

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Jacob A. Riis Park

other names/site number Park #123

2. Location

street & number 6100 W. Fullerton Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Chicago ☐ vicinity

state Illinois code IL county Cook code 031 zip code 60639

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Wheeler, SHPO 3-17-95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 4/20/95
Entered in the National Register

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

4	0	buildings
1	0	sites
1	0	structures
1	0	objects
7	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park
District

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

None

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/park

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/park

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor
recreation

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals/
Georgian Revival
French Renaissance

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

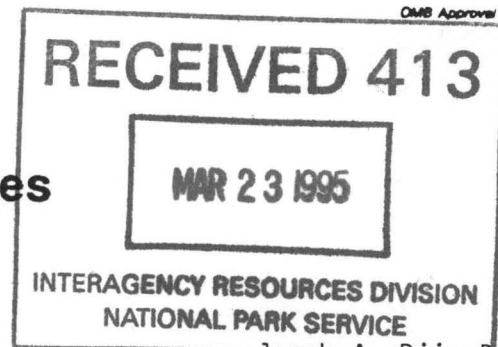
foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
Stone/limestone
roof metal
other vegetation

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet



Section number 7 Page 1

Jacob A. Riis Park

Jacob A. Riis Park is a 56.84 acre site, located on the northwest side of Chicago at 2400 N and 6400 W. Although the land was acquired in 1916 by the Northwest Park Commission, completion of the park did not occur until after the consolidation of all Chicago's park districts and with funding by the Works Progress Administration. The park has significant historic architecture designed by Walter W. Ahlschlager, as well as important early landscape design work by Alfred Caldwell.

The park's period of historic significance is 1928 to 1944. This time frame begins with the construction of the park and its buildings and extends to the arbitrary fifty year cutoff for the National Register of Historic Places. To help explain the organization and spatial relationships of the park, three plans are submitted as part of this nomination:[A] June 1935 "Proposed Plan of Riis Park" [B] Caldwell's August 1936 landscape design plan for the meadow and lagoon areas [C] current plot plan.

Despite some modifications in its almost sixty year life, Riis Park retains many of its originally intended features and exhibits a high degree of integrity. This well-planned park has a wide variety of features. The Walter W. Ahlschlager fieldhouse was constructed by 1929. An eclectic building, it has characteristics of both the Georgian Revival and French Renaissance Revival styles. The impressive structure has had few alterations. Riis Park's remaining architecture, including the comfort station, pergola, service yard building, and swimming pool pavilion were constructed by 1935 and relate to one another stylistically. The year 1940 marked the completion of Alfred Caldwell's redesign of the landscape of the western half of the park. Caldwell created a beautiful and tranquil landscape. He incorporated native plant materials in a two-tier planting

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system, water elements, as well as shady, enclosed spaces and sunny meadows.

At its inception, Riis Park was located adjacent to a brick yard and in the midst of a newly developing middle class neighborhood. Today many of these homes remain and have grown older along with the park. The brickyard, however, has been replaced by a shopping mall. Although the shopping mall is bustling and the area has become denser, the park design is still successful at enclosing its open and natural setting. Riis Park remains an important element in its northwest Chicago community and still serves the neighborhood well since the acquisition of the land in 1916. It was simply open park land until construction began in 1928 to create walks, install lighting and drainage systems, clear and grade grounds, plant trees and scrubs, build a nine-hole golf course, and a ski-jump. In 1934 the golf course was removed from the park and tennis courts were added. The ski jump was eventually removed, but it did still exist in 1936 when Caldwell began work in the western half of the park.[B]

Riis Park's circulation systems maintain a high degree of historic integrity. The park is bounded by Fullerton Avenue to the south, Narragansett Avenue to the west, Wrightwood Avenue to the north, and Meade Avenue to the east [A]. There are still only two vehicular entrances to the park - one off Wrightwood Avenue to the north side parking area [A-1] and the other off of Fullerton Avenue to the south side parking area [A-2]. Non-vehicular entrances occur at each corner, next to the swimming pool on the south side, and at the northernmost part of the meadow. Each corner entrance, except the southeast corner where the fieldhouse stands, draws the visitor into the park with an allee of American Elm trees opening onto a broad meadow or

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sun opening. The park's interior system of circulation is made up of two, interconnecting, circular paths surrounding meadows. The largest circular path [A-3] is located in the western half of the park and the smaller one is found in the eastern half of the park along with most of the buildings, sports facilities, and playing fields [A-4].

The western portion of the park includes an ancient beach of glacial Lake Chicago running north to south [A-5]. Some 10,000 years ago, Riis Park land sat on the shores of what became the present day Lake Michigan, and the eastern half was submerged. This ancient lake retreated to the current shore miles east. The western half of the park is among the highest of any park in the city, affording visitors incredible views. Today the land use of the park remains almost exactly as it was originally intended. The naturalistic Caldwell designed planting, lagoon, and meadows dominate the west. The grand Ahlschlager fieldhouse, the tennis courts, ball fields, running track, pool, and other activity centers dominate the eastern portion of the site. Riis Park has two distinct halves. There is a distinctly different feel and intended use between the more activity oriented eastern half and the elevated, wooded western half of the park. Despite their differences, the landscapes do fit together well.

To simplify the description of this large park, this essay will begin by focusing on the features of the western half of the park and then move on to describing the elements of the eastern half of the park. The brilliance of Alfred Caldwell's design is evident in his expert handling of the site. When mentioning the hill at Riis Park in an interview with Caldwell he expounded on the attributes of the land. Caldwell used the natural contour of the glacial ridge as a stage for dramatic vistas, intimate enclosed spaces, and

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sun drenched meadows. He was successful at incorporating his design philosophy to a previously well laid out park plan designed by the Chicago Park District. He employed the ideas of using the natural land formations, introducing and manipulating native plant materials, and forming enclosed areas out of multi-level plantings of trees and shrubs, and incorporating water elements. He believed this philosophy was a method that could be applied to any site.

One of the contributing features of the landscape of Riis Park is the lagoon, designed by Caldwell. Located in the southwest portion of the park [B-1], the lagoon retains much of its historic integrity. It was designed and built before Caldwell's lily pond in Lincoln Park. During an interview with Caldwell, he stated that the Riis Park Lagoon may have influenced his design of the lily pond, with its ponds, irregular shape, and enclosed, dark spaces. Walking along the circular path at Riis Park one discovers this sublime element in Caldwell's design. The path crosses the narrow middle of the lagoon [B-2]. At this point the connecting space between the two portions of the lagoon is enclosed by a canopy of trees and the pond banks are edged in huge slabs of limestone[Plan B]. Caldwell used rough limestone slabs, a popular material in Prairie School landscapes, at the edge of much of the lagoon. Where there is no stone, a gentle, grassy slope touches the water's edge [B-3]. Upon exiting the shady and intimate space one enters an open expanse, and experiences the view across both ends of the lagoon. A non-contributing concrete pier [C- 1] has been added to the north end of the lagoon and although somewhat obtrusive, it could be easily removed. The lagoon has much of its historic character intact.

