

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
June 20, 2006, Designation List 377  
LP-2197

**ORCHARD BEACH BATHHOUSE AND PROMENADE**, including the upper and lower bathhouse terraces, upper terrace benches and ticket booths, stairways and flanking walls, lighting fixtures, flagpole, railings, paving, seating areas, trees, and comfort stations; Pelham Bay Park, Borough of the Bronx. Constructed 1934-37; Aymar Embury II, Consulting Architect; Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano, Consulting Landscape Architects.

Landmark Site: The portion of Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5650, Lot 1 in part, incorporating the Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade which is bounded by a line beginning at the point that is at the southern end of the eastern edge of the promenade, extending northwesterly, northerly, and northeasterly along the curved eastern edge of the promenade (including all stairs) at its juncture with the beach, extending northerly along the northeastern polygonal end of the promenade to the point at which the beach ends, southwesterly and southerly along a curved line that is fifteen feet northwesterly and westerly from the northern and western paved edge of the promenade (and incorporating the outer perimeter of the comfort stations), westerly and southerly along the northern and western edges of the paved curving paths located north and northwest of the bathhouse, southerly along a line that is a southerly continuation of the western edge of the path on the (north)east side of the bathhouse (adjacent to and west of the stairs leading to the bathhouse upper terrace) to the path south of the stairs and (south)east of the bathhouse, southerly and easterly along the western and southern edges of the paved curving paths located southwest and south of the bathhouse, southeasterly along a curved line that is fifteen feet southwesterly from the southwestern paved edge of the promenade (and incorporating the outer perimeter of the comfort stations), and northerly along the southeastern polygonal end of the promenade, to the point of beginning.

On April 18, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade (LP-2197) including the upper and lower bathhouse terraces, upper terrace benches and ticket booths, stairways and flanking walls, lighting fixtures, flagpole, railings, paving, seating areas, trees, and comfort stations, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, and representatives of the Historic Districts Council and the Art Deco Society. The site was previously heard on June 2, 1992 (LP-1885).



### Summary

The Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade, which since 1936 has served as the major waterfront recreation complex for Bronx residents, is an outstanding example of the federally-funded public works projects executed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Located in Pelham Bay Park and fronting on Long Island Sound, Orchard Beach was constructed in 1934-37 during the administration of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Department Commissioner Robert Moses with funds obtained largely from the Works Progress Administration. Planned on a massive scale, its construction required a major landfill and a mile-long seawall to connect Hunter Island to the mainland, creating an entirely new, artificial landscape. Designed by a talented staff supervised by the well-known architect Aymar Embury II and the noted landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano, the facility contains a bathhouse in a Modern Classical style and a wide promenade, the plan of which was influenced by Beaux-Arts principles. The concrete, brick, and limestone bathhouse, embellished with tile and terrazzo finishes, features two monumental colonnades that radiate outward from a raised central terrace. The crescent-shaped promenade, which follows the curve of the beach, is paved with hexagonal blocks and edged by cast-iron railings evoking a nautical motif. Situated on the promenade are Moderne style concession and supply buildings, park benches, drinking fountains, and modernistic lamp posts. The original and creative use made of these materials and forms, and the careful siting of the facility, make it a distinguished, individual design. Orchard Beach, a major accomplishment of engineering and architecture, and New York City's most ambitious park project of the New Deal, is recognized as being among the most remarkable public recreational facilities ever constructed in the United States.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of the Site<sup>1</sup>

The drive to acquire new parkland for the citizens of the City of New York began with Frederick Law Olmsted, who was the chief of the Park Department's Bureau of Design and Superintendence in the 1870s. His vision for the developing the Bronx included a system of parks and parkways, with roads following the existing topography rather than a rigid grid system as in Manhattan. City officials rejected his recommendations and dismissed him in 1877. However, his ideas were not forgotten. John Mullaly, editor of the New York Herald Tribune, rallied public enthusiasm for the plan. In 1881, New York Park Association was formed. It was made up of many of the City's leading businessmen and professionals, such as Charles L. Tiffany, Gustav Schwab, Jordan L. Mott, Egbert L. Viele, and H.B. Claflin. They proposed creating new public parkland by preserving large tracts of open land in rural areas that were newly annexed or soon-to-be-annexed to the City. The Association was unsuccessful, however, in persuading the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen to authorize a commission to oversee the selection of new parkland, so they took their case to the New York State Legislature. Despite much political opposition, the Legislature created the Park Commission in 1883. It proposed three large parks: Pelham Bay, Bronx, and Van Cortlandt, and three smaller parks: Crotona, Claremont, and Saint Mary's.

New York City government officials opposed the purchase of these lands because of the cost of acquisition; they were especially hostile toward Pelham Bay Park because the land was still located beyond city limits. After much debate and a series of court cases, all of the parks, including the embattled Pelham Bay Park, were secured for the City by 1887. Not only would there be thousands of acres of new parkland, but also a system of parkways - the Pelham, Mosholu, Claremont and Crotona Parkways - which would serve as green linkages between the great parks. Pelham Bay Park, the largest tract of land purchased under the bill, officially became the City's first public seaside park, as well as its largest park, on December 12, 1888.<sup>2</sup>

The City consolidated several estates to create Pelham Bay Park, including lands belonging to the Hunter, Furman, Edgar, Lorillard, Morris, Stinard, Marshall, LeRoy, and Delancey families. The park's largely natural acreage was virtually ready-made parkland, requiring only the construction of roads and walks.<sup>3</sup> During the late nineteenth century, the Bronx Park Department leased some former estate buildings to various organizations, such as the Jacob Riis Settlement. One of these, the Bartow-Pell Mansion is a designated New York City Landmark. Several others were either demolished or converted into hotels and restaurants. By the 1930s, virtually all of them had been demolished. The Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, however, remains and is a designated New York City Landmark.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the City began to lease land in the park to campers, who constructed tents and small bungalows on Hunters Island. When it became overcrowded, another camp was opened on Rodman's Neck in 1905. Orchard Beach was named for the numerous orchards behind it. Orchard Beach eventually grew into a summer colony of more than 300 tents and bungalows, with wooden locker rooms and bathhouses. In 1912, about 2,000 people occupied the beach on summer weekdays and 5,000 a day on weekends. Boating and fishing were also popular activities within the park, and the renowned film maker, D.W. Griffith used the park's islands as the setting for several early silent movies.

By the late 1920s, urbanization had reached the areas bordering the park and the facilities were becoming overcrowded and run-down. Vandalism was rampant and sanitation was poor. The press began to decry the monopolization of the park by the leaseholders, who were mainly Tammany Hall insiders who paid nominal sums for their leases, and then sub-leased the sites at much higher rates.

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, the City obtained funds to construct improvements at Orchard Beach from the Civil Works Administration (CWA), one of the pre-New Deal Federal relief programs set up to combat unemployment. The hastily prepared changes to Orchard Beach were ill-conceived and poorly built. An improperly designed breakwater and retaining wall, intended to expand the beach area, instead eroded the beach and caused flooding at high tide. The old unsanitary wooden bathhouses were replaced with poorly-ventilated and unattractive bathhouses built of paving blocks, and the beach was blanketed with uninviting, gray New England sand.

