

RECREATION IN THE UNITED STATES

National Historic Landmark
Theme Study

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Recreation in the United States

The history of recreation in America is associated with a broad range of properties representing activities that suggest themselves for possible historic recognition. Baseball parks; college and professional football gridirons; yacht clubs; amusement parks, roller coasters, and carousels; circuses; camps; resort hotels; horse and auto racetracks; zoos; aquariums, planetariums; world's fair sites; and casinos are all recreational sites. This report examines a number of outstanding and illustrative examples of these types for potential National Historic Landmark designation.

The properties described in this study have been selected to represent places and activities that have had a major impact in American history. The properties and individuals associated with them are, in many cases, just as well known to most Americans as masterworks of architecture and political and literary figures. Those accessible to the public are visited by numbers of people that would overwhelm learned societies or scholarly institutions.

Certain properties on this list will be known to the most casual sports fan or traveler. Other sites included are relatively obscure, but treasured by enthusiasts. Overall, there is little pattern to the relatively few sites illustrating these subjects that have been recognized by local or state programs through nomination to the National Register or in the handful of properties that have been designated National Historic Landmarks in the field. It has also proved difficult to find intact sites for some sports and activities. Tastes in sports and amusement change and there may be little immediate use or reason to save their decaying remnants. Some recreational sites, such as world's fairs, in fact, were usually designed to be temporary.

The contributions of ethnics, minorities, and women to recreation and sports merit consideration. These studies have been prepared with a conscious effort to relate these contributions. Considering the early dates of some of the properties, the accomplishments noted are exceptionally worthy and demonstrate how sports and recreation have served to advance these elements of society.

A broad definition of recreation has led to the selection of a diverse collection of properties. Some categories are, however, not included because it appears best to treat them under other subjects. The most noticeable exclusion is of properties whose significance rests strongly on landscape architecture, such as golf courses, highways, trails, and most major public parks. Such properties grow and change in ways that buildings, or even tennis courts, do not. Boston Common and Boston Public Garden, on the other hand, are included because they are of fundamental importance to the Park movement and because they have notable recreational associations on other accounts.

An example may help explain the difficulty with this aspect of recreation and the decision to exclude it from this study. A number of the early automobile roads of this century were designed with touring, as well as transportation, in mind. For that reason, the Columbia River Highway, in Oregon, was closely examined, but not nominated. Historic roads and trails clearly present problems in integrity and require analysis of landscape design. Because of their enormous size and unusual shape and because the very use that makes them significant may help destroy them,

they require exhaustive study. (There are a number of such historic recreational associations, e.g., the Skyline Drive traversing Shenandoah National Park.)

The National Parks have been excluded from this study, although there are examples in many recreational fields in them. For example, the role of mountain climbing clubs in the establishment of Mount Rainier National Park suggests that some of the trails within the Park may be significant historically. Also, the National Park Service already possesses its own carousel, at Glen Echo Park near Washington, D.C. In the latter case, a decision on the level of significance of the more distinguished carousels presented in this theme study can offer guidance on how the Glen Echo carousel should be evaluated.

Exclusion of nearly all homes of individuals has also substantially narrowed the scope of the study. Thus, "Babe" Ruth's houses are not included but Wrigley Field and Fenway Park, two of the baseball parks where he played, are. In the existing National Historic Landmark list, there are exceptions to this practice. Only one major exception is proposed in this study, for John James Audubon.

Organization of the Report

In the introductory summaries that follow, the existing Landmarks important in recreation are listed topically, along with those nominated in this study and a capsule explanation of how they were selected and issues they raise. Not all properties suggested or considered for nomination will be noted, in the interest of keeping this essay brief.

Some properties in this study have significance in more than one area of recreation or in other themes that lend strength to their consideration. Only a handful of National Historic Landmarks have been specifically designated for their recreational importance. Because they are physical remains, recreational sites may represent or include accomplishments in architecture, engineering, art, or other subjects. These exceptional areas of importance are specified in the individual studies. Harvard Stadium, is, for example, significant in the history of concrete construction, as well as football.