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Another outstanding historic feature in the western portion of the park is the "Crabapple Lane" which Caldwell referred to in his drawing [B-4]. It consists of a grove of crabapple, American Elm, ironwood, sugar maple, cherry trees and other native trees that form a natural wall along the western edge of the park [B-5]. This small forest, made up of trees of varying heights, is elevated on a berm, further adding to its enclosure of the park. A grassy lane is contained between the berm with the wall of crabapple trees and the circular walkway. Today the Crabapple Lane appears to have changed little when compared to Caldwell's 1936 drawing.

As stated earlier, the western meadow [B-6] is encircled by a pathway. Surrounded by plantings designed by Caldwell including black cherry, sumac, junberry, and maple trees, the meadow serves as an open area for picnicking, relaxing, or play. Caldwell planted the edge around the meadow heavily except in the steepest part of the glacial ridge where the view [B-5] would be the most dramatic. Much of the fabric of the original planting plan is in place, but the open space of the meadow has been intruded upon by playground equipment and an archery range. While the meadow has been disturbed by non-contributing elements, these facilities do not have solid walls and therefore the views are unobstructed

Dominating the southeastern portion of Riis Park, placed on an angle facing the corner of Fullerton Avenue and Meade Avenue is the Walter W. Ahlschlager designed fieldhouse (1929) [A-6]. A competent Chicago architect, Ahlschlager designed other Chicago park buildings, including Kelvyn and Simons Park fieldhouses which look almost identical to the Riis Park fieldhouse. This eclectic building exhibits a combination of Georgian and French Renaissance Revival style elements. The red brick structure has

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a two story main block which houses park offices, meeting rooms, an auditorium and a theater. Projecting out the back forming a "T" shaped plan is a gymnasium which is sunk one half story lower so as to not eliminate light from the second floor. The building has a symmetrical facade and a metal mansard roof. A broken pediment caps the front door. The multi-paned, steel-sashed windows are original as are the limestone headed oval windows at each end of the second story. Limestone is used throughout the design as a contrast to the red brick, including the pediment, window lintels, and quoining that form pilasters. Precast concrete urns are located at the roofline at each end of the facade. The interior also has a high level of historic fabric including a classically inspired frieze and knotty pine paneling.

The comfort station [C-2] has changed little since its construction. It was built by 1935 at the base of the ridge, just to the northeast of the meadow. The comfort station is located at the junction of the two circular pathways. Georgian Revival in style, the building is composed of red brick with limestone details and is constructed in a front gable and rear wing configuration. The entrance is made up of two simple limestone columns supporting an arch. The roof material is asphalt shingle. The designer of the station and the other support buildings is unknown.

All of the buildings in Riis Park relate stylistically and are constructed in red brick with limestone trim. Today the comfort station houses the Chicago Park District Near North Regional office and was converted to this use without the loss or removal of critical features.

Two other contributing resources located in the eastern part of Riis Park are the swimming pool and pool house [C-3]. Located in the southeastern

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portion of the park, the poolhouse relates stylistically to the comfort station and the service yard building in its modest design, little decoration, and with the use of red brick and limestone trim. The structure is configured in the shape of a "U", with locker areas located in the projecting ends and common area that gives access to the pool at the center. Limestone is used for quoining, keystones, and window sills. The central entry has a hipped roof while the locker wings have a gable configuration. The central entry is made up of a loggia of three brick arches. The original concrete bleachers are located across the pool from the poolhouse to the west. The building dates from before 1935.

The spray pool and pergola, were also built by 1935 and stand directly behind the fieldhouse in the southeast corner of the park [C-4]. A newer concrete spray pool without a concrete "lip" has replaced the original, but it is in the same location and of the same circular shape and footprint. The pergola, designed to shade spectators, is located directly to the northwest. It covers a seating area and an extension of the sandbox play area (located around the perimeter of the spray pool). The pergola has a gabled, asphalt shingle roof and open timber construction. The vertical timber members rest in cast iron shoes. The end gables of the roof have flat, decorative sawn trim pieces.

The final piece of historic architecture in Riis Park's collection is in the eastern half of the park. The Service Yard Building [A-7] was constructed by 1935 and is located just to the west of the southern parking area. As stated earlier, this structure relates stylistically to the comfort station and the swimming pool pavilion. It is also constructed of red brick and limestone in a front gable and rear wing style, similar to the comfort station. Limestone is used as a contrasting element, also similar to the other buildings in Riis

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Park. The roof is gabled and covered in asphalt shingle. The building is surrounded by a brick and limestone fence. Caldwell cleverly enclosed the Service Yard and Building with plantings to insure that the structures would not disturb the appearance of the tranquil landscape [B-8]. The building has had few alterations and still conveys its historic qualities.

Riis Park was originally designed to hold many activities, especially sports. For the most part, the park maintains its original layout of the playing fields, including tennis courts, baseball/softball fields, and soccer field with perimeter running track.[C] The archery range and playground equipment were added to the park after 1937. The tennis courts are located in a northeast corner of the park. These ten courts have been not been drastically altered or relocated. The baseball field is located just north of the swimming pool and also remains in its original location. The soccer field is located along the eastern edge of the park and is enclosed by a running track. The softball fields are within the smaller meadow which is enclosed by the pathways and plantings of maples, sumacs, and other indigenous plants designed prior to Caldwell's plan of the western portion of the park. They are also located in their original spot within Riis Park. Most of these elements do not include structures and therefore do not detract from the broad and open feel of the park.

The Jacob A. Riis monument is located at the end of the southwestern allee entrance. It is a giant boulder standing on end. The plaque states the park and monument are dedicated to Jacob A. Riis, social reformer, journalist, and photographer. It was donated to the park by the Danish Americans of America and located there by 1932. The monument is a contributing object in the park.

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Riis Park maintains a high level of historic integrity. The overall site plan is intact, including the location of the circulation systems, playing fields, and parking areas. The architecture retains a great deal of its historic fabric. Caldwell's Prairie style landscape design has endured with many of the original elements and plantings still surviving.

