

Appendix D.
Historic Technical Report



Appendices

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**Technical Report
109th Street Pool and Bathhouse**

Prepared for:

City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks
Planning & Development Division
1200 W. 7th St., 7th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Contact: Paul J. Davis

Prepared by:

Jones & Stokes
811 West 7th Street, Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Contact: Barbara Lamprecht
213/627-6853

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Statement of Purpose.....	2
Regulatory Setting – Applicable Criteria.....	3
Local Regulations.....	6
DESCRIPTION	7
Alterations to the 1939 facility:.....	10
New Construction.....	10
SIGNIFICANCE	11
History of Aquatics in the City of Los Angeles	13
WPA Standard Pool Design	15
The 1950 Recreation Center	16
Period of Significance: 1939	17
FINDINGS / ELIGIBILITY, CALIFORNIA REGISTER	17
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS.....	18
Threshold Used to Determine Level of Impact	18
Archaeological and Paleontological Resources	19
Impact Assessment - Historical Resources.....	20
REFERENCES.....	21

FIGURES

Figure 1: Bathhouse, east façade	1
Figure 2: Bathhouse, women’s changing room, looking north	7
Figure 3: Bathhouse, entrance to women’s changing room, original sign.....	8
Figure 4: Pool, looking southeast, showing WPA water access configuration.....	8
Figure 5: Pool, showing original etched coping and scored deck	9
Figure 6: Pool and bathhouse, looking northeast.....	9
Figure 7: Recreation Clubhouse, Frederick E. Emmons, 1950	10

109th Street Pool and Bathhouse



*Figure 1: Bathhouse, east façade.
6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.*

Executive Summary

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1 and 3. It is historically significant under Criteria 1 for its association with the building program of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and as representative of the policies and social movements that influenced the construction of recreational facilities in Los Angeles in the 1930s, including the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, early civic moves toward racial equity, and an attempt to assuage the impacts of the Great Depression.

The property is historically significant under Criterion 3 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a 1930s WPA designed public pool by the Aquatics Division of the Department of Recreation and Parks, City of Los Angeles. As the best (and virtually only) preserved pool of this type and age in the Department, the caliber of its integrity is very high. Remarkably intact, it retains its character-defining features and conveys its historic significance.

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse meets the eligibility criteria for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources. Therefore, the property is considered a historic resource for the purposes of CEQA. According to stipulations Section 15064.5(b)(1) of the CEQA Guidelines and judicial precedence, demolition of a historical resource would result in a significant impact under Section 21084.1 of CEQA.

Statement of Purpose

The City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks contracted with Jones & Stokes to conduct a historic assessment of the the 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse, located at 1500 E. 109th Street in the Watts community of the City of Los Angeles. The City wishes to refurbish and/or demolish and replace a number of pool/bathhouses in the City, including the 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse. This historic assessment was completed at the City's request in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Jones & Stokes examined the 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse to determine whether the property is a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA, according to the criteria set forth in Section 15064.5 of the CEQA Guidelines, including application of the criteria for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register or NRHP), the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register or CRHP), and local designation, and evaluates whether the City's proposed project poses a potential significant adverse impact to identified cultural resources.

This report documents the findings of Jones & Stokes' historic assessment. Efforts included conducting archival research, reviewing available architectural drawings, surveying and documenting the resource, and applying the eligibility criteria to determine whether the pool and bathhouse are cultural resources under CEQA. Jones & Stokes' qualified Architectural Historians completed the historic assessment, and evaluated the property according to the applicable criteria provided under CEQA. Senior Architectural Historian Barbara Lamprecht was the Principal Investigator for the project, with the assistance of Christopher Hetzel, Project Manager, and John English, Architectural Historian II. In order to support a determination of the building's eligibility or ineligibility for the California Register, information was assembled from various sources, including:

1. any previous historic surveys completed in the City of Los Angeles;
2. building permit records and/or Assessor's improvement records;
3. historic City Directories;
4. the California Historical Resources File System maintained by the State Office of Historic Preservation;
5. original architectural drawings at the archives of the Department of Recreation and Parks, 1200 West 7th St., 7th Floor, Los Angeles; and
6. *Los Angeles Times* articles/data base records.

Regulatory Setting – Applicable Criteria

Under CEQA, a baseline threshold that is typically used to begin an assessment of historical significance begins when a potential resources exceeds 50 years in age. While the age of a property is an appropriate place to begin discussing its significance, it is only one factor in determining whether a property can qualify as an historical resource.

