired in late 1975 and was replaced in early 1976 by James E. Hadaway, who had previously been the chief of the Parks and Recreation Department of Memphis, Tennessee. See *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1975, March 17, 1976.

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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the past year, including five murders, and believed that far more had gone unreported. Staff and patrons alike were victims of assaults.<sup>131</sup>

A few weeks later, in June of 1973, a city councilman, in reacting to the report and the “changing times” it portrayed, suggested that Frederickson needed to arm some of his personnel patrolling the more remote park districts. Frederickson opposed the idea, arguing that “turning park rangers into armed policemen would destroy their ‘Smokey the Bear’ image of helping people in the parks.”<sup>132</sup> But the concerns for safety continued into the 1980s, and by 1989 rangers were granted a limited peace officer status.<sup>133</sup>

Less dramatic, but equally draining, was the cost of dealing with vandalism. Maintenance teams increasingly spent time on graffiti removal, so as to lessen the perception that the parks were out of control. Efforts at rehabilitation and remodeling concerned themselves with discouraging encampments of the homeless and eliminating areas which could conceal criminal activity. In spite of these efforts, many parks, such as MacArthur, were simply seen as too dangerous and became off limits, particularly at night.<sup>134</sup>

Along with this increase in perceived danger came budget problems. Recreation and Parks remained overwhelmingly dependent upon its proportion of the local property tax. As early as 1974 the Department was faced with a proposed 1.6 million dollar decrease of its yearly budget, which would have eliminated most sports programs and resulted in the layoff of forty-one recreation center directors. But the cuts after the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 were the most drastic. Needed capital improvements and maintenance were deferred. Activities for which fees could not be charged were discontinued.<sup>135</sup>

Nonetheless, the Department continued to fulfill its mission, albeit through innovative financing. Typical was the opening of Parthenia Park in January of 1977, located at the intersection of International Avenue and Parthenia Street in Canoga Park. The park was extremely small, at 1.4 acres, and contained only a sand yard, swings, a balance beam and a slide. It was made possible under a state act that encouraged its funding by the developer of the surrounding area.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1973.

<sup>132</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1973.

<sup>133</sup> Eberts, “Recreation and Parks,” p. 609.

<sup>134</sup> Eberts, “Recreation and Parks,” p. 609.

<sup>135</sup> Eberts, “Recreation and Parks,” pp. 608-609, *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1974.

<sup>136</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1977.



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### Associated Department of Recreation and Parks Historical Resources

There are a number of unique properties of the Department of Recreation and Parks that are not represented by the sub-themes and resource types presented in this theme. They include designated historic parks and museums as indicated below.<sup>137</sup>

#### Designated Historic Parks:<sup>138</sup>

- Andres Pico Adobe (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 7/California Historic Landmark 362): Historic adobe associated with the Pico family, parts of which date from 1834
- Banning Residence Museum (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 25/California Historic Landmark 147): Built in 1864, this was the home of Phineas Banning, the founder of Wilmington
- Barnsdall Art Park (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 34): This complex is built around the Barnsdall, or Hollyhock, House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and constructed in 1917
- Bolton Hall (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 2): Meeting hall built in 1913 for the Little Landers society which first settled Tujunga
- Campo de Cahuenga (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 29/ California Historic Landmark 151): Site of the signing of the Treaty of Cahuenga on January 13, 1847, which ended the war with Mexico in California, with a reconstructed adobe
- Drum Barracks Civil War Museum (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 21/ California Historic Landmark 169): 1862 barracks remaining from Civil War-era Camp Drum in Wilmington
- Homestead Acre/Minnie Hill Palmer Residence (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 133): Ranch cottage built in 1913, within Chatsworth Park South
- Lummis Home and Garden (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 68/ California Historic Landmark 531): Home of Charles Lummis, historian and founder of the Southwest Museum, begun in 1898
- Orcutt Ranch Horticulture Center/Rancho Sombra del Roble (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 31): Facility built around the 1920 adobe residence of W. W. Orcutt
- Shadow Hills/Shadow Ranch (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 9): Workman Ranch adobe constructed between 1869 and 1872 in West Hills
- Wattles Mansion and Garden (L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 579): Mansion in Hollywood from 1907, designed by Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey

#### Museums:<sup>139</sup>

- Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, San Pedro: museum and laboratory focusing on marine life
- Fort MacArthur Museum, San Pedro (Battery Osgood – Farley House Historic Site, L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 515): museum examining the history of the fort

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<sup>137</sup> This list does not include resources that are on Recreation and Parks land but are operated by other organizations.

<sup>138</sup> Information on sites is from *Landmark L.A., passim*.