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CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES OF RIIS PARK

site -
landscape

buildings -
fieldhouse
comfort station
pool house
service building

structures -
pergola

object -
monument to Jacob Riis

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Landscape Architecture

Architecture

Social History

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1928-1944

Significant Dates

1929 - Date of Fieldhouse

1940 - Date of Caldwell landscape

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Caldwell, Alfred/Landscape Designer

Ahlschlager, Walter W./Architect

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Chicago Park District Archives

Jacob A. Riis Park
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 56.84

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

D 1

1	6
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4	3	4	8	18	10
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4	16	4	1	7	19	10
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Zone Easting Northing

B 3

1	6
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4	3	5	4	9	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	6	4	1	4	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

A 2

1	6
---	---

4	3	5	4	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	----

4	16	4	1	7	19	10
---	----	---	---	---	----	----

C 4

1	6
---	---

4	3	4	8	18	10
---	---	---	---	----	----

4	6	4	1	4	0	0
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☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Begley and Jennifer Moelling/Masters of Historic Preservation Students
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
organization Chicago Park District/Julia Sniderman date November 1994
street & number 425 E. McFetridge Dr. telephone (312) 294-2226
city or town Chicago state Illinois zip code 60605

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Chicago Park District
street & number 425 E. McFetridge Drive telephone (312) 747-0551
city or town Chicago state Illinois zip code 60605

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Jacob A. Riis Park

The Jacob A. Riis Park satisfies Criterion A and Criterion C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The park is locally significant for its social history and recreational facilities. It is associated with the beginnings of the Northwest Park District and it reflects the city wide development of middle class parks in Chicago. This association along with the important recreational activities and facilities provided by this park contribute to the park's local significance. Locally prominent architect Walter W. Ahlschlager designed the Riis Park fieldhouse, this building along with the other park structures are of local architectural significance. Riis Park also has national significance in landscape architecture and fulfills Criterion C due to the design produced by prominent landscape architect Alfred Caldwell. Riis Park qualifies for listing in the National Register under the multiple property documentation form, entitled the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District.

The period of significance of this park spans from 1928 to 1944. Initial improvements began in 1928, after years of community petitions for the development of the Park. The initial improvements included the construction of a golf course and fieldhouse. The most significant development in Riis Park history occurred in 1934, with the re-design of the park by the Chicago Park District under the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.). The re-design of the park provided new recreational facilities and the implementation of the Caldwell landscape plan. Riis Park's period of significance spans until 1944, the arbitrary 50 year cut-off date for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The development of parks in the city of Chicago was outlined in the National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, prepared in 1990. As explained in section FIII, the three original Park Commissions formed in 1869, and between 1895-1934 nineteen additional Park Commissions were formed. This discussion illuminates the changing requirements of the new neighborhoods parks including a variety of new programmatic characteristics. The different facilities and programmatic characteristics were defined by the newly formed Chicago Park District and "afforded facilities under four classifications, namely: playgrounds, play fields, athletic fields and neighborhood parks." (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 103)

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As Chicago's population increased in the early 20th century, the northwest side of the city experienced growth with a large concentration of German and Swedish, along with Greek, Polish and Irish residents (Breen, 1941, p. 11). This new northwest side middle class neighborhood required parks for different reasons than earlier neighborhood parks. The concerns of this neighborhood were not for open green spaces in a dense urban environment but for all the recreational amenities that up-to-date parks provided and for the enhancement of the neighborhood (Northwest Park Commissioners, 1929, p. 5). In a 1929 brochure of the Northwest Park District states "in planning the buildings of the Northwest Park District the commissioners have successfully endeavored to design structures that would enhance the value of the homes which surround every park." (Northwest Park Commissioners, 1929, p. 7)

The community created a park district and commission to meet their recreational wishes. On June 7, 1911 the community filed a petition to form a park district and create a commission as allowed by a 1895 law (Breen, 1941, p. 1). The Northwest Park District, its boundaries and first board were created by the June 30th, 1911 approval of the petition. The first purchase of land by the Commission was in 1914 for Mozart Park (Breen, 1941 p. 5). Land for Riis Park was acquired on March 28, 1916 for \$71,000 (Breen, 1941, p. 10). This new Northwest park consisted of 56.84 acres and included a section of the ancient glacial shore line of Lake Michigan.

In commemoration of the reformer, journalist and author of the book How the Other Half Lives, the park was named for Jacob A. Riis in 1916. The Commissioners, upon dedication of the park "determined to equip Riis Park with all the facilities common to the largest parks in the city. Thus it differed from other parks designed primarily for neighborhood recreational purposes." (Breen, 1941, p. 8) Until the late 1920's no improvements were made in the Park, possibly because of funding constraints. Community residents went before the Commission with repeated petitions for improvements beginning in 1924 until construction was begun in 1928 (Northwest Park Commissioners, Meeting Minutes, 1924-1929). These petitions included requests for all the facilities of up-to-date parks: a field house, baseball diamonds, playground equipment, lighting and a drinking fountain. In

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1928, the construction of a fieldhouse was begun along with a ski jump, walkways and a nine hole golf course (Northwest Park District minutes, 1928, p. 131).

The Riis Park fieldhouse was completed in 1929 by the architect Walter W Ahlschlager. A locally prominent architect, W.W. Ahlschlager designed other Northwest Park District buildings including the Blackhawk Park gym, Simons Park Fieldhouse and the Kelvyn Park Fieldhouse. Ahlschlager was known for designing buildings in a variety of revival styles popular in the 1920's. This eclecticism was exemplified by the Georgian revival style, with French Renaissance elements, of the Riis Park Fieldhouse.

Ahlschlager designed for the Northwest Park District but he was primarily known as a commercial architect. He specialized in designing school buildings, theaters and hotels. Ahlschlager was educated in Chicago at Lewis Institute and Armour Institute as well as the Art Institute (Gilbert, Bryson, 1929, p. 869). Among his other designs were fourteen buildings for the Lutheran Concordia College, the Jackson Tower Apartments and the Medinah Athletic Club at 505 N. Michigan Avenue, currently the Intercontinental Hotel. Ahlschlager designed movie theaters in Chicago, his first was the Pantheon (Gilbert, Bryson, 1929, p. 869). Along with this theater he designed many other theaters in Chicago as well as The Roxy Theater in New York.