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 in 1929. Roosevelt promised to rebuild confidence in American capitalism and to improve the nation's standard of living by creating an economic program of unprecedented public spending on social programs and construction projects, known as the New Deal.

New York City had been especially hard hit by the economic downturn,<sup>4</sup> and its citizens, also hoping for change, elected Fiorello LaGuardia to the mayoralty of New York City in 1933 under a reform-minded "fusion" ticket. He chose New York State Park Commissioner, Robert Moses, a champion of reform politics, as New York City's new Park Commissioner. The new mayor's success in securing a lion's share of monies made available by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), and Moses' superb management skills and his ability to attract talented designers and engineers to his staff, resulted in profound physical changes in the environment of New York City. The recreation of Orchard Beach, beginning in 1934, was one of the most ambitious and successful projects undertaken by Moses with funds largely provided by the WPA.

#### Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert Moses and the New Deal<sup>5</sup>

Fiorello H. La Guardia became the ninety-ninth mayor of the City of New York in January 1934, as an anti-Tammany Hall reform candidate. A maverick Republican and a five-term congressman from East Harlem, LaGuardia won the 1933 mayoral election on a "fusion" ticket, after losing the 1929 mayoral race on the Republican line. The Fusion Conference Committee at first considered 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, such as 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. As a reward, the mayor-elect invited Moses to join his future administration within a week of the election.

Moses accepted the position of Commissioner of Parks on the condition that the existing five independent Park Departments, one for each borough, be consolidated into one with himself as the sole Commissioner, and that the Park Commissioner's authority include control of the City's parkways. He also demanded that he 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 State 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.

Moses began to assess the state of the City's parks and to plan for the future as soon as LaGuardia announced his intention to appoint him as Commissioner of Parks. 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>6</sup> Moses hired a consulting engineer and three assistant engineers to survey every park and parkway in the City. It was completed by the time he took office in mid-January 1934.

When Moses took over the Park Department, it was already employing 69,000 relief workers with a total monthly payroll of eight million dollars provided by the federal Civil Works Administration and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA). However, Moses found the men to be ill-equipped and inadequately supervised, and thought that many of the construction projects had been poorly designed. Included among these was the earlier Orchard Beach reconstruction, which Moses considered to be an unacceptable design for such a grand site. He immediately began to revamp the entire operation of the Park Department and established a Division of Design at the Arsenal in Central Park. The staff was to be headed up by experienced professionals drawn mainly from his State agencies. They were a talented staff of young architects, landscape architects and engineers. Some of them had worked on the designs for Long Island's highly acclaimed parks, including Jones Beach, which is considered one of Moses' greatest accomplishments. His staff also included a number of well-known designers, among them architect Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, a landscape architect and civil engineer.

The Department needed to immediately begin producing plans and blueprints, so that the growing force of relief workers could be assigned to worthwhile projects. Within a week, Moses managed to persuade CWA officials to drop some of the regulations governing the hiring of staff and to relax its spending limits on project planning, allowing him to hire 600 architects, engineers and draftsmen at salaries above CWA wage guidelines. By the first of February, they were busily producing designs and blueprints.

The Division of Design was organized in the following manner: a topographical unit of about 400 surveyors and draftsmen, a landscape architecture unit of about sixty people, an architecture unit made up of sixty architects and draftsmen, and an engineering unit of about fifty. 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>7</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 the designs. 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, his personal demeanor, described as stubborn and arrogant, offended many and made him many enemies. He was known to sometimes fire people on the spot, and for no apparent reason. At times, he disregarded 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 constructing 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 Park 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. To many he was a master builder; to others he was a spoiled bully; and he seemingly always had his way.

In the summer of 1934, however, Robert Moses was a hero. Hundreds of projects, covering virtually every City neighborhood, had been completed. Structures were repainted, tennis courts resurfaced, and lawns reseeded. Hundreds of new construction projects were either underway or being designed.<sup>8</sup> Among the projects being drawn up at the time was the new Orchard Beach.

#### The Designers of Orchard Beach<sup>9</sup>

Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, respectively the Park Department's Consulting Architect and Consulting Landscape Architect, are often credited with the design of Orchard Beach. A monograph of Clarke's work definitely associates him with the Orchard Beach development, along with his business partner Michael Rapuano. However, Embury's exact involvement in the project is not clear. Both men were employed by the City on a part-time basis, not exceeding fifty days per year for Embury and eighty days per year for Clarke, according to contract. The head of the Division of Design at the time was the Park Engineer, William H. Latham, who was 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 the direction of the Park Engineer. The sketches were then submitted for approval to the Park Engineer, the General Superintendent and the Commissioner. The consultant's role was to give regular criticisms during the preparations 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 and Stokes, and Palmer and Hornbostel. 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 gained for 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, establishing him as an historian of note. By the start of the Great Depression, he was well-known and had received a wide 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.

During the Depression, Embury opened a new chapter in his career as consulting architect to the leading public works agencies of New York City: the Port Authority of New York, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and the New York City Parks Department. He was said to have supervised the design of over six hundred projects, Orchard Beach among them. Due to the collaborative nature of most of the work, it is difficult to assign specific projects to him, but the designs for many buildings from this era have been attributed to Embury. In addition to Orchard Beach, Embury supervised the designs of Bryant Park, the Donnell Branch of the New York Public Library, the Hofstra University Campus, the Central Park and Prospect Park Zoos, Jacob Riis Park, five neighborhood pool and play centers,<sup>10</sup> the Lincoln Tunnel, the Triborough Bridge, and the New York City Building at the 1939 World's Fair, which was subsequently altered.

Later in life he continued to design for Hofstra and also served on the board for the design of the New York Coliseum. Embury retired from active practice in 1956, but continued to serve as a consultant to the firm continued by his son, Edward Coe Embury, until his death in 1966.

Gilmore D. 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, which included the Rye Beach Playland, the Saw Mill River Parkway, and the Bronx River Parkway, 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.

His career advanced during the 1930s. Besides being hired by Robert Moses as the Consulting Landscape Architect to the New York City Park 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. In addition to Orchard Beach, his work for the Park Department included Bryant Park, Central Park Zoo, City Hall Park, Astoria Park in Queens, 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 landscape architectural firm 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.

Michael Rapuano (1904-1965) was born in Warner, New York, and received a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from Cornell University in 1927. He was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome from 1927 to 1930. After going into practice with Clarke in 1935, he served on the New York City Art Commission, the Bucks County (PA.) Park Commission, and as a Trustee and later President of the American Academy in Rome. His work in association with Gilmore D. Clarke included the Parkchester housing development in the Bronx, Idlewild (now Kennedy) Airport in Queens, the East Bronx Hospital Center, reconstruction of the Bronx and Pelham Parkway, and the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair.

