Calumet Park Fieldhouse
9801 South Avenue G

Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, March 2, 2006

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Lori T. Healey, Commissioner
The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.
Chicago’s parks constitute one of the city’s most important historic resources with their abundance of historically and architecturally significant landscapes and buildings. Calumet Park, located on Chicago’s Southeast Side, contains one of the city’s finest fieldhouses, a significant building type in the history of the city. The neighborhood fieldhouse exemplifies a period in park design and programming—the creation of neighborhood parks and playgrounds in working-class neighborhoods early in the twentieth century—that is significant not only to Chicago, but to the nation’s history as well.

The Calumet Park Fieldhouse is also significant for its large-scale Classical Revival architectural style. Constructed of exposed aggregate concrete, the building’s picturesque appearance resembles a grand Classical-style villa, and is the work of the South Park Commission architects, resembling earlier fieldhouses designed for the South Park Commission by the noted Chicago firm of D. H. Burnham & Co. In addition, the fieldhouse’s exterior is ornamented with low-relief sculpture designed by a noteworthy Chicago artist, Frederick Hibbard.
THE FIELDHOUSE AND NEIGHBORHOOD PARK DEVELOPMENT IN CHICAGO

From its founding in 1833 as a small trading village on the edge of the American frontier to the 1880s when it became second only to New York among American cities, Chicago amazed both its citizens and outside observers with its dynamic growth and commercial vitality—largely due to private development and unabashed free-market capitalism. At the same time, however, Chicagoans recognized the importance of physical improvements such as public parkland.

As early as 1839, a portion of the Lake Michigan shoreline east of Michigan Avenue was dedicated to open space, labeled as “public ground, forever to remain vacant of building” on a subdivision map, and called for many years “Lake Park.” At the same time, the land bounded by Michigan, Washington Street, Randolph Street, and Garland Court was set aside as Dearborn Park. (Lake Park is now part of Grant Park, while the Chicago Cultural Center is located on the site of Dearborn Park.)

Park development in Chicago displays a rich variety of traditions. In the first half of the nineteenth century, in an effort to provide a physical amenity for newly platted residential neighborhoods and to encourage sales, Chicago real estate developers set aside small tracts of land for parks in several neighborhoods intended for upper-income houses. The first of these parks, Washington Square, was given to the City in 1842 by the American Land Company, which was subdividing the surrounding Near North Side area. Other parks acquired in the next thirty years by the City through gifts of land from developers included Union Park and Vernon Park on Chicago’s West Side and Ellis Park on the city’s South Side. These parks were relatively modest in size and intended for strolling and passive recreation by nearby residents. In overall form and use they resembled small residential parks or “squares” found both in European cities as well in older American cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.

The value of parks as enhancements to real estate development and civic life continued to be recognized in the years after the Civil War. In 1869 the Illinois state legislature established three new governmental agencies to oversee the development and maintenance of new parks in Chicago and neighboring suburban townships. The creation of the South Park, West Park, and Lincoln Park Commissions brought about the enhancement of the already created Lincoln Park on the city’s north lakefront and the creation of five additional large parks, connected by landscaped boulevards, on the city’s West and South sides.

These parks—Lincoln, Humboldt, Garfield, Douglas, Washington, and Jackson Parks—were designed as large-scale “pastoral” landscapes of picturesque meadows, encircling woodlands, curvilinear ponds and meandering bridal paths. They were meant to both encourage nearby real estate development and to provide recreational opportunities for people living throughout the Chicago area. Their designs were influenced by the naturalistic English landscape tradition of the 18th century and the mid-19th-century development of large, park-like cemeteries such as Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery and Chicago’s
Top: The Calumet Park Fieldhouse was built between 1922 and 1924 as a grandly-scaled Classical Revival building. Bottom: It is located in Calumet Park (indicated by circle and arrow) on Chicago’s Far Southeast Side lakefront.
Chicago’s parks have varied in their design and use over time. The city’s earliest parks, such as Washington Square Park (seen above in a historic photo), were usually small residential parks or “squares,” similar to those commonly found in both European and older East Coast cities. Later parks, including (below) Sherman Park, designed by D. H. Burnham & Co. and the Olmsted Brothers for the South Park Commission, combine picturesque landscapes with fieldhouses, encouraging both active and passive recreation.
Graceland Cemetery. The two South Park Commission’s parks, Washington and Jackson, were the creation of Frederick Law Olmsted, America’s leading 19th-century landscape architect. Olmsted’s earlier designs for New York’s Central Park (begun in 1857) and Prospect Park (begun in 1865) were widely admired and were prototypes for Chicago’s large-scale parks.