<sup>139</sup> Date from the Department of Recreation and Parks website, <http://www.laparks.org>, accessed October 2017.

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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- Point Fermin Lighthouse Museum, San Pedro (listed in the National Register): lighthouse constructed in 1874
- White Point Park Nature Preserve, San Pedro: 102-acre restored coastal sage habitat

## **CRITERIA FOR MUNICIPAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND LEISURE**

### **Note on Evaluating Extant Resources**

Many parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers have evolved over time, due to changing ideas as to what these public spaces should be. As historic resources, many represent more of an evolution than a single period or philosophy of park planning and may be evaluated under more than one of the sub-themes below. In addition, an element within a park, playground, or recreation center, such as an intact building, structure, or other feature, may be individually evaluated for significance.

### **SUB-THEME: PLEASURE GROUNDS, 1886-1903**

**Summary Statement of Significance:** Pleasure grounds in Los Angeles represent the city's earliest and best-known public parks and are significant in the areas of Recreation, Community Planning and Development, Social History, and/or Landscape Architecture. They are important as the local expression of national trends in park planning and the resultant construction of large public parks in urban areas. Public parks, at the time, were generally naturalistic in design, offered passive recreational activities, and were touted as an antidote to the stresses of urban life. In Los Angeles, with its low-density urban form and agricultural character, pleasure grounds were often grand, showy, and thickly planted with a variety of ornamental flora. Pleasure grounds were generally manmade and designed by landscape architects, but some in Los Angeles, such as Griffith Park and Elysian Park, also featured wilderness areas with natural landscapes. Parks originally developed as pleasure grounds may now include features that reflect later periods of urban park planning,

**Period of Significance:** 1886-1903

**Period of Significance Justification:** The period of significance begins in 1886, when Elysian Park was acquired by the City, and ends in 1903, when the City system of major pleasure grounds was completed.

**Geographical Locations:** Citywide, with concentrations near Downtown and Hollywood

**Area(s) of Significance:** Recreation; Community Planning and Development; Social History; Landscape Architecture

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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**Criteria:** NR: A/C CR: 1/3 Local: 1/3

**Associated Property Type:** Institutional - Recreation – Pleasure Ground

**Property Type Description:** Pleasure grounds are large, municipally-owned acreages that offer opportunities for passive recreation activities and civic engagement. Although naturalist in character, most were designed by landscape architects and planted with a variety of species. Some pleasure grounds also feature natural landscapes. In addition to the plantings, pleasure grounds may include pavilions, boat houses, water features, walking trails, pathways, and picnic areas as well as commemorative statuary and monuments. The oldest extant example of a pleasure ground in Los Angeles is Elysian Park.

**Property Type Significance:** See Summary Statement of Significance above.

### Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed during the period of significance
- Large, municipally-owned acreage that offers opportunities for passive recreation activities and civic engagement
- Reflects national trends in urban park planning from the period of significance
- Naturalistic, unstructured, and pastoral in character
- Is an excellent example of its type and/or represents the work of a significant landscape architect or designer

### Character-Defining Features:

- Present appearance resembles the original appearance and retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its historical association
- Retains a significant number of character-defining features, such that the visual, spatial, and contextual relationships of the property may be understood
- May include “gardenesque” design features such as a wide variety of mature vegetation to delineate activity areas, ornamental planting beds, and large concentrations of a particular species or type of vegetation
- Trees, shrubs, and other plants may be positioned and managed in such a way that the character of each plant is fully displayed
- May include winding or curvilinear paths
- May include earthworks, such as artificial mounds and recessed glades

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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- May include commemorative statuary and monuments
- May include features for passive recreation such as picnic areas, park furniture, planters, artificial lakes/water features, walking trails, and pathways
- Park as a whole may also represent later periods of urban park planning

### **Integrity Considerations:**

- Should retain integrity of Design, Setting, Location, Feeling, and Association
- A sufficient number of original materials should be intact such that the historic fabric, character, and overall visual effect have been preserved
- Alterations, if reversible, may be acceptable
- Examples of original vegetation may have been replaced
- Some individual design features may have been modified, altered, or replaced
- Original spaces for activities may have new uses

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL PARKS, 1904-1931

**Summary Statement of Significance:** The emergence of municipal parks in Los Angeles during the period from 1904-1931 reflects the city's increased urbanization and the need to provide residential neighborhoods with space dedicated for recreational and cultural activities. They are significant in the areas of Recreation, Community Planning and Development, Social History, and /or Landscape Architecture.

The municipal park includes both traditional parks for adult and family activity and separate playgrounds for children. Both represent the local expression of national trends in park planning. The parks and playgrounds served a combined function as civic, social, and active recreational spaces with aspirations toward a democratic vision in which opportunities for free public recreation were available to all residents. Municipal parks may include features that reflect both earlier and later periods of urban park planning.