CLASSIFIED LIST OF PROPERTIES

BASEBALL PARKS

Proposed:

Comiskey Park, Illinois
Wrigley Field, Illinois
Fenway Park, Massachusetts
Cleveland Municipal Stadium, Ohio
League Park, Ohio

Designated:

Jackie Robinson House, New York

Notes:

Few sites from baseball's early years have any reasonable historic integrity. Those presented here are all early 20th-century baseball fields that have not, with the exception of League Park, been heavily modified in recent years. Cleveland Municipal was designed as a multipurpose stadium, but is included here for convenience.

Consideration was also given to nominating Yankee Stadium and Tiger Stadium, in light of their great importance in the sport. Both have, however, been greatly altered in recent years.

The briefness of this list may shock baseball fans, but as Lowell Reidenbaugh has documented in his recent book, Take Me Out to the Ball Park, the majority of early 20th-century ball parks have been demolished. All the proposed properties also represent early professional football as well as baseball because the early professional football teams did not have their own facilities.

STADIUMS AND "BOWLS"

Proposed:

The Rose Bowl, Pasadena, California
Yale Bowl, New Haven, Connecticut
Grant Park Stadium (Soldier Field), Chicago, Illinois
University of Illinois Memorial Stadium, Urbana, Illinois
University of Notre Dame Main and South Quadrangles Historic District and Stadium,
Notre Dame, Indiana
Harvard Stadium, Massachusetts
University of Michigan Stadium, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Ohio Stadium, Ohio

Designated:

Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, California

Notes:

Some of these facilities have been used for an astonishing variety of sports and recreational events in addition to football, although they are all primarily representative of it. Those at universities represent the athletic achievements of the players and coaches early in this century. Other university stadiums and sites of "Bowl" games might have been included; the "Cotton Bowl" is within Dallas' Fair Park, which is being nominated as a whole. The selections here represent the class, but should not be regarded as a definitive selection. The spectacles and ceremonies that attend the events in the stadium are pageants that may merit some recognition.

COLLEGE ATHLETIC FACILITIES

Proposed:

Butler Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Indiana
Herron Gymnasium; Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Designated:

None

Notes:

Other properties might be considered under this subject. Butler represents an era in the history of basketball. Herron Gym was significant for the accomplishments of the coaches it graduated, whose lifework, it should be noted was mostly accomplished at stadiums and baseball parks, including those proposed in this study.

CRICKET, TENNIS, AND LAWN BOWLING

Proposed:

St. Petersburg Lawn Bowling Club, Florida
Germantown (Manheim) Cricket Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Merion Cricket Club, Haverford, Pennsylvania
Newport Casino, Newport, Rhode Island

Designated:

None

Notes:

Cricket, an important sport historically, was once a workingmen's game as well as one favored by aristocrats. Tennis has undergone a contrary transformation. Germantown and Merion are important in both cricket and tennis. Merion Cricket also has a highly commendable role in squash rackets play. The Newport Casino has additional importance in architecture and social history. Bowling Green in New York, which might suggest itself in light of St. Petersburg, lacks historic integrity.

RACETRACKS AND SPEEDWAYS

Proposed:

Hialeah Park Race Track, Florida
Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Indiana
Churchill Downs, Kentucky

Designated:

Historic Track, New York

Notes:

Racing is an antique sport in America, but most of the early tracks have been destroyed. The dilemma in these cases is the relative importance that should be attached to the tracks themselves, as opposed to grandstands, barns, and other facilities at the tracks. Belmont, Pimlico, Santa Anita, and several others have been excluded because of great changes to them. Keeneland and Saratoga, on the other hand, merit further study if Churchill Downs and Hialeah set the standard. The Kentucky State Historic Preservation Officer has also suggested that the horse farms around Lexington should be recognized.

PUBLIC PARKS AND GARDENS:

Boston Common, Massachusetts
Boston Public Garden, Massachusetts

Designated:

Central Park, New York City, New York

Notes:

As mentioned above, multiple properties seem to deserve additional attention under this subject. For example, many have been the sites of outstanding events, such as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St. Louis World's Fair of 1904) at Forest Park and Washington University in St. Louis. San Pedro Springs Park in San Antonio is an exceptional early park site set aside during Spanish rule. Other parks are important in city planning, e.g., Chicago's system and Frederick Law Olmsted's "emerald necklace" of Boston parks. All need study for their landscape architecture and may have other attributes as well; the Boston Public Garden has its renowned swan boats, and the Boston Common has a notable connection to the early history of football.

