

**JACKIE ROBINSON (COLONIAL PARK) PLAY CENTER BATH HOUSE INTERIOR,** first floor interior consisting of the vaulted entry foyer and the two staircases leading to the second floor locker rooms, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, ticket booth, bas-reliefs, signage and metal grilles, Bradhurst Avenue between West 146<sup>th</sup> Street and West 147<sup>th</sup> Street, Borough of Manhattan.

Constructed 1935-1937; Aymar Embury II, Henry Ahrens and others, Architects.

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 2052, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On January 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior (LP-2239) first floor interior consisting of the vaulted entry foyer and the two staircases leading to the second floor locker rooms, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, ticket booth, bas-reliefs, signage and metal grilles, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 33). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twelve witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, and representatives from the offices of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer, the Municipal Art Society of New York, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Preservation League of Staten Island and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission has also received letters from Congressman Charles Rangel, New York City Council Member Robert M. Jackson, and the Community Board 10 Chairman, in support of designation. Several of the speakers also expressed support for the larger designation effort of all the WPA-era pools. The site was previously heard on April 3, 1990 and September 11, 1990 (LP-1783).

### Summary

The Jackie Robinson Play Center is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal agencies created in the 1930s to address the Great Depression. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout New York City's five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities constructed in the country. The pools were completed just two and a half years after the LaGuardia administration took office, and all but one survives relatively intact today.



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

The Jackie Robinson Play Center was the only one of the WPA-era pools sited in a predominantly minority neighborhood. Formally opened on August 8, 1936, the Play Center was built on a narrow hillside site acquired by the City of New York and developed as Colonial Park soon after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The uniquely monumental two-story design of the Play Center bath house exterior is matched in its grandeur by the cathedral-like vaulted interior lobby. Several Gothic arches spring from four exposed brick columns towards the center of the lobby, resulting in soaring vaults of various magnitudes. The rear vaults are centered above two cascading stairways that lead in opposite directions to the men's and women's locker rooms. Along the north and south walls of the space, two recessed doorways, capped by segmental brick relieving arches and featuring rounded brick reveals, are found beneath pointed Gothic arches projecting from the wall only the thickness of a single brick course. The ticket booth, vaguely reminiscent of the prow of a ship, projects seamlessly from a full-height attached buttress located between the two main doors to the Play Center lobby, and features sixteen multi-paned windows and a polished stone countertop. Exposed brick walls featuring bas-relief panels of water-related activities, floral limestone corbels supporting the concrete Gothic arches, and an original flagged bluestone floor, further characterize this space.

## **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

### History of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Site<sup>1</sup>

The Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center is set within a 12.8 acre, narrow hillside site acquired by the City of New York between 1894 and 1899. The acquisition of parkland during this time was part of a larger nation-wide reform effort to increase the availability of organized play areas in inner cities, made possible by the Small Parks Act of 1887, which authorized the creation of parks south of 155<sup>th</sup> Street as deemed necessary for the public welfare. The *New York Times* noted at the time of the acquisition that the Colonial Park site already “had much of the character of a park,” but needed to be preserved for park purposes before land values increased to the point that it would become impossible.<sup>2</sup> Formed by retreating glaciers some 20,000 to 50,000 years ago, the parklands were particularly notable for having varied topography, a picturesque appearance, and trees providing ample shade. Colonial Park officially opened as a playground on August 12, 1911. Site interventions from this era included the addition of a comfort station, drinking fountains, and children's playgrounds.

A variety of names have been given to the area in which Jackie Robinson (Colonial) Park is located. Known as Harlem Heights to Dutch and English settlers in the 1700s, by 1870 the neighborhood was referred to as Washington Heights, in commemoration of Revolutionary War battles that took place nearby, as well as to set it apart from neighboring working-class areas. By the turn of the century, both upper-middle class white professionals and recent immigrants from Italy, Ireland, and Germany were living in Harlem's many neighborhoods. When African Americans began moving into the area after 1920, the elevated residential enclave just west of Colonial Park became known as "Sugar Hill," one of the choicest neighborhoods in Harlem, tenanted by some of the area's most successful black citizens. By the 1930s, however, much of Harlem was suffering under the combined effects of racism and the Great Depression. Colonial Park was noted at this time for being a welcome relief from the crowded conditions of the tenements and rooming houses that surrounded it.

Under the auspices of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and his legendary Park Commissioner, Robert Moses, major improvements to Colonial Park were made in the 1930s. By August 1935, the Parks Department had broken ground on the Colonial Park Play Center, a complex which would include new swimming and diving pools and an elaborate bath house. Other additions planned for the park were a new wading pool area, comfort station, bandshell and dance floor terrace, in addition to recreational areas for adults and a children's playground. Overall enhancements were also planned for the surrounding park grounds. Funding for the various improvements was largely made possible by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of the many public works programs created by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the United States Congress during the Great Depression.

In 1978, under a local law introduced by Councilmember Fred Samuel and signed by Mayor Edward I. Koch, Colonial Park and the Colonial Park Play Center were renamed for Jackie Robinson, the first black professional baseball player in the major leagues. A bronze bust of Jackie Robinson by Inge Hardison was installed inside the bath house lobby in 1981.

### Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert Moses and the New Deal<sup>3</sup>

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

New York City had been especially hard hit by the economic downturn,<sup>4</sup> and its citizens, hoping for change, elected Fiorello H. LaGuardia to the mayoralty of New York City in 1933 as an anti-Tammany Hall reform candidate. A maverick Republican and a five-term congressman from East Harlem, LaGuardia won the mayoral election on the "Fusion" ticket after losing the 1929 mayoral race on the Republican line. The Fusion Conference Committee at first considered running Robert Moses, another Republican, who was appointed Chairman of the New York State Council of Parks in 1924 by his political mentor, Governor Alfred E. Smith, a Tammany Hall Democrat from New York City. However, the committee decided against Moses because of his association with Smith, and chose LaGuardia instead. At the time, Moses was a popular public figure with a reputation as a progressive and as the builder of great parks and parkways like Jones Beach and the Northern State Parkway on Long Island. His endorsement of LaGuardia during the campaign was considered instrumental in securing a victory for LaGuardia. Within a

week of the election, LaGuardia chose Moses, a champion of reform politics, as New York City's new Park Commissioner.

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

In the 1920s, Moses was at the forefront of the national recreation movement that began in the first decade of the twentieth century, led by such men as President Theodore Roosevelt and the lesser-known George D. Butler of the National Recreation Association. The movement gained momentum under the administration of President Calvin Coolidge with the organization of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation (NCOR) in 1924.<sup>5</sup> The Depression of the 1930s further amplified the need to provide more, or improve existing, outdoor recreational opportunities, especially in urban areas. Fortunately, such goals fit nicely into FDR's New Deal economic programs. Mayor LaGuardia's success in securing a lion's share of monies made available by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), and Moses' management skills and his ability to attract talented designers and engineers to his staff, resulted in profound physical changes to the environment of New York City. The construction and renovation of neighborhood recreation areas, such as pools and play grounds, were some of the most ambitious and successful programs undertaken by Moses with funds largely provided by the WPA.

Moses began to assess the state of the City's parks and to plan for their future as soon as LaGuardia announced his intention to appoint Moses as Park Commissioner. According to one source: "Immediately after the election he wrote out, on a single piece of paper, a plan for putting 80,000 men to work on 1,700 relief projects."<sup>6</sup> Moses hired a consulting engineer and three assistant engineers to survey every park and parkway in the City. The survey was completed by the time he took office in mid-January 1934.

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

The Parks Department's Division of Design was organized in the following manner: a topographical unit of about 400 surveyors and draftsmen, a landscape architecture unit of about 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 of the plans. Moses himself sometimes stepped in to revise or overrule a design, especially on the larger, more visible projects.

Moses' superior management ability and political savvy allowed him to move projects along very quickly and to produce concrete results, gaining for him much public admiration. However, Moses' personal demeanor was notoriously stubborn and arrogant, and he was known, at times, to disregard the legitimate authority of other governmental agencies. Once, when the Department of Plant and Structures refused to suspend a ferry service that used a terminal in the path of 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 Parks Department. His later battles with and subsequent triumphs over community groups opposed to the routing of the Gowanus and the Cross-Bronx Expressways through their neighborhoods are now legendary. Moses was also known to have been insensitive to people of color, and reputedly tried to restrict access to many of his recreational facilities, including the WPA-era pools.<sup>8</sup>

To many, Robert Moses was a master builder; to others he was a spoiled bully who seemingly always had his way. In the summer of 1934, however, Moses was a hero. Hundreds of projects, covering virtually every neighborhood in the city, had been completed. Structures were repainted, tennis courts resurfaced, and lawns reseeded. Hundreds of new construction projects were either already underway in the process of being designed.<sup>9</sup> Among them was the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center in Harlem.

### History of Swimming in New York City<sup>10</sup>

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

In the 1890s, New York City's first public bath was opened on the Lower East Side of Manhattan by "The Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor," following a 1895 state

law requiring the construction of such facilities. The pool-like indoor baths, however, were never very popular with the working class, and many of the bath houses eventually added actual swimming pools and gymnasias in hopes of attracting more patrons. The indoor pools at the municipal bath houses never quite replaced the need or demand for outdoor swimming facilities in the city, and by the 1930s, it was clear that they not aged well.

At the time Robert Moses became Parks Commissioner in 1934, only two outdoor pools remained, one at Betsy Head in Brownsville, the other at Faber Park on Staten Island. Moses, however, considered the Betsy Head pool “unsanitary,” with an “unattractive, inadequate, and impractical bath house,” and furthermore recognized in the city “a demand for safe bathing which could never be satisfied until the boundary waters were cleaned up.”<sup>11</sup> To Moses, a forerunner in the national recreation movement and an avid swimmer since his university days, a change was desperately needed, and by October 1934, excavations had already begun for the first of eleven state-of-the-art swimming pools. The pools were to be sited near inner-city neighborhoods in order to provide swimming for those who could not easily reach places like Orchard Beach or the beaches of Long Island. In addition to swimming pools, the new centers would incorporate elaborate bath houses, and also provide active adult sport areas, children’s playgrounds, and other amenities. The eleven pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies and quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities ever constructed in the country.<sup>12</sup> After the completion of the WPA-era pool complexes, no other public swimming pools were constructed in New York City until the 1970s.