The design and function of the Riis Park Fieldhouse by Ahlschlager exemplified the middle class desires of a neighborhood to provide recreational activities for the community as well as to increase the prestige of the neighborhood. The various activities included in the fieldhouse were an assembly banquet hall, shower areas, club room, game rooms, a workshop, a gymnasium and auditorium. "One of the most significant developments of modern community and civic life has been the increase of facilities for recreation." (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 2)

The desire to create a community center was illustrated again by the W.P.A. re-design of Riis Park in 1934. Before 1935, no further improvement had been done. Even though there was a great desire among area residents for more recreational outlets in the park, the Great Depression caused a financial crisis that effectively made further improvements impossible. The consolidation of the three original and

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nineteen additional Park Commissions into the Chicago Park District in 1934 enabled the parks to become eligible for federal W.P.A. funds. The community in 1935 petitioned the newly formed Chicago Park District for the removal of the golf course and its conversion into more varied recreational activities (Breen, 1941, p. 11).

The overall layout of Riis Park was done in-house by the Chicago Park District. This layout included the Caldwell landscape plan in the western half of the park, and pathways to and around recreational areas. Other W.P.A. projects done for Riis Park included the construction of a comfort station, a swimming pool, bath house, wading pool for children, a pergola and sand boxes, a running track, tennis courts and open play areas. These elements were also evident in other Chicago parks, but few parks had all the facilities of Riis Park. The inclusion of all these recreational facilities in one park was due in part to the Chicago Park District formation in 1934. The newly formed Chicago Park District "defined a uniform type of (recreational) program that was established for all community center parks in the city." (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 23)

The construction of all the built elements and active recreational areas occurred in the eastern half of the park. As was already stated the fieldhouse was constructed prior to the redesign of the park in 1934. The new buildings added during the W.P.A. project were built in a Georgian Revival style and used a similar vocabulary as the fieldhouse. The Chicago Park District design for the new buildings succeeded in making the structures of the park visually coherent. The use of red brick and limestone detailing in the comfort station, the service yard building and the pool house and grandstand created this unity. The visual coherence, as well as the important recreational functions provided by the 1934 support buildings, contributed to the local significance of these buildings. The thought given in designing the new support structures was also evident in the design for the new recreational facilities provided.

The swimming pool, tennis courts, ball fields, playgrounds and track were all included in this comprehensive park. The swimming pool and tennis courts strongly reflected the Chicago Park District desire to create a park system that could offer all

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
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Jacob A. Riis Park

neighborhood residents some type of recreation. The swimming pool provided at Riis Park supplemented "bathing and swimming in Chicago neighborhoods not near the lake." (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 203) The Riis Park pool and pool house were well planned in 1934. The pool house and grandstand, at the east and west end of the pool respectively, were given architectural character beyond what was necessary for utility. The overall feeling of the pool area is fairly formal and may have been designed with competitive swimming events in mind.

Eleven tennis courts were provided in Riis Park and exemplified the goal of building up-to-date facilities. "Tennis is regarded as one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S." (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 195) Pool and tennis courts were common W.P.A. projects because most of the money was spent on labor and they provided the most jobs. (Todd, Bryon, Vierow, 1937, p. 195)

The track, ball fields, and various other recreational areas were standard features for most large parks. These facilities were provided in Riis Park in order to create the most comprehensive neighborhood park possible. The result of this effort was the completion of a park that sixty years later is still highly utilized with very few modifications.

The opposite end of the park, the western half, was undeveloped and included a steep hill that had once been the shore line to a glacial Lake Michigan. In 1936, Alfred Caldwell's landscape plan for the western section of the park was implemented, in which he utilized the natural feature of the glacial shore line.

Alfred Caldwell theories on landscape architecture had developed while working for prominent landscape architect Jens Jensen from 1925 to 1931 as a construction superintendent (Wilson, 1977, p. 408). In Riis Park, Jensen's influence was clearly evident, as Caldwell used principles and vocabulary developed by Jensen. Important principles developed by Jensen and utilized by Caldwell in Riis Park were emphasis on horizontality, the use of native plants, the creation of a meadow or sun opening in the forest, the use of stratified rock, and non-formal planting arrangements.

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Jacob A. Riis Park

The Prairie Style of landscape design developed simultaneously with the Prairie School of architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright in the forefront of the architecture movement. A young Alfred Caldwell held both Jensen and Wright in high esteem and aspired to learn and work with both these men. Caldwell met Wright in 1924 after a year of study at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in landscape architecture (Domer, 1991, p. 5). Wright invited Caldwell to become an intern at Taliesin, however Caldwell declined this invitation because of obligations to his young family. But after meeting in 1925 with Jensen, Caldwell accepted a job offer from him. Caldwell's education in landscape architecture began in earnest with his position as construction superintendent under Jensen. Jensen relied heavily on his superintendents to implement his designs (Grese, 1993, p. 191). This experience prepared Alfred Caldwell for future commissions.

In 1931, Jens Jensen's practice had slowed and Caldwell began a private practice (Domer, 1991, p. 5). The Great Depression greatly affected the entire country and left few possibilities for any type of construction including landscape architecture. The early 1930's were desperate years for many including Caldwell and his family. Finally, in 1933, through friend and business associates, Caldwell secured work with the Chicago Park District through the Civil Works Administration. This work, along with his experience with Jensen, helped Caldwell secure the position of Park Superintendent of Dubuque, Iowa the following year. Unfortunately, even though Caldwell's work in Dubuque at Eagle Point was acclaimed by many, including Franklin Roosevelt during a visit, he was dismissed in 1935 (Wilson, 1977, p. 411). Caldwell returned to the Chicago Park District and worked on W.P.A. projects from 1936 to 1941. Included among these projects were the Lincoln Park Extension, the Burnham Park Extension, the Lincoln Park Lily Pool, Montrose Harbor, Promontory Point and his first W.P.A. project, Riis Park in 1936 (Sniderman, Tippens, 1989, sec. FIII, p. 20).

Later from 1941 to 1945, Caldwell worked for the War Department as an engineer. During this time he was introduced to Mies Van der Rohe and Ludwig Hilberseimer (Domer, 1991, p. 6). Eventually his friendship and associates with Mies and Hilberseimer led to an invitation to teach at the newly formed Illinois Institute of Technology. "Thus began Alfred's career as a teacher and although he did not know

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17

Jacob A. Riis Park

it at the time, it was to become his first love." (Domer, 1991, p. 8) Caldwell stated in a personal interview that this new school offered possibilities to both Mies and Caldwell, not only as instructors but as the architect and landscape architect of a new campus (Begley, Moelling, 10/28/94).

Caldwell continued to teach, work on his own home in Bristol, Wisconsin and the IIT campus until 1959. Later through business associates Caldwell was hired by the City of Chicago Planning Department in 1960. In 1964 he was offered the opportunity to teach again and he accepted a position at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. After one year Caldwell accepted a position with the University of Southern California. He remained at USC until 1973 and stated in a personal interview that these were some of the happiest years of his life (Begley, Moelling, 10/18/94). In 1981, Caldwell returned to Chicago and started to teach again at IIT. Today Alfred Caldwell divides his time between the IIT campus and his home in Wisconsin.