### The Design and Construction of Orchard Beach<sup>11</sup>

Orchard Beach and the entirety of Pelham Bay Park, geologically the southernmost extension of the jagged New England coastline and the most complex natural environment within New York City, sit on a foundation of Hartland bedrock. This bedrock underlies Long Island Sound, which had been a river

until it was flooded at the end of the last ice age, 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. As the glaciers retreated, they left behind large boulders and a mixture of rocks, gouging out small coves in the bedrock, thus forming an irregular coastline. Glacial boulders in the Pelham Bay Park area include the Gray Mare Rock on Hunter Island and Mishow Rock at the north end of Orchard Beach. Left behind by the floodwaters were a series of salt and fresh water marshes, estuaries, coves, bays, inlets, islands, peninsulas, forests, uplands and meadows.

At the time when Pelham Bay Park was acquired by the City, large urban parks were generally thought of as being pleasure grounds mainly for passive recreation and for the quiet contemplation of nature. Most parks, Pelham Bay Park among them, were preserved in their natural states or, like Central Park, landscaped to take advantage of the natural topography. By 1930, all that had changed and, led by the thinking of Robert Moses, such parks came to be seen as vast recreational facilities for the urban masses. The value of the landscape was no longer just in the appreciation of nature, but rather in their potential for the placement within them of recreational facilities. Thus, the natural landscape could be manipulated and altered at will, as was the situation in Pelham Bay Park for the construction of Orchard Beach. The natural beauty of its shallow bays and rocky islands, gave way to a grandiose reshaping into an artificial landscape created with seawalls and landfills, a method of environmental manipulation known as land reclamation.

Robert Moses was known to have been an avid swimmer who resided near the ocean in Babylon, Long Island. Thus, he took a special interest in the design and construction of the bathing and swimming facilities, such as Jones Beach, Orchard Beach and Riis Park, as well as the neighborhood swimming pools. Moses was said to have spent a lot of time at the Orchard Beach site, imagining about how best to remake the facility. After thinking of the concept for the new beach, he took his designers on a tour of the area, relaying his ideas to them.

The setting for Moses' vision of a new Orchard Beach was the easternmost area of the park fronting on Pelham Bay, a protected basin on Long Island Sound. Surrounding the bay are parts of Rodman Neck, a wooded peninsula on the Bronx mainland extending southward into Eastchester Bay; two large islands, Hunters and City Islands; and three smaller islands, the Twin Islands and High Island. Separating Rodman Neck from Hunters Island was a shallow inlet called LeRoy Bay. Moses' scheme consisted of creating a gigantic recreation area with a mile-long beach, a wide promenade, a large bathhouse including viewing terraces and concessions, picnic groves, game areas, playgrounds, and a parking field for several thousand cars. He instructed his designers to be imaginative, as they had been at Jones Beach, to make the new facility fit visually into the Pelham Bay Park environment. According to one account, it was Moses who first suggested the use of a colonnade at the site, citing the verticality of the site's wooded, hilly backdrop. To accomplish these plans, all the existing buildings on the site, including the private bungalow colony and the newly completed beach improvements, had to be demolished and Hunters Island had to be connected to Rodman Neck by filling in LeRoy Bay.

On February 27, 1934, Moses publicly announced his plans for Orchard Beach, envisioning the proposed improvements to be similar to those made earlier at Jones Beach. He described Orchard Beach in its current state as a "monstrosity," criticizing the poor design of the recently constructed seawall and bathhouses and accusing the Tammany-connected campers of "monopolizing" the beach. He vowed to open the beach to all the public. During the next couple of months, while the Division of Design was preparing the preliminary plans, Moses was engaged in a legal battle to evict the campers from the beach. By mid-May 1934, the courts decided that the City had the right to break the campers' leases, clearing the way for the project. The very next day, the Division of Design released the chart of development for Orchard Beach, showing a configuration of two smaller curving beaches, rather than the one large crescent-shaped beach that was eventually built.<sup>12</sup> Soon thereafter, the bungalow colony was demolished.

Over the course of the next year, the design for the facility was revised and fine-tuned, with the final design officially being released to the public in July of 1935. The published rendering showed a layout and design that was very close to what was eventually to be built: a curving beach and promenade with a concave plaza framed by two curving colonnades, joined at the center by a large terrace. Spreading out beside each colonnade were large, open-air locker rooms that were more expansive than what was actually built. Behind the bathhouse stretched a long tree-lined mall with a parking lot on one side and groves on the other.

Robert A. Caro credits Moses with the idea to use a colonnade in the design of the bath house, but not specifically for suggesting its concave plan.<sup>13</sup> It is known, however, that the plan of the bath house was revised from convex to concave between Spring 1934 and Summer 1935. At about the same time, a competition was conducted to redesign the Palais du Trocadero, an art museum and theater across the Seine River from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The winning scheme by the architects J. Carlu, L. Boileau and L. Azema was a classically-influenced design consisting of a concave plan facing the river, featuring two wings joined by a raised central terrace in an arrangement very similar to the bath house at Orchard Beach. Furthermore, the curving wings were constructed of white stone and have vertically arranged windows flanked by tall pilasters. The curving colonnades at Orchard Beach produce a similar effect. The design for the Trocadero was widely published at the time. Embury and his design team may have been influenced by its design in their scheme for Orchard Beach.

Landfill operations at the site began in early 1935, and problems immediately arose concerning the quality of the fill. Commissioner Moses planned to use sand only, but was pressured by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment to use municipal waste provided by the Department of Sanitation in an apparent cost saving measure.<sup>14</sup> Since the seawalls needed to hold back the fill were only partially built, refuse began washing out into Pelham Bay and Long Island Sound, polluting the coastline for miles around.<sup>15</sup> The work was stopped, and Moses demanded that the Department of Sanitation clean up the mess. It had become clear that municipal waste was not a suitable fill material for the site, so Moses appealed to the Board to immediately appropriate \$500,000 for 1,700,000 cubic yards of sand needed to complete the fill operation, so that the beach could open for the 1936 season.<sup>16</sup> The main seawall, on the east side of the site facing Long Island Sound, was built by placing boulders and large rocks in a mile-long, crescent-shaped pile to create the curve of the beach. The wall is twenty-five feet wide at the floor of the bay and rises twenty-one feet, tapering to a point above high tide. A somewhat smaller seawall was constructed on the west side of the beach, creating a lagoon on the back bay behind Hunter Island. A total of 4,000,000 cubic yards of landfill was deposited, most of it dredged from Jamaica Bay and Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Barges carried the sand to the site, discharging it into hydraulic pumps, which then deposited it at a rate of 4,000 cubic yards per day. Approximately 115 acres of dry land were created in this manner.

Schematic drawings of the bathhouse facility and related buildings were made by the Division of Design during 1935 and the working drawings were produced and revised over the course of several months beginning in late 1935 through early 1937, with production peaking in Spring 1936.