### The Swimming Pools, Moses, and Segregation in New York City<sup>13</sup>

Institutionalized racism was still an established way of life in the United States during the inter-war years, even on the federally sanctioned level. For example, as a result of federal guidelines articulated in the 1935 Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual, it was impossible for non-segregated developments to attain mortgage insurance, meaning ethnic and even religious minorities could only secure mortgages in certain areas. The result was a substantial increase in both racial segregation and urban disinvestment in cities across the country, New York included. At its peak, estimates of segregation in public housing nation-wide ran as high as 90 percent due in large part to both federal and local government policies.<sup>14</sup> Even as late as 1943, the City of New York gave its approval for Metropolitan Life’s all-white, middle income project – Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village.

Robert Moses himself has been described as insensitive to people of color, an attitude which may have impacted both the siting and administration of the WPA-era pools. LaGuardia and Moses often went to great lengths to show the media that they did care about minorities, holding, for example, a celebration for 25,000 people upon the opening of the Colonial Park pool, at which the mayor offered the facility as proof that his administration was in fact “building and doing things for Harlem.”<sup>15</sup> Although LaGuardia and Moses claimed they were siting pools in the most congested areas of the city, Colonial Park in Harlem remained the only one sited in a predominantly “non-white” neighborhood. Moreover, the Thomas Jefferson Park pool, located in East Harlem (LaGuardia’s old congressional district) was close to Spanish Harlem where the city’s growing Puerto Rican population was settling. To discourage minority use at this facility, Moses reputedly kept the water heating system turned off, believing that the cold water would not bother Caucasian swimmers, but would somehow deter non-whites.<sup>16</sup>

It has been alleged that the Parks Department at the time had an active policy of hiring only white lifeguards and attendants in hopes of deterring minority patrons. Whether or not such

directives came from Moses himself, the fact remains that the pools were largely segregated at the time of their opening. In the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, “The Power Broker,” Robert Caro writes that “one could go to the [Thomas Jefferson] pool on the hottest summer days, when the slums of Negro and Spanish Harlem a few blocks away sweltered in the heat, and not see a single non-Caucasian face.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, oral histories relating to Betsy Head pool tell of an unwritten rule that “African-Americans could swim in the Brooklyn pool only in the late afternoon, after white residents had vacated the premises.”<sup>18</sup> Such claims are supported by photographs and video footage from the era, showing that largely, white and black New Yorkers swam in different pools.<sup>19</sup> For a handful of sites, however, including the Highbridge and Colonial Park Play Centers in Manhattan, as well as McCarren Play Center in Brooklyn, photographs and video footage seem to indicate that, on occasion, the populations did mix.<sup>20</sup>

### The Design and Construction of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Pool<sup>21</sup>

The Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play center is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal agencies created in the 1930s to address the Great Depression. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout New York City’s five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities ever constructed in the country. The city’s pool construction program was reported to have been the most expensive in terms of total cost. Robert Moses, an avid swimmer who had a home near the ocean in Babylon, Long Island, was known to have taken a special interest in the design and construction of bathing and swimming facilities, such as Jones Beach, Orchard Beach and Riis Park, as well as the neighborhood swimming pools.<sup>22</sup> As a result of his special attention, along with that of Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, the design and execution of New York City’s aquatic facilities in the 1930s were a cut above most other park projects at the time.

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

To satisfy federal stipulation on low-cost materials, it appears that the design team for the pools determined that the streamlined and curvilinear forms of the Art Moderne and Modern Classical styles would best meet the low-cost needs and still permit pleasing aesthetics. As a group,

the pools were also distinguished by the innovative mechanical systems required to heat, filter, and circulate the vast amounts of water they used. Many of these innovations set new standards for swimming pool construction, such as scum gutters that allowed in enough sunlight to naturally kill off bacteria and a series of footbaths filled with foot cleaning solution through which bathers were forced to pass upon entering the pool areas from the locker rooms.

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

In October 1934, the Parks Department announced the start of excavations and site work for several of the new pools. By August 1935, construction of the Colonial Park swimming pools was underway, although plans for the bath house structure were not filed until October of that year. By the time the Colonial Park Play Center opened on August 8, 1936, only half of the bath house building, with accommodations for 1,800, was open to the public.<sup>23</sup> Revisions for the bath house were still being approved as late as November 1936, for the bandshell and dance floor terrace as late as December 1936, and for grading and other park improvements as late as April 1937.

The year 1936 was known as “the swimming pool year,” since ten of the eleven pools were opened that summer, one per week for ten weeks.<sup>24</sup> Each opening day was a memorable event for its neighborhood. The day-long events featured parades, blessings of the waters, swimming races, diving competitions, appearances by Olympic stars, and performances by swimming clowns. Mayor LaGuardia attended every opening to perform the ribbon cutting. Festivities continued well after dusk with LaGuardia pulling the switch to turn on each pool’s spectacular underwater lighting to the “oooohs” of the crowds. The opening of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center was attended by 25,000 people, jam-packed into the narrow site, and spilling out onto the streets. The 369<sup>th</sup> Regiment Band welcomed the public with a song, and was joined at the chorus by the enthusiastic crowd. Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, a pioneer and preeminent tap dancer, was also on hand to entertain the people.