Such factors or thresholds, usually called *criteria*, are specific and regulated determinants based on a property's historical and cultural associations, architectural design and integrity, and historical context (its setting). A building listed in the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources is automatically considered to be a historical resource for the purposes of CEQA.

However, any resource *eligible* for listing on the California Register (and this includes properties listed on, or *formally determined eligible for*, the National Register of Historic Places) is also subject to CEQA review. In addition, CEQA allows a lead agency (typically a city) to consider something (e.g., a building, manuscript, object) as a “historical resource” provided the lead agency's determination is supported by substantial evidence in light of the whole record.

Local governments and lead agencies have an obligation not only to determine whether a resource is listed, but also whether it may be eligible for listing, in other words, whether it is historically significant.

CEQA guidelines define three ways that a property can qualify as a significant historical resource for the purposes of CEQA review:

- 1) The resource is listed in or determined eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR).
- 2) The resource is included in a local register of historical resources, as defined in section 5020.1(k) of the Public Resources Code or identified as significant in an historical resource survey meeting the requirements of section 5024.1(g) of the Public Resources Code, unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant.
- 3) The lead agency determines the resource to be significant as supported by substantial evidence in light of the whole record (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, section 15064.5).

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criteria

Per the National Register, properties are not considered eligible for listing if they are less than 50 years old unless a property is of “exceptional importance.” The

109th St. Pool and Bathhouse, built in 1939, meets this threshold. Once eligible for consideration, the NHRP significance criteria applied to evaluate the cultural resources in this study are defined in 36 CFR 60.4 as follows:

“The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”

Furthermore, “a resource must also be judged with reference to the particular criteria under which a resource is proposed for eligibility.” [CCR §4852 (c)]

In order for a property to convey its historical significance based on one of the four above criteria, it must retain its *integrity*: “Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. Historic properties either retain their integrity or they do not.”¹ “All properties change over time. It is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features or characteristics. The property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity. These essential physical features are those features that define both *why* a property is significant (applicable Criteria and Areas of Significance) and *when* it was significant (Periods of Significance).”² They are features without which a property can no longer be identified.

Integrity is judged on seven aspects: location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. These seven factors can be roughly grouped into three types of integrity considerations. Location and setting relate to the relationship between the property and its environment. Design, materials, and workmanship most often apply to historic buildings and relate to construction methods and architectural details. Feeling and association are the least objective criteria, pertaining to the overall ability of the property to convey a sense of the

¹ National Register Bulletin 15, Section VIII

² Ibid.

historical time and place in which it was constructed (National Park Service 1991).

National Register regulations also state “Alterations over time to a resource or historic changes in its use may themselves have historical, cultural, or architectural significance” [CCR §4852 (c)].

California Register of Historical Resources Criteria

The CRHR was created by the State Legislature in 1992 and is intended to serve as an authoritative listing of historical and archaeological resources in California. Additionally, the eligibility criteria for the CRHR are intended to serve as the definitive criteria for assessing the significance of historical resources for purposes of CEQA, in this way establishing a consistent set of criteria to the evaluation process for all public agencies statewide.

A resource less than 50 years old may be considered for listing in the California Register if it can be demonstrated that sufficient time has passed to understand its historical importance.

For a historical resource to be eligible for listing in CRHR, it must be significant at the local, state, or national level under one or more of the following four criteria that are very similar to the NRHP criteria:

1. is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California’s history and cultural heritage; *or*
2. is associated with the lives of persons important in our past; *or*
3. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, *or* possesses high artistic values; *or*
4. has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

As with the National Register, in addition to meeting one of the four criteria, eligibility for the California Register requires that a building or property must also retain its “integrity.” According to the California Register definition, “integrity is the authenticity of an historical resource’s physical identity evidenced by the survival of characteristics that existed during the resources’ period of significance.”³

³ CCR §4852 (c)]

Historical resources eligible for listing in the CRHR must meet one of the criteria of significance described above and retain enough of their historic character or appearance to be recognizable as historical resources and to convey the reasons for their significance. Historical resources that have been rehabilitated or restored may be evaluated for listing.

Like the National Register, integrity in the California Register is evaluated with regard to the seven aspects of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It must also be judged with reference to the particular criteria under which a resource is proposed for eligibility. Alterations over time to a resource or historic changes in its use may themselves have historical, cultural, or architectural significance.