The construction of the facility would be phased over the course of two years to permit the reopening of the beach for the 1936 season. The plan was to first complete a part of the southern section of the beach, a piece of the south bath house, and a small parking area in 1936, while work continued on the rest of the site. The pace of construction accelerated greatly in Spring 1936 in anticipation of opening the facility that summer. Some 4,000 relief workers funded through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were being bused to the site every day from the I.R.T. Pelham Bay station.<sup>17</sup> The crews were able to complete a remarkable amount of work in the three months prior to the opening of the beach in late July. Roads were laid, the temporary parking lot built, 250,000 cubic yards of sand were deposited on the beach, and one of the six bath house units was completed. To accomplish all this, crews worked for twenty-four hours a day in three shifts. Nevertheless, the opening was delayed for one week due to a shortage of available heavy equipment needed to deliver sand from Rockaway Inlet in Queens.

On July 25, 1936, the partially built facility was opened with much fanfare. As planned, the temporary facility included part of the south section of the permanent bathhouse containing shower and locker space for about 2,300 people, a beach with a capacity for 35,000 bathers, and parking for 2,000 cars. The festivities were attended by 10,000 people. Several dignitaries were present, including Mayor LaGuardia, Commissioner Moses, Bronx Borough President James J. Lyons, and federal Public Works Administrator Victor L. Ridder. Also in attendance was George Mand of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce, who was cheered by the crowd when he labeled the beach "The Riviera of New York City." The celebration culminated in a fireworks show with a ninety foot display in which the words "Orchard Beach" were spelled out in fiery letters.<sup>18</sup>

On opening day, the larger part of the bath house, including the colonnade consisted only of its steel frame, and the facility, including much of the promenade and most of the beach and parking lot, was more than a year away from completion. Construction took place all summer long while the temporary



beach and bath house remained open to the public. Work at Orchard Beach continued at a frenzied pace during the following winter, and when the beach reopened to little fanfare for the 1937 summer season, bathers were treated to a modern shorefront facility, which included a classically-inspired bath house building with an 180-degree panorama of Long Island Sound. Crews were, however, still on hand putting the finishing touches on the bathhouse, and the seawall, promenade, parking area and mall were not completely done until the next summer.

The completed facility boasted a mile-long beach, 200 feet wide at high tide, with a capacity of 100,000 bathers, bath house facilities for 7,000 people, a forty -five acre parking lot for 8,000 cars, and a mile-long, fifty-foot wide promenade. In addition to having showers, lockers and lavatories, the one-thousand by two-hundred foot bath house building included spacious waiting rooms, flower-lined ramps, administrative offices, reception areas, first aid stations, concessions spaces, a large cafeteria, an upstairs restaurant, storage areas, a boiler room, and a laboratory for testing water quality. The upper terrace of the bath house featured a large decorative fountain (removed in 1941), while the lower terrace had a dance floor and a bandstand (also now removed). Four utility and storage buildings, one story in height and constructed of brick, were built in pairs along the promenade, about a thousand feet to the north and to the south of the bath house. Eighteen lifeguard stations on the beach protected the bathers. The facility also included a large park area with picnic groves, baseball diamonds, football fields, tennis courts and children's play areas. Nearby a sewerage disposal plant and a large incinerator were constructed. There were also a water treatment plant, an incinerator, and a bus terminal large enough to hold twenty buses at a time.

The natural vegetation of Rodman Neck and Hunter's Island was preserved, consisting mainly of chestnut, oak, hickory, black locust and black cherry trees. The newly created land was landscaped with flower beds, shrubbery and sod, along with a variety of trees, including poplars, oaks and elms. Planters for flowers, shrubs and small trees were installed on the upper terrace, while the lower terrace was planted with trees.

The facility, which was open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. during the summer season, was expected to generate nearly \$175,000 per year in gross revenue, with an operating cost of approximately \$134,000. While no charge was imposed for admission to the beach itself, it cost fifty cents to enter the dressing rooms and the fee for renting a locker was fifteen cents for children and a quarter for adults. Other fees included bathing suit rentals for one dollar including a fifty cent deposit, thirty-five cents for towel rentals including a fifteen cent deposit, and parking fees of a quarter for cars and motorcycles, and fifty cents for buses. A large staff was necessary to operate the facility, including a general supervisor of operations with two assistants, a stenographer and typist, nurses, watchmen, gardeners, laborers, ticket agents, engineers, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and numerous attendants, lifeguards and clerks.

Although the new Orchard Beach was generally considered a great success by the public and the press, several problems arose during its first year of operation. Rowdy behavior at the facility became a major concern, resulting in the opening of a special Orchard Beach Court at the nearby 45th Precinct Station House. A hurricane in 1938 caused \$50,000 in damage to the facility, including \$10,000 worth to the bath house. The cost of operating and maintaining the vast facility was higher than the original estimates, and Robert Moses complained to Mayor LaGuardia that the current operating fund for Orchard Beach and Riis Park did not allow for the proper maintenance of these facilities.<sup>19</sup> He threatened to not open the beaches that summer without the necessary personnel. Water pollution caused by sewage discharges from City Island was another problem. Only after Moses threatened to close the beach permanently did the Board of Estimate approved \$250,000 for the construction of a treatment plant on City Island. Traffic jams caused by the crowds on weekends affected nearby neighborhoods, especially the residents and businesses of City Island.

#### Subsequent History<sup>20</sup>

In 1938, just one year after completing it, the city began planning a substantial expansion of the popular Orchard Beach facility. The proposal called for expanding the locker rooms and for extending the beach and promenade northward to the Twin Islands. The first phase to be carried out was a 150 foot extension to the south locker room in 1939, which was built using materials and detailing that matched the

original design. The stone fountain, removed from the upper terrace in 1941, was replaced by the present pavement featuring a compass motif. The rest of the work was delayed by material and manpower shortages during the Second World War.<sup>21</sup> Construction resumed in 1945 with the enlargement of the north locker room in a more simplified design than the original. In 1946-47, work on the beach and promenade extension got underway. The seawall and landfill were extended northward connecting Hunter and the Twin Islands, permitting the promenade to be lengthened by 1,200 feet and creating seven new acres of beach. Prior to this, the bathing area ended at the inlet that separated Twin Island from Hunter Island. The new section of promenade was paved with hexagonal blocks to match the existing, and the original fencing, lamp posts and benches were replicated for the new section. Two new jetties at either end of the beach were constructed to break the strong tides and to prevent the beach's sand from being washed away. Also, the brick utility buildings on the promenade were altered for the installation of concessions.

A number of alterations occurred in the 1950s. In 1952, new concession windows were added under the stairs leading from the upper to the lower terraces. Following a series of severe storms that damaged the beach, the north jetty was enlarged in 1955, and new beach sand was deposited.