The completed Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play center has been widely acclaimed since its opening. It was touted for being more eclectic than the other pools, with its “Romanesque-inspired details” and “bold cylindrical forms.”<sup>25</sup> The monumental two-story facade has always had a striking presence on Bradhurst Avenue, where, as noted in a 1986 Parks Department exhibition on the WPA-era pools, the “imposing medieval fortress... could easily be mistaken for an arsenal.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, of the eleven WPA-era pools, the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center is the only one to evoke so strongly the architecture of another era, while still incorporating elements of the popular Art Moderne style, employed at each of the remaining pool sites. Whether considered alone or together with the other WPA-era park improvements, including the dance floor terrace with its undulating brick walls, or the wading pool and comfort station which closely reference the curvilinear forms found at the main pool site, the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center complex was clearly a major achievement of the New Deal in New York City.



### The Designers Behind the Planning of Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Pool<sup>27</sup>

The eleven WPA-era pool facilities shared many common features and specifications that could be repeated at each site, and contained other elements that were similar from complex to complex. As a result, junior designers, having different areas of expertise, appear to have moved quickly among the various pool projects. The department produced designs and construction documents simultaneously with great speed so that eleven pools and hundreds of other park projects, including some massive undertakings like Orchard Beach, were completed within a few years. Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, respectively the Parks Department's Consulting Architect and Consulting Landscape Architect, were employed by the City on a part-time basis to oversee designs for park projects under Robert Moses. William H. Latham, the head of the Division of Design at the time, was the Park Engineer, responsible for the preparation of all plans and specifications within the department. Major design problems were discussed by Embury and Clarke before the preliminary sketches were made under Latham's direction. Completed sketches were subject to approval by the Park Engineer, the General Superintendent, and Commissioner Moses. The consultants would give regular criticism during the 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. He also worked for Cass Gilbert. 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 authority on that subject. 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. Embury was said to have supervised the design of over six hundred public projects, including Orchard Beach, Bryant Park, the New York City Building at the 1939 World's Fair, the Donnell Branch of the New York Public Library, the Hofstra University Campus, the Central Park and Prospect Park Zoos, Jacob Riis Park, five of the eleven neighborhood pool and play centers,<sup>28</sup> the Lincoln Tunnel, the Triborough Bridge, and many more.

The lead architect for each pool project generally designed the bath house, which was unique to each site, establishing the motif that guided the design and detailing of the rest of the complex. Although each pool complex has been credited to a particular architect, the designs appear to actually have been collaborative efforts among the army of architects, draftsmen, engineers, and landscape architects employed by the Parks Department in the 1930s. Although Embury's exact relationship to the planning of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center, beyond his role as the department's consulting architect, is not confirmed, he is commonly credited with the design of the Play Center's bath house. While no plans bearing Embury's name were found at the Parks Department's archives at the Olmsted Center in Queens, Embury is reported to have pointed proudly to the bath house as an example of his work, and was likely to have been the lead architect for the project.

Underscoring the collaborative nature of the design process for the pool complexes, the majority of the architectural plans and construction drawings on file at the archives for the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center, including those for the bath house interior, were prepared by

architect Harry Ahrens, with G.P. Logue as supervising Park Designer. Although not much is on record about Ahrens, what is known is that he was born in New York City in 1896, received his degree from Columbia University in 1916, was “Architect in Chief” with the New York City Parks department from 1936 until 1941, and a project manager with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill from 1942 until 1946. By 1962, it appears as though Ahrens had relocated to Philadelphia.

Architect Arthur J. Barzaghi prepared the majority of the engineering drawings on file at the Olmsted Center archives. Information on record for Barzaghi is limited to at least five buildings he designed in Manhattan between 1921 and 1930, including two industrial buildings, two office buildings, and one single-story “moving picture theater,” before going to work for the Parks Department. An assortment of other names (Latham, Wells, McCagg, Daugherty, Wohlpart, Cowell, etc.) appear on the drawings as well.

### Subsequent History<sup>29</sup>

The Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center official opened on August 8, 1936, the tenth of the eleven pools to open. Despite its inauguration on this date, the pool complex was not entirely complete - most notably, only half of the bath house was open to the public at the pool’s opening. Many of the drawings on file at the Parks Department archives in Queens are dated as approved well after the official inauguration date. Revisions for the bath house were still being approved as late November 1936. Significant alterations to the Play Center lobby are limited to the addition of non-historic lighting fixtures, Parks Department signage, furniture, fire-safety equipment, as well as the painting of historic surfaces. A modern, unenclosed extension of the original ticket booth structure was added, although it is unclear when, and a bronze bust of Jackie Robinson by Inge Hardison was installed beneath the pointed arch of the rear wall in 1981.

In 1978, Colonial Park was renamed Jackie Robinson Park after the first black professional baseball player in the major leagues. Born in Georgia in 1919 and raised in California, Robinson was the first UCLA student to earn letters in four sports: baseball, basketball, football and track. Robinson served in the U.S. army in World War II, played baseball in the Negro Leagues, and signed to the Brooklyn Dodgers top farm team, the Montreal Royals, in August 1945. On April 15, 1947, Robinson made history as the first African-American to play in a major league baseball game, paving the way for generations of black athletes to compete in the sport, which did not become fully integrated until 1959. As second baseman, Robinson led the Dodgers to six World Series, and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of fame in 1962. Robinson later became involved in a number of business enterprises, including several black-owned community businesses, and was active in the NAACP. He also served as a special assistant to Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller before dying of heart disease at the age of 53 (1972). In 1981, a bronze bust of Jackie Robinson by Inge Hardison was installed inside the pool and recreation center lobby at West 147th Street.