However, with regard to integrity, California law differs in that it is possible that historical resources may not retain sufficient integrity to meet the criteria for listing in the NRHP, but they may still be eligible for listing in the CRHR. A resource that has *lost* its historic character or appearance *may still have sufficient integrity* for the CRHR if it maintains the *potential* to yield significant scientific or historical information or specific data (California Office of Historic Preservation 2001).

Local Regulations

The Los Angeles Municipal and Administrative Codes address the designation and preservation of Historic-Cultural Monuments and Historic Preservation Overlay Zones. A list of Historic-Cultural Monuments has been compiled and is maintained by the Cultural Heritage Commission, a board of five persons appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. It is the responsibility of the Cultural Heritage Commission to oversee and approve the establishment of Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (LA Municipal Code Sec. 12.20.3) and to preserve monuments when such action is not in conflict with the public health, safety, and general welfare (LA Administrative Code Sec. 22.128).

According to Section 22.130 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code, a historical or cultural monument is “any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon), building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.”

DESCRIPTION

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse is located in the 109th St. Recreation Center, located between S. Central and Compton avenues in the Watts Community of Los Angeles. The park contains the 1939 pool and bathhouse, a 1950 recreation center,⁴ ball field, and two tennis courts. The area surrounding the park is domestically scaled in a low-rise residential neighborhood of primarily small, one-storey single-family homes with a few small apartment buildings and one-storey housing projects. A review of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1927 and 1951 shows the area has remained a low-density neighborhood, undergoing surprisingly little change over a 34-year period. Setbacks, lot sizes and placement of buildings on lots vary widely. In both plan and elevation, the diminutive one-story bathhouse and the other park facilities are sited on originally six tracts of land contiguous to 109th Street to the north and 110th Street to the south. By 1927, these six tracts contained a total of four houses and three ancillary structures. As a whole, the park and its facilities are tautly composed, with no wasted space.

Bathhouse:

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse, sited next to and parallel to one another, were designed in spring 1938. Groundbreaking for both pools occurred on September 2, 1938.⁵

The simple, utilitarian bathhouse is designed in a symmetrical Beaux Arts-school layout, detailed in Mediterranean Revival style. Oriented north south, in plan it is shaped like a cross: a long, narrow, rectangular structure with a shallow gable roof, daylit from both sides, is bisected by a short gabled transept (an area set crosswise to the main axis of the building.) This transept, stepping out from the long portion of the building, contains both major entrances to the bathhouse: one opening to a baseball field to the east, and an identical entrance on the west opening to the pool area. These primary entrances consist of a centrally located door flanked by one vertically oriented, rectangular window of eight lights on either side. An incision in these protruding transept walls, tracing the outline of the door, along with a roundrel window incised above it, is the wall's only ornamental feature on the transept. Both ends of the building, containing the toilet banks of the restrooms for each gender, also step out, here with shed roofs



Figure 2: Bathhouse, women's changing room, looking north. 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.

⁴ See section "Significance" – the recreation center is not being evaluated in this report.

⁵ Ibid.

sloping away from the building. A wide landing on the public side lies in front of the door with three steps on each side leading north or south.

The long walls on each side of the bathhouse contain five frameless, horizontally oriented windows on each side of the entrance, symmetrically located, and placed in the top portions of the walls. Along these same walls and on either side of the building, a vertically oriented window, placed lower than the others, completes the window groups.

The bathhouse is of Type 5 (wood) construction. Exterior character-defining features also include smooth cement-plaster walls, the shallow roof gables, spatial configuration, the transepts, the incisions in the frameless molding, and Spanish red-brown tiles used for roofing.

The entrance divides the building into two wings housing boys and girls changing rooms and toilet rooms, extending from the central section with its entry lobby and check-in area.

The interior is remarkably intact, constructed and finished in wood, giving the interior an open, barn-like demeanor. Open truss painted timber roof framing spans the walls throughout. Vertically oriented unadorned painted lumber planking is used for the interior walls. The utilitarian sink in the toilet area appears to be original. There is a sign at the entrance to each changing area (See Figure 3), warning those with skin infections against entering the “plunge,” that appears to be original and in its original location.

The pool and bathhouse continue to be used for their traditional functions.



Figure 3: Bathhouse, entrance to women's changing room, original sign. 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.



