

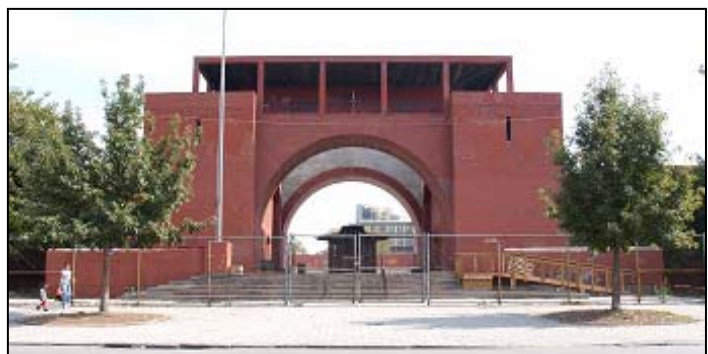
**MCCARREN PLAY CENTER**, including the bath house, swimming pool, diving pool, wading pool, filter house, lifeguard house, brick perimeter walls, piers and cast-iron fencing, comfort stations, linking pathways, and the planted median paralleling the western side of the bath house, Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street, Borough of Brooklyn.  
Constructed 1934-1936; Aymar Embury II, lead architect; Joseph L. Hautman, Henry Ahrens and others, consulting architects; Gilmore D. Clarke and others, landscape architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2696, Lot 1 in part, and portions of the adjacent public way, consisting of the property bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the northern curblineline of Bayard Street and the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street, extending easterly along the northern curblineline of Bayard Street to the western curblineline of Leonard Street, northerly approximately 670 feet along the western curblineline of Leonard Street, then westerly along a line extending from the chain link fence located approximately 80 feet north of the northeast corner of the 8-foot high brick wall of the McCarren Play Center, then westerly along the line of the chain link fence, following its line as it turns northwesterly, westerly and finally southwestwesterly to its end point located approximately 35 feet northeast of the northeast corner of the northern brick comfort station of the McCarren Play Center, continuing westerly to a point on the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street located approximately 330 feet south of the intersection formed by the southern curblineline of Driggs Avenue and the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street, then southerly along the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street to the point of beginning.

On January 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the McCarren Play Center (LP-2244) including the bath house, swimming pool, diving pool, wading pool, filter house, life guard house, brick perimeter walls, piers and cast-iron fencing, comfort stations, linking pathways, and the planted median paralleling the western side of the bath house, Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 26). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Fourteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, and representatives from the offices of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer, the office of Assembly member Joe Lentol, the Municipal Art Society of New York, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Waterfront Preservation Alliance of Greenpoint & Williamsburg, the McCarren Park Conservancy, the Preservation League of Staten Island and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission has also received letters of support from the Modern Architecture Working Group, and from Community Board 1, who stated support for the Vollmer plan for the pool. At the time of designation, Councilmember Rosie Mendez, of Manhattan's Second District, spoke in favor of designation of the McCarren Play Center. Several of the speakers also expressed support for the larger designation effort of all the WPA-era pools. The site was previously heard on April 3, 1990 and September 11, 1990 (LP-1789).

### Summary

The McCarren Play Center is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal agencies created in the 1930s to address the Great Depression. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout



New York City's five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities constructed in the country. The pools were completed just two and a half years after the LaGuardia administration took office, and all but one survives relatively intact today.

While each of the 1936 swimming pool complexes is especially notable for its distinctive and unique design, the eleven facilities shared many of the same basic components. The complexes generally employed low-cost building materials, principally brick and cast concrete, and often utilized the streamlined and curvilinear forms of the popular 1930s Art Moderne style. Sited in existing older parks or built on other city-owned land, the grounds surrounding the pool complexes were executed on a similarly grand scale, and included additional recreation areas, connecting pathway systems, and comfort stations. The team of designers, landscape architects and engineers assembled to execute the new pool complexes was comprised largely of staff members and consultants who had earlier worked for Moses at other governmental agencies, including architect Aymar Embury II, landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Allyn R. Jennings, and civil engineers W. Earle Andrews and William H. Latham. Surviving documents also indicate that Moses, himself a long-time swimming enthusiast, gave detailed attention to the designs for the new pool complexes.

The size of the swimming pool at the McCarren Play Center (165' x 330'), dedicated on July 31, 1936, is matched only by two of the other 1936 play center pools: Astoria and Betsy Head. Semi-circular diving and wading pools flank the swimming pool, an arrangement duplicated at both Sunset Play Center and Astoria Play Center. Contemporary sources indicated, however, that the capacity of the McCarren Play Center bath house exceeds by a few hundred that of the other ten play centers, including Astoria. The immense scale of the McCarren Play Center is powerfully expressed in the monumental forms of the main entryway, a massive cubic block topped by a set-back gallery. Giant arches emphasized by decorative brick patterning span the openings giving onto the street and swimming pool, while the smooth light-colored walls in the upper portion of the open courtyard reflect the light entering from above and add to the dramatic character of this space. Other notable features of the entryway include the Art Moderne ticket booth, the rounded jambs of the entrances into the locker rooms, and the decorative metal work in their transoms. Wide arches duplicated at a smaller scale than those of the main entryway link the separate comfort stations to the north and south ends of the bath house structure, further enhancing its monumentality. The landscaped setting, including linking pathways, additional play areas and plantings, was contemporary with the construction of the McCarren Play Center.

Although the McCarren Play Center was last open in the summer of 1983, the Parks Department, with the support of local elected officials and community groups, is committed to renovating, restoring and reopening the pool and bath house/recreation building. Meanwhile, since 2005, the pool and deck of the McCarren Play Center have been used for concerts, film screenings, performances, and other public events, which have greatly increased the visibility of the pool and have catalyzed interim improvements.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of the McCarren Play Center Site<sup>1</sup>

The McCarren Play Center is set within the 35.71-acre McCarren Park, in the southern portion of the Brooklyn neighborhood known as Greenpoint. Sited near the Greenpoint-Williamsburg border, McCarren Park serves both neighborhoods and features ball fields, playgrounds, a running track, and large, grassy areas for picnicking and sunbathing.

Located in the northernmost portion of Brooklyn, Greenpoint is historically one of New York City's industrial centers. Prior to the nineteenth century, Greenpoint remained relatively isolated due to its geography; it is surrounded by water on three sides—the East River on the western shore and Newton Creek to the north and east. Historically a small creek separated Greenpoint from Williamsburg at its southern boundary, further isolating the area. This creek, which was called Bushwick Creek, was later filled and was located approximately where McCarren Park now sits.

Initially a small farming village, the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area grew exponentially with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.<sup>2</sup> Until about 1830 the shipbuilding industry had been located on the eastern shores of Manhattan from about Grand Street north to East 14<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1832 Nezhiah Bliss and Eliphalet Nott, owners of the New York shipbuilding factory Novelty Iron Works, purchased thirty acres of farmland in Greenpoint along the East River. Novelty became one of the nineteenth century's premier producers of marine engines, and by mid-century nearly all steamboats produced in the area were equipped with Novelty engines. As land in Manhattan became more and more precious for residential development, other firms followed suit. Over a dozen shipbuilding firms moved across the river to Greenpoint, turning it into one of the major areas for shipbuilding in the country.

Other industries to locate in Greenpoint in the mid-nineteenth century included porcelain and pottery works, brass and iron foundries, breweries, sugar plants and oil refineries. The large amount of industry created thousands of jobs, and immigrants flooded the area to work in the factories, creating a need for housing. The first wave of immigrants in the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area included Germans, Irish and Austrians, and later, towards the turn of the century, Poles, Russians and Italians. Williamsburg had a black population as early as 1820, when more than 20 of the area's 58 black residents were enslaved. With the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827, Williamsburg's African-American population increased exponentially; by 1855, its 1,147 black residents represented the second largest black community in Kings County.<sup>3</sup> However, as the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area's white population increased at the end of the nineteenth century, the overall percentage of African Americans decreased to 1.2 percent.

By the early part of the twentieth century, with the population of Greenpoint-Williamsburg at nearly a quarter of a million people, the area had some of the oldest, most dilapidated housing in Brooklyn. As thousands of new middle- and upper-class apartment buildings were built across New York City in the years following World War I, many residents of Greenpoint-Williamsburg left for more adequate housing, causing a population decline for the first time in over a century. According to urban planner Helen Logan, residents of the area in the 1940s tended to move out because of "bad housing conditions, lack of parks, and poor transit,"<sup>4</sup> and the WPA Guide to New York City called Williamsburg a "virtually unrelieved slum."<sup>5</sup> Following World War II, the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area faced another major shift in the population, with an influx of Puerto Ricans, Hispanics, African Americans and Eastern European Jews. While the area had a predominantly white, first- and second-generation immigrant population at the turn of the century, the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics increased during the mid- and post-war years.

Not only was the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area notorious for its poor housing conditions, it was also underserved in the ways of public recreation facilities. The enormous Greenpoint Park (later McCarren Park) was intended to alleviate this need; in 1906, the park officially opened to the public. In 1909, the Board of Alderman voted to rename the park for Patrick Henry McCarren (1847-1909). McCarren, who rose through the ranks of the Brooklyn Democratic Party to eventually serve as New York State Senator for 18 years, spent his childhood in Williamsburg and worked in the sugar refineries along the Greenpoint waterfront. Robert Moses chose McCarren Park as the location for one of the WPA pools based on the availability of parkland and the needs of the area's population. Residents of both Williamsburg and Greenpoint lobbied for the construction of pools in their respective neighborhoods; Moses responded by building the largest of the WPA pools in McCarren Park, which was located near the boundary of the two neighborhoods.

### Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert Moses and the New Deal<sup>6</sup>

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932 in the middle of the Great Depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929. Roosevelt promised to rebuild confidence in American capitalism and to improve the nation's standard of living by creating the New Deal economic program of unprecedented public spending on social programs and construction projects.

New York City had been especially affected by the economic downturn,<sup>7</sup> and its citizens, hoping for change, elected Fiorello H. LaGuardia to the mayoralty of New York City in 1933 as an anti-Tammany Hall reform candidate. A maverick Republican and a five-term congressman from East Harlem, LaGuardia won the mayoral election on the "Fusion" ticket after losing the 1929 mayoral race on the Republican line. The Fusion Conference Committee at first considered running Robert Moses, another Republican, who was appointed Chairman of the New York State Council of Parks in 1924 by his political mentor, Governor Alfred E. Smith, a Tammany Hall Democrat from New York City. However, the committee decided against Moses because of his association with Smith, and chose LaGuardia instead. At the time, Moses was a popular public figure with a reputation as a progressive and as the builder of great parks and parkways like Jones Beach and the Northern State Parkway on Long Island. His endorsement of LaGuardia during the campaign was considered instrumental in securing a victory for LaGuardia. Within a week of the election, LaGuardia chose Moses, a champion of reform politics, as New York City's new Park Commissioner.

Moses accepted the position of Commissioner of Parks in the LaGuardia administration on the condition that the five existing independent Parks Departments (one for each borough) would be consolidated into a single department with himself as the sole Commissioner, with authority extending also over the City's parkways. Moses also demanded to be appointed the Chief Executive Officer of the Triborough Bridge Authority, which was then building the bridge of that name, and that a new agency, the Marine Parkway Authority, which would build a bridge to the Rockaways, be created with himself at the helm. Already in charge of the Long Island State Park Commission, the New York City Council of Parks, the Jones Beach State Park Authority, and the Bethpage State Park Authority, Moses would then be in control of all existing and proposed parks and parkways in the New York metropolitan region, with the exception of areas outside of New York State.