By the late 1970s, many of the WPA-era pools, Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) included, had become badly run down, partially the result of the fiscal crisis of the 1970s which hit the Parks Department particularly hard. By March 1981, the Parks Department workforce had dwindled to a record low of 2,900 employees, mostly unskilled and temporary, as compared to the 30,000 parks employees on staff during the Moses administration. The strain on Parks Department resources was evident in the deplorable conditions of many of its facilities. To address the rapid deterioration of its recreational facilities, in 1977 the Parks Department began a major capital construction program involving more than 500 projects, expected to total more than \$180 million, partly in Federal funds – the first such projects undertaken by the parks system

since the fiscal crisis halted such work in 1975, and arguably the most ambitious program to improve the parks since the 1940s. Among the projects planned was a \$10 million plan to preserve Prospect Park, a \$1 million renovation of the Coney Island Boardwalk, and a \$2.6 million rehabilitation of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center. Several of the other WPA-era pools, including Sunset Park and Betsy Head, underwent restoration under the same program.

Closed since 1978, the newly renovated Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center was re-opened on July 14, 1980, to the great relief of neighborhood residents. Much like LaGuardia and Moses before him, the administration of Mayor Ed Koch had been plagued by accusations of insensitivity towards minorities. In an effort to disprove such allegations, Mayor Koch was sure to attend the re-opening of the pool, where “an enthusiastic crowd of children plunged happily into the water at the Mayor’s signal.”<sup>30</sup> Also present at the opening was Mrs. Jackie Robinson. The Parks Department called the renovations of the WPA-era pools “an essential part of the revitalization [of] the entire public recreational infrastructure of the city,” helping transform the aging pools back into modern recreational facilities.<sup>31</sup>

The WPA-era pools faced a new set of challenges beginning in the mid-1980s, with pools like the Crotona Play Center in the Bronx becoming infamous for vandalism and walkways littered with broken glass. In 1991, Mayor David Dinkins proposed closing the pools as part of a package of budget cuts. Only a donation of \$2 million from a private donor, real estate magnate Sol Goldman, guaranteed the pools would be kept open for at least a portion of that summer; an additional \$1.8 million was still needed to cover the entire nine-week long swimming season. In the mid-1990s, a menacing ritual known as “whirlpooling” had become common throughout the pool system, a practice characterized by groups of teenage boys locking arms and shoulders, churning the water and disrupting the activities of other swimmers, particularly women who often found themselves unwilling fondled. Several more serious complaints of sexual assault were recorded throughout the pool system in the summer of 1994. With improvements in security staffing and increased vigilance on the part of patrons, many of the problems of the 1990s did eventually dissipate, and by 2003, the pools were once again touted as both extremely safe, and a welcome alternative on a hot summer day.

#### The Architecture and Site of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Interior

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

Formally opened on August 8, 1936, the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center was built on a narrow hillside site acquired by the City of New York and developed as Colonial Park soon after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The uniquely monumental two-story design of the Play Center bath house exterior is matched in its grandeur by the cathedral-like vaulted interior lobby. Several Gothic arches spring from four exposed brick columns towards the center of the lobby, resulting in soaring vaults of various magnitudes. The rear vaults are centered above two cascading stairways that lead in opposite directions to the men's and women's locker rooms. Along the north and south walls of the space, two recessed doorways, capped by segmental brick relieving arches and featuring rounded brick reveals, are found beneath pointed Gothic arches projecting from the wall only the thickness of a single brick course. The ticket booth, vaguely reminiscent of the prow of a ship, projects seamlessly from a full-height attached buttress located between the two main doors to the Play Center lobby, and features sixteen multi-paned windows and a polished stone countertop. Exposed brick walls featuring bas-relief panels of water-related activities, floral limestone corbels supporting the concrete Gothic arches, and an original flagged bluestone floor, further characterize this space.

### Description

#### *Plan and Circulation*

Jackie Robinson (Colonial) Park is bounded by West 145<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, West 155<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, Edgecombe Avenue to the west, and Bradhurst Avenue to the east. Due to the steep difference in elevation between Edgecombe Avenue and Bradhurst Avenue, the park is mainly accessible along Bradhurst Avenue. Additional entry points can be found at the southwest corner of the park, as well as along Edgecombe Avenue, all of them via stairway.

The Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center is located towards to southern boundary of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial) Park. The Play Center can be approached from either the north or the south along Bradhurst Avenue. The two entrance doorways to the Play Center bath house are found just north of the intersection of Bradhurst Avenue and West 146<sup>th</sup> Street, beneath the imposing brick arches of the structure's front (east) facade. Upon entering the bath house building, patrons will find themselves in the vaulted, Gothic-inspired entrance lobby. Admission to the pool must first be purchased here, at the ticket booth, a projecting, oblong, glass-enclosed structure. The ticket booth structure is vaguely reminiscent of the prow of a ship, and is located between the two entrance doorways. A modern, unenclosed extension of the original ticket booth structure was added in recent years.