Figure 4: Pool, looking southeast, showing WPA water access configuration. 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.

Pool:

The 109th Street pool is rectangular in plan and configuration, 120 feet in length and 45 feet in width, and is of poured concrete construction. An eight-foot-tall fence with vertical steel railings now surrounds it. The pool is located approximately 10 feet west of the bathhouse.



Figure 5: Pool, showing original etched coping and scored deck. 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.

WPA public pool plans of this era, demonstrated here and at the Harvard Pool, had a distinctive feature in how a swimmer entered the water. At each of the four corners, a small rectangular “bump-out” of poured concrete steps protrudes out from the pool in plan. This design was intended to allow the entire larger rectangle of the pool to be devoted to bathing and swimming rather than for access/circulation and also permits a gradual entry for non-swimmers.

In addition, the 109th Street Pool also follows the pre-World War II model of pool design, an Aquatics Division innovation which doubled the area allotted for non- or beginning swimmers, seen in the shallow depth of 2 ½ feet at each end and 9 feet at the center for diving.

The walls of the pool rise approximately 9 inches above the surrounding concrete deck, to create a one-inch-wide curb. The lined scoring on the top of the walls, following the outline of the pool, appears to be original, as does the diagonal scoring on the deck. Lighting for the pool included three original 500-watt underwater lights on either side of the pool near the center, housed in square poured concrete light wells that project slightly outward. Outdoor area lighting was provided by a series of 1000-watt, pole-mounted lights located around a perimeter chain link fence.

Originally, a diving board on the west side of the pool was accessed by steps on either side. The board was supported by a steel pipe support structure mounted to the pool deck. One lifeguard seating tower is located on the west side of the pool near the center where the depth is greatest. It is of steel pipe construction, with simple wood plank seats at the top. It is approximately 10 feet tall, and mounted to the pool deck with



Figure 6: Pool and bathhouse, looking northeast. 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.

bolts. In contrast to the Harvard Pool and Bathhouse, the original unsigned plans (dated March 17, 1938) do not indicate a diving platform.

The pool water was filtered and purified every eight hours by a then state-of-the-art chlorine filtration system, part of the Department's move to create better sanitary conditions. This same system was used for each of the 18 pools owned and operated by the Department by 1939.⁶

Alterations to the 1939 facility:

On each end of the bathhouse, a vertical plywood "shelf" of about five feet tall and attached to the roof, extending up from the roofline, line was built to discourage roof-climbing. These shelves appear to be easily reversible.

New large outdoor light fixtures are attached above the entrance on the ballfield side and to the right of the pool entrance.

The diving board was removed at an unknown date.

New Construction

In November 1950, well-known Case Study House architect Frederick E. Emmons designed a new two-storey "Playground Clubhouse" set north of the pool and bathhouse, parallel to 109th Street and separated from it with landscaping and palm trees. It is located at right angles to the pool and bathhouse, separated by a children's playground and equipment. Like the bathhouse, the newer recreation center is a modest, sturdy structure and mimics the domestic fabric surrounding the playground. However, though built only 11 years later, the clubhouse manifests a completely different architectural aesthetic. The structure's higher gabled roof, housing a gymnasium, pokes up above the longer ground-floor space that is also gabled with an identical slope. This space, west and east of the taller gym, features a small theatre, offices and recreation room. Its exterior finishes include unpainted brick, sash windows set



Figure 7: Recreation Clubhouse, Frederick E. Emmons, 1950. . 6 June 2007. Jones and Stokes.

⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1939

in horizontal strips, wood trim and light-painted rough cement plaster on some infill panels containing windows. The architect's drawings indicate that Emmons also designed the signage for the building. (This facility is not part of this technical evaluation.)

SIGNIFICANCE

The presence and location of the 109th St. Pool and Bathhouse in Los Angeles is tied to larger social and cultural movements sweeping the country in the 1930s, including the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, early civic moves toward racial equity, and an attempt to assuage the impacts of the Great Depression, 1929–1939.