Situated near handsome middle- and upper-income neighborhoods, Chicago’s great 19th-century parks were destinations for Chicago’s citizens. Relatively passive recreations such as strolling, horseback riding, and carriage rides were popular ways of experiencing the parks. Pastoral parks such as these were seen as beneficial to Chicagoans because they served as the “lungs” of the city, providing places of natural beauty and relaxation that contrasted sharply with the city’s rapidly expanding urban streetscapes. As noted by architectural historian Daniel Bluestone, Victorian-era Americans believed that parks offered psychological benefits to city dwellers through their separation from “artificial” scenes of commerce and contact with nature. Parks were also seen as cultivators of culture and democracy in an increasingly capitalistic and class-oriented society.

Unfortunately, Chicago’s great pastoral parks were located at some distance from most of the city’s working-class neighborhoods. By the early 1900s, social reformers were advocating a new kind of park, attuned to what were perceived as the specific needs of members of Chicago’s poor, largely immigrant working class, for whom the existing large parks were inaccessible. Progressives such as architect Dwight Perkins and sociologist Charles Zueblin saw the need for small parks within poor neighborhoods, easily available to working-class families. They also believed that the emphasis in these neighborhood parks should be on active recreation, such as swimming, gymnastics, and ball playing, and supervised play, rather than walking and passive recreation.

Playgrounds—consciously designed spaces for child’s play—were an innovation of late-19th-century urban reformers. Settlement house pioneers such as Jane Addams, working and living amidst the poverty and squalor of Chicago’s working-class neighborhoods, had observed children playing in streets and alleys amidst filthy, often dangerous conditions. Combined with the widespread use (and abuse) of children as laborers in Chicago factories and workshops, child welfare advocates believed that healthy, wholesome environments, including supervised play, were essential for the proper social and physical development of children. Without such environments, children stood little chance of becoming fruitful citizens.

In 1899, the Special Park Commission was established by the City of Chicago to assess the city’s parks and to make and implement recommendations for improvements in existing parks and the creation of new parks. Although subsequent funding prevented the Special Park Commission from actively acquiring land and developing parks itself, the Commission’s recommendations, published in 1904, called for the creation of numerous neighborhood parks throughout the city.

The first neighborhood parks, beginning the construction of McKinley Park in 1900, were built on Chicago’s South and Southwest Sides by the South Park Commission and were hailed for their innovative social programs and designs, including the building of
“fieldhouses,” which combined a variety of meeting and activity rooms, including gymnasiums, auditoriums, classrooms, and crafts studios. Loosely based on settlement house buildings, park fieldhouses were intended to become the physical focus of recreational activity in neighborhood parks, housing activities as varied as drama, English classes, and weight-lifting, and to become de facto community centers in working-class Chicago neighborhoods.

**The Design and Construction of Calumet Park and Its Fieldhouse**

Calumet Park is a 199-acre site on Chicago’s Southeast Side that is bounded on the north by 95th Street, on the south by the Illinois-Indiana State Line, on the east by Lake Michigan, and on the west by the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern (E.J. & E.) Railroad right-of-way. Calumet Park’s name pays tribute to the Calumet region, where the park is located, as well as the area that includes numerous South Side communities within the Calumet River basin. Early French explorers who traded with the Pottawatomie Indians in the region used the French-Norman word for pipe, “chalumet,” in reference to their peace pipes.

In 1903, the South Park Commission, on the recommendation of the Special Park Commission, went forward with a grand scheme to create fourteen neighborhood parks for the South Side of Chicago. The commissioners contracted with D. H. Burnham & Co. and the Olmsted Brothers, respectively, to provide the parks’ architectural and landscape designs. The design for “Park No. 1,” later called Hardin Square (cleared to make way for the Dan Ryan Expressway), was modeled after small 19th-century residential squares and was less than ten acres in size. That same year, the firms started construction on Mark White, Armour, Fuller and Cornell Squares—Park Numbers 2-5—and had preliminary designs for the remaining nine parks. It was soon discovered that acquiring land for these new parks was a time-consuming and expensive process, involving the condemnation of buildings, the relocation of residents, and the rising costs of labor and materials. By 1905, however, the first ten parks of the plan were opened to the public, while the completion of “Park No. 11,” as Calumet Park was originally called, was delayed for further revisions.