In the 1920s, Moses was at the forefront of the national recreation movement that began in the first decade of the twentieth century, led by such men as President Theodore Roosevelt and the lesser-known George D. Butler of the National Recreation Association. The movement gained momentum under the administration of President Calvin Coolidge with the organization of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation (NCOR) in 1924.<sup>8</sup> The Depression of the 1930s further amplified the need to provide more, or improve existing, outdoor recreational opportunities, especially in urban areas. Fortunately, such goals fit nicely into FDR's New Deal economic programs. Mayor LaGuardia's success in securing a lion's share of monies made available by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), and Moses' management skills and his ability to attract talented designers and engineers to his staff, resulted in profound physical changes to the environment of New York City. The construction and renovation of neighborhood recreation areas, such as pools and play grounds, were some of the most ambitious and successful programs undertaken by Moses with funds largely provided by the WPA.

Moses began to assess the state of the City's parks and to plan for their future as soon as LaGuardia announced his intention to appoint Moses as Park Commissioner. According to one source: "Immediately after the election he wrote out, on a single piece of paper, a plan for putting 80,000 men to work on 1,700 relief projects."<sup>9</sup> Moses hired a consulting engineer and three assistant engineers to survey every park and parkway in the City. The survey was completed by the time he took office in mid-January 1934.

When Moses took over the Parks Department, it was already employing 69,000 relief workers funded mainly by the federal Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA). However, Moses found the men to be ill-equipped and inadequately supervised, and considered many of the construction projects to have been poorly designed. He immediately began to revamp the entire operation of the Parks Department and established a Division of Design, located at the Arsenal in Central Park. The staff was to be headed up by experienced professionals drawn mainly from his State agencies. Some of his talented staff of young architects, landscape architects and engineers had worked on the designs for Long Island's highly acclaimed parks, including Jones Beach, which his considered one of Moses' greatest accomplishments. His staff also included a number of well-known and accomplished designers, among

them architects Aymar Embury II and John M. Hatton, and the landscape architect and civil engineer Gilmore D. Clarke. Other top members of Moses' staff were the landscape architect Allyn R. Jennings, and civil engineers W. Earle Andrews and William H. Latham.

The Parks Department's Division of Design was organized in the following manner: a topographical unit of about 400 surveyors and draftsmen, a landscape architecture unit of about 60 people, an architecture unit made up of 60 architects and draftsmen, and an engineering unit of about 50. Smaller units included an Arboricultural Department and an Inspection Department. All the work in the Division of Design was under the direct supervision of the Park Engineer, who was aided and advised by a Consulting Architect, a Consulting Landscape Architect, and a Consulting Engineer.<sup>10</sup> All new projects began in the topographical unit, where a complete survey of the land was prepared. It then moved on to the landscaping unit, where the basic concept for the design was developed. Next, the three units: landscape, architecture, and engineering, collaborated to produce the final design and all the necessary construction documents. The Park Engineer and his aides had to approve all of the plans. Moses himself sometimes stepped in to revise or overrule a design, especially on the larger, more visible projects.

Moses' superior management ability and political savvy allowed him to move projects along very quickly and to produce concrete results, gaining for him much public admiration. However, Moses' personal demeanor was notoriously stubborn and arrogant, and he was known, at times, to disregard the legitimate authority of other governmental agencies. Once, when the Department of Plant and Structures refused to suspend a ferry service that used a terminal in the path of construction of the Triborough Bridge approach road, Moses had his men demolish the terminal while the boat was on the other side of the river. He feuded with President Franklin D. Roosevelt for years, even while Washington was pouring millions of dollars into Moses' own Parks Department. His later battles with and subsequent triumphs over community groups opposed to the routing of the Gowanus and the Cross-Bronx Expressways through their neighborhoods are now legendary. Moses was also known to have been insensitive to people of color, and reputedly tried to restrict access to many of his recreational facilities, including the WPA-era pools.<sup>11</sup>

To many, Robert Moses was a master builder; to others he was a spoiled bully who seemingly always had his way. In the summer of 1934, however, Moses was a hero. Hundreds of projects, covering virtually every neighborhood in the city, had been completed. Structures were repainted, tennis courts resurfaced, and lawns reseeded. Hundreds of new construction projects were either already underway or in the process of being designed.<sup>12</sup> Among them was the McCarren Play Center in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

### History of Swimming in New York City<sup>13</sup>

The Hudson and East Rivers lining the shores of Manhattan both served as popular bathing spots dating to the Colonial Era. Despite extensive contamination resulting from decades of unchecked pollution, the long tradition of swimming in the city's rivers was still strong at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Out of concern for the health and welfare of the people of the city, and particularly of immigrant populations who took most advantage of the rivers, the city opened its first floating pools in 1870. The floating pools, however, were essentially wood-framed structures suspended on pontoons, filled with the same unfiltered river water. By the turn of the century, there were about two dozen of these floating pools moored at various places along the waterfront, competing directly with industry for the space. Some improvements were eventually made to the floating pool concept; for example, by 1914, the baths were required to be watertight and filled with purified water. Nonetheless, as river quality continued to erode, and access to nearby beaches improved, the floating pools gradually disappeared.

In the 1890s, New York City's first public bath was opened on the Lower East Side of Manhattan by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, following an 1895 state law requiring the construction of such facilities. By 1911, twelve new bath houses had been constructed in Manhattan, mostly sited within immigrant neighborhoods. The pool-like indoor baths, however, were never very popular with the working class, and many of the bath houses eventually added actual swimming pools and gymnasias in hopes of attracting more patrons. The indoor pools at the municipal bath houses never quite replaced the need or demand for outdoor swimming facilities in the city, and by the 1930s, it was clear that they not aged well.

When Robert Moses became Parks Commissioner in 1934, only two outdoor pools remained, one at Betsy Head in Brownsville, the other at Faber Park on Staten Island. Moses, however, considered the Betsy Head pool "unsanitary" and often lamented its "unattractive, inadequate, and impractical bath house."<sup>14</sup> Moses, a strong believer in the need for safe bathing in the city, consulted with the heads of the New York City Health

and Sanitation Department in July 1934. Finding that only an increase in the number of swimming pools could ease the existing burden, Moses wrote the following in a press release picked up by the New York Times:

It is no exaggeration to say that the health, happiness, efficiency and orderliness of a large number of the city's residents, especially in the summer months, are tremendously affected by the presence or absence of adequate swimming and bathing facilities. We are providing additional wading pools for children as fast as we can... This, however, does not meet the problem of any but small children... It is one of the tragedies of New York life, and a monument to past indifference, waste, selfishness and stupid planning, that the magnificent natural boundary waters of the city have been in large measure destroyed for recreational purposes by haphazard industrial and commercial developments, and by pollution through sewage, trade and other waste... We must frankly recognize the conditions as they are and make our plans accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

To Moses, a forerunner in the national recreation movement and an avid swimmer since his university days, a change was desperately needed, and by October 1934, excavations had already begun for the first of eleven state-of-the-art swimming pools. The pools were to be sited near inner-city neighborhoods in order to provide swimming for those who could not easily reach places like Orchard Beach or the beaches of Long Island. In addition to swimming pools, the new centers would incorporate elaborate bath houses, and also provide active adult sports areas, children's playgrounds, and other amenities. The eleven pools opened in the summer of 1936 and quickly gained recognition as being among the most exceptional public facilities constructed in the country.<sup>16</sup> All of the pools featured new bath houses, with the exception of Hamilton Fish and Betsey Head.<sup>17</sup> After the completion of the WPA-era pool complexes, no new public swimming pools were constructed in New York City until the 1970s. Over 1.65 million bathers are thought to have used the new swimming pools in their first summer of use.

#### The Swimming Pools, Moses, and Segregation in New York City<sup>18</sup>

Institutionalized racism was still an established way of life in the United States during the inter-war years, even on the federally sanctioned level. For example, as a result of federal guidelines articulated in the 1935 Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual, it was impossible for non-segregated developments to attain mortgage insurance, meaning ethnic and even religious minorities could only secure mortgages in certain areas. The result was a substantial increase in both racial segregation and urban disinvestment in cities across the country, New York included. At its peak, estimates of segregation in public housing nation-wide ran as high as 90 percent due in large part to both federal and local government policies.<sup>19</sup> Even as late as 1943, the City of New York gave its approval for Metropolitan Life's all-white, middle income project – Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village.

Robert Moses' reported attitude as being insensitive to people of color might have impacted both the siting and administration of the WPA-era pools.<sup>20</sup> LaGuardia and Moses often went to great lengths to show the media that they did care about minorities, holding, for example, a celebration for 25,000 people upon the opening of the Colonial Park pool, at which the mayor offered the facility as proof that his administration was in fact "building and doing things for Harlem."<sup>21</sup> Although LaGuardia and Moses claimed they were siting pools in the most congested areas of the city, Colonial Park in Harlem remained the only one sited in a predominantly "non-white" neighborhood. Moreover, the Thomas Jefferson Park pool, located in East Harlem (LaGuardia's old congressional district) was close to Spanish Harlem where the city's growing Puerto Rican population was settling. To discourage minority use at this facility, Moses reputedly kept the water heating system turned off, believing that the cold water would not bother Caucasian swimmers, but would somehow deter non-whites.

It has been alleged that the Parks Department at the time had an active policy of hiring only white lifeguards and attendants in hopes of deterring minority patrons. Whether or not such directives came from Moses himself, the fact remains that the pools were largely segregated at the time of their opening. In the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, "The Power Broker," Robert Caro writes that "one could go to the [Thomas Jefferson] pool on the hottest summer days, when the slums of Negro and Spanish Harlem a few blocks away sweltered in the heat, and not see a single non-Caucasian face."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, oral histories relating to Betsy Head pool tell of an unwritten rule that "African-Americans could swim in the Brooklyn pool only in the late afternoon, after white residents had vacated the premises."<sup>23</sup> Such claims are supported by photographs and video footage from the era, showing that largely, white and black New Yorkers swam in different pools.<sup>24</sup> For a handful of sites, however, including the

Highbridge and Colonial Park Play Centers in Manhattan, as well as McCarren Play Center in Brooklyn, photographs and video footage seem to indicate that, on occasion, the populations did mix.<sup>25</sup>

### The Design and Construction of the McCarren Pool<sup>26</sup>

Along with the other WPA-era pools, the McCarren Play Center was opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with public funding provided by the WPA. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout New York City's five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities ever constructed in the country. The city's pool construction program was reported to have been the most expensive in terms of total cost. Robert Moses, an avid swimmer who had a home near the ocean in Babylon, Long Island, was known to have taken a special interest in the design and construction of bathing and swimming facilities, such as Jones Beach, Orchard Beach and Riis Park, as well as the neighborhood swimming pools. As a result of his special attention, along with that of Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, the design and execution of New York City's aquatic facilities in the 1930s were a cut above most other park projects at the time.