The Los Angeles City Council of Los Angeles established the Department of Parks in 1889, almost half a century after the city was founded. The decline of a lawless frontier, a healthy economy, a higher standard of living and a more urbanized workforce led to a new paradigm of “leisure time” and the need for recreation. The earliest Los Angeles City parks were created for the passive enjoyment of the natural and designed landscapes. “Keep off the Grass” signs were common.⁷ These restorative environments were not intended as playgrounds, and did not provide for more active and athletic recreational activities. Children, for example, “were forced to find their play on public streets and vacant lots that were hardly suited for organized games.”⁸

By 1904, spurred by the progressive thinking of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, (an outgrowth of the larger City Beautiful Movement popularized by 19th century East Coast reformers), the City of Los Angeles established a separate Playground Department. The City's move echoed national trends, which called for the creation of distinct places for play. For example, the Playground Association of America, which would emerge as a powerful national advocate for recreation, was established soon after in 1906. This organization and others emphasized the social role that parks played in society and called for the creation of new “active” recreational facilities in public parks across the country. In particular, reformers urged municipal governments to construct playgrounds in locations physically separated from the perceived dangers of the urban environment, where children could play under supervised, controlled conditions.

Proponents believed that such supervised play improved a child's mental,

⁷ Andre Keil. *Swimming at the Park Pool: A History of Aquatics in the City of Los Angeles*, undated monograph, courtesy Recreation and Parks Department, City of Los Angeles, p. 5.

⁸ City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, <http://www.laparks.org/dept/history.htm>

moral, and physical well being, and aided them in becoming responsible, well-adjusted citizens, steering them away from juvenile delinquency. For adults, organized recreation was seen as having similar benefits. Contemporaries believed that the psychological benefits of disciplined health and exercise led to greater happiness among workers and, especially among immigrants, provided a means to more quickly enter mainstream American culture. Improved production in the workplace, increased buying power, and a stronger local economy all were perceived benefits.

Throughout the 'teens and the early 1920s, the popularity and attendance of recreation created both new demands and opportunities for municipal services. 1925 was a milestone year for public recreation in the City. The Charter created a Department of Playground and Recreation and granted both the Department of Parks and the Department of Playground and Recreation control of their own funds. The latter's mission was "to organize, promote, conduct and supervise recreation activities for people of all ages." At this time, it assumed administrative responsibility for all city pools, streamlining their operation and setting consistent standards for facilities earlier operated by different departments. In 1947, the Department of Parks and the Department of Playground and Recreation merged with the Department of Parks to become the Department of Recreation and Parks.

Under the early supervision of Frank Shearer, who served as the Superintendent of Parks from 1910–1936, the City of Los Angeles demonstrated a heightened interest in the construction and improvement of parks and recreation facilities throughout the early twentieth century. Many of the city's existing parks were established in this period, and the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation erected a large number of new recreation facilities throughout the city. Recreation and physical activity, always popular in the Southern California climate, became well established as a municipal responsibility for civic enjoyment. Proponents viewed it as an accepted function and no longer as a means solely for social reform.

This new emphasis was reflected in financial support. Until 1925, both the Department of Parks and the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation relied on allocations from the city's general fund for ongoing maintenance and new projects. A new City Charter in 1925 changed this by establishing separate department funding funded by new tax assessments that allowed a more aggressive approach to public improvements. During the 1930s, federal funding provided substantial support for the city's parks and playgrounds in the form of unemployment relief bonds, supplementing local funds. In 1931, for example, the Los Angeles City Council allocated \$2 million dollars in bond funds to

improve existing parks and to pay for the construction of many new recreation facilities throughout the city.

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse, for example, was one of the first of two public pool facilities in Los Angeles to be constructed following Works Progress Administration (WPA) standard plans and also to be partially financed with WPA funding.⁹ (The other is the Harvard Pool and Bathhouse, which was very similar, if more elaborate, in scope and design.) Other pools, including the Algin Sutton Pool (once known as the Manchester Pool), 5800 S. Hoover St., and the Stoner Pool, 1831 Stoner Ave., both 1931, and the Los Angeles Memorial Swim Stadium received federal “unemployment funding.”

History of Aquatics in the City of Los Angeles

Other than the Pacific Ocean, the earliest pools in Los Angeles, such as the Los Angeles Natatorium, which opened in 1888, were private and in many cases exclusive and widely scattered. The first suggestion of incorporating public aquatics into the City’s Department of Playground and Recreation appeared in the 1912 annual report. The department asked for \$50,000 to build a bathhouse and plunge. The first pools were actually a series of wading pools no more than a foot deep, that were constructed at Echo Park, Violet Street, and Slauson Playgrounds. In 1914 the City acquired its first real swimming pool, the Bethlehem Baths, operated by the Bethlehem Institutional Church and renamed Vignes Municipal Bathhouse and Natatorium by the City.