In its early planning stages, the South Park Commissioners desired Calumet Park to have a landscape design with both formal and naturalistic elements similar to Frederick Law Olmsted’s design for Jackson Park in the 1890s. The Far Southeast Side, however, was becoming densely populated by the influx of European and Mexican immigrants and later African Americans to work in Chicago’s steel mills and railroad yards. The growing population instituted a need for additional parkland, so the South Park Commission requested permission and financial assistance from the government to extend landfill out into Lake Michigan. Anticipating the additional acreage, the Olmsted Brothers revised the Calumet Park plan in 1907 and again in 1908. Meanwhile, the public was permitted to make use of the park’s minimal amenities—the beachfront, ball fields, tennis courts and a children’s wading pool.
Although planning for Calumet Park began in 1904, it was not until the 1920s that the park's final form began to take shape. Top: The 1921 plan for Calumet Park with its fieldhouse (in black). Bottom: An aerial view of Calumet Park with the completed fieldhouse, 1941.
The Calumet Park Fieldhouse has a U-shaped plan, with a tall central pavilion and flanking gymnasium wings. Top: A historic view of the building from the northwest, showing the north (front) elevation. Bottom: A photograph of the south (rear) elevation of the fieldhouse’s central pavilion, taken in 2006.
When government approval for the breakwater extension and landfill finally arrived in 1918, the South Park Commission had by that time terminated its ongoing relationship with D. H. Burnham & Co., the architects for previous fieldhouses, and had its own in-house architects for building designs. Burnham had entrusted Edward H. Bennett, a graduate of the École de Beaux-Arts, with the task of designing the Commission’s early fieldhouses and was responsible for producing the chiefly Classical style park buildings. In addition, the Olmsted Brothers’ 1908 landscape plan was dropped altogether as out-of-date as the Commission continued to acquire additional land for the park. In 1920 and again in 1924, the Commission utilized slag produced from nearby steel mills as landfill and added 100 acres to the existing park. By retaining in-house designers for the Calumet Park Fieldhouse and all future park structures, the Commission was spared the greater architectural fees that came with using such noted outside architects. They likewise canceled their contract with the Olmsted Brothers at a later date and designed future landscapes in-house as well.

The first phase of the Calumet Park plan, with its formal fieldhouse and adjacent boiler house, was not completed until 1924. Additional landfill operations were continued in the 1930s, bringing the park’s size to a total of 194 acres by 1935. Lastly, with the closure of the neighboring Falstaff Brewing Company’s malting plant, the Chicago Park District acquired an adjacent land parcel of 4.98 acres south of the park in 1993.

Under the direction of South Park Commission Chief Engineer Linn White, plans were completed for the Calumet Park Fieldhouse and a separate boiler house (which is not being considered as part of this landmark designation) in 1922, almost 20 years after the first design work for the park by the Olmsted Brothers. There was an expectation, however, that these new buildings would remain consistent with the style and materials previously used in structures designed by D. H. Burnham & Co. for the South Park Commission. Construction of the fieldhouse commenced in 1923 and was completed in 1924.

Following the Commission’s earlier building tradition, the Calumet Park Fieldhouse is rendered in the Classical Revival architectural style and is built of exposed aggregate concrete, also known as “popcorn concrete” or “marblecrete.” The South Park Commission had used the material for its early fieldhouses primarily because buildings built in this manner could be constructed inexpensively and rapidly. Such buildings depended mainly on their overall form and large-scale details for visual effect, as ornamental detailing was molded into the concrete and lacked the small-scale intricacies possible with carved stone.

The Fieldhouse has a U-shaped plan consisting of a visually-dominant central pavilion, connected to two flanking gymnasium wings around a central courtyard. The central pavilion is two stories in height and houses offices and classrooms, a small community history museum on the first floor, a second-floor auditorium, and a model train room and crafts rooms in the basement. The most monumental and ornate part of the fieldhouse, this main section has a low-hipped roof and on the north and south elevations, large-scale round-arched windows, detailed with fanlights and keystones, that light the second-floor auditorium. Horizontal coursing molded into the concrete give the building’s first-floor...
The Calumet Park Fieldhouse incorporates numerous Classical Revival-style elements in its design, including (top) large round-arched windows, and (right) Classical window surrounds, cornice and balustrade.
walls the appearance of rusticated stone. The north elevation has the building’s main entrance, consisting of a grouping of three doorways aligned with the second-floor arched windows, while the south elevation, facing an open courtyard formed by the fieldhouse’s side wings, has a gently-bowing first-floor bay. The Calumet Park Fieldhouse follows a tripartite scheme similar to the fieldhouse designs at Bessemer, Hamilton and Sherman Parks, by D. H. Burnham & Co. for the South Park Commission.