At the start, the Parks Department adopted a list of shared guidelines for the entire pool project in order to enhance the efficiency of the design effort, to unify the operations of each complex, and to meet the various local and federal requirements of the relief programs. For example, each pool complex was to have separate swimming, diving and wading pools, and a large bath house, the locker room sections of which doubled as gymnasiums during non-swimming months. The bath houses, which would serve as the centerpieces of each complex, would be distinctive pavilions that would establish the design motif of each facility. Concrete bleachers at the perimeter of the pools would furnish spectator viewing areas to be augmented at some sites with rooftop promenades and galleries. There would be a minimum width for the decks to provide enough room for sunbathing and circulation. There had to be underwater lighting for night swimming, and at least one dimension of each swimming pool would have to be a multiple of fifty-five yards to allow swimming competitions to be held at standard distances in either English or metric systems. Plus, the complexes had to share low-cost building materials, principally brick and cast concrete, as required by the federal government as per the terms of the WPA funding.

To satisfy federal stipulations on low-cost materials, it appears that the design team for the pools determined that the streamlined and curvilinear forms of the Art Moderne and Modern Classical styles would best meet the low-cost needs and still permit pleasing aesthetics. As a group, the pools were also distinguished by the innovative mechanical systems required to heat, filter and circulate the vast amounts of water they used. Many of these innovations set new standards for swimming pool construction, such as scum gutters that allowed in enough sunlight to naturally kill off bacteria and a series of footbaths filled with foot cleaning solution through which bathers were forced to pass upon entering the pool areas from the locker room.

Sited on existing older parks or built on other city-owned land subsequently developed as parks and playgrounds, the huge pool complexes were provided with landscaped settings that included additional recreational areas, connecting pathway systems, and comfort stations. Despite the fact that the basic components were essentially the same and that the WPA required that only the cheapest materials be used, each of these swimming pool complexes is especially notable for its distinctive and unique setting, appearance and character.

Articles announcing a new pool at McCarren Park in Brooklyn began appearing in local newspapers as early as 1930.<sup>27</sup> The park had undergone major reconstruction early that decade, and a new playground at the site was opened in September 1934. By October of the same year, the Parks Department announced the start of excavations and site work for several of the new pools. Plans for the McCarren Play Center bath house, with its monumental arched entryway at Lorimer Street and its accommodations for 6,800 bathers, were filed in August 1935; plans for the one-story filter house and lifeguard station were also filed at that time.

The year 1936 was known as "the swimming pool year," since ten of the eleven pools were opened that summer, one per week for ten weeks.<sup>28</sup> Each opening day was a memorable event for its neighborhood. The day-long events featured parades, blessings of the waters, swimming races, diving competitions, appearances by Olympic stars, and performances by swimming clowns. Mayor LaGuardia attended every opening to perform the ribbon cutting. Festivities continued until well after dusk with LaGuardia pulling the

switch to turn on each pool's spectacular underwater lighting to the "oooohs" of the crowds. The McCarren Play Center opened on July 31, 1936, the eighth of the WPA pools to open that summer. The main swimming pool measured 330 by 165 feet—larger than four Olympic sized pools combined—with a small hemispherical pool at either end, one for wading and one for diving. The wading pool, which had been opened the prior fall, was separated from the rest of the pool complex by a brick wall and was free to the public at all times.

Some 75,000 people attended the opening ceremony of McCarren Play Center, making it the largest public gathering of the eleven pool dedications. Mayor LaGuardia, Robert Moses, City Comptroller Frank J. Taylor, Works Progress Administrator Victor Ridder, King's County Sheriff Peter J. McGuinness, and Greenpoint Chamber of Commerce President Dr. Ignatius P.A. Byrne made remarks at the ceremony. After turning on the pool's underwater lights, Mayor LaGuardia proclaimed, "the garden spot has truly flowered," adding, "I have been opening quite a few of these pools lately, and it is a pleasure to note on this occasion that no pool anywhere has been so much appreciated by the people as this one."<sup>29</sup> More than 200 policemen maintained order as amplifiers broadcast the ceremony to the thousands of people gathered in the streets and on neighboring rooftops.

From the moment of its opening through the decades that followed, the McCarren Play Center was the centerpiece of McCarren Park and one of the social centers of the Greenpoint-Williamsburg area. Even after facing gradual physical decline in the latter part of the twentieth century, the Play Center continues to inspire awe in the monumentality of its bold, modern forms. Together with the other WPA-era park improvements, it is one of the major achievements of the New Deal in New York City.

#### The Designers Behind the Planning of McCarren Pool<sup>30</sup>

The eleven WPA-era pool facilities shared many common features and specifications that could be repeated at each site, and contained other elements that were similar from complex to complex. As a result, junior designers, having different areas of expertise, appear to have moved quickly among the various pool projects. The department produced designs and construction documents simultaneously with great speed so that eleven pools and hundreds of other park projects, including some massive undertakings like Orchard Beach, were completed within a few years. Aymar Embury II and Gilmore Clark, respectively the Parks Department's Consulting Architect and Consulting Landscape Architect, were employed by the city on a part-time basis to oversee designs for park projects under Robert Moses. William H. Latham, the head of the Division of Design at the time, was the Park Engineer, responsible for the preparation of all plans and specifications within the department. Major design problems were discussed by Embury and Clarke before the preliminary sketches were made under Latham's direction. Completed sketches were subject to approval by the Park Engineer, the General Superintendent and Commissioner Moses. The consultants would give regular criticism during the preparation of the plans.

Aymar Embury II (1880-1966) was born in New York City and studied engineering at Princeton University, where he received a Master of Science degree in 1901. He acquired his architectural training through apprenticeships with three New York firms: George B. Post, Howells & Stokes, and Palmer & Hornbostel. He also had a brief stint in the firm of Cass Gilbert, between 1902 and 1903.<sup>31</sup> In 1905, Embury won both first and second prize in a contest held by the Garden City Company for a modest country house to be built in Garden City, Long Island. This earned him a reputation as a talented designer and led to many commissions for country houses in the New York metropolitan area. He subsequently published seven books and several pamphlets, mainly on early American architecture, further establishing him as an authority on the subject. By the start of the Great Depression, he was widely known and had received a diverse range of commissions all over the east coast of the United States, including college buildings and social clubs, in addition to residences. He designed the Players and Nassau Clubs in Princeton, New Jersey, the Princeton Club in New York City, and the University Club in Washington, D.C. Embury was said to have supervised the design of over 600 public projects, including Orchard Beach, Bryant Park, the Hofstra University Campus, the Central Park and Prospect Park Zoos, Jacob Riis Park, five of the eleven neighborhood pool and play centers, the Lincoln Tunnel, the Triborough Bridge, and many more.

The lead architect for each pool generally designed the bath house, which was unique to each site, establishing the motif that guided the design and detailing of the rest of the complex. Although each pool complex has been credited to a particular architect, the designs appear to actually have been collaborative



efforts among the army of architects, draftsmen, engineers, and landscape architects employed by the Parks Department in the 1930s.

Although the design of the McCarren Play Center is most commonly attributed to Aymar Embury II, the majority of the architectural plans and construction drawings on file at the Olmsted Center Archives in Queens for the bath house and filter house were prepared by Joseph L. Hautman. The drawings for the ticket booth, the iron gates and many of the Play Center's bronze details—including the clocks and much of the exterior lettering—were prepared by Harry Ahrens. Hautman was born in Cincinnati in 1903, attended the University of Cincinnati from 1921 to 1923, received his degree in architecture from MIT in 1926, and later studied at the Atelier Gromort Ecole de Beaux Art in Paris from 1927 to 1928. Between 1933 and 1936, Hautman was "Chief of Architecture" for the Parks Department, and served as assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Designs for the New York World's Fair of 1939. Hautman joined the already established firm of Voorhees, Smith, Smith & Haines in 1942, where he remained an architect at least through the 1960s. Ahrens was born in New York City in 1896, received his degree in architecture from Columbia University in 1916, was "Architect in Chief" with the New York City Parks Department from 1936 until 1941, and a project manager with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill from 1942 until 1946. By 1962, it appears that Ahrens had relocated to Philadelphia. Williams H. Latham is noted as the supervising engineer on many of the drawings for the bath house, filter house, and pool deck areas; an assortment of other names appear on the drawings as well.

Gilmore D. Clarke, to an unknown degree, was directly involved with the landscape design of the McCarren Play Center. Clarke (1892-1982) was born in New York City and studied landscape architecture and civil engineering at Cornell University, from which he received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1913. He served as an engineer in the army during World War I, receiving many citations and decorations, and remained in the Army Reserve Corps until 1939. During the 1920s, he served on several local, state and federal commissions as landscape architect, including the Architectural Advisory Board for the United States Capital, the New York State Council of Parks (which was headed by Robert Moses), and the Westchester County Park Commission, among many others. For his work in Westchester County, Clarke was awarded the Gold Medal of Honor in Landscape Architecture from the Architectural League of New York in 1931. By the time of the Great Depression, Clarke was already established as the most popular landscape architect in public works in America.

Clarke's career advanced during the 1930s. Besides being hired by Robert Moses as the Consulting Landscape Architect to the New York City Parks Department, he also became a member of the National Commission on Fine Arts, the New York State Planning Council, and the Board of Design for the 1939 New York World's Fair. His work for the Parks Department included Astoria Park, Bryant Park, Central Park Zoo, City Hall Park, Orchard Beach in the Bronx and the Henry Hudson Parkway. He taught landscape architecture at Cornell University from 1935 to 1950, serving as dean from 1939 until his retirement in 1950, and wrote several articles for trade periodicals. In 1935, Clarke joined Michael Rapuano, an engineer and landscape architect, establishing the New York civil engineering and architectural firm of Clarke & Rapuano, Inc. Clarke was president of the firm from 1962 until his retirement in 1972. Later in his career, Clarke worked as a consultant on the construction of the United Nations Headquarters in New York and became a Trustee for the American Museum of Natural History.

### Subsequent History<sup>32</sup>

The McCarren Play Center appears to have been mostly completed by the date of its dedication on July 31, 1936, with the exception of some of the finishing details; drawings for the large bronze clocks, the iron gates and the bronze signage were not approved until October 1936. However, it appears that the Play Center was entirely complete by the opening of the 1937 season, and few alterations were made to the complex in the years immediately following the opening.

By the late 1970s, many of the WPA-era pools, McCarren Play Center included, had become badly run down, partially the result of the fiscal crisis of the 1970s which hit the Parks Department particularly hard. By March 1981, the Parks workforce had dwindled to a record low of 2,900 employees, mostly unskilled and temporary, as compared to the 30,000 parks employees on staff during the Moses administration. The strain on Parks Department resources was evident in the deplorable conditions of many of its facilities. In the summer of 1976, the city's pools opened a week later than normal, and water safety staff was reduced more than fifty

percent; the decimation of able staff as well as the lack of funding for general maintenance contributed to the steady decline of the pools. To address the rapid deterioration of its recreational facilities, in 1977 the Parks Department began a major capital construction program involving more than 500 projects, expected to total more than \$180 million, partly in Federal funds—the first such projects undertaken by the parks system since the fiscal crisis halted such work in 1975, and arguably the most ambitious program to improve the parks since the 1940s. Among the projects planned was a \$10 million plan to preserve Prospect Park, a \$1 million renovation of the Coney Island Boardwalk, and several millions dedicated to the rehabilitation of many of the WPA-era pools—including the McCarren Play Center.