The Exposition Pools, located in Exposition Park, were built in 1918 (later demolished to construct the Swim Stadium for the 1932 Olympics). By 1926, the City operated 11 pools, four of them at campsites. It was one of only two cities in the U.S. that had a separate swimming pool, beach and bathhouse division within its community recreation administration, reflected in a dramatic increase in pool attendance each year.¹⁰

A \$1.5 Million bond issue was passed in 1923 that funded the construction of three new pools, one in Eagle Rock, one in downtown Los Angeles, and the Griffith Park Pool on Riverside Drive in Griffith Park. Completed in 1927 at 50 feet wide by 225 feet long, and serviced by a bathhouse designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the Griffith Park Pool was the largest public pool and the Department’s most impressive. With the exception of minor remodeling of the pool, the facility as a whole, including the bathhouse retains a high level of integrity. It is still operating, very popular, and houses the offices of the City’s Aquatics Division.

⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1938, p. 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

The Griffith Park Pool also boasted an innovation designed to accommodate more patrons with little swimming experience. The pool's shallow-deep-shallow configuration was the first of its kind, created by Aquatic Supervisor C.P.L. Nicholls. Originally intended to separate the sexes, it eventually allowed pools to be also set up for multiple programming and for a larger portion of the pool to be devoted to less advanced swimmers. Many of the other pools built in the 1930s, including the Harvard and 109th Street pools, followed this model.

Development of 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse is located in the community of Watts, about seven miles south of downtown Los Angeles. In 1902, the Pacific Electric Company completed a depot in Watts and the community rapidly grew after that. In 1925, whites in the community successfully petitioned the Los Angeles City Council to annex the city in hopes of blocking black mayoral control, joining other communities or cities which augmented the City of Los Angeles' territory throughout the 1920s and '30s.

Watts initially had a white majority population but quickly became more diverse as the city continued to grow through the 1930s. "As late as 1940, the population of Watts was 50 percent white or Mexican American, 35 percent black, 13 percent Mexican immigrants, and 1.5 percent Asian."¹¹

However, that multi-racial character of neighborhoods and schools did not extend to public space. In many parks, for example, such as the Centinela Park in the then all-white suburb of Inglewood, less than 10 miles away, blacks were not allowed in the pool. At the beach next to the popular Santa Monica amusement park, blacks were welcomed as patrons but confined to a "small patch of sand away from white beachgoers."¹² In contrast, Central Playgrounds, near Central Avenue, and Lincoln Park (also known as East Los Angeles Park, Eastside Park, Eastlake and East Lake Park) were frequented by blacks and Mexican Americans from South Central as well as from East Los Angeles.

The "Playground and Recreation Department," as Parks and Recreation was then called, set aside special times, days, or facilities for minorities. For example, an entry in the Playground Commission notes dated March 11, 1920 stated that the Vignes Bathhouse and "Natatorium," (from the Latin root *nāre*, to swim), at Vignes and Ducommun streets, was to be set aside as a "negro pool." (This wood-plank "natatorium," open from 1916 to 1924, was comprised of two pools, and also segregated by gender.)

¹¹ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p. 19.

¹² *Ibid.*

The year 1932, the height of the Great Depression, was perhaps pivotal in the context of the 109th Street facility in two ways. First, the Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles, where the new swim stadium became a symbol of civic prestige and swimming became even more popular. Second, one aspect of racism became forbidden: In 1932, the California Supreme Court ruled that the Los Angeles Department of Playgrounds and Recreation could no longer segregate its pools, although the practice continued well into the 1940s.

Therefore, opening the Harvard and 109th pools in 1939 in South (formerly known as South Central) Los Angeles were important in bringing these social goals together in serving primarily minority populations. In the 109th, Watts-area residents now had their “own” pool, but its location also may have drawn the attention of the local mixed-race population away from all-white pools in nearby communities, thus possibly reinforcing racism in a way both tacit and effective, at least until segregation was federally outlawed in 1954.

WPA Standard Pool Design

WPA funds spurred the building of both the Harvard and 109th Street pools. The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse cost \$51,942, with \$30,197 from the WPA and the balance from the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation.¹³

Even though swimming pools are not typically considered an art form, one of the accomplishments of the WPA was the construction of many distinctive swimming pools across the U.S. throughout the 1930s. Despite the WPA’s budgetary constraints, many prominently sited pools and bathhouses across the country were uniquely designed by a range of architects who employed styles from Tudor to Modern and a variety of ornamental embellishments.