Acting as a transition between the fieldhouse’s central pavilion and two flanking gymnasium wings are a pair of two-story, flat-roofed “connectors” housing additional classrooms and other facilities. Classical-style ornament includes low-relief swags and scroll-shaped brackets decorating windows, plus rooftop balustrades.

The two gymnasium wings of the fieldhouse are a tall one story in height with low-hipped roofs. The wings house separate men’s and women’s gymnasiums and locker rooms, each with a formal side entrance labeled “GYMNASIUM” in block letters molded into the concrete. These entrances are decorated with Classical-style ornament, including ornate cartouches displaying Indian clubs and balls.

The exterior of the fieldhouse is further decorated with low-relief sculptural panels flanking the north elevation’s second-floor arched windows. Commissioned by the South Park Commission in 1926, the panels are the work of artist Frederick C. Hibbard (1881-1950) and exhibit playful, Classically-inspired children with a variety of toys exemplifying navigation, music, dance and drama. A protégé and former assistant of the renowned Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft, Hibbard produced panels meant to symbolize types of activities slated for the fieldhouse.

Born in Canton, Missouri, Hibbard attended the University of Missouri in St. Louis and, in the 1890s, came to Chicago to study electrical engineering at the Armour Institute of Technology. Opting to abandon electrical work as a career, he decided in 1901 to enroll at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. It was there that he studied sculpture with Taft and was soon hired as his assistant. By 1904 he opened his own studio at 923 East 60th Street to be near his mentor, Taft’s Midway Studios being located nearby at 6016 S. Ingleside Ave.

Hibbard overall received more than 70 sculpture commissions both locally and nationally during his career. His works in Chicago include the Carter Harrison monument in Union Park; the Eagles in Grant Park; the Garden Figure in the Lincoln Park Conservatory; and, working collaboratively with his wife Elizabeth Haseltine Hibbard, the Wallach Fountain in Burnham Park.

Located on the second floor of the Calumet Park Fieldhouse’s central pavilion is an auditorium with an open-truss roof and ornate Classical-style proscenium arch. Mounted on the auditorium’s walls are four murals created and installed between 1927 and 1929 by the artist Tom Lea (1907-2001), a protégé of Chicago muralist John Warner Norton. Likely commissioned through an art fund established by Judge John Barton Payne in 1909, the murals depict scenes of Native Americans, explorers and settlers to the region. Inspired by stories of the early history of the Calumet region, the murals are entitled Indian Ceremony, Father Marquette with Traders and Indians, Hunting Party Returns to Village, and Indians and Fur Traders.

Left: Tom Lea in his studio, ca. 1941. Right: One of Lea’s murals, titled Father Marquette with Traders and Indians, Hunting Party Returns to Village, and Indians and Fur Traders.
THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL STYLE

The Calumet Park Fieldhouse was designed by the South Park Commission’s architects as a Classical Revival-style building. The use and adaptation of a long-standing historic architectural style to such a modern and spatially complex building is consistent with how Americans in general, and Chicagoans in particular, saw architectural design in the 1920s. With a few exceptions, most Americans wanted buildings that were modern and up-to-date in function, but were designed using traditional architectural styles. In that context, the Classical Revival style remained an important part of American cultural life.

The Classical tradition in architecture and design is one of the oldest and most significant traditions in Western civilization, influential from its origins in the Greek city-states of the 6th century BC through the present day. The architecture of ancient Greek temples and sacred buildings was widely admired by other Mediterranean cultures, including ancient Rome, which incorporated Greek Classical architectural forms and details in its buildings throughout its empire, which encompassed regions as far flung as England, North Africa, Spain, and Persia.

The effort to keep Classical architecture as a living architecture was an important part of the Italian Renaissance, when architects sought to revive Classicism through a melding of ancient Roman Classical forms with contemporary building types, including palaces and churches. This effort to keep Classical architecture alive continued through the Baroque era of the 17th century, the Rococo and Neoclassical periods of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the Greek Revival, Renaissance Revival and Classical Revival periods of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Classical design was seen as a significant aspect of Western civilization, and buildings intended to house important cultural, economic, or social institutions, whether public or private, often utilized Classical forms and ornament as part of their designs. By the early 1900s, the Classical style was increasingly adapted to a wide variety of building types, including banks, university buildings, railroad stations, and large hotels, that had developed as large-scale, densely-populated cities had grown through industrialization and migration.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, architects in both Europe and America increasingly learned their professions in architecture schools. The most prominent ones, including the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, taught students how to design complex modern buildings while cloaking them in historic architectural styles, especially Classicism.