This restoration, however, would never take place. By the early 1980s, the McCarren Play Center had become, according to the *New York Times*, “overrun by thousands of teen-agers and ... a haven for drug dealers and prostitutes.”<sup>33</sup> Some residents of the neighborhood, many of whom had beloved childhood memories of swimming in McCarren pool, saw it as a magnet for degenerate behavior and wanted it closed for good. Local resident Larry Smith was quoted in the local newspaper as saying that as the 1970s rolled by, “each year the pool got a little worse. Gangs would come to the pool and intimidate the lifeguards. The pool became unsanitary with pampers and candy wrappers in the water.”<sup>34</sup> The reputation of being unsafe, as well as reports of children developing rashes after swimming in the pool, led to the Play Center’s closing at the end of the 1983 season. When contractors showed up to begin the restoration of the complex in the summer of 1984, a group of protestors had chained themselves to the entrance gates, demanding that the project be reconsidered.

The 1980s and 90s saw the gradual rehabilitation of the other WPA-era pools, while the McCarren Play Center sat, vacant and crumbling, at the center of a community debate regarding its future. After more than a year of study, the local community board adopted a plan to turn the pool complex into a year-round recreational center. The plan included the demolition of the bathhouse wings, the construction of a gymnasium and community center, and the reduction of the pool to Olympic size—decreasing its capacity from 6,800 to 2,000. Many community members were outraged by the proposed reduction in the size of the pool, asserting that it was a racist ploy to “keep out black and Hispanic youths from neighboring Williamsburg and other nearby sections.”<sup>35</sup> Supporters disputed this claim with the argument that a smaller pool would be easier to patrol; they felt that in the 1990s, as opposed to 1936, a pool full of more than six thousand people would likely result in chaos. The inability of all parties to find a resolution regarding the future of the complex resulted in a stalemate, and the Play Center suffered under years of continued neglect. Roof failure led to exposure and accelerated severe structural decay. Vandals breached the Play Center’s walls and stripped the buildings of their fixtures and covered their walls with graffiti. The large bronze eagles that once flanked the stairs were recovered by a Parks Department employee as they were being wheeled down Houston Street to an architectural salvage store; at one point, a car was driven into the pool.

In 2005, with a resolution for the McCarren Play Center still in flux, local choreographer Noemie LaFrance requested permission to stage a large site-specific dance performance in McCarren pool. Sensing an opportunity to increase the visibility of the Play Center and bring the question of its restoration back into the forefront, the City allocated funds to clean up the space and stabilize the bath house enough for a public event. Together with money supplied by neighborhood-based Ron Delsener Presents and Sens Productions, the funding provided for “moderate clean-up of the site, which included clearing an access path off Leonard Street and installing a new double gate, clearing the pool deck and floor drains, applying new stucco to the inside of the arch, and clearing some of the excess vegetation. The Mayor’s Graffiti Task Force sent two paint crews to cover the graffiti on the bathhouse and accessory buildings.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, a low rail was installed around the pool, perimeter fencing was installed or repaired, various steps and trip hazards cemented, the ticket booth cleaned, and the perimeter relandscaped.<sup>37</sup> The performance, titled “Agora,” took place from September 13 through October 1, and the McCarren Play Center was seen by the general public for the first time in more than 21 years.

The overwhelming popularity and immense amount of news coverage surrounding LaFrance’s performance brought new identity to the McCarren Play Center as performance space. Today, the pool hosts a variety of summer events, including movie screenings, concerts, “Pool Parties,” and other public happenings.<sup>38</sup> The Parks Department, with the support of local elected officials and community groups, is committed to renovating, restoring and reopening the pool and bath house/recreation building. In 2007, as part of Mayor Bloomberg’s PlaNYC initiative, nearly \$50 million was allocated to the rehabilitation of the McCarren Play

Center as a state-of-the-art recreational space. Conceptual plans for reconstruction have been produced by Robert A.M. Stern, Vollmer Associates, and others, as well as by the in-house staff of the Parks Department. In the interim, the Parks Department is seeking to further stabilize the Play Center for continued use as a performance space, and is exploring the possibility of installing a temporary ice skating rink and skateboarding park on the premises for use before the capital project ensues.

### The Architecture and Site of the McCarren Play Center<sup>39</sup>

The New Deal construction projects within New York City, such as the McCarren Play Center, were a part of a national trend that included similar projects undertaken by various governmental agencies, ranging from the vast Tennessee Valley Authority to small cities and towns. Urban projects built with WPA funding often possessed similar qualities from region to region, partly because the difficult economic climate dictated the use of inexpensive building materials, but also because the programs provided employment opportunities for a generation of young architects and engineers, many of whom were committed to modernism. For example, the bath house and waterfront facilities at Aquatic Park in San Francisco are similar in plan and appearance to the public pool and beachfront projects being built at about the same time New York City. The California facility, with its streamlined, concrete façade and steel-framed windows, bears a striking resemblance to the façade added in 1936 with WPA funds to the bath house at Jacob Riis Park in Queens. The original and creative use made of these modest materials by Moses' talented design teams and the careful siting of each project makes every one of them a distinguished, individual design, as much related to their specific environment and needs as to one another.

The implementation of a modern aesthetic in the design of the WPA pools stands as a testament to the influence of the young designers on Moses' team; Aymar Embury II, who oversaw the design of the eleven neighborhood pools, was generally a traditionalist with little patience for modernism. In a 1938 interview, Embury was quoted as having said:

If an architect has any function, it is to coordinate units so that they do a required job and at the same time create a pleasant emotion. Modernists believe that the essence of their work is to do something that has never been done before. They leave off all ornamentation because, they say, the ornaments do not aid the structure to do its job. I suppose some of these architects do not use neckties or buttons when they dress.<sup>40</sup>

Considering the collaborative nature of the design process of the WPA Play Centers, it is fitting that the design of the McCarren Play Center, like that of the other neighborhood pools, relied on classical forms while employing a modern vocabulary. The McCarren Play Center's dominant feature is the arched entrance to the bath house, which is visible from a distance as one approaches McCarren Park, and has become a iconic symbol of the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area. The immense scale of the McCarren Play Center is powerfully expressed in the monumental forms of the main entryway, a massive cubic block topped by a set-back gallery. The designers relied on the material of the building itself to relate ornament; giant arches emphasized by decorative brick patterning span the openings onto the street and swimming pool, while the smooth light-colored walls in the upper portion of the open courtyard reflect the light entering from above. Other notable features of the entryway include the Art Moderne ticket booth, the rounded jambs of the entrances into the locker rooms, and the decorative metal work in their transoms. Wide arches duplicated at a smaller scale those of the main entryway link the separate comfort stations to the north and south ends of the bath house structure, further enhancing its monumentality.

The McCarren Play Center historically had bronze details that enhanced the massive brick structure. Large bronze eagles once stood at either side of the entrance stairs, serving as bases to the tall flag poles. Large bronze letters spelling out "McCarren Play Center" adorned the exterior of the building, and smaller lettering indicated the women and men's entrances to the bath house. Large bronze clocks were once located at the interior and exterior of the bath house, and small bronze reliefs of marine creatures once embellished the lower panels of the ticket booth. These bronze features, most of which were removed by vandals, no longer exist at the McCarren Play Center site.

## Description

### *Plan and Circulation*

McCarren Park covers approximately 36 acres and is divided into four blocks by city streets.<sup>41</sup> The park is irregular in shape, and is bordered roughly by North 12<sup>th</sup> Street to the southwest, Bayard Street to the southeast, Nassau Avenue to the west and north and Lorimer and Leonard Streets to the east. The McCarren Play Center encompasses nearly an entire city block and is located at the eastern portion of McCarren Park. It is bounded by Bayard Street to the south, Lorimer Street to the west, and Leonard Street to the east. The north boundary of the lot is irregular, and is bounded by Driggs and Manhattan Avenues. The Vincent V. Abate Playground is located in the northernmost portion of the block and is not part of the landmark site. The landmark site includes the former wading pool, which is currently the McCarren Water Park and is open to the public. Entry to the former wading pool is located at Driggs Avenue; one must pass through the Vincent V. Abate Playground for access. It is not accessible from the McCarren Play Center and is separated from the rest of the landmark site by a historic brick and iron fence.

The McCarren Play Center bath house is a long, rectangular building that stretches north to south, along Lorimer Street. There are two public comfort stations at either end of this bath house building, connected to its north and south-facing elevations by brick double archways. The pool and deck areas are located just beyond the bath house, to the east. There is a large, rectangular pool with a smaller, semicircular pool at either end (to the north and south). On the opposite side of the pools is the filter house complex, which also houses the lifeguard station, control room and bleacher area. The complex is connected by a series of interconnecting pedestrian pathways and iron-and-brick walls. The plan of the entire Play Center is generally symmetrical on an east-west axis.

The McCarren Play Center can be approached from the west at Lorimer Street, or from the east at Leonard Street. Historically, the main entrance was located at Lorimer Street, slightly south of center of the block. There are two rear entrances to the Play Center at Leonard Street, to the east. Swimmers would enter the Play Center by climbing the wide steps at the Lorimer Street entrance and entering the open pavilion beneath the massive arch. A ticket for admission would be purchased here at the ticket booth, which is a freestanding structure located at the center of the open pavilion. After purchasing an admission ticket, patrons would enter the bathhouse through one of two entrances; men would enter to the north and women to the south. From the locker rooms, access to the pool deck area was provided by doors at the respective ends of the men's and women's sides of the rear (east) façade, and only after patrons had passed through the mandatory shower and foot baths. Today, access to the pool area is available directly past the ticket booth and through the arch of the bathhouse pavilion. The open pavilion historically had iron gates prohibiting patrons from passing directly through the second archway to the pool area.

The former wading pool, which is accessed from the north, is semicircular in plan and surrounded on all sides by an ample promenade lined with trees and benches. The filled-in wading pool area is currently used as a children's water park. This area is totally separate from the rest of the Play Center and is the only part of the complex still open to the public. The northern public comfort station, which included boys' and girls' restrooms as well as areas for storage, was located to the west of the wading pool; this is no longer in use today and is blocked by a chain link fence. An additional small, square-shaped brick building is located to the west of the wading pool.

The McCarren Play Center is completely surrounded by chain link fences and the historic brick and iron walls. A pedestrian pathway follows the perimeter of the Play Center, on the opposite side of the fencing, and is accessible to the public today. This pathway extends north around the perimeter of the Vincent V. Abate Playground, outside of the landmark site. The former wading pool area has a pedestrian pathway around its perimeter; however, this pathway does not connect to the larger continuous pathway that follows the perimeter of the Play Center.

### *The Bath House and Viewing Platforms*

The two-story bath house employs a long, rectangular plan and is constructed of concrete, English-bond brick (now entirely painted and, in many places, covered with graffiti), and stucco. The plan is centered around a large open-air entrance pavilion, with wings stretching in either direction. These wings historically housed the men's locker room (to the north) and the women's locker room (to the south). Located at each end of the rectangular building are the former public comfort stations; these comfort stations are connected to the

bath house building by brick archways. The building's height varies to accommodate the central pavilion and the viewing platforms. The complex is symmetrical on an east-west axis.

The west, or main, façade of the bath house faces Lorimer Street. The massive entrance pavilion is located at the center of this façade and features a large, open archway with decorative brick voussoirs. There are two towers at either side of the archway, and the grouping is topped by a set-back gallery with a flat roof. The gallery terrace surrounds a windowless wall that separates it from the open courtyard below. There are two, tall windows at the first floor of the flanking towers. These windows, which were topped by splayed lintels, historically had steel-casement sashes with three panes each. Today, they are covered with metal panels. The second story of the flanking towers each featured a tall, thin window with copper louvers for ventilation. These louvers have been removed, but the window openings remain. The gallery above the archway has concrete posts supporting a concrete lintel, and above, the flat roof of the building. The gallery has a historic metal handrail at all sides. Two brick chimneys rise above the flat roof of the central pavilion, one at the north side and the other at the south side.