In 1962, a brick comfort station and concession building was constructed on the promenade, 2,800 feet north of the bath house. During the middle and late 1960s, the windows and doors were restored and new lockers were installed. Following that, however, came an extended period of neglect lasting through the 1970s. A proposal to replace the north locker room with a theater was rejected in 1974. By 1980, Orchard Beach had become a rundown facility with a reputation for being unsanitary and unsafe. Beginning in 1980, the Parks Department began planning for the rehabilitation of Orchard Beach to coincide with its fiftieth anniversary in 1986. Over \$1,000,000 was spent on a variety of work, the most noticeable of which is the replacement of the original steel doors to the cafeteria with new aluminum units. However, the rehabilitation was not complete. Many parts of the bath house, including the north locker room, remain closed to the public.

#### The Architecture and Site of the Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade

The New Deal construction projects within New York City, such as Orchard Beach, were a part of a national trend which 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 who were committed to modernism. For example, the bathhouse 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 in New York City. The California facility, with its streamlined, concrete facade and steel-framed windows, bears a striking resemblance to the facade added in 1936 with WPA funds to the bathhouse at Jacob Riis Park in Queens.

Influenced by Beaux-Arts planning principles, the architecture of the Orchard Beach bathhouse is a simple and restrained interpretation of classical styles, while the promenade features streamlined Moderne characteristics employing nautical motifs. Like the public pools and other waterfront projects built in New York City by Robert Moses during the New Deal, Orchard Beach used inexpensive materials, particularly concrete, red brick, and asphalt paving, in its construction. However, 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.

#### Description

*Circulation.* Movement through the complex was designed to be very controlled and ceremonial, and remains despite the closing of the locker areas and upper loggias. From the entrance plaza, located on the land side of the bathhouse, arriving bathers climb a broad staircase to the raised viewing terrace which overlooks the beach. On either side of the viewing terrace are covered waiting rooms, which remain open, through which the north and south wings, containing the former locker

areas and the loggias, were entered. Bathers originally moved down the concrete ramps with service windows on each side to enter the open-air locker rooms, located a few feet above beach level. (Only the exterior walls of the former locker areas are included in this designation.) After changing, bathers exited the locker rooms onto the promenade, from which they stepped down to the beach through one of the openings in the promenade railing. Alternatively, the beach, the lower terrace, and the promenade could be reached directly by using the staircases leading from the upper terrace to the lower terrace, by additional staircases located at the end of each loggia (now closed), or by a series of paved paths that lead in from areas located to the west of the bathhouse and the promenade, including the parking lot, the bus station, and the mall. (The paths, parking lot, bus station, and mall are not included in this designation.)

*The Bathhouse.* The bathhouse, designed in a modernistic interpretation of classical styles, consists in plan of a raised plaza and two symmetrical radiating wings which face the beach. Each wing includes a curved colonnade set upon an arcaded base and a large, enclosed structure, L-shaped in plan, containing the former open-air locker areas. The predominant materials are reinforced concrete and red brick, with detailing consisting of granite, tile, bluestone, limestone, terra cotta, terrazzo, slate, and a variety of metal finishes.

A broad granite stairway with concrete side walls and massive concrete posts leads from the mall to the upper terrace, the east side of which is curved outward to provide a sweeping view of Long Island Sound. The terrace is paved with bluestone slabs and has granite curbing. At the center of the floor of the terrace, in an area that had been occupied by a circular fountain until 1941, is a patterned pavement made of granite, bluestone and slate incorporating the four points of a directional compass. The terrace has original cigar-shaped wooden benches with fluted concrete bases, non-original lamp posts, and garden beds planted with a variety of trees and bushes. A concrete parapet wall protects the eastern edge of the terrace.

Two covered waiting pavilions, which overlook the beach to the east and the mall to the west, are situated on either side of the upper terrace. The waiting pavilions have tall openings on all sides to provide for ventilation, viewing, and access to other parts of the complex. Geometrically-patterned metal grilles placed in the upper part of each opening create a sense of enclosure within these covered outdoor spaces. Large clocks (no longer functioning) with stylized digits set in concrete panels occupy the upper sections of the openings facing the beach. The floors of the waiting rooms are finished in terrazzo with borders resembling stylized Greek frets. The interior walls are finished with glazed tile blocks, blue in color, for a height of about six feet. They are topped by tile moldings featuring stylized Greek frets. The upper walls and the ceilings are unfinished concrete. The south waiting room retains original cigar-shaped wooden benches with fluted concrete bases (these have been removed from the north pavilion). Originally, brass light fixtures (no longer extant) hung from the ceilings. The built-in telephone booths have been sealed, but the signage is intact. Access to the west balconies, the concourses to the former locker areas, and the upper loggias are provided through the waiting pavilions.

The covered balconies, which face the mall, have colonnades of four concrete columns, topped by pre-cast concrete friezes with a glazed terra-cotta fret motif. The floors are finished in terrazzo, with borders resembling stylized Greek frets. The inner walls of the colonnade and the columns are finished with glazed tile blocks in a pattern similar to the interiors of the waiting pavilions. The balconies are enclosed by geometrically-patterned iron railings. The bases, exposed on the west side, consist of brick bases and segmental archways containing service entryways.

The concourses consist of concrete ramps which gently slope down toward the former locker areas. The north concourse is no longer in use, while a portion of the south concourse is used by Parks Department personnel as offices and storage. The concourses are flanked for about half their length by one-story, cast-concrete structures, which abut the taller waiting pavilions. These contain offices and counters from which bathing suits, towels, and other supplies were originally distributed. The west facades of these office and supply buildings, facing the mall, are faced in cast-concrete and have original steel casement on the north side and non-historic aluminum sash on the south side, as well as curved niches with urns. Paved areaways lead to below-grade loading docks covered with steel roll-down gates. The counter windows on the concourses have steel roll-down gates (some of the windows

have been sealed with concrete) and blue, paneled terra-cotta bases (painted green on the south concourse). They are topped by lead-coated copper canopies, but the canopy on the west side of the south concourse has been sheathed in aluminum. Steel doors provide access to the interior offices. (The interiors of these spaces are not subject to this designation.) Beyond the distribution buildings the concourses lead into the wings containing the former locker areas. Here the ramps are lined on one side by the west outer walls of the complex and by the one-story perimeter walls that enclose the locker areas. The east walls of the concourses are punctuated by occasional service doors and windows. Landscaping in this area includes linear planting beds containing a variety of bushes and hedges. The entrance vestibule to each former locker area and a semicircular space, which originally contained a display fountain, are located at the bottom of each ramp. Each vestibule has a central freestanding wall with a niche containing a decorative, blue terra-cotta fountain (no longer functioning), facing the concourse. The vestibule walls are capped by blue terra-cotta bands featuring a fret motif, incised lettering, and arrows pointed toward the for men's and women's locker rooms. The semicircular spaces, formerly occupied by the display fountains, are now paved with concrete.