After purchasing an admission ticket, patrons walk up one of two cascading stairways at the rear of the entrance lobby, to either the men's or women's locker rooms. From the locker rooms, access to the pool deck area, located west of the bath house structure, was provided by doors at the respective ends of the men's and women's sides of the rear (west) facade, and only after patrons had passed first through the mandatory shower and foot baths. Today, access to the pools is available directly from the top of the two stairways, making it possible to circumvent the entirely redesigned men's and women's locker areas, but not the remarkable entrance lobby. To the north and south of the entrance lobby, on the ground floor, lie the original service spaces of the Play Center bath house, including the mechanical and filtration systems for the swimming pool complex (not part of this interior designation).<sup>32</sup> The entranceways to the north and south wings are located roughly at the center of the northern and southern walls of the lobby.

### *The Bath House Interior*

The entrance lobby of the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center is essentially square in plan. Four exposed brick columns are located towards the center of the space, from which spring a series of concrete Gothic arches. The largest of the pointed arches span the distances between the four columns, forming the cathedral-like vaulted ceiling at the center of the lobby. A square, recessed skylight pierces the plastered vault at its center. Smaller Gothic arches spring from the four central columns to the exposed brick walls of the lobby, creating more diminutive vaulted spaces at each of the room's four corners. These smaller pointed arches meet the walls at rounded hanging brick buttresses that protrude only slightly from the wall surface, supported by elaborate limestone corbels featuring floral motifs. The two rear vaults are centered above the two concrete staircases that lead in opposite directions to the men's and women's locker rooms. The first seven risers of each staircase almost have the appearance of a cascading waterfall, spanning between the adjacent walls in concentric quarter-rounds. After the first landing, the stairs continue in a traditional fashion up the narrow hallways leading to the locker room areas, parallel to the west facade.

To the north and south of the entrance lobby lie the original service spaces of the Play Center bath house, including the mechanical and filtration systems for the swimming pool complex (not part of this interior designation). The entranceways to the north and south wings are located roughly at the center of the northern and southern walls of the lobby. Each wall features a pointed Gothic arch that projects from the wall only the thickness of a single brick course. The recessed surface of the wall beneath each arch features a bas-relief panel depicting water related activities (on the north wall, a bather by a shoreline, on the south wall, a bather in a sailboat). The doorways themselves are capped by segmental brick relieving arches and feature rounded brick reveals, and are recessed considerably from the walls. The reveals are particularly striking, constructed using a non-alternating, header bond.

The glass-enclosed, oblong ticket booth projects seamlessly from a full-height attached buttress located between the two main doors to the Play Center lobby. A segmental arched doorway embedded within the apparent buttress, accessible only from inside the ticket booth, leads into a room labeled on original plans as a "check room," and features its original door. The shape of the ticket booth is vaguely reminiscent of the prow of a ship, and features sixteen rectangular multi-paned windows which surround it on all sides, and a polished stone countertop. A modern, unenclosed extension of the original ticket booth structure was added in recent years.

Other notable details of the Play Center lobby include the metal grilles featuring geometric shapes found on the northern and southern walls, the backlit metallic signs pointing to the men's and women's locker rooms, and the flagged bluestone paving, all original to the space. Two recessed bays also line the eastern wall of the lobby, each featuring a segmental brick arch and punctuated by a single window with a cast-stone sill. A bronze bust of Jackie Robinson by Inge Hardison was installed beneath the pointed arch of the rear wall in 1981. All of the vaults are plastered, as they were at the time of construction. The arches, which originally featured an imitation Caen stone finish, have been painted in a contrasting color. The stairs have also been painted. Non-historic lighting fixtures, Parks Department signage, mailboxes, furniture, and fire-safety equipment can be found throughout.

Report prepared by  
Jennifer Most  
Research Department

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Adams, Michael Henry. *Harlem: Lost and Found*. New York: Monacelli, 2001, pp. 255-258; Federal Writers' Project in New York City. *New York City Guide*. New York: Random House, 1939, pp. 253-257; Moses, Robert (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation). *26 Years of Progress: 1934-1960*. 1960; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. "Jackie Robinson Park." 1997; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. "Jackie Robinson (Colonial) Park." hanging file (located at the Parks Library at the Arsenal, Manhattan, New York); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Designation Report for Hamilton Heights / Sugar Hill Historic District." LP-2064, June 27, 2000; Stern, Robert A. M., et al. *New York 1930: Architecture between the Two World Wars*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1987; Weir, L.H., editor, *Parks: a Manual of Municipal and County Parks* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1928); \_\_\_\_\_ (Editorial 1 – No Title), *New York Times*. May 26, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (Editorial 1 – No Title). *New York Times*. May 26, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> This section adapted from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's Designation Report for the Astoria Park Pool and Play Center (LP-2196), researched and written by Donald Presa, June 20, 2006. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975, pp. 347-369, 372-373; Cormier, Francis. "Some New York City Parks and Parkways: Recreational Improvements Made Since 1934," *Landscape Architecture Vol. 29*. April 1939, pp. 124-136; Cutler, Phoebe. *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*. Hew Haven: Yale University Press, c.1985), pp. 8-9; LaGuardia Collection (located at the Municipal Archives): miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor LaGuardia; Moses, Robert. "Parks and Recreation in New York," transcript of the proceedings of the National Recreation Association (1947), pp. 41-50; New York City Department of Parks, "Memorandum on 1935 Budget Request for the Department of Parks." typescript dated August 14, 1934, p. 100; "Pattern For Parks," *Architectural Forum Vol. 65*. December 1936, pp. 499-500; Rodgers, Cleveland. *Robert Moses: Builder For Democracy*, 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952, pp. 82-84; Rosen, Laura. "Robert Moses and New York: The Early Years," *The Livable City Vol. 12*, no. 2. December 1988, pp. 2-4; Taylor, Floyd. "Moses Keeps Up With His Work and Cuts Through Red Tape," *The World Telegram*. January 7, 1938.