The central entrance arch is fronted by a granite staircase, which provides entry to the bath house. A non-historic wood handicap-access ramp has been placed at the southern portion of this staircase. The archway was historically marked with the words "MCCARREN PLAY CENTER" in bronze lettering (this signage has been removed). The first seven risers of the staircase extend beyond, and turn at a 90-degree angle to meet, the cast-granite sidewalls of the entry. These sidewalls culminate into two cast granite plinths that flank the stairs to the main entrance.<sup>42</sup> A granite landing composed of large blocks with a decorative diamond-shaped pattern in the middle meets patrons at the eighth riser; from this landing one can either continue through the arch to the ticket booth, or instead walk to the right or left up another series of granite steps that lead to the mezzanine, viewing platforms at the side wings and set-back gallery above the arched pavilion. Historically, there was wrought iron fencing prohibiting access to the upper floors; this fencing has been replaced with a solid brick wall on both sides.

To either side of the central pavilion are located the wings that housed the locker room areas. The wings, which stretch to the north and to the south, are each nine bays wide and one story high at this façade. They have a flat roof topped with cast-stone coping that steps up gradually towards the central pavilion. Each wing historically featured nine identical multi-paned steel casement windows. Each window consisted of six casement sashes; the center two sashes were six panes each, while the flanking sashes were three panes each. The comfort stations, which are located at the outermost end of the wings, each featured one window at the west façade. These windows had two steel casement sashes, each with four panes. All windows have been covered with metal panels. Today, creeping ivy covers much of the west façade of the north and south wings.

The interior plan of the entrance pavilion works around a symmetrical bi-axial plan: at the west and east elevations are two identical large open archways; at the north and south elevations are two identical enclosed archways, which have smaller entrances to the flanking wings of the bath house. The floor of the pavilion consists of granite and red brick laid in large, geometric patterns. The interior walls are brick; the walls above the arches are clad with stucco. The arches have simple brick voussoir surrounds at the interior. The pavilion's interior walls are topped with a denticulated brick cornice with cast stone coping. The north and south interior walls are identical. They each feature two central doorways with segmental arched openings and rounded jambs. These entrances led to the north and south wings of the bath house. These entrances historically featured metal double-doors with decorative wrought iron transoms. The transoms exist today; however, the doors have been replaced with metal panels. A third, smaller entrance topped with a splayed lintel is located at the eastern portion of the wall, at both the north and south elevations. This entrance also historically featured a single metal door; currently, it is covered with a metal panel. According to the original drawings, each of the north and south interior elevation walls featured bronze lettering that read "men" and "women" (respectively), bronze sconce light fixtures centered over each of the two main entrances and a bronze clock on each wall. None of these features exist today. There are six cast concrete benches in the pavilion—three at the north wall and three at the south wall.

The ticket booth sits at approximately the center of the floor in the interior of the pavilion. It is a multi-sided Art Moderne structure measuring approximately 8 x 17 feet with a wide, overhanging copper roof. According to the original plans, the ticket booth featured a bronze base and a steel frame, and was clad with marble panels below window-level. The upper half of the structure featured windows all the way around, with openings for communication and dispensing tickets. The ticket booth featured bronze moldings and bronze

relief sculptures in the shapes of marine-themed creatures mounted to the marble panels. A bronze fascia sat above the windows, beneath the roof. The roof, which was clad with copper and had eaves with a nearly four-foot projecting overhang, had copper louvers for ventilation. Today, the building exists in skeletal form. The underlying structure is exposed and has been reinforced with steel beams, and most of the marble, bronze and copper has been removed.<sup>43</sup> What remains has been painted the same brick-red color as the rest of the bath house.

The east façade of the bath house mimics somewhat the west façade; due to the similar nature of these two façades, the east façade will only be described as it differs to the west façade. The north and south wings are more elaborate at this façade, rising two stories with the second story stepped back to provide space for viewing platforms on the roof of the first story. Historically, there were two glazed metal bays on either side of the central arch; the northern bay provided entrance to the first aid facility, and the southern bay provided entrance to the Play Center office. All that remains of these glazed bays are remnants of copper flashing of the bays' conical roofs on the façade of the bath house. Other than the bay configuration, the east façade of the central pavilion of the bath house is nearly identical to the west façade. A non-historic light fixture hangs from a metal chain that has been attached to the arch of the pavilion. Historically, a large bronze clock was mounted to the façade at the second story of the southern tower.

The east facades of the north and south wings of the bath house are 16 bays wide at the first story. The facades of the wings are generally symmetrical. The first bays (counting away from the central arch) consist of a recessed entrance with an arched opening. The arched opening has a simple brick voussoir surround and projecting brick cheek walls. Historically, the entry consisted of flush metal double doors and was fronted by a foot bath (these doors provided entrance back into the locker rooms). Today, these doors have been covered with metal panels. The concave footbaths remain. Secondary entrances existed at the outermost bays; three at the south end and two at the north end. A brick cheek wall extends out and in front of these entrances, and the concave foot baths exist within the spaces between the cheek walls and the building's façade. Fenestration at the first story of the wings historically consisted of steel casement, multi-paned hopper windows, with either three or four panes apiece and stacked two sashes high. These windows had simple cast-stone sills and splayed brick lintels. Today, they have been covered with metal panels.

The east facades of the north and south wings of the bath house are 25 bays wide at the second story. This story is set back and fronted by a terrace that was used as a viewing platform. The platform floor has been clad with asphalt sheets. The facades of the wings are symmetrical. The first bays (counting away from the central arch) have open arched passageways allowing access to the viewing platforms from the west side of the building, via stairways. A second set of stairways (leading to the open gallery space above the arch in the central pavilion) flank these open archways. These steps are composed of granite, and have stepped brick handrails. The stepped handrails appear to have been repaired and, while the northern stairway is still stepped, it is not stepped in the original configuration. Fenestration at the second story consists of windows in groups of threes, with engaged brick piers spaced intermittently between them. These windows contained metal louver sashes; today, they are covered with metal panels. A continuous cast stone sill course runs beneath these windows, broken only by the engaged piers. Historically, there were cast stone and bronze lamps at the foot of the stairs leading to the open gallery. These lamps no longer exist. The roof of the second story is flat and topped with cast-stone coping.

A comfort station, containing a women's and men's restroom facility, is located at either end of the bath house building. They are attached to the bath house by a pair of arches. The comfort station at the north end is separated from the Play Center pool and deck area by a brick and iron wall. Each comfort station featured two entrances: one at the north or south façade, and one at the east façade. These entrances historically consisted of single metal glazed doors; today they are covered with metal panels. Signage indicating the "Girls" and "Boys" entrances still exists. All windows at the comfort stations have been covered with metal panels.

Generally, the bath house building has suffered a significant amount of damage, with much of the brickwork in disrepair. All windows and entrances have been enclosed with metal panels,<sup>44</sup> and the entire building has been painted a brick red color. The painting of the building's exterior occurred in the years after the Play Center had been closed to the public, and today, much of the accessible surfaces have been covered with graffiti.

### *The Filter House, Life Guard's Station and Bleacher Area*

The filter house and lifeguard's station are located on the east side of the pool, directly across from the bath house. The complex is composed of two square-shaped buildings that are connected by a wide brick wall and concrete bleachers. The buildings are English-bond brick with cast-granite bases and, like the rest of the Play Center buildings and walls, have been painted a brick red color. The filter house is located in the basement of the complex; the control room is located in the northern building, while the lifeguard's station is located in the southern building. The complex is symmetrical on an east-west axis.

The northern building, or control room, is one story in height and square in plan. The building features a faux wall that rises to about a foot and a half below the cornice. This faux wall wraps around the building and stops at either side of the main entrance, at the west façade. The main entrance historically consisted of a wood paneled double door with glazing. Each door featured six square panes of glass, and the door was topped with a 15-paned, segmental-arched transom. Today, the entrance is covered with metal panels. The entrance is set within an exaggerated arched opening, with radiating voussoirs of alternating lengths; this arch mimics the giant arch of the bath house. The entrance is recessed within this opening, with curved walls on either side of the doors. The north and east elevations of the lifeguard's station building each historically featured three tall 15-pane steel casement windows with splayed lintels. Today, these windows are covered with metal panels. The north elevation wall extends westerly past the building itself, then curves and extends northerly, forming the east boundary wall of the pool area. The south elevation of the control room features no windows or doors. The building is connected to the concrete bleachers and brick rear wall at the south elevation. The building features a pyramidal hipped roof that was historically capped with a copper-covered finial (which has been removed). A simple, denticulated brick cornice meets the roof's eave, and the faux wall is topped with cast-stone coping. Historically, the building had a slate roof with copper gutters; the gutters have been removed. A pipe vent is located at the south portion of the roof.

The southern building, or lifeguard's station, is nearly identical to the northern building. Similarly, it features a faux wall that rises to about a foot and a half below the cornice. This faux wall wraps around the building and stops at either side of the main entrance, at the west façade. The main entrance historically consisted of a wood panel double door with glazing. Each door featured six square panes of glass, and the entrance was topped with a 15-paned, segmental-arched transom. Today, the entrance is covered with metal panels. The entrance is set within an exaggerated arched opening, with radiating voussoirs of alternating lengths; this arch mimics the giant arch of the bath house. The entrance is recessed within this opening, with curved walls on either side of the doors. The south and east elevations of the control room building each historically featured three tall 15-pane steel casement windows with splayed lintels. Today, these windows are covered with metal panels. The easternmost opening at the south facade has been partially covered with a steel roll-up gate. The north elevation of the control room features a non-historic roll-up gate at the lower portion of the wall. This opening has been partially covered with a metal panel. The building is connected to the concrete bleachers and brick rear wall at the north elevation. The building features a pyramidal hipped roof that was historically capped with a copper-covered finial (which has been removed). A simple, brick denticulated cornice meets the roof's eave, and the faux wall is topped with cast-stone coping. Historically, the building had a slate roof with copper gutters; the gutters have been removed. A pipe vent is located at the south portion of the roof.

The two square buildings—the control room and the lifeguard station—are connected by a 50-foot wide brick wall. The wall is fronted on its west side (or pool-facing side) by concrete bleachers. The bleachers consist of three continuous concrete risers that extend the entire width of the brick wall, between the two buildings. The wall is approximately nine feet high and is composed of English-bond brick with intermediate engaged brick piers. It is topped with cast stone coping. Four of the engaged piers show scarring where there were, at one time, sconce light fixtures. On the opposite side of the wall, or the east-facing elevation, there is a deep ravine that exposes the basement wall of the filter house. The basement wall is composed of concrete block, with a cast-granite course separating the basement walls from the brick wall above. The basement elevation has six window openings, which have been covered with metal panels. Historically, each of these window openings had of a pair of six-pane steel casement windows, placed side-by-side. The brick wall above the basement wall is composed of English-bond brick with intermediate engaged brick piers.

The small ravine that exposes the basement level of the filter house is fronted by a low concrete retaining wall that was historically topped by a metal pipe railing. Today, the metal railing has been removed and a chain link fence fronts this ravine.