The loggias, also entered by way of the waiting rooms through geometrically-patterned wrought-iron gates, consist of tall square columns above arcaded bases, framing a low terrace and facing the beach. They are topped by cast-concrete friezes decorated with glazed terra-cotta ornament in a fret motif. Original light fixtures are attached to each column. Like the floors of the waiting pavilions and the west balconies, the loggia floors are finished in terrazzo, with borders resembling stylized Greek frets. Similarly, the inner walls of the loggia and the columns are finished with glazed blue tile blocks for a height of about six feet and feature stylized Greek fret caps. The interior walls of the loggias are punctuated by louvered, cast-iron portholes, featuring a wave motif. The upper walls of the loggia are finished with white plaster. Each loggia originally contained bar counters (no longer in use) protected by steel roll-down gates. Shallow niches contain steel drinking fountains decorated with red stars. The loggias are enclosed by geometrically-patterned iron railings. At the far end of each loggia is a spiral staircase of granite, situated within a circular pavilion, that leads down to the lower terrace. The stairs wind around a low wall faced in blue terra cotta and topped by terra-cotta panels forming a sun motif. The curving interior walls of the stairwells are faced with blue tiles, adorned with white stars. Originally, brass light fixtures similar to those in the waiting rooms were suspended over the stairs, but they have been removed. The portholes are visible on the curved, brick rear walls of the loggias, as are the concrete pavilions containing the loggia stairs. The rear walls are topped by molded concrete coping blocks.

The lower terrace is reached by either the spiral stairs of the loggias (now closed) or by sets of granite stairs leading from each side of the upper terrace. Concession windows (some now sealed with brick) and service doors were installed under each of the terrace stairways in 1952. Built into the curving base of the upper terrace and flanked by the staircases which lead down from it, the cafeteria faces onto the lower terrace. (The interior of the cafeteria is not subject to this designation.) The original steel and glass cafeteria doors have been replaced with roll-down gates and the original tempered lead-coated copper marquee was replaced by the present concrete, steel and aluminum canopy in 1956. The arcades feature brick segmental arches. The south arcade is open and features a bluestone floor, brick and painted concrete interior walls, concrete ceiling, and non-historic lighting. An original bronze sign marking the former location of a telephone bank remains on the north interior wall of the south arcade. The north arcade is presently filled with non-original concession space, with non-historic aluminum and glass doors and fixed awnings. The interiors of the now-enclosed areas appear to retain the original paving materials and wall surfaces as in the south arcade. The lower terrace is landscaped with trees and paved with concrete slabs. Originally, railings enclosed the lower terrace, but these have been removed. An iron flagpole resembling the mast of a ship was installed in 1944. Decorative fountains located within the arches of the arcade facing the promenade are no longer operational. Although their upper basins have been filled in with concrete, their lower basins retain the original mosaic tile floors.

The exterior walls of the north and south locker wings, facing the promenade, contain two locker area exits, separated by concession counters, and one doorway to interior offices. Ticket windows, installed in 1958, are now sealed with brick. The exits consist of vestibules similar to those on the

concourses with freestanding walls and decorative fountains (no longer functional) and decorative iron gates featuring anthemion. The vestibule walls are capped by terra-cotta blocks with fretwork. Beside each vestibule are small ticket windows installed in 1958. The counter windows are covered with roll-down gates and have fixed awnings above. The exterior walls of the locker areas facing the groves, playgrounds, and mall have alternating sections of plain and diaper-patterned brick coursing. The 1939 expansion of the south locker area replicated the brick detailing of the original walls, while the 1945 expansion of the north locker area did not.

*The Promenade.* The curve of the beach is outlined by a long, wide promenade. It features hexagonal paving blocks, two original brick utility and concession buildings, two later concession buildings that are not part of this designation, streamlined lamp posts, cast-concrete water fountains, cast-iron railings, non-original park benches, and concrete steps descending to the beach at regular intervals. The original gates to the beach, which matched the railings, have been removed.

The one-story utility and concessions buildings, which are slightly recessed from the promenade, are rectangular in plan, and feature recessed doorways, patterned brickwork, curved corners, and round windows. Later alterations include the installation of large rectangular counter windows, roll-down gates, and the application of paint. Two of the buildings had brick ticket booths added to them in 1958. The cast-iron lamp posts feature a modernistic gyro motif, but the light fixtures are not original. The cast-concrete drinking fountains replaced the original units in 1944. Nautical-like railings, made of galvanized cast iron and wood hand grips, sit upon concrete bases along both sides of the promenade. At both ends, the promenade terminates in polygonal platforms.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Robert Caro, *The Power Broker* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974; report, New York: Random House, Inc., 1975), 323, 363-364; Albert Fein, ed., *Landscape into Cityscape* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981), 331; Michael Golan, "The Bronx Parks: A Wonder From the Past," *Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 12, no.2 (1975), 32-41; "Historical and Modern Orchard Beach, with a Brief Resume of the Surrounding Territory," unpublished typescript [1960?], 15-16; Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 315; John McNamara, *History in Asphalt: The Origin of Bronx Street and Place Names* (New York: The Bronx Historical Society, 1978, 1984), 197; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, *Pelham Bay Park: Building Orchard Beach* (New York: City of New York, 1986), 6; and *Pelham Bay Park: History* (New York: City of New York, 1986), 2, 11-12; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Bartow-Pell Mansion, Expanded Landmark Site* (LP-0125) (New York: City of New York, 1966); Martha Rogers, "The Bronx Park System: A Faded Design," *Landscape* 27, no.2 (1983), 16.

<sup>2</sup> At 2,764 acres, it is more than three times the size of Central Park in Manhattan.

<sup>3</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the massive landscaping efforts required during the creation of Central Park in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

<sup>4</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. Caro, 323.

<sup>5</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Caro, 347-369, 372-373; Francis Cormier,

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"Some New York City Parks and Parkways: Recreational Improvements Made Since 1934," *Landscape Architecture* 29 (April 1939), 124-136; LaGuardia Collection (located at the Municipal Archives): miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor LaGuardia; Robert Moses, "Parks and Recreation in New York," transcript of the proceedings of the National Recreation Association (1947), 41-50; New York City Department of Parks, "Memorandum on 1935 Budget Request for the Department of Parks," typescript dated August 14, 1934, 100; "Pattern For Parks," *Architectural Forum* 65 (Dec. 1936), 499-500; Cleveland Rodgers, *Robert Moses: Builder For Democracy*, 1st ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952), 82-84; Laura Rosen, "Robert Moses and New York: The Early Years," *The Livable City* 12, no. 2 (Dec. 1988), 2-4; Floyd Taylor, "Moses Keeps Up With His Work and Cuts Through Red Tape," *The World Telegram*, January 7, 1938.

<sup>6</sup> Rodgers, 82.