<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, p. 323.

<sup>5</sup> By the 1920s, the recreational needs of people were changing with the increase in leisure time afforded by the advent of shorter work weeks, paid vacations, and greater mobility due to inventions like the car. The addition of active recreation to city parks was in direct keeping with popular theories on the importance of providing the public with outlets for active recreation over passive recreation in these changing times. The Great Depression of the 1930s further amplified such needs.

<sup>6</sup> Rodgers, p. 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, p. 84. Moses later came under fire by a number of city aldermen for hiring people for the Parks Department's technical staff who did not meet the guidelines for relief work. Moses vigorously defended this practice, calling the investigation "Tammany-controlled." *New York Times*, April 10, 1935, p. 1; April 20, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Work is ongoing as to whether Robert Moses did actively discourage minorities from using Parks Department facilities such as the WPA-era swimming pools. Also see: Caro and Ballon, Hilary and Jackson, Kenneth T., eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> During Moses' first year as Parks Commissioner, the Department spent over \$90,000,000 (\$1.2 billion in 2005 dollars) for work relief projects, most of which was provided by the Federal government. New York City was the largest single recipient of Federal largesse during the course of the New Deal. It has been estimated that the city received one-seventh of the total national outlay. See Rodgers, pp. 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Ballon, Hilary and Jackson, Kenneth T., eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, pp. 72-85 and 153-154; Jackson, Kenneth T., ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp.87-88; LaGuardia Collection (located at the Municipal Archives): miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor LaGuardia, August 26, 1935; Martin, Douglas. "A Day in the Water, Floating on Air," *New York Times*. August 15, 1999, p. CY1; Moses, Robert (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation). *6 Years of Progress: 1934-1940*. 1940, p. 20-23; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Crotona Pool." 2001; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Restoration of New York City's WPA-Era Swimming Pools." 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Moses, p.20-21.

<sup>12</sup> In the order of their inauguration, the eleven WPA-era pools included: Hamilton Fish Play Center (Manhattan, no longer exists), Thomas Jefferson Play Center (Manhattan), Astoria Play Center (Queens), Joseph Lyons (Tompkinsville) Play Center (Staten Island), Highbridge Play Center (Manhattan), Sunset Play Center (Brooklyn), Crotona Play Center (Bronx), McCarren Play Center (Brooklyn), Betsy Head Play Center (Brooklyn), Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center (Manhattan), and Red Hook Play Center (Brooklyn).

<sup>13</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: "25,000 at Opening of Harlem Pool," *New York Times*. August 9, 1936, p. N6; Ballon, Hilary and Jackson, Kenneth T., eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, pp. 72-85 and 153-154; Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975, pp. 512-514; LaGuardia Collection (located at the Municipal

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Archives): miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor LaGuardia, August 26, 1935; Thabit, Walter. *How East New York Became A Ghetto*. New York: New York University Press, 2005, p.39.

<sup>14</sup> Thabit, p.39.

<sup>15</sup> "25,000 at Opening..." p. N6.

<sup>16</sup> Work is ongoing as to whether Robert Moses actually actively discouraged minorities from using Parks Department facilities such as the WPA-era swimming pools. Also see: Caro...*The Power Broker* and Ballon, Hilary and Jackson, Kenneth T., eds.

*Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Caro, p. 514.