#### *The Pools and Deck Area*

The enclosed pool area to the east of the bath house forms an ellipse with its long axis set from north to south. Within this area are located the rectangular swimming pool flanked on either side by semicircular pools for diving on the south and wading on the north. Altogether, the three pools, which are separated by concrete decks, echo the elliptical shape of the enclosure. Opposite the pool area, to the east, is the filter house complex and concrete bleachers. A brick and wrought iron wall surrounds the pool area; at the south it leads from the bath house and around the ellipse of the diving pool. At the north, it leads from the bath house, in a straight line easterly between the wading pool and the larger pool, and southerly to the filter house complex. This wall has one entrance break, to the north of the filter house complex. The wall itself is composed of wide brick segments alternating with wrought iron fencing. The brick segments are English bond with granite bases and cast stone and coping (all painted); the fencing has granite bases. The wall is relatively intact, with some brick damage, and has been covered in some areas with plastic tarps. It is topped with non-historic chain link fence at the northeasterly portion of the wall.

The large, rectangular pool is empty and lined with a concrete gutter. The paint of the pool floor is cracked and peeling. Two long, metal grates are exposed at the pool floor, near the middle and running north and south. Two water-filtering islands still exist in the pool, one in the northern portion of the pool and the other in the southern portion. These islands are mushroom-shaped and made of concrete, with glazed-block at their upper portions. They are covered with graffiti and appear to be missing some of their working components. Three temporary wood staircases have been placed in the pool, providing access into the pool from the deck. These staircases are located near the southeast and southwest corners of the pool. A low, pipe railing has been installed around the perimeter of the pool. It is non-historic and was installed in the last couple of years. Historically, several pipe-metal ladders that provided access in and out of the pool were located intermittently throughout the pool's perimeter; these ladders no longer exist.

The former diving pool is located to the south of the larger pool. It has been filled in with dirt. Remnants of the former concrete diving board pedestal/platform exist at the north side of the pool; it is currently in a state of disrepair. The remnants of two smaller pipe-metal frames that appear to have held low diving boards are located at the southern end of the diving pool. These frames each have a single wood step. Scarring on the ground surrounding the diving pool indicates the former presence of a surrounding pipe-metal railing and pipe-metal ladders that provided access in and out of the pool. None of these features exist today. The diving pool is currently surrounded at its southerly end by portable restrooms.

The former wading pool is located to the north of the larger pool, separated from the rest of the complex by the historic perimeter wall. The wading pool has been filled in with concrete and features several non-historic concrete faux rocks and concrete animals equipped with spray spouts. The pool is surrounded by a blacktop pedestrian walkway that is in turn surrounded by a concrete pathway that is broken by intermittent planters and benches. A concrete drinking fountain is located at the western end of the pathway. There is a low, non-historic concrete and tile wall that surrounds the northern part of the wading pool, following the elliptical shape of the pool. A small landscaped area, which is enclosed with an iron fence, is located at the south end of the wading pool, near the wall that separates the wading pool from the rest of the pool complex. A historic iron fence surrounds the wading pool, with an opening at the north end, facing the Vincent V. Abate Playground.

The deck surrounding the pools has the remnants of historic lampposts,<sup>45</sup> historic concrete drinking fountains (one near the diving pool and the other near the former control room),<sup>46</sup> and a tall flag pole between the large pool and the diving pool at its north end.

A large stage area has been installed at the eastern edge of the pool, between the pool's edge and the bleachers of the filter house complex. The stage armature stands about two stories tall and extends from the start of the bleachers to the pool's gutters. Another temporary pipe-metal structure is located within the pool, directly across from the stage.

#### *The Surrounding Park*

The portions of McCarren Park that are part of the landmark site include a series of pathways paved with either blacktop or hexagonal blocks. All curbs are concrete. A pedestrian pathway follows somewhat the



elliptical perimeter of the Play Center, extending north to the entrance of the Vincent V. Abate Playground at the north end of the block (outside of the landmark site). Between the Play Center walls and the perimeter pathway there are a series of landscaped areas. Today, these areas are extremely overgrown and unkempt. Between the perimeter pathway and the sidewalk, there are grassy medians and other landscaped areas, also which are generally unkempt. Several brick posts, which at one time were likely connected by iron fencing, surround the perimeter of the park. Many of these posts have suffered brick damage, and all have been painted the same brick red color of the rest of the Play Center.

North of the former control room, on the east side of the Play Center walls, is a blacktopped area that is currently being used as a backstage area for the performances. There are trailers, a temporary generator and a tarp awning set up in this area. South of the former lifeguard station, on the east side of the Play Center walls, is the current rear entrance to the Play Center complex. Several large storage containers are currently located in this area, and it appears to have been somewhat recently paved with blacktop.

Report prepared by  
Kathryn E. Horak  
Research Department

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, (*Former*) *Colored School No. 3, later Public School 69* (LP-1977) (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Donald G. Presa; LPC, *Greenpoint Historic District* (LP-1248) (New York: City of New York, 1982), prepared by James T Dillon, Andrew S. Dolkart and Lisa Niven. Information in this section is based on the following sources *The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers' Project Guide to 1930s New York* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982): 253-257; Benjamin Marcus, *Last One In: Community, Conflict and the Preservation of McCarren Park Pool*. (Master's Thesis. Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, 2006), 37-43; "McCarren Park," hanging file (located at the Parks Library at the Arsenal, Manhattan, New York); Moses, Robert (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation), *26 Years of Progress: 1934-1960* (New York, 1960); *McCarren Park Historical Sign*, New York City Dept. of Parks and Recreation Online, September 9, 1999 <[http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/historical\\_signs/hs\\_historical\\_sign.php?id=200](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=200)>.

<sup>2</sup> Because of McCarren Play Center's proximity to both the Greenpoint and Williamsburg neighborhoods, the history of its site will include information about both neighborhoods. In this text, the author will refer to the area as Greenpoint-Williamsburg.

<sup>3</sup> Other concentrations of African Americans resided in the downtown and Fort Greene areas, in Weeksville, and in Carrville.

<sup>4</sup> See Marcus, "*Last One In...*" Citation as follows: Helen Logan. *Williamsburg—A Neighborhood Study*. (Masters Thesis. Columbia University School of Social Work, 1941), 23.

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<sup>5</sup> Also, see Marcus, “*Last One In...*” Citation as follows: *The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers’ Project Guide to 1930s New York* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 34.

<sup>6</sup> Portions of this section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center* (LP-2196) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Donald Presa; LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 347-369, 372-373; Cleveland Rodgers, *Robert Moses: Builder For Democracy, 1st ed* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952) 82-84.

<sup>7</sup> More than 10,000 of the City's 29,000 manufacturing firms had shut down, and the unemployment rate skyrocketed to over thirty percent. An estimated 1,600,000 people in New York City were receiving public assistance. See Caro, 323.

<sup>8</sup> By the 1920s, the recreational needs of people were changing with the increase in leisure time afforded by the advent of shorter work weeks, paid vacations, and greater mobility due to inventions like the car. The addition of active recreation to city parks was in direct keeping with popular theories on the importance of providing the public with outlets for active recreation over passive recreation in these changing times. The Great Depression of the 1930s further amplified such needs.

<sup>9</sup> Rodgers, 82.

<sup>10</sup> A staff of 1,893 architects, engineers, landscape architects, and technicians was employed at the peak of the work. See Rodgers, p. 84. Moses later came under fire by a number of city aldermen for hiring people for the Parks Department's technical staff who did not meet the guidelines for relief work. Moses vigorously defended this practice, calling the investigation "Tammany-controlled." *New York Times*, April 10, 1935: 1; April 20, 1935: 4.

<sup>11</sup> Work is ongoing as to whether Robert Moses did actively discourage minorities from using Parks Department facilities such as the WPA-era swimming pools. Also see: Caro, and Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> During Moses' first year as Parks Commissioner, the Department spent over \$90,000,000 (\$1.2 billion in 2005 dollars) for work relief projects, most of which was provided by the Federal government. New York City was the largest single recipient of Federal largesse during the course of the New Deal. It has been estimated that the city received one-seventh of the total national outlay. See Rodgers, 84-85.

<sup>13</sup> Portions of this section adapted LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007). 72-85, 153-154.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Moses (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation), *6 Years of Progress: 1934-1940* (New York: 1930) 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> “23 Bathing Pools Planned by Moses,” *New York Times* July 23, 1934: 17; Robert Moses (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation), “Press Release: Public Summing Facilities in New York City,” July 23, 1934.

<sup>16</sup> In the order of their inauguration, the eleven WPA-era pools included: Hamilton Fish Play Center (Manhattan), Thomas Jefferson Play Center (Manhattan), Astoria Play Center (Queens), Joseph Lyons (Tompkinsville) Play Center (Staten Island), Highbridge Play Center (Manhattan), Sunset Play Center (Brooklyn), Crotona Play Center (Bronx), McCarren Play Center (Brooklyn), Betsey Head Play Center (Brooklyn), Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center (Manhattan), and Red Hook Play Center (Brooklyn).

<sup>17</sup> The Hamilton Fish Play Center bath house, designed by Carrere & Hastings in 1898, was designated a New York City Landmark in 1982. The original 1915 bath house structure at Betsy Head was destroyed by fire shortly after the 1936 opening of the pool, and was rebuilt in 1939.

<sup>18</sup> Portions of this section adapted LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most.

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- <sup>19</sup> Walter Thiabit, *How East New York Became A Ghetto* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 39.
- <sup>20</sup> See Caro, and Ballon and Jackson.
- <sup>21</sup> “25,000 at Opening of Harlem Pool,” *New York Times* August 9, 1936: N6.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 512-514.
- <sup>23</sup> Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T Jackson, eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007) 72-85, 153-154.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Research currently being conducted indicates that the racial composition of pool users may have actually been more complex, and dependent on a variety of factors, including the entrance fee structure, which varied depending on the age of the swimmer as well as the time of day. Also see: Caro, *The Power Broker...* and Ballon, et al., *Robert Moses...*
- <sup>26</sup> Portions of this section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2196) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Donald Presa; LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Information in this section is based on the following sources: “Brooklyn Planning for 10-Year Growth” *New York Times* (September 21, 1930): N1; Benjamin Marcus, *Last One In: Community, Conflict and the Preservation of McCarren Park Pool*. (Master’s Thesis. Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, 2006), 44-70; “Mayor Will Open Pool tomorrow in M’Carren Park” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (July 30, 1936): 3; New York City Department of Parks, “Press Release,” July 30, 1936; “Pool is Dedicated at M’Carren Park” *New York Times* (August 1, 1936): 11; “75,000 Hail Opening of Pool in Greenpoint” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (August 1, 1936): 11. Additional resources: Plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.
- <sup>27</sup> See “Brooklyn Planning for 10-Year Growth” *New York Times* (September 21, 1930): N1.
- <sup>28</sup> Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 456.
- <sup>29</sup> “75,000 Hail Opening of Pool in Greenpoint” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (August 1, 1936): 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Portions of this section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2196) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Donald Presa; LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Additional resources: Plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.
- <sup>31</sup> Margaret Heilbrun, ed., *Inventing the Skyline: the Architecture of Cass Gilbert*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Portions of this section adapted LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Nadine Brozan, “A Crumbling Pool Divides a Neighborhood,” *New York Times* 30 July 1990; City of New York Parks and Recreation, Capital Projects Division, “Project Objectives: Completion of Regional Parks—McCarren Park & Pool.” 2007; “Dancers Revive ‘Roman Ruin,’” *Metro* July 27, 2005: 3; David W. Dunlap, “Old Bathhouse Defended As Brooklyn Landmark,” *New York Times* March 6, 1989; “Greenpoint: A Giant Splash for an Old Pool,” *Newsday* July 18, 1990: 23; Phil Guie, “City Dives Into Pool Renovation,” *Brooklyn Star* Vol. 5, No. 4, May 3, 2007; Emily Hulme, “McCarren Park Pool Heats Up,” *amNY* Aug. 11, 2006: 10; Eva S. Moskowitz, “The Risk Pool,” *New York Times* June 26, 2005; “New Life For McCarren Pool,” *The Daily Plant* Vol. XX, No. 4407, July 28, 2005: 1; Erica Orden, “Urban Pioneer,” *New York Sun* Aug. 28, 2006: 11; Luis Perez, “City Rapped on Pool: Board Says Get McCarren Back in the Swim,” *Daily News* Sept. 3, 2002; Emanuel Perlmutter, “Vandalism Keeps Some Out of Pools,” *New York Times* June 22, 1971; Anna Quindlen, “New York City Park System Stands As a Tattered Remnant of Its Past,” *New York Times* Oct. 13, 1980; Kelefa Sanneh, “Deerhoof and Beirut at McCarren Pool: Playful Experiments and Gypsy Flavors,” *New York Times* Aug. 15, 2006; Kathryn Shattuck, “Come on In: It’s the Big Chill of ’36,” *New York Times* Aug. 14, 2006: E1; “Six Splendid Ways to Make a Splash And Avoid the Mob at the Beach,” *New York Times* July 8, 1973; Arthur Steier, “The McCarren Park Swimming Pool Scandal,” *The City*