<sup>7</sup> A staff of 1,893 architects, engineers, landscape architects, and technicians was employed at the peak of the work. See Rodgers, 84. Moses later came under fire by a number of city aldermen for hiring people for the Park 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, p. 1; April 20, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> During Moses' first year as Park 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>9</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: "Gilmore D. Clarke," *Who's Who in America*, vol. 31 (Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Co., 1961), 547; Gilmore D. Clarke obituary, *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1982, p. B19; Cormier, 125; "Designing the Moses Era: The Architecture and Engineering of Aymar Embury II," text of the exhibition at the Hofstra Museum of Hofstra University, May 21 to July 21, 1988; Aymar Embury II obituary, *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1966, p. 47; Aymar Embury II obituary, *Progressive Architecture* 48, no. 1 (Jan. 1967), 47-48; "Gilmore D. Clarke, Landscape Architect," reprinted from *Architecture and Design*, July 1940; LaGuardia Collection: miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia; "Michael Rapuano," *Who's Who in America*, vol. 31 (Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Co., 1961), 2369; and Michael Rapuano obituary, *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> These are the Colonial Park Pool and Play Center in Manhattan, the Crotona Park Pool and Play Center in the Bronx, the Tompkinsville Pool and Play Center in Staten Island, and the McCarren Park Pool and Play Center and the Red Hook Pool and Play Center in Brooklyn.

<sup>11</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Charles T. Abernathy, Acting Administrator, "Final Report of the WPA for the City of New York, 1935-1943," Mar. 2, 1943, 158; Andre Bloc, "Pendant Qu'on Demolit le Trocadero," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 6 (Nov. 1935), 5-7; Caro, 102-103, 363-367; Cormier, 131; Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982); "Gotham's Sweltering Hordes Cool Off at Two New Beaches," *Architectural Record* 82 (Aug. 1937), 29; "Historical and Modern Orchard Beach...", 13, 17, 19-20; LaGuardia Collection: miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, members of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, and Thomas W. Hammond, Commissioner of Sanitation; "L'ancien et le Nouveau Trocadero," *L'Architecture* 49 (April 15, 1936), 109-112; "Le Projet de MM. J. Carlu, L. Boileau et L. Azema," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 7 (Jan. 1936), 4-5; Robert Moses, "New York Metropolitan Beach Development," *Rockaway Review* (Aug.-Sept. 1939), 10; Robert Moses, *Public Works: A Dangerous Trade* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 10-11; New York City, Department of Parks, "Eight Years of Parks Progress," booklet, 23-24; New York City Park Department, "Plan to Provide a Special Fund for the Operation of Certain Recreational Facilities," March 2, 1936; *New York Times* ("New 'Jones Beach' Planned in Bronx"), Feb. 28, 1934, p. 21; ("Moses is Upheld in Park Camp Ban"), May 16, 1934, p. 9; ("Chart of the Orchard Beach Development Plan"), May 17, 1934, p. 23; ("Orchard Beach Model at Bronx County Courthouse"), July 7, 1935, pp. 1, 7; ("Bus Service for WPA Men"), Mar. 6, 1936, p. 16; ("Beach Opening Delayed"), July 9, 1936, p. 17; ("Public is Greeted at Orchard Beach"), July 26, 1936, II, p. 1; ("Two City Beaches Open for Season"), June 26, 1937, p. 15; *Pelham Bay Park: Building Orchard Beach*, 9-10, 12, 14; *Pelham Bay Park: History*, 2; *The Pelham Bay Park of the Bronx* (New York: Earth Environmental Group, 1977), leaflet; and Robert A.M. Stern et al, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1987), 723.

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<sup>12</sup> See "Chart of the Orchard Beach Development Plan," *New York Times*, May 17, 1934, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Caro, 366-367. Caro interviewed William Latham and a confidential source for this account.

<sup>14</sup> The rules governing the expenditure of WPA monies largely restricted the use of these funds to relief labor. Therefore, the city had to appropriate most of the money for purchasing material and hiring equipment from its own budget. See letter from Robert Moses to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, dated June 20, 1935. LaGuardia Collection, Box 3153, Folder 2.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently, the Park Department began construction of the seawall before having obtained permission from the federal War Department (which had jurisdiction over coastal waters). In a letter, dated June 20, 1935, from Commissioner Moses to members of the City's Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Moses described the dam as being half completed. However, the War Department did not approve its construction until April 1936. See "Pelham Bay Dam Approved," *New York Times*, April 14, 1936, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> See correspondence from Robert Moses to: Thomas W. Hammond, Commissioner of Sanitation, dated March 21, 1935; Fiorello H. LaGuardia, Mayor of the City of New York, dated March 21, 1935; and members of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, dated June 20, 1935. *The La Guardia Collection*, Box 3153, Folder 2.

<sup>17</sup> The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created in 1935 in a reorganization of the existing work relief programs such as the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA). Corruption regarding the busing operation was uncovered in 1938. The former WPA superintendent and five officials from the bus companies hired to transport the workers were indicted and convicted of defrauding the government of \$25,000 by submitting phony vouchers. Other corruption was discovered as well. The next year, two trucking companies that had received WPA contracts for work at Orchard Beach were likewise indicted for fraud. See *New York Times* ("Six Are Indicted in WPA Bus Fraud"), June 2, 1938, p. 3; ("Five Found Guilty"), Aug. 28, 1938, p. 16; and ("Two Truckers Held in WPA Fraud Case"), Oct. 14, 1939, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> "Public is Greeted at Orchard Beach," *New York Times*, July 26, 1936, Sec. II, p. 1; *Pelham Bay Park: Building Orchard Beach*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Since the Park Department produced combined operating estimates for both Orchard Beach and Riis Park, the exact cost of operating the Orchard Beach facility alone is not available. LaGuardia Collection: miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

<sup>20</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: "At Orchard Beach, Updated Fare," *New York Times*, July 10, 1986, II, p. 3; "City Halts Plan for Park Theater," *New York Times*, Aug. 25, 1974, p. 43; "Historical and Modern Orchard Beach...", 17-19; New York City Department of Parks, "[Construction Schedule] constructed: 1946-1947, scheduled: 1948-1949," [New York, 1947], 5, 17; Sara Rimer, "'Riviera of the Bronx' Shines Again," *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1984, p. B1; and "Trash Piling Up on New York City Beaches," *New York Times*, July 6, 1975, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> However, some minor alterations and advance work occurred during the war years, such as the addition of two clocks on the east facade of the bath house, the installation of a new steel flagpole, and the replacement of the original drinking fountains along the promenade in 1944. Test borings for the construction of new jetties were also performed that year and the blueprints for the planned extension of the beach and promenade were prepared in 1941.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade has a special character, 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 Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade, which since 1936 has served as the major waterfront recreation complex for Bronx residents, is an outstanding example of the federally-funded public works projects executed during the Great Depression of the 1930s; that Orchard Beach was a major accomplishment of engineering and architecture, and New York City's most ambitious park project of the New Deal; that it is recognized as being among the most remarkable public recreational facilities ever constructed in the United States; that it was constructed in 1934-37 during the administration of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Department Commissioner Robert Moses, men who were important public figures in the history of New York City, with funds obtained largely from the Works Progress Administration; that its construction required major landfill and a mile-long seawall along Long Island Sound to connect Hunter Island to the mainland, creating an entirely new, artificial landscape on a massive scale; that designed by a talented staff supervised by the well-known architect Aymar Embury II and the noted landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano, the facility contains a bathhouse designed in a modern classical style and a wide promenade, the plan of which was influenced by Beaux-Arts principles; that the concrete, brick, and limestone bathhouse, embellished with tile and terrazzo finishes, features two monumental colonnades that radiate outward from a raised central terrace which faces Long Island Sound; that the crescent-shaped promenade, which follows the curve of the beach, is paved with hexagonal blocks and edged by cast-iron railings evoking a nautical motif; that situated on the promenade are Moderne style concession and supply buildings, park benches, drinking fountains, and modernistic lamp posts; 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.