Caldwell's principles required the use of native plants in a designed landscape; relied on a simple and harmonious plan; used stratified stone work to show the nobility of rock; and intertwined nature and design. These principles were evident in the 1936 plan Caldwell developed for the western half of Riis Park. Riis Park is an early example of Caldwell's independent application of Prairie Style landscape and the continuation of a uniquely American landscape architecture.

Riis Park demonstrated Caldwell's principles of landscape architecture. It also illustrated the progression and maturation of Caldwell's theories when shown in relationship to his other projects, such as the Lily Pool and Promontory Point. While working for Jensen, Caldwell had learned to use a two tier planting system with native trees to create intimate areas. Taller trees acted as a backdrop to an area and then lower, more horizontal trees, such as crabapple or hawthorn trees were used to provide color, canopies, and attract birds, as well as create a connection to the prairie through horizontality. Caldwell used this system in Riis Park in the area named "Crabapple Lane".

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Jacob A. Riis Park

Another feature developed by Jensen and modified by Caldwell in Riis Park is the "meadow". This area demonstrated the idea of a sun opening in a forest. It was a large open grassy area bordered by trees planted in undulating curves to create eye movement and the feeling of spaciousness. Jensen wrote of the meadow as the place to give a sense of wide open space (Jensen, 1939, p.72). Caldwell used this theory and developed a soothing open area for picnicking and passive recreation. Once again the two tier tree planting system was used for bordering the large grassy area. At Riis Park Caldwell also used the steep hill that was once the glacial shore line of Lake Michigan to border the eastern edge of the meadow and create dramatic views. Thus, Caldwell incorporated the natural features of the site into his landscape design.

Water elements were also important to the Prairie style of landscape design. In Riis Park, Caldwell created the lagoon with a small waterfall that offered the comforting sound of water movement. The pathway over the lagoon was of rough stratified limestone. The use of stratified stone illustrated another connection between the natural and designed environment. The stone was used to show how the glacial tides would have washed area earth and left the native stratified stone exposed. The nobility of stone that Caldwell spoke about in his own writings was used at Riis Park in 1936 (Caldwell, p.29). He had used this principle before at Eagle Point in Dubuque, Iowa and later at the Lincoln Park lily pool.

The use of native limestone, plants, water elements, undulating curves of plantings and intimate and open areas were all strong ideas in Prairie style landscapes and helped to create a connection through design to the natural environment. Caldwell had used these ideas in previous projects and he would further develop them in later projects. Riis Park illustrated these theories clearly and are outstanding examples of Caldwell's craftsmanship and artistry.

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Jacob A. Riis Park

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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Jacob A. Riis Park

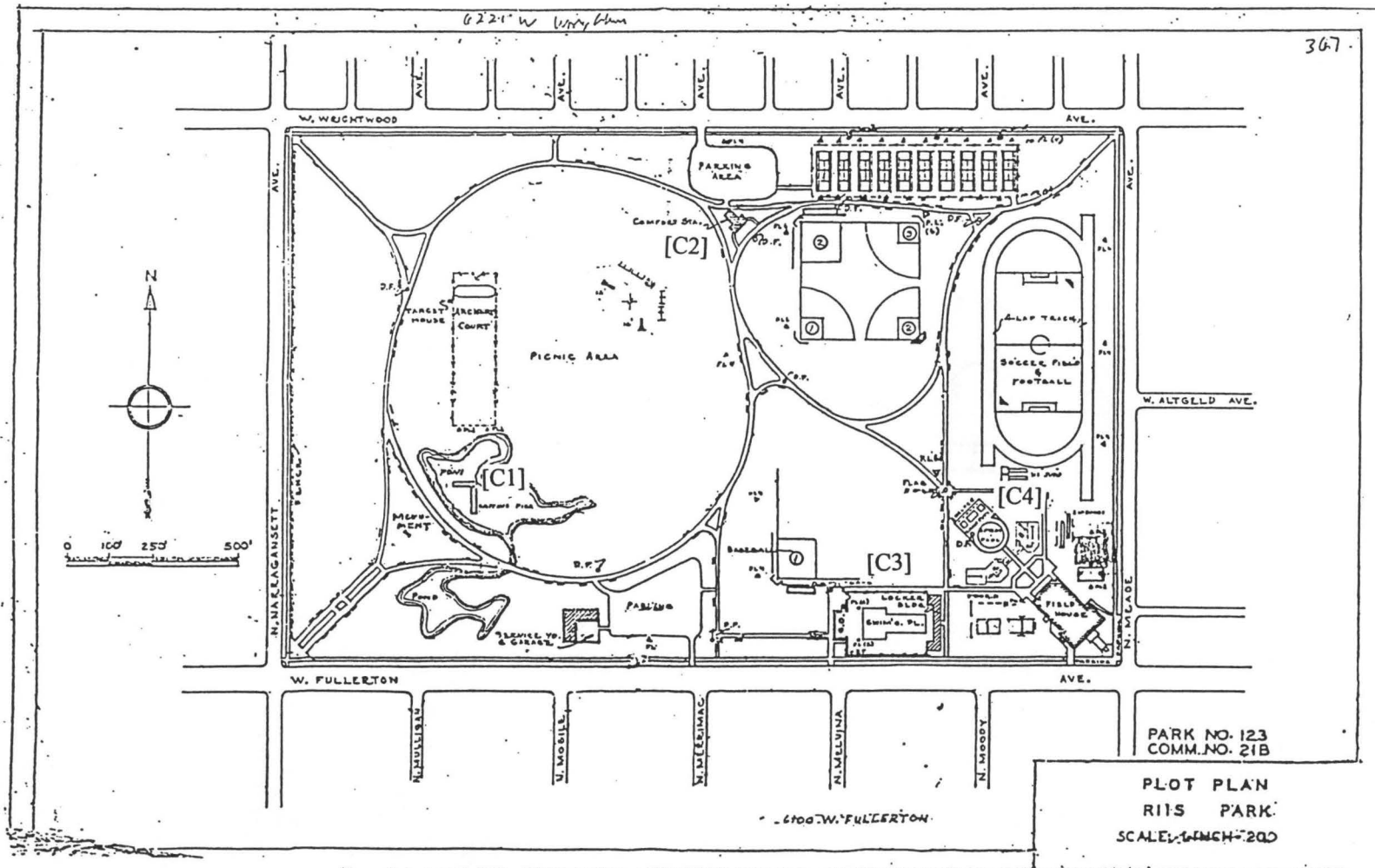
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is bounded on the north by the south curb of W. Wrightwood Ave., between N. Narragansett and N. Meade Ave.; and on the south by the north curb of W. Fullerton Avenue between N. Narragansett Ave. and N. Meade Ave; and on the west by the east curb of N. Narragansett Ave. between W. Fullerton Ave. and W. Wrightwood Ave.; and on the east by the west curb of N. Meade Ave. between W. Fullerton Ave. and W. Wrightwood Ave..