This academic training came at the same time as a popular revival of interest in Classicism that was fed by the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago’s Jackson Park in 1893. This grandly-scaled “White City” of Classical Revival-style exposition buildings and monuments on the city’s south lakefront was immensely influential in the popularization of the style both among Chicagoans and throughout the United States.
It was a decade after the fair that the South Park Commission commissioned its first fieldhouse designs from D. H. Burnham & Co. Burnham himself had been the mastermind of the fair, and his firm’s later architecture, including the South Park Commission’s fieldhouses, reflects the influence of the fair. Even after the Commission no longer used Burnham’s firm, its own architects employed the still-popular architectural vocabulary of the Classical Revival as the building style for the Calumet Park Fieldhouse and other parks.

The Calumet Park Fieldhouse has been previously recognized for its architectural significance. The building is identified as a contributing building to Calumet Park, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The fieldhouse is also color-coded “orange” in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey.

The Classical Revival architectural style became tremendously popular throughout the United States in the years following (right) the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893.

Below: The South Park Commission adopted the Classical Revival style for its early fieldhouses, including both early fieldhouses such as (below) the fieldhouse for Fuller Park, as well as later ones such as the Calumet Park Fieldhouse.
CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Calumet Park Fieldhouse be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City’s History
Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

- The Calumet Park Fieldhouse exemplifies the importance of Chicago’s neighborhood parks, built in working-class neighborhoods for the city’s large immigrant population, to the city’s heritage.

- The Fieldhouse reflects changing cultural attitudes towards the role of parks in Chicago in the early twentieth century, from pastoral settings devoted to passive recreation to landscapes more intensively programmed with recreational and social uses accommodated by fieldhouses.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture
Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Calumet Park Fieldhouse is a significant example of a neighborhood fieldhouse, a building type significant in the history of park design and one for which Chicago designers were innovators.

- The Fieldhouse is a fine example of Classical Revival-style architecture, an architectural style of great significance in the history of Chicago and the United States. Popularized by its extensive use during World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, it greatly influenced the architectural design of public buildings in the following decades.

- The Fieldhouse exhibits excellent detailing and craftsmanship, including Classical-style arched windows, window ornamentation, and balustrades, constructed using aggregate concrete, wood and metal.

- The Fieldhouse is ornamented with several art works, including exterior low-relief sculptural panels by Frederick Hibbard and interior murals by Tom Lea.
**Integrity Criteria**

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Calumet Park Fieldhouse possesses excellent physical integrity, displaying through its siting, scale and overall design, its historic relationship to the surrounding Southeast Chicago neighborhood. It retains a strong sense of historic visual character through historic materials and detailing.

Exterior changes to the fieldhouse that have occurred over time include the replacement of the building’s original tile roof with asphalt shingles, the removal of the balconies on the north façade below the second-floor round-arched windows, and the replacement of French doors with fixed windows in these windows.

**Significant Historical and Architectural Features**

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Calumet Park Fieldhouse, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building; and
- The historic stairs and retaining walls adjacent to building.

**Selected Bibliography**


Chicago Park District, Archives. Photographs, drawings, brochures, and annual reports.

Above Left: The South Park Commissioners published a variety of how-to booklets to accompany the activities at their parks. Above Right: A model plane building class at the Calumet Park Fieldhouse, 1938. Below Left: A mask making class and its participants, 1938. Below Right: Model Train Club members at the Calumet Park Fieldhouse, 1956. The Model Train Club is still active.

Lea, Tom. Tom Lea Collection. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin (website).


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Works Progress Administration. *Historical Register of the Twenty-Two Superceded Park Districts in the City of Chicago.* 1941.
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Chicago Park District Archives: cover (top) pp. 7, 8 (top), 14 (bottom), 17 (top), 18 (bottom), 19.
From Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922 by the Art Institute of Chicago: p. 14 (top).
From Daniel Burnham by Charles Moore: p. 4 (bottom).
From History of Raymond, Mississippi: Frederick C. Hibbard: Raymond Confederate Monument, Part I (website): p. 11 (left).
From The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago’s Parks by Julia Sniderman: p. 18 (top).
From Tom Lea Collection. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin (website): p. 12 (left).
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