**Period of Significance:** 1904-1931

**Period of Significance Justification:** The period of significance begins in 1904 with the creation of the City's Playground Commission and ends in 1931, when increasingly difficult economic times prevented further municipal park development.

**Geographical Location:** Citywide; concentrations may be found in Hollywood, Los Feliz, Silver Lake, Koreatown, Mid-Wilshire, Hancock Park, and West Adams

**Areas of Significance:** Recreation; Community Planning and Development; Social History; Landscape Architecture

**Criteria:** NR: A/C      CR: 1/3      Local: 1/3

**Associated Property Type:** Institutional - Recreation – Municipal Park/Municipal Playground

**Property Type Description:** Municipal parks and playgrounds vary considerably in size and type. They were typically constructed to provide residential



## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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neighborhoods with space dedicated for organized sports, recreational, and cultural/educational activities. In place of the pleasure ground, with its passive enjoyment of the landscape, the municipal park and the playground were places of activity. This could take the form of educational or cultural programs, in structures specifically designed to house them, or the provision of open spaces for outdoor activities, the practice of which would lead to better health and, it was hoped, more sportsmanlike behavior. Amenities to support outdoors activities may include athletic fields, golf courses, playgrounds, tennis courts, pools and bath houses, pavilions, and game courts, among others. Features to support indoor activities may include club houses and auditoriums. Buildings are often associated with noted architects and reflect architectural styles of the day.

**Property Type Significance:** See Summary Statement of Significance above.

### Eligibility Standards:

- Municipal parks and playgrounds constructed between 1904 and 1931 to serve residential areas
- Includes areas for active recreation, such as athletic fields, tennis courts, golf courses, ball fields, horseshoe courts, activity lawns, game courts, outdoor pools, plunges, archery ranges, and facilities to support athletic events
- Is an excellent example of its type and/or represents the work of a significant landscape architect or designer

### Character-Defining Features:

- Present appearance resembles the original appearance and retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its historical association
- Retains a significant number of character-defining features, such that the visual, spatial, and contextual relationships of the property may be understood
- May include playgrounds or play areas for children
- May include commemorative statuary and monuments
- May include civic-themed areas such as a parade ground or pavilion for outdoor performances
- May provide indoor space suitable for a variety of activities including dancing, games, stage productions, food preparation, and dining
- May include support structures such as maintenance sheds and night lighting

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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- May include buildings, structures, and features to support social/recreational activities (e.g., childcare facilities, senior activity centers, club houses, auditoriums, picnic areas)
- May include buildings and features that are significant examples of architectural styles of the period and/or the work of noted architects
- Park as a whole may also represent other periods of urban park planning

### **Integrity Considerations:**

- Should retain integrity of Design, Setting, Location, Feeling, and Association
- A sufficient number of original materials should be intact such that the historic fabric, character, and overall visual effect have been preserved
- Alterations, if reversible, may be acceptable
- Examples of original vegetation may have been replaced
- Individual design features may have been modified, altered, or replaced
- Original spaces for activities may have new uses

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, 1932-1978

**Summary Statement of Significance:** The emergence of municipal recreational facilities in Los Angeles during the period 1932-1978 reflects the city's increased urbanization, and the need to provide public opportunities for physical exercise, athletic events, organized recreational activities, and social interaction for all regardless of class or age. With this inclusion, recreational facilities combined the functions of the adult-oriented park and the child-based playground. These facilities are significant in the areas of Recreation, Community Planning and Development, Social History, and /or Landscape Architecture.

Municipal recreational facilities reflect trends in park planning, and urban planning generally during the period of significance. They vary considerably in size, type, and amenities offered and were both neighborhood and regional. In the orthodoxy of postwar urban planners, the recreational facility, particularly its neighborhood form, became a necessary requirement of a complete community. Such a facility was a public service, as much as fire and police protection and a local school. While recreational facilities were newly constructed, some were expansions of and improvements to existing municipal parks and playgrounds. As such, these facilities may also include features that reflect earlier periods of urban park planning,

**Period of Significance:** 1932-1978

**Period of Significance Justification:** The period of significance begins in 1932, when the first municipal recreational facilities were built under Depression-Era programs. It ends in 1978, with the passing of Proposition 13, which limited funds for new projects.