The national scope of the WPA pools project also required innovative solutions to engineering and public health problems such as water circulation, bacterial control, and foot washing. Polio during the Great Depression was an ever-present and very real threat, as FDR knew personally: the “wheelchair president” had installed the first pool in the White House. The WPA’s technologically innovative municipal pools “would help to remove swimmers from the stagnant waters of the city’s rivers and floating pools, where infection and disease, let alone drowning, were very real dangers. In addition to keeping people cool, the pools were very much about providing a safe place for the poor.”

Hardship and scarcity could have prompted leaders like Roosevelt to conclude that costly swimming pools were too great a luxury during a depression.

¹³ *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1939.

However, the program for public pools showed that public works would provide not only employment for professionals such as architects and engineers but for non-professional staff such as lifeguards and attendants. Such pools, sometimes referred to as “palaces for the poor,” could also be educational tools in evoking the kinds of architecture most people would never see.

In its design and attention to concerns about public sanitation and cleanliness, the 109th St. Pool and Bathhouse modestly exemplifies WPA goals and strategies.

The Harvard and 109th Street facilities broke ground on the same day, September 2, 1938, and both were meant to be trend-setting in design, according to a February 12, 1939 *Los Angeles Times* article headlined, “Pools under Construction: Municipality Embodies Unique Ideas in New Natatoriums.”¹⁴ In addition to incorporating WPA standards for pool and bathhouse layout, they also departed from the traditional type of outdoor swimming centers that were generally used only in summer months. The article refers to the new facilities as having been designed with interiors and “fixtures” that could be easily changed over for use as community clubhouses in winter, when the pools were closed. (In practice, the pools have been used only seasonally from June through September.) The pools both featured the innovation of the filtration system already put into practice in the sixteen other swimming pools operated by the City, according to the article. Finally, the 109th Street pool also shared the “shallow-deep-shallow” configuration first featured in Griffith Park Pool twelve years earlier.

The opening of the 109th Street pool was probably an early milestone in providing athletic amenities and a community center for Watts. Its importance for the community was soon eclipsed by the pool and facilities at the nearby Will Rogers Memorial Park, which offered more community programs, larger facilities, and did become an important gathering point and local resource for the wider Watts community. On a primary street, it also had a more central location.

The 1950 Recreation Center

Frederick Emmons’ involvement with the 109th St. facility is significant. The Modernist architect is best known in his partnership with A. Quincy Jones, 1951–69. They are well known for their post-World War II Modern house designs for Joseph Eichler, the now legendary developer of Modern houses for the masses. An Eichler home they designed was the only tract development home included in the iconic Case Study House program (1945–66) sponsored by *Arts & Architecture Magazine*.

¹⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 12, 1939, p. E2.

According to architect/historian Cory Buckner,

“Their practice was consistent in their implementation of rationalized building systems, sensitive site design, attention to the user, and experimentation with both design and materials. The partnership grew to include commissions for churches, manufacturing plants, university structures, libraries, and commercial buildings of varying size. They made certain that there was always a residential project on the boards, serving as a laboratory for many of the ideas used in other structures. Often taking advantage of industrial prefabricated units to provide affordable yet refined architecture, Jones and Emmons bridged the gap between custom-built and merchant-built homes, producing dynamic, livable housing for the postwar moderate-income family.”¹⁵

Additionally, their practice emphasized that a good house did not stand alone but was situated within a community which in turn was dependent on facilities for education, shopping, worship, recreation, and play. The 109th Street Recreation Center, while completed far earlier, is emblematic of this thinking.

Period of Significance: 1939

Date of Construction

FINDINGS / ELIGIBILITY, CALIFORNIA REGISTER

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1 and 3.

It is historically significant under Criteria 1 for its association with the building program of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and as representative of the policies and social movements that influenced the construction of recreational facilities in Los Angeles in the 1930s, including the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, early civic moves toward racial equity, and an attempt to assuage the impacts of the Great Depression.