Accordingly, pursuant to 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 Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade, including the upper and lower bathhouse terraces, upper terrace benches and ticket booths, stairways and flanking walls, lighting fixtures, flagpole, railings, paving, seating areas, trees, and comfort stations, Pelham Bay Park, Borough of The Bronx, and designates Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5650, Lot 1 in part, incorporating Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade and bounded by a line beginning at the point that is at the southern end of the eastern edge of the promenade, extending northwesterly, northerly, and northeasterly along the curved eastern edge of the promenade (including all stairs) at its juncture with the beach, extending northerly along the northeastern polygonal end of the promenade to the point at which the beach ends, southwestly and southerly along a curved line that is fifteen feet northwesterly and westerly from the northern and western paved edge of the promenade (and incorporating the outer perimeter of the comfort stations), westerly and southerly along the northern and western edges of the paved curving paths located north and northwest of the bathhouse, southerly along a line that is a southerly continuation of the western edge of the path on the (north)east side of the bathhouse (adjacent to and west of the stairs leading to the



bathroom upper terrace) to the path south of the stairs and (south)east of the bathroom, southerly and easterly along the western and southern edges of the paved curving paths located southwest and south of the bathroom, southeasterly along a curved line that is fifteen feet southwesterly from the southwestern paved edge of the promenade (and incorporating the outer perimeter of the comfort stations), and northerly along the southeastern polygonal end of the promenade, to the point of beginning, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo Vengoechea, Vice Chair  
Steven Burns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,  
Elizabeth Ryan



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade**

*Photo: Jenny Staley, 2005*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade**

*Photo: Jenny Staley, 2005*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: North Lobby**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: North Loggia Wall**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



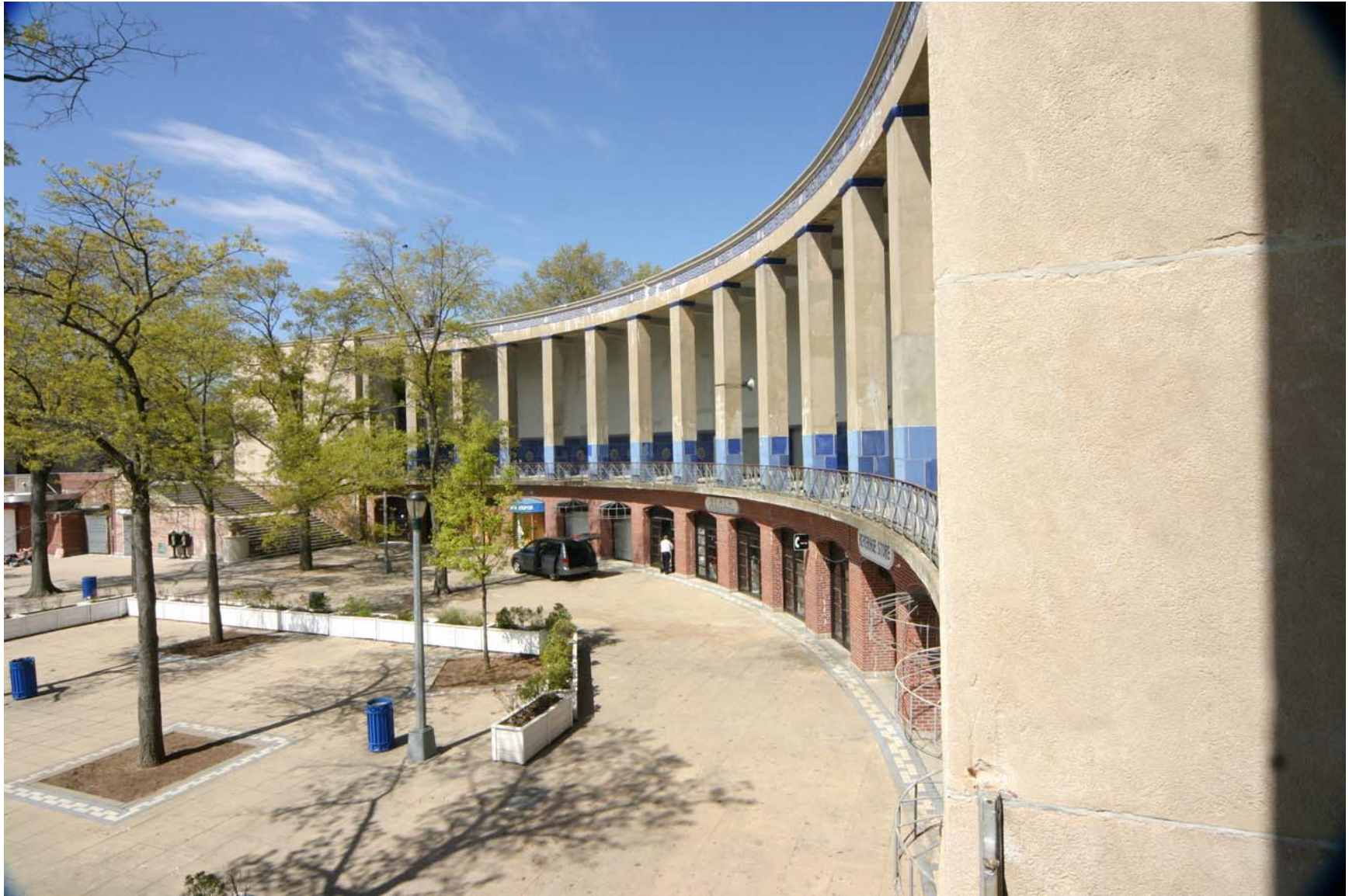
**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Vent Port Hole**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Loggia Stair Well**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: North Loggia**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*





**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Entry Plaza**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: North Lobby**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: South Ramp Concessions Windows**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: South Locker Area Entrance**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: South Loggia Wall**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Bench**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Entry Plaza**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Frieze Detail**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*





**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: South Arcade**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Cafeteria Facade**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Stair to Lower Terrace**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Loggia Stair Well**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: South Loggia**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: East Facade**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Original Lamp Post**

*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*



**Orchard Beach Bath House and Promenade: Niche in West Facade**  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2006*





**Orchard Beach Bathhouse and Promenade (LP-2197), Pelham Bay Park, Bronx.**

Landmark Site: Borough of Bronx, Tax Map Block 5650, Lot 1, in part.

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003