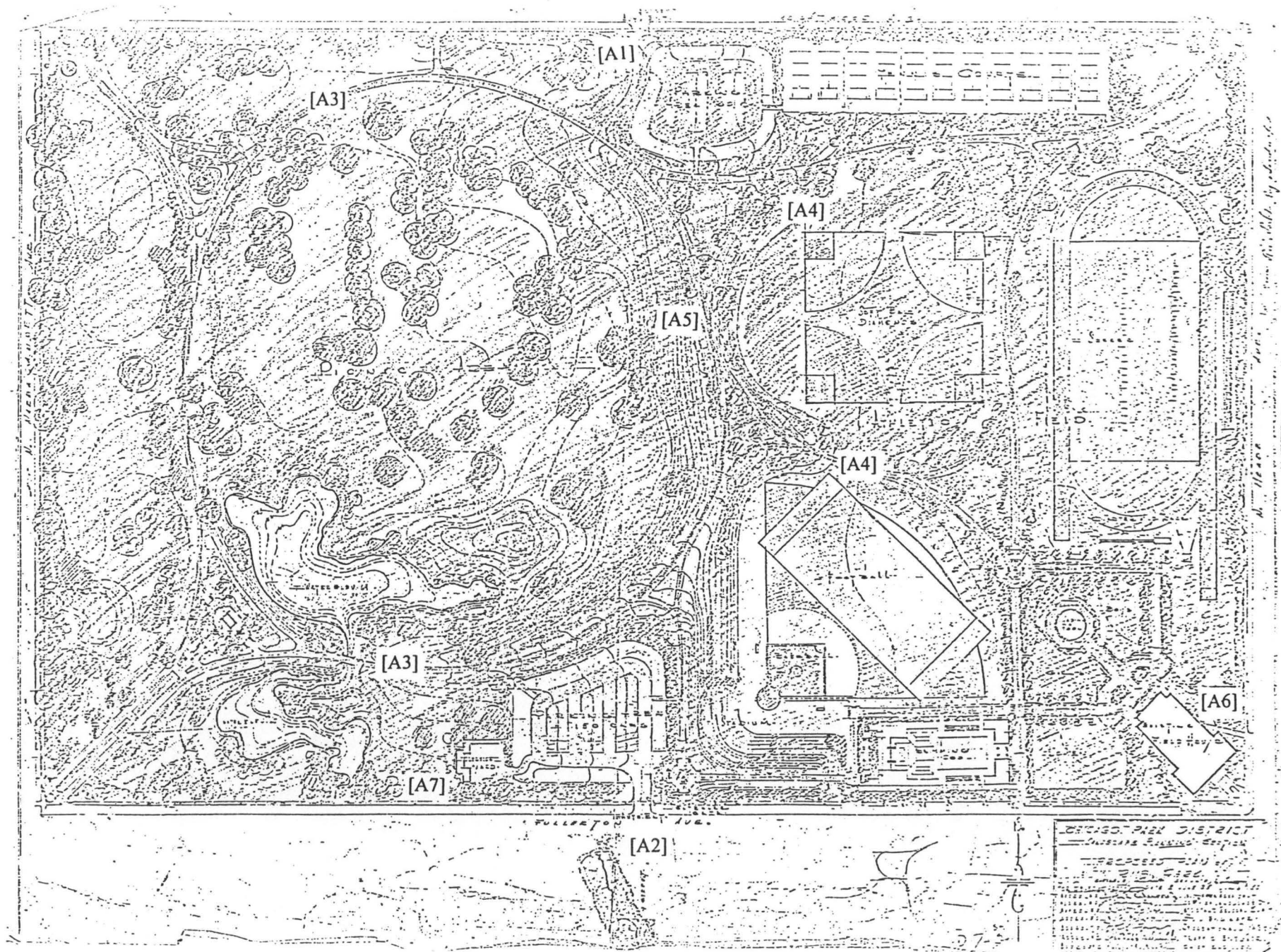
Boundary Justification

This is the plot of land historically associated with the park during its period of significance.