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse, embodying WPA layout, design and construction and manifesting early 20th century approaches to pool conception and design, approaches devised in Los Angeles by leaders in the Aquatics Division and the Department of Recreation and Parks, appears eligible for California Register listing under Criteria 3, which refers to “the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or [that] represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic

¹⁵ Cory Buckner, *Touring California with Architect A. Quincy Jones: the Remarkable Designs of Jones & Emmons*, *Eichler Network Newsletter*, <http://www.eichlernetwork.com/ENStry20.html>

values.” It appears to have been one of only two pools that were constructed using WPA funds *per se*. It does not appear to be directly related to important events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California’s history and cultural heritage and does not appear to be associated with the lives of persons important in the past of California, Los Angeles or Watts’s past.

The 109th St. Pool and Bathhouse is also remarkably intact. While it has lost the original diving board and gained removable plywood rooftop barriers and outdoor lighting, the overall composition remains largely intact, both exterior and interior, and retains a high degree of integrity from its period of significance.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Threshold Used to Determine Level of Impact

Section 15064.5 of the CEQA Guidelines, *Determining the Significance of Impacts to Historical Resources and Unique Archaeological Resources*, has been applied to this project to determine whether the proposed project will have any significant effect on historical resources. According to these criteria, the project would result in a significant impact if it causes a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource based on the following criteria established by the CEQA Guidelines:

(b) A project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.

(1) Substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource means physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration in the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historic resource would be materially impaired.

(2) The significance of an historical resource is materially impaired when a project:

(A) Demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for inclusion in, the California Register of Historical Resources; or

- (B) Demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics [of an historical resource] that account for its inclusion in a local register of historical resources (pursuant to section 5021.1(k) of the Public Resources Code), or its identification in an historical resources survey meeting the criteria in section 5024.1(g) of the Public Resources Code, unless the public agency reviewing the effects of the project establishes by a preponderance of evidence that the resource is not historically or culturally significant; or
 - (C) Demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its eligibility for inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources as determined by a lead agency for purposes of CEQA.
- (3) Generally, a project that follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (1995), Weeks and Grimmer, shall be considered as mitigated to a level of less than a significant impact on the historical resource.

Archaeological and Paleontological Resources

Jones & Stokes conducted a reconnaissance survey and assessment of cultural resources for the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse Replacement Project. This included a record search and review of previous cultural resources surveys, reconnaissance survey of the project site, and preparation of an archaeological survey report. The record search indicated that there are no previously recorded archaeological sites in the project area. The project area is located within a residential neighborhood. There are grass lawns, trees, ornamental vegetation, paved sidewalks and paved driveways within the surrounding area. The pool and bathhouse is located within a park that has paved pathways, sand lots with play equipment, a large grass field and a baseball diamond. No cultural resources were observed within the project area during the survey for the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse Replacement Project.

No prehistoric or historic-era cultural resources were observed during survey of the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse Replacement Project. Because the City of Los Angeles instituted trash and sewer services in the late 19th century, no hollow filled historical archaeological deposits are likely to be present in the project area and due to the disturbed nature of the project area from on-site and surrounding development and the lack of previously recorded archaeological resources within a ¼ mile radius of the project area, which indicates a low sensitivity for buried cultural resources, no further archaeological management is recommended. Buried cultural resources that were not identified during field surveys could be inadvertently unearthed during ground-disturbing activities that could result in demolition of or substantial damage to significant cultural resources. If cultural resources are discovered during monitoring or other construction, all work will be halted in the vicinity of the archaeological discovery until a qualified archaeologist can visit the site of discovery and assess the significance of the archaeological discovery. Further treatment may be required, including site recordation, excavation, site evaluation, and data recovery.

If during cultural resources monitoring the qualified archaeologist determines that the sediments being excavated are previously disturbed or unlikely to contain significant cultural materials, the qualified archaeologist can specify that monitoring be reduced or eliminated.

Impact Assessment - Historical Resources

The Department of Recreation and Parks, City of Los Angeles, is currently considering demolishing/refurbishing some City pool and bathhouse properties and replacing them with new facilities. The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse is one of the candidates for replacement/refurbishment.

The 109th Street Pool and Bathhouse meets the eligibility criteria for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources. Therefore, the property is considered a historic resource for the purposes of CEQA. The proposed project would result in the demolition of the pool and bathhouse. According to stipulations Section 15064.5(b)(1) of the CEQA Guidelines and judicial precedence, demolition of a historical resource would result in a significant impact under Section 21084.1 of CEQA.

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