WORLD'S FAIR AND EXPOSITION SITES

Administration Building, Golden Gate International Exposition (1939), Treasure Island, San Francisco, California
Pan-Pacific Auditorium, Los Angeles, California
San Francisco Civic Center (Panama-Pacific International Exposition [1915]), California
Washington University Hilltop Campus Historic District (Site of Louisiana Purchase Exposition and Third Olympic Games [1904]), Missouri
Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Building (New York Building, Pan-American Exposition [1901]), New York
Fair Park (Texas Centennial Exposition [1936]), Dallas, Texas

Designated:

Balboa Park, San Diego (Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and California-Pacific International Exposition of 1935), California
Cincinnati Music Hall (Cincinnati Industrial Exposition of 1879 and Centennial Exposition of the Ohio Valley and Central States of 1888), Ohio
Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia (Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876)

Notes:

Several other properties must be acknowledged. The New York World's Fairs Site (1939-40 and 1964-65) has a surviving landscape plan as well as several structures from 1939 and others from 1964. Of the sites of Chicago's two great fairs, that of 1893 survives largely in the landscape plan of Jackson Park and Midway Plaisance. The important Museum of Science and Industry there is a reconstruction of an 1893 fair building. Of the 1933 "Century of Progress" only features there before the fair (Soldier Field, Adler Planetarium, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Field Museum, the first three of which are nominated elsewhere in this study) remain. The rest of the latter fair's site in Burnham Park is vastly changed.

A number of fair buildings, such as the Lustron houses from the "Century of Progress," at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, have been removed from their original sites. None of these moved features are included in this study, because it does not seem clear that they merit an exception to the rule on moved buildings.

AMUSEMENT PARKS, CAROUSELS, AND ROLLER COASTERS

Proposed:

Mission Beach Roller Coaster, California
Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Loeffl Carousel and Roller Coaster, California
Santa Monica Loeffl Hippodrome, California
Philadelphia Toboggan Company Carousel #6, Burlington, Colorado
Broad Ripple Park (Children's Museum) Carousel, Indianapolis, Indiana
Logansport Dentzel Carousel, Logansport, Indiana
Parker Carousel, Abilene, Kansas
Flying Horse Carousel, Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts
Highland Park Dentzel Carousel, Meridian, Mississippi
Armitage-Herschell Carousel, Minden, Nebraska
Playland Amusement Park, Rye, New York
Kennywood Park, Pennsylvania
Flying Horses Carousel, Westerly, Rhode Island
Crescent Park Loeffl Carousel and Shelter Building, E. Providence, Rhode Island

Notes:

Some 225 wood carousels of varying ages, histories, and states of preservation survive, of thousands built in the United States beginning in the 1860s. Carousels can also be classified by manufacturer. The examples presented in this study are, in general, the oldest and best preserved that survive from each manufacturer.

The National Carousel Association Census has been a basic tool for examining and selecting the examples proposed here. In addition to the carousels that are nominated here individually, historic carousels remain as features within certain amusement parks and other properties proposed for designation. Unlike most historic properties, carousels tend to have been moved, often repeatedly. Thus their shelter structures tend not to have survived, and are even rarer than the carousels themselves.

Carousels then can be considered as a separate category of properties. On the other hand, many have been features of amusement parks. Likewise for roller coasters, which tend to be even rarer than carousels because of their scale; in other words, they cannot be as easily moved or restored. Other features of amusement parks, some of great rarity, have not been as exhaustively studied or described, by anyone, as carousels and roller coasters, both of which have active constituency groups urging their preservation.

Amusement parks themselves tend not to remain the same. Few are substantially intact from historic times. They usually retain a few popular classic features and "retheme" the rest. Only a handful of the great amusement parks have survived relatively intact by having resisted Americans' increasing mobility and the emergence of the modern theme parks. Kennywood, near Pittsburgh, and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk are practically the last of their types and even they have been much modified. Playland, in Rye, New York, is notable as a well-preserved park designed for early automobile travelers.