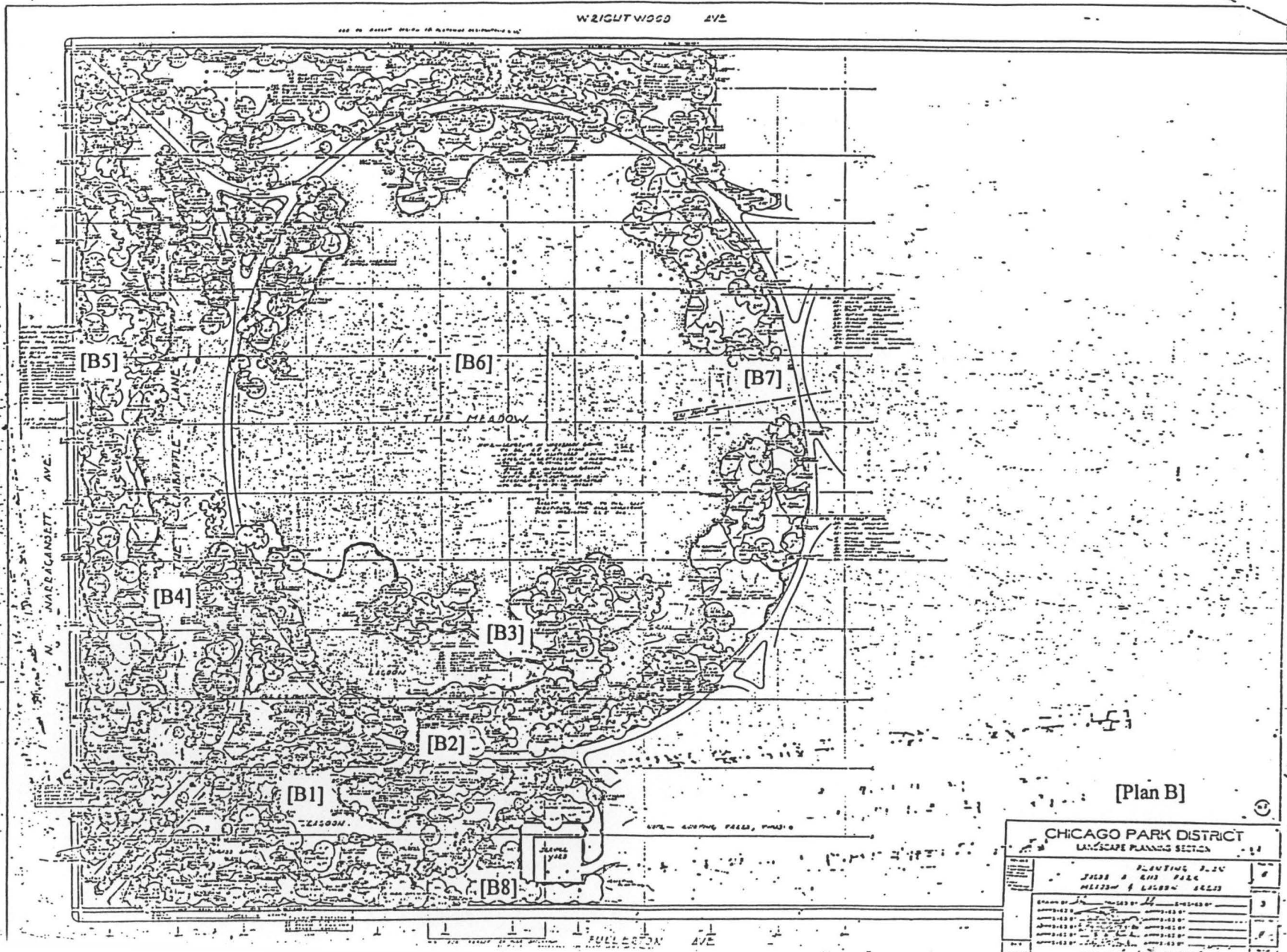
[Plan C]

Jacob A. Riis Park



[Plan A]

Jacob A. Riis Park



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Riis, Jacob A., Park
NAME:

MULTIPLE Chicago Park District MPS
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ILLINOIS, Cook

DATE RECEIVED: 3/23/95 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/04/95
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/20/95 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/07/95
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 95000483

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 4/20/95 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



2115 PARK-FIELDHOUSE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELWAß

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: LOOKING NORTHEAST

Feature KEY #: A6

Photo1



NAMES WON LOST PCT

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9



MEN

**COMMUNITY
BUSINESS FAIR**
SAT. OCT. 8TH • 8 PM - 9:30 PM
WRIGHT COLLEGE
Activities for kids
Dance & Karaoke 2000s
Video & Board Games
Food
Toss of the Coin
Wheel of Fortune
Ballroom Dancing
Ballroom & Banquet

RUIS PARK - FIELD HOUSE INTERIOR
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JEWELER MOELLER

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: LOOKING NE

Feature KEY #: Ab

Photo 2



RILEY PARK - POOL

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

LOCATION OF NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK

VIEW: SW (LOOKING SW) DISTRICT

Feature Key #: C3

Photo 3



CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
Welcome To
The Near North Region Office

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
NEAR NORTH REGION
OFFICES
2100 N. LAUREL AVE.
CHICAGO, ILL. 60647

RIIS PARK - COMFORT STATION

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLER

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: Looking WEST

Feature KEY #: C2

Photo 4



REIS PARK - POOLHOUSE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: LOOKING SOUTH

Feature KEY #: C3

Photo 5



RIIS PARK - PERGOLA
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING

DATE TAKEN: OCT. 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: LOOKING NE

Feature #: C4

Photo 6



RIS PARK - "CRABAPPLE LAWE"
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING
DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994
NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
VIEW: LOOKING NORTH
Feature Key #: B4
Photo 7.



RIIS PARK MONUMENT
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: NORTH

Feature KEY #: PLANC

Photo 8



RIIS PARK - MEADOW

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLING

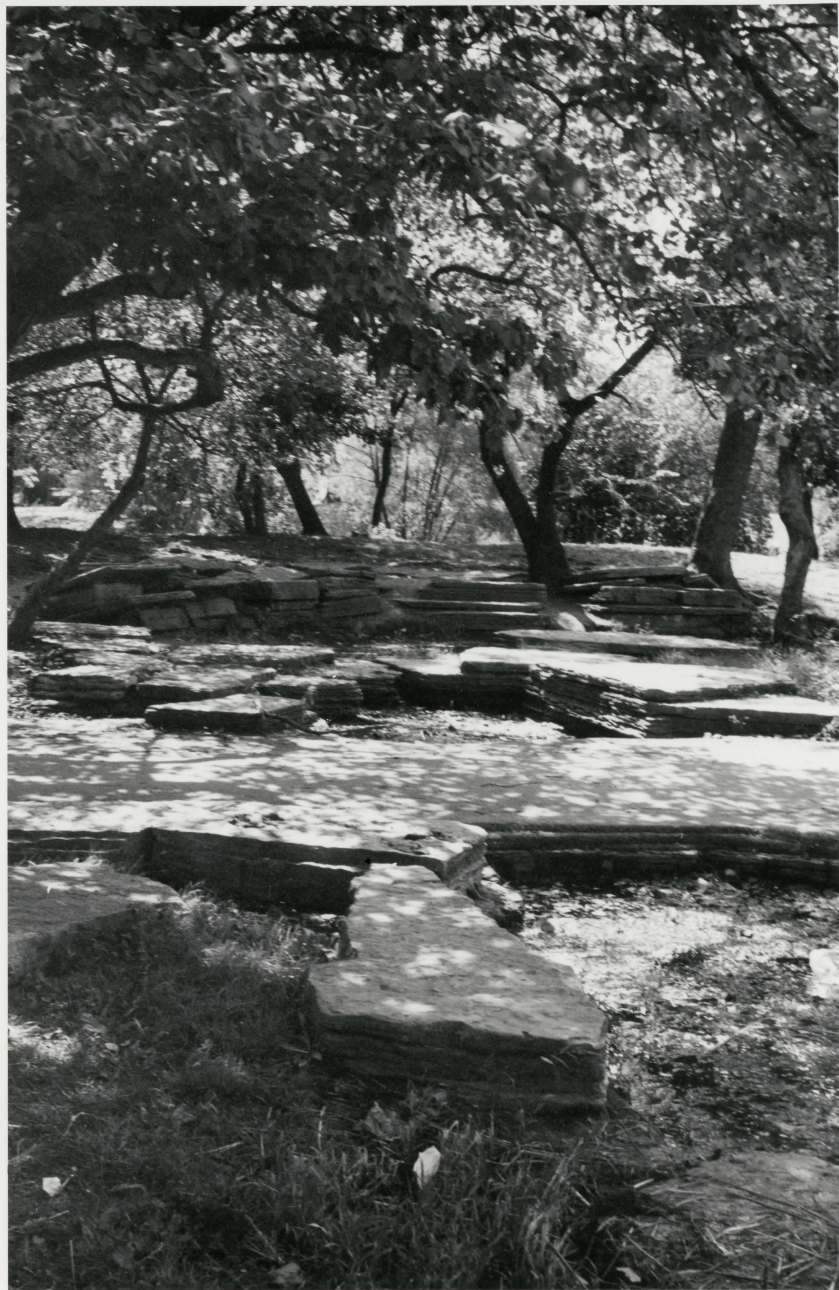
DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVE: CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: LOOKING NORTH