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*Sun*, Nov. 10-16, 1993: 33; “The Mayoralty: Parks,” *New York Times* Oct. 28, 1969; Tim Stelloh, “Seeking to Recapture the Glory of the Past. Or Maybe Not,” *New York Times* April 9, 2006: 14; “Understanding the McCarren Pool Controversy,” *Greenline—North Brooklyn Community News* March, 1989: 14-15; Hannah Wallace, “Neighborhood Report—Greenpoint: A Long-Dry Pool, With a Famous Past, Faces the Future,” Dec. 17, 2000; Timothy Williams, “In Park Plan, A New Life For Spaces Long Closed,” *New York Times* April 26, 2007; Phyllis Yampolsky, “Imperiled Pool In Greenpoint,” *Newsday* April 5, 1990; Additional resources: Plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.

<sup>33</sup> Nadine Brozan, “A Crumbling Pool Divides a Neighborhood,” *New York Times* 30 July 1990.

<sup>34</sup> “Understanding the McCarren Pool Controversy,” *Greenline—North Brooklyn Community News* March, 1989: 14-15.

<sup>35</sup> Brozan.

<sup>36</sup> “New Life For McCarren Pool,” *The Daily Plant* Vol. XX, No. 4407, July 28, 2005

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> In the 2007 summer season, the McCarren Pool served as venue for: a concert series; “Pool Parties,” which are hosted by Helio and JellyNYC and typically feature live music acts, DJs, and other activities; Summer Screen, a free film series; the Renegade Craft Fair; and others.

<sup>39</sup> Portions of this section adapted LPC, *Crotona Play Center* (LP-2232) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most. Information in this section is based on the following sources: “Aymar Embury, Architect, Dead” *New York Times* (Nov. 15, 1966): 47. Additional resources: Plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.

<sup>40</sup> “Aymar Embury, Architect, Dead” *New York Times* (Nov. 15, 1966): 47.

<sup>41</sup> At the time of the park’s renaming in 1909, it was divided by streetcar lines.

<sup>42</sup> Historically, these plinths served as bases for large, bronze eagle statues. From these statues rose wood flagpoles. One wood flagpole still exists today, to the north of the entrance. The southern flagpole, as well as the bronze eagles, does not exist today on the site.

<sup>43</sup> It is unclear whether marble was actually used in the construction of the ticket booth. Today, the panels that exist (most have been removed or severely damaged) appear to consist of concrete. Even the relief sculptures that were mounted to these panels, which in the original drawings were indicated to have been bronze, appear today to be made of cast concrete.

<sup>44</sup> Because all window and door openings have been covered with metal panels, it is unknown whether any of the historic windows or doors still exist onsite.

<sup>45</sup> Many of the posts exist, however all of the lamps have been removed.

<sup>46</sup> The drinking fountain near the control room has been knocked over and appears damaged.

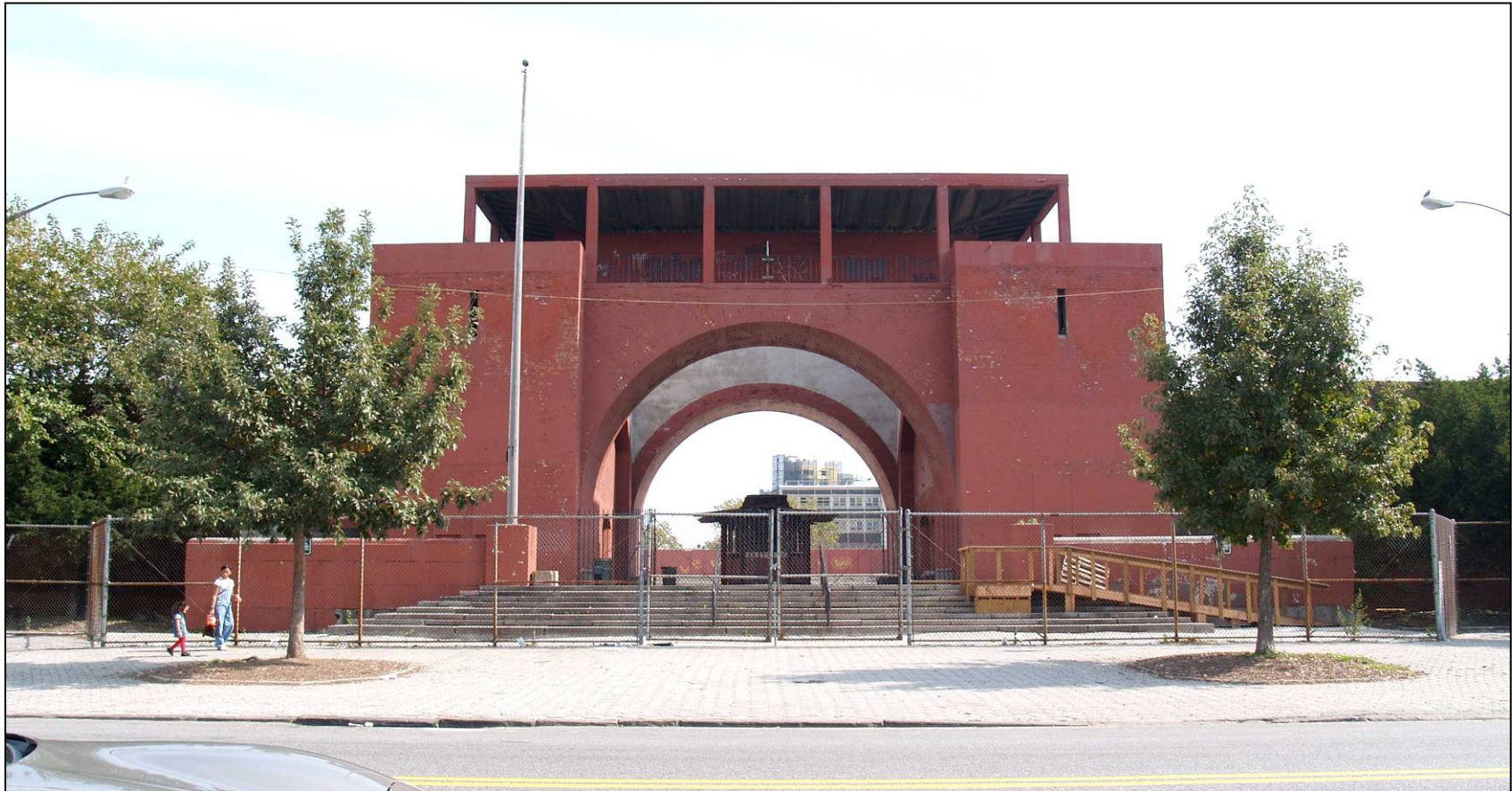
## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the McCarren Play Center has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the McCarren Play Center is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools which were opened in the summer of 1936 by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses; that the Play Center officially opened on July 31, 1936 and became the eighth WPA pool opened throughout New York City and the second to open in Brooklyn; that it was constructed with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration; that it was built to accommodate 6,800 swimmers, giving it the largest capacity of all of the WPA-era pools; that it was designed by lead architect Aymar Embury II, landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Allyn R. Jennings, and civil engineers W. Earle Andrews and William H. Latham; that the Play Center is set within the 35.71-acre site of McCarren Park, located in the Greenpoint neighborhood and developed as a park at the beginning of the twentieth century; that the grounds surrounding the eleven pool complexes were executed on a similarly grand scale, and included additional recreation areas, connecting pathway systems, and comfort stations; that the immense scale of the McCarren Play Center is powerfully expressed in the monumental forms of the main entryway, a massive cubic block topped by a set-back gallery; that giant arches emphasized by decorative brick patterning span the openings giving onto the street and swimming pool, while the smooth light-colored walls in the upper portion of the open pavilion reflect the light entering from above and add to the dramatic character of the space; that the Play Center contains other notable features such as an Art Moderne ticket booth, rounded jams at locker room entrances, and decorative metal work at the entrance transoms; that wide arches duplicated at a smaller scale than those of the main entryway link the separate comfort stations to the north and south ends of the bath house structure, further enhancing its monumentality; that although the McCarren Play Center was last open the summer of 1983, the Parks Department, along with the support of local elected officials and community groups, is committed to renovating, restoring and reopening the pool and bath house/recreation building; that the original and creative use made of modest materials and forms, and the careful siting of the facility, make it a distinguished, individual design; and that the complex, along with the other WPA-era pools, was a major accomplishment of engineering and architecture, and is recognized as being among the most remarkable public recreational facilities ever constructed in the United States.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the McCarren Play Center, Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2696, Lot 1 in part, and portions of the adjacent public way, consisting of the property bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the northern curblineline of Bayard Street and the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street, extending easterly along the northern curblineline of Bayard Street to the western curblineline of Leonard Street, northerly approximately 670 feet along the western curblineline of Leonard Street, then westerly along a line extending from the chain link fence located approximately 80 feet north of the northeast corner of the 8-foot high brick wall of the McCarren Play Center, then westerly along the line of the chain link fence, following its line as it turns northwesterly, westerly and finally southwestly to its end point located approximately 35 feet northeast of the northeast corner of the northern brick comfort station of the McCarren Play Center, continuing westerly to a point on the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street located approximately 330 feet south of the intersection formed by the southern curblineline of Driggs Avenue and the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street, then southerly along the eastern curblineline of Lorimer Street to the point of beginning.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair  
Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Christopher Moore, Elizabeth Ryan,  
Roberta Washington, Commissioners