Coney Island, where the prototypes of amusement parks developed, has many small amusements of some age, but only one old coaster, the ("Cyclone") (1928) [not as old as others included in this study]; a giant Ferris wheel; and the Parachute Jump, which actually was a feature of the 1939-40 New York World's Fair and was afterward moved to its current site.

In addition to the properties presented here, the Stein & Goldstein Carousel, Central Park, New York, and the Natatorium Looff in Spokane, Washington, have similar qualifications.

CIRCUS PROPERTIES

Proposed:

Wallace Circus Winter Quarters, near Peru, Indiana

Designated:

Ringlingville, Baraboo, Wisconsin

Notes

Circuses in America have traditionally been traveling collections of performers, animals, and curiosities. The greater ones resembled combinations of world's fairs and zoos. There are relatively few sites available to commemorate their vagrant existence. Their winter quarters are one of the exceptions.

Several sites, including the Peter Sells and John Robinson Houses, both in Ohio, and the Ringling House, Sarasota, Florida, which were once residences of great circus figures, have been considered but ruled out. They do not have extant historic circus quarters in their vicinities.

ZOOS

Proposed:

New York Zoological Park (The Bronx Zoo), New York
Cincinnati Zoo Historic Structures, Ohio

Previously Designated:

None

Notes:

Zoos originated as stationary circuses and existed in primitive form even in antiquity. The Philadelphia Zoo, which is slightly older than Cincinnati's, has important historical remains that deserve study if the Bronx and Cincinnati Zoos qualify. San Diego's genius has been in its landscaping and use of open enclosures. It has very little in the way of intact structures of qualifying age.

NAUTICAL RECREATION AND SPORTS

RMS Queen Mary, Long Beach, California
New York Yacht Club, New York City, New York
Boat House Row, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Notes:

These three properties represent strikingly different aspects of water recreation. Queen Mary's role is more complex than might be imagined. Since America has been destroyed, the New York Yacht Club seems to be the premier site for yachting. Boat House Row is one of the finest collections of structures associated with rowing.

RESORT HOTELS, SPAS, CASINOS, AND CAMPS

Proposed:

Asilomar Conference Grounds, California
Avalon Casino, California
W. Baden Springs Hotel, Indiana
Mapes Hotel and Casino, Reno, Nevada
Canfield Casino and Congress Park,
Saratoga Springs, New York
Saratoga Spa State Park, near Saratoga Springs, New York
Hotel Breakers, Ohio

Already Designated:

Hotel del Coronado, San Diego, California
Mission Inn, Riverside, California
Tampa Bay Hotel, Florida
Cape May Historic District, New Jersey
Timberline Lodge, Oregon

Notes:

This group of properties represents the passive side of recreation, which takes many forms. Additional properties might be proposed as counterparts to those included here. The history of American camping, especially, is poorly documented.

The selections here have a highly eclectic mixture of associations, including everything from the perfecting of the foreword pass to the "big band era."

SCIENCE AS RECREATION

Adler Planetarium, Chicago, Illinois
Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, Illinois
Mill Grove, near Audubon, Pennsylvania

Designated:

None

Notes:

These properties illustrate the relation of recreation and science or reveal how avocations can grow into scientific enterprises.

Just as colleges may be reluctant to accept praise for their athletic teams, when they want to be known instead for (or at least also for) scholarship, some institutions that perform scientific work have the same duality of purpose. Adler Planetarium and Shedd Aquarium are institutions aptly illustrating this dichotomy. Mill Grove, on the other hand, illustrates the same conflict growing out of the work of a transcendently important individual who contributed vastly to natural science, but also fathered bird-watching.

PAGEANTRY AND FESTIVALS

Proposed:

Atlantic City Convention Hall, New Jersey

Designated:

None

Notes:

This great structure has merits in engineering, and perhaps music, as well as for the pageant for which it is best known. In common with Churchill Downs and the Rose Bowl, the Miss America pageant in Convention Hall is a focus of great interest and attention and a celebratory spectacle in which the majority of the Nation to some extent, shares, whether they endorse the concept or not. The Mardi Gras and other great American pageants are of comparable significance but were not examined in this study.