Feature KEY #: BG

Photo 9



2115 PARK-LABODW

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PHOTOGRAPHER: JENNIFER MOELLER

DATE TAKEN: OCT 1994

NEGATIVES: CHG. PARK DISTRICT

VIEW: SOUTH

Feature Key #: A3

Photo 10

Please refer to the map in the
Chicago Park District MPS Cover
Sheet for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64500200



Illinois Historic
Preservation Agency

Old State Capitol • Springfield, Illinois 62701 • (217) 782-4836

RECEIVED 413

MAR 23 1995

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Mayor Richard Daley, City of Chicago
Charles Thurow, Deputy Commissioner, Landmarks
Division, Department of Planning and Development

FROM: Ann V. Swallow, Survey & National Register Coordinator *AVS*

DATE: December 7, 1994

SUBJECT: Preliminary Opinion of Jacob A. Riis Park, Chicago

In my opinion Jacob A. Riis Park, 6100 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, meets Criteria A and C for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a nationally significant neighborhood park for its landscape design by Alfred Caldwell, and locally important for architecture, social history and recreation.

Riis Park is being nominated under the multiple property documentation form entitled "Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District." The documentation form explains the recreational and social history significance of Chicago's parks, and the nomination for Riis Park presents the history of the development and function of the park within its neighborhood. The period of significance extends from 1928 to 1944, to include its initial development until the arbitrary 50 year date for the Register.

Prominent Chicago architect, Alfred Ahlschlager, designed the eclectic fieldhouse at Riis Park in 1929, and within the next ten years several additional support buildings were constructed to accommodate the recreational needs of the community. Although these buildings cannot be attributed to Ahlschlager, their design is obviously influenced by the earlier classical building. They also contribute to the architectural significance of the park. Caldwell's 1936 design for the western half of the park is an important example of the Prairie style of landscape design. The distinctive stone lagoon and the two tier spatial arrangement of tree and understory plantings key this park design to Caldwell's naturalistic landscapes.



City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Commission on
Chicago Landmarks

Peter C. B. Bynoe
Chairman

Room 516
320 North Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610-4711
(312) 744-3200 (Voice)
(312) 744-2958 (TDD)
(312) 744-9140 (FAX)

February 1, 1995

Ms. Ann Swallow
National Register Coordinator
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
Old State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62701

RE: Jacob A. Riis Park
6100 West Fullerton

Dear Ms. Swallow:

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks has reviewed the information regarding the nomination of Jacob A. Riis Park to the National Register of Historic Places. The Commission's Program Committee met on Wednesday, January 18, 1995 to review the nomination and to hear a presentation by the nominator. The Committee found that Riis Park is a nationally significant neighborhood park due, in part, to its Prairie style of landscape design by Aldred Caldwell.

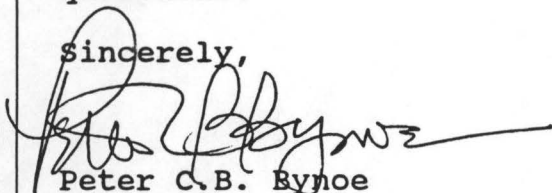
The Program Committee proposed the following resolution for adoption by the full Commission:

The Program Committee recommends that the Commission on Chicago Landmarks endorse the nomination of Jacob A. Riis Park to the National Register of Historic Places as the park meets Criteria A and C for listing.

The motion passed unanimously at the Commission's regular meeting on February 1, 1995.

Please feel free to contact our staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


Peter C. B. Bynoe
Chairman

xc: Alderman William Banks
General Superintendent Forrest Claypool





City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning
and Development

Valerie B. Jarrett
Commissioner

320 North Clark Street, Room 516
Chicago, Illinois 60610-4711
(312) 744-3200 (Voice)
(312) 744-2958 (TDD)
(312) 744-9140 (FAX)

February 1, 1995

Ms. Ann Swallow
National Register Coordinator
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
Old State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62701

RE: Jacob A. Riis Park

Dear Ms. Swallow:

On behalf of Richard M. Daley, Mayor of the City of Chicago, I am responding to your correspondence of December 7, 1994 regarding the nomination of Riis Park to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Department of Planning and Development has reviewed this matter and concurs that the park meets Criteria A and C for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to its significance in the social and recreational history of Chicago; further, the park is considered nationally significant in the area of landscape architecture. Chicago's parks are one of the city's greatest assets and play a vital role in making Chicago a quality environment for all residents. Listing on the National Register will foster and encourage public participation in the preservation and appreciation of one of Chicago's most utilized amenities.

Please feel free to contact our staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Valerie B. Jarrett, Commissioner
Department of Planning and Development

xc: Alderman William Banks
General Superintendent Forrest Claypool





**Illinois Historic
Preservation Agency**

Old State Capitol • Springfield, Illinois 62701 • (217) 782-4836

March 20, 1995

Ms. Beth Boland
National Register Program
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
800 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20421

RECEIVED 413

MAR 23 1995

**INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

Dear Beth:

Enclosed please find the National Register documentation forms for these properties in Illinois. They are as follows:

Levi Willits House, New Boston
Joseph Schertz House, Metamora vicinity
Louis Jehle House, Pana
Moultrie County Courthouse, Sullivan
Hamilton Park, Chicago
Trumbull Park, Chicago
Portage Park, Chicago
Indian Boundary Park, Chicago
✓ Riis Park, Chicago
South Side German Historic District Boundary Increase, Quincy

Bryn Mawr Avenue Historic District, Chicago--one owner objection letter enclosed.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,

David Newton

David Newton
Assistant National Register Coordinator

enclosures