**McCarren Play Center**

Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street, Borough of Brooklyn

*Photo: Zerina Philip, NYC Parks Dept., 2006*





McCarren Play Center bath house: entrance platform, looking north.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: arch detail, looking east.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center bath house: ticket booth, looking northwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: ticket booth detail, north elevation.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: pavilion interior, entrances to north wing.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: pavilion interior, bench detail, looking southeast.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center: swimming pool and bath house, east façade, looking southwest.  
*Photo: Zerina Philip, NYC Parks Dept., 2006*



McCarren Play Center bath house: east façade, looking northwest.  
*Photo: Zerina Philip, NYC Parks Dept., 2006*



McCarren Play Center bath house: viewing platform, south wing, looking north.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center bath house:  
East façade, remnants of glazed bay, north tower, looking west.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house:  
East façade, arches of southern wing, looking west.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: east façade, north wing, looking northwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: north wing foot bath, looking north.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center bath house: east façade, south wing arches, between bath house and comfort station, looking west.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center bath house: east façade, south comfort station, looking west.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: diving pool, looking southwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: diving board, looking south.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center:  
Drinking fountain, near south wing of bath house.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center: wading pool, looking south.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: path surrounding wading pool, looking southwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house: view looking southeast.  
*Photo: Zerina Philip, NYC Parks Dept., 2006*



McCarren Play Center filter house: view looking northeast.  
*Photo: Zerina Philip, NYC Parks Dept., 2006*

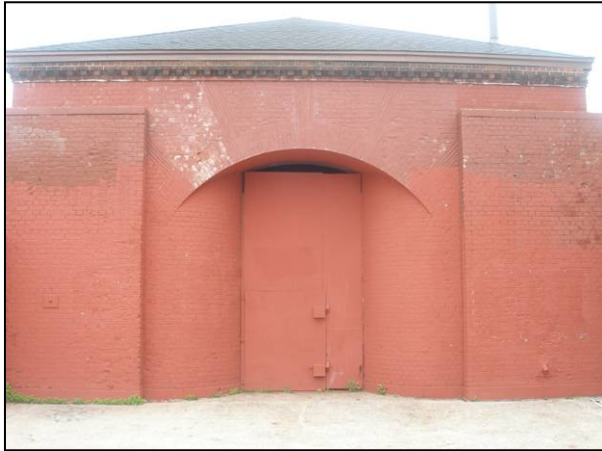




McCarren Play Center filter house: bleacher area, looking northeast.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house: bleacher area and south elevation of northern filter house building, looking north. Stage and pool are to the left.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house:  
west façade of northern filter house building,  
looking east.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house:  
north façade of northern filter house building,  
looking southwest.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house:  
north façade of southern filter house building,  
looking southeast.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house:  
south façade of southern filter house building,  
looking northeast.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center filter house and bleacher area: east facade, looking southwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center filter house and bleacher area:  
east facade and exposed basement wall of filter house, looking south.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: pool and stage area, looking east.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: pool, northern filter island. Looking southwest.  
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





McCarren Play Center: area north of filter house, currently the backstage area for performances, looking south. Filter house in the background.

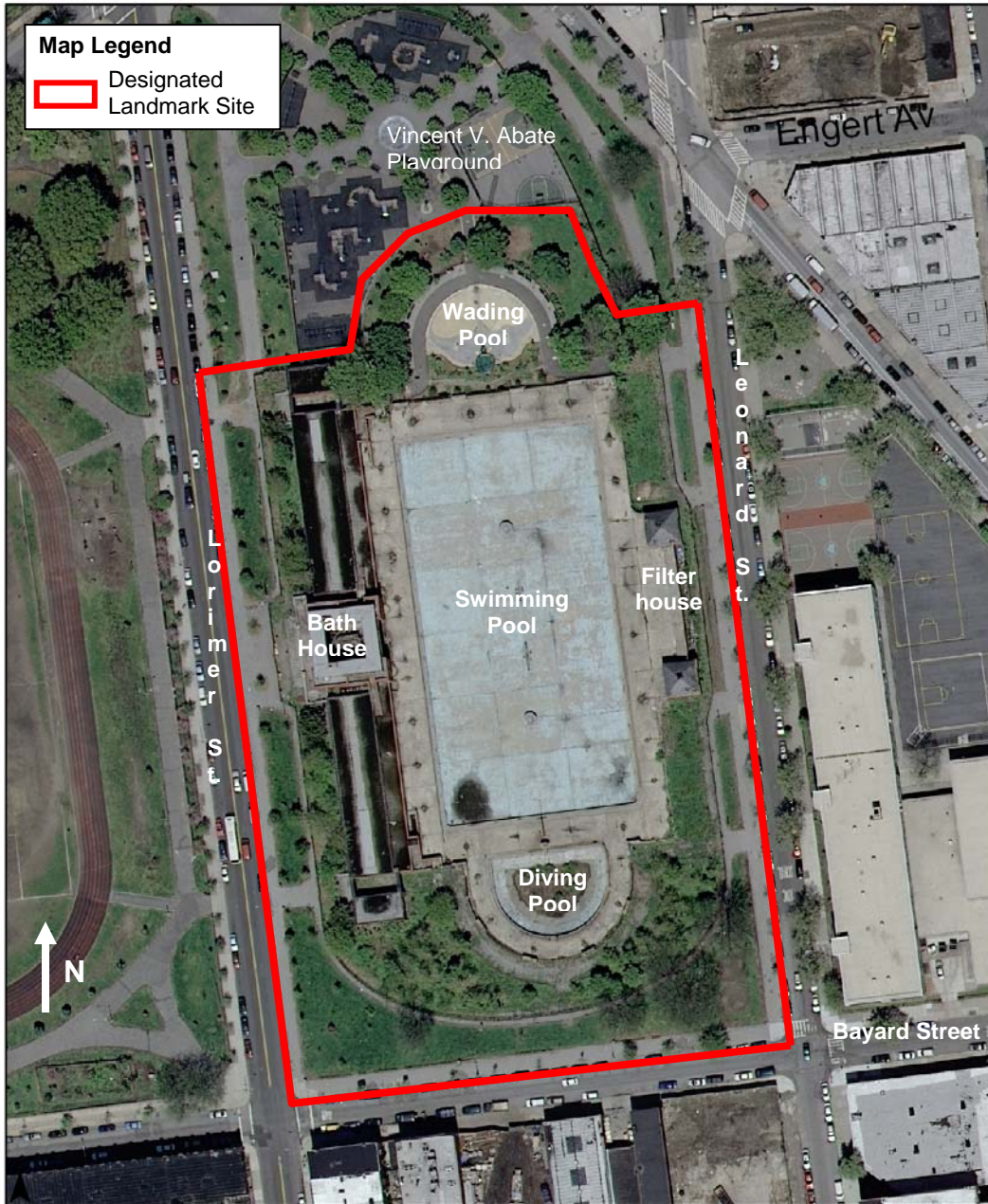
*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*



McCarren Play Center: remnants of perimeter walls. Looking north, from corner of Lorimer and Bayard.

*Photo: Kathryn Horak, 2007*





**Map Legend**  
 Designated  
 Landmark Site

Vincent V. Abate  
 Playground

Wading  
 Pool

Bath  
 House

Swimming  
 Pool

Filter  
 house

Diving  
 Pool



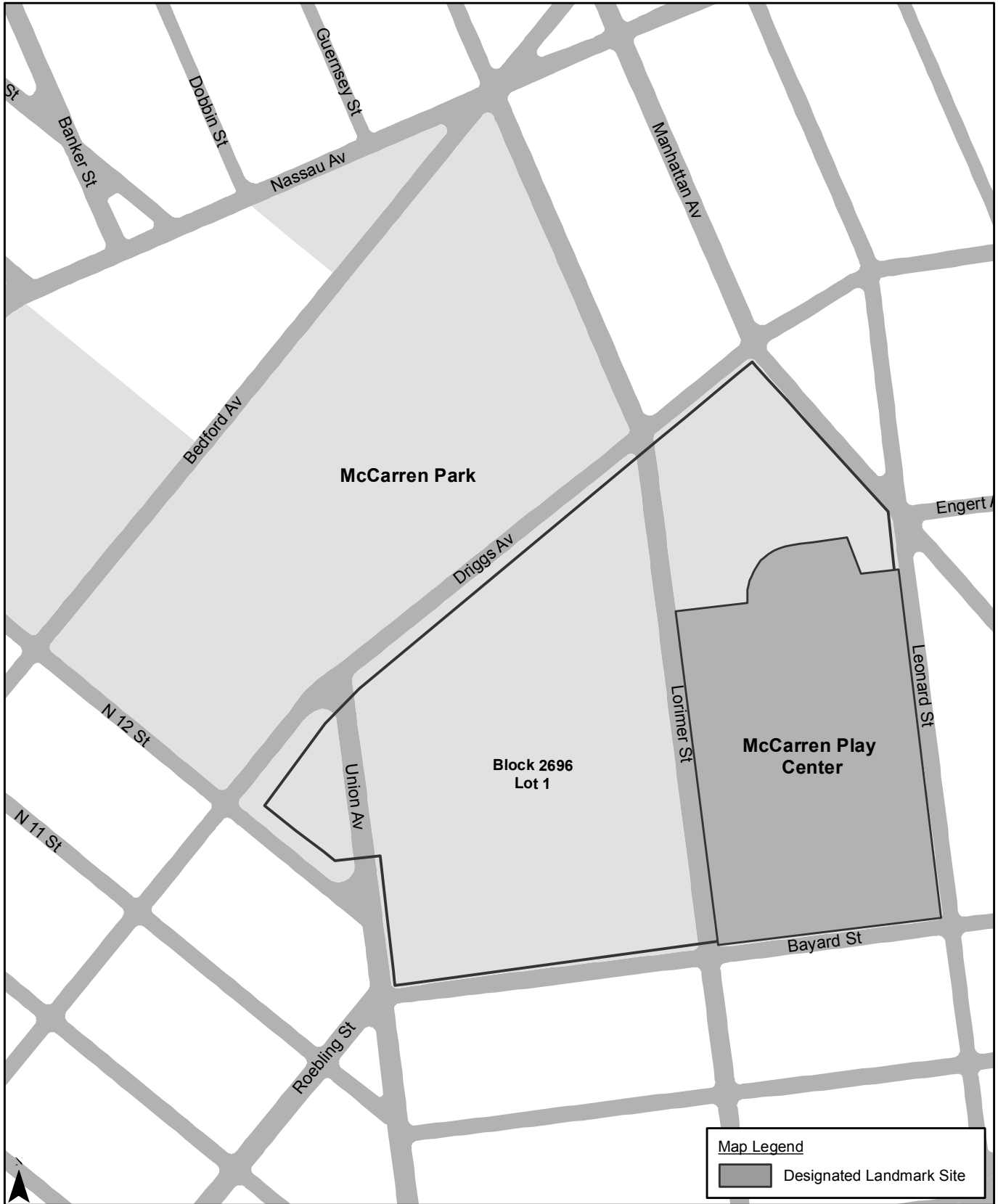
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**MCCARREN PLAY CENTER (LP-2244)**  
 Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street.  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2696, Lot 1  
 (in part and portions of the adjacent public way).

Designated: July 24, 2007

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.





**MCCARRAN PLAY CENTER (LP-2244)**

Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street.  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2696, Lot 1  
 (in part and portions of the adjacent public way).

Designated: July 24, 2007