**Geographical Location:** Citywide

**Areas of Significance:** Recreation; Community Planning and Development; Social History; Landscape Architecture

**Criteria:** NR: A/C CR: 1/3 Local: 1/3

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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**Associated Property Type:** Institutional - Recreation – Municipal Recreation Facility

**Property Type Description:** Recreational facilities vary considerably in size and type and were both neighborhood and regional. They were constructed to provide space for a variety of recreational activities in all parts of Los Angeles, regardless of class or age of residents. Site layout was shaped by the activities to be provided and, inevitably given the increasingly suburban location of the centers in the Post WWII period, by the need for parking. Outdoor amenities include athletic fields, golf courses, playgrounds, tennis courts, pools and bathhouses, among others. Features to support indoor activities include club houses, recreation centers, and auditoriums. Buildings are often associated with noted architects and reflect architectural styles of the day. Municipal recreation facilities were both expansions of existing municipal parks and playgrounds as well as newly constructed facilities.

**Property Type Significance:** See Summary Statement of Significance above.

### **Eligibility Standards:**

- Municipal Recreation Facility constructed between 1932 and 1978
- Includes active recreation areas such as athletic fields, tennis courts, golf courses, ball fields, horseshoe courts, activity lawns, game courts, outdoor pools, plunges, archery ranges, and facilities to support athletic events
- Is an excellent example of its type or style and/or represents the work of a significant landscape architect or designer

### **Character-Defining Features:**

- Present appearance resembles the original appearance and retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its historical association
- Retains a significant number of character-defining features, such that the visual, spatial, and contextual relationships of the property may be understood
- May include areas for social recreational functions (e.g., childcare facilities, children's play areas, senior activity centers, club houses, recreation centers, auditoriums, picnic tables, and grill areas)
- May include buildings and features that are significant examples of architectural styles of the period and/or the work of noted architects

## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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- May provide indoor space to support a variety of activities including dancing, games, stage productions, food preparation, and dining
- May include support structures such as maintenance sheds and night lighting
- May represent more than one period of municipal park development
- May include improvements associated with WPA programs
- For the National Register, properties must possess exceptional importance if less than 50 years of age

### **Integrity Considerations:**

- Should retain integrity of Design, Setting, Location, Feeling, and Association
- A sufficient number of original materials should be intact such that the historic fabric, character, and overall visual effect have been preserved
- Alterations, if reversible, may be acceptable
- Examples of original vegetation may have been replaced
- Individual design features may have been modified, altered, or replaced
- Original spaces for activities may have new uses

## SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### SUB-THEME: MUNICIPAL PARK BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, AND FEATURES, 1886-1978

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| <b>Summary Statement of Significance:</b>    | Buildings, structures, and other features constructed in municipal parks may be individually significant in the areas of Architecture, Recreation, Social History and/or Community Planning and Development. These facilities often served as important places for neighborhood social/recreational activities and reflect important concepts in urban park planning over time as well as the role of municipal parks in community planning. Most were designed in popular architectural styles of the day and are the work of noted architects. |
| <b>Period of Significance:</b>               | 1886-1978  |
| <b>Period of Significance Justification:</b> | The period of significance spans the entire period for the Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure theme.   |
| <b>Geographical Location:</b>                | Citywide   |
| <b>Areas of Significance:</b>                | Architecture; Recreation; Community Planning and Development; Social History   |
| <b>Criteria:</b>                             | NR: A/C      CR: 1/3      Local: 1/3   |
| <b>Associated Property Type:</b>             | Institutional - Recreation – Municipal Pool/Plunge, Bath House, Club House, Recreation Center, Auditorium, Other   |
| <b>Property Type Description:</b>            | Individually significant buildings, and structures and other features built within a municipal park to house a variety of social and recreational activities. Specific property types include pools, bathhouses, club houses, recreation centers, auditoriums, and others. Facilities range in size and type; some represent architectural styles of their period of construction such as Craftsman, Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival, and Mid-Century Modern.   |
| <b>Property Type Significance:</b>           | See Summary Statement of Significance above.   |



## **SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement**

Public and Private Institutional Development/Government Infrastructure and Services/ Municipal Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, 1886-1978

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### **Eligibility Standards:**

- Municipal recreation building, structure, or other feature constructed between 1886 and 1978
- Served as an important place for neighborhood social and recreational activities
- Reflects concepts in urban park planning and activities associated with municipal parks

### **Character-Defining Features:**

- Retains most of the essential character defining features of the type and/or style
- Is a good to excellent example of its type or style and/or represents the work of a noted architect or designer
- For the National Register, properties must possess exceptional importance if less than 50 years of age

### **Integrity Considerations:**

- Should retain integrity of Design, Materials, Setting, Location, Feeling, and Association
- Alterations, if reversible, may be acceptable
- Some original materials may have been removed, altered, or replaced
- Original use may have changed
- May have been relocated within or near the associated park for preservation purposes, particularly under local HCM criteria

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