<sup>18</sup> Ballon and Jackson, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Ballon and Jackson, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Research currently being conducted indicates that the racial composition of pool users may have actually been more complex, and dependent on a variety of factors, including the entrance fee structure, which varied depending on the age of the swimmer as well as the time of day. Also see: Caro...*The Power Broker* and Ballon, Hilary and Jackson, Kenneth T., eds. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> This section adapted from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's Designation Report for the Astoria Park Pool and Play Center (LP-2196), researched and written by Donald Pesa, June 20, 2006. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Abernathy, Charles T., Acting Administrator. "Final Report of the WPA for the City of New York, 1935-1943." Mar. 2, 1943, p. 158; Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975, pp. 456-457, 512-514; Cranz, Galen. *The Politics of Park Design*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982; LaGuardia Collection: miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and members of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment; Latham, W. H. "Swimming Pool Construction," *American Architect and Architecture*. November 1936, pp. 33-34; Moses, Robert (for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation). *Eight Years of Parks Progress: 1934-1942*. 1942, pp. 23-24; Moses, Robert. "Municipal Recreation," *American Architect and Architecture*. November 1936, pp. 21-23 and 28-29; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Astoria Pool." 2001; *New York Times*. October 4, 1934, p. 48; September 22, 1935, p. E10; July 3, 1936, p. 1; Sept 27, 1937, p. 23; "Pavilion Astoria Swimming Pool, New York," *Architectural Forum*. August 1937, pp. 127-28; \_\_\_\_\_, plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York. Additional resources: "25,000 at Opening of Harlem Pool," *New York Times*. August 9, 1936, p. N6; "Baths to Cost \$1,050,000," *New York Times*. October 29, 1935, p. 37; Carr, Ethan (for New York City Department of Parks and Recreation). "Outdoor Public Pools: Exhibition Text and Captions," Exhibition for the Department of Parks and Recreation, 1986; "Moses Files Bathhouse Plans," *New York Times*. October 29, 1935, p.23; "Pattern For Parks," *Architectural Forum Vol. 65*. December 1936, pp. 499-500; "New Swimming Pool will Open Tomorrow," *New York Times*. August 7, 1936, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Moses encourages his engineers to innovate more efficient heating and filtering plants, and underwater lighting that were revolutionary developments in pool technology. Caro, p. 456.

<sup>23</sup> When completed, the bath house would have room for 4,100.

<sup>24</sup> Caro, p. 456.

<sup>25</sup> Patterns for Parks..." p. 369.

<sup>26</sup> Carr, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> This section adapted from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's Designation Report for the Astoria Park Pool and Play Center (LP-2196), researched and written by Donald Pesa, June 20, 2006. Information in this section is based on the following sources: Aymar Embury II obituary, *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1966, p. 47; Aymar Embury II obituary, *Progressive Architecture Vol. 48, no. 1*. January 1967, pp. 47-48; Cormier, Francis, "Some New York City Parks and Parkways: Recreational Improvements Made Since 1934," *Landscape Architecture Vol. 29*. April 1939, p. 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; "Gilmore D. Clarke," *Who's Who in America, Vol. 31*. Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Co., 1961, p. 547; "Gilmore D. Clarke, Landscape Architect," reprinted from *Architecture and Design*. July 1940; Gilmore D. Clarke obituary, *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1982, p. B19; Hatton, John M. "Forty Stores," *Architectural Forum Vol. 88*. May 1948, pp. 93-144; LaGuardia Collection: miscellaneous correspondence between Robert Moses and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia; New York City Directories 1915-34; *New York Times*. September 22, 1935, p. E10; August 27, 1937 p. 36; January 16, 1941, p. 39; June 1, 1947, p. R3; July 10, 1947, p. 36; November 20, 1947, p. 53; December 2, 1947, p. 52; Stern, Robert A. M., et al. *New York 1930: Architecture Between the Two World Wars*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1987, p. 305; United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (10<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, sheet 2451); Ward, James. *Architects in Practice in New York City 1900-1940*. New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989, pp. 20, 33; \_\_\_\_\_, "Interiors' Principles of Commercial Design," *Interiors Vol. 111*. July 1943, pp. 31-35; \_\_\_\_\_, "Match Case Factory," *Architectural Forum Vol. 83*. May 1946, pp.115-117; \_\_\_\_\_, "Mechanical Equipment and Store Design," *Pencil Points Vol. 26*. August 1944, pp. 72-77; \_\_\_\_\_, "Third Annual Collection of Interiors to Come," *Interiors Vol. 102*. January 1943, pp. 21-47; \_\_\_\_\_, "Two Famous Firms Go Modern," *Interiors Vol. 101*. April 1942, pp. 36-41. Additional resources: "Colonial Park to get \$1,000,000 Bathhouse," *New York Times*. May 5, 1936, p. 17; Koyl, George S., ed. "American Architects Directory, Second Edition." (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, under the sponsorship of the American Institute of Architects, 1962); "Manhattan Always Rebuilding to Supply Modern Needs," *New York Times*. October 7, 1928, p. RE1.

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<sup>28</sup> They 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>29</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: “25,000 at Opening of Harlem Pool,” *New York Times*. August 9, 1936, p. N6; Carmody, Deidre. “Parks Department to Start Hiring For the First Time Since Fiscal Crisis” *New York Times*, March 15, 1981, p. 50; “City Pools? ‘99.9 Percent Peaceful,’” *New York Times*. August 7, 1994, p. CY14; “Donation will Keep 32 Public Pools Open,” *New York Times*. May 16, 1991, p. B2; “Koch Mends Fences by Opening a Pool,” *New York Times*. July 15, 1980, p. B2; Marriott, Michel. “A Menacing Ritual is Called Common in New York Pools,” *New York Times*. July 7, 1993, p. A1; Martin, Douglas. “A Day in the Water, Floating on Air,” *New York Times*. August 15, 1999, p. CY1; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, “City Will Begin Repairing 3 of It’s Swimming Pools” in *Daily Plant*, June 25, 1982; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, “Jackie Robinson Park.” 1997; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. “The Restoration of New York City’s W.P.A.-Era Swimming Pools.” 1986; “New Swimming Pool will Open Tomorrow,” *New York Times*. August 7, 1936, p. 15; Rimer, Sara. “Pool, and Pride, Return to the South Bronx,” *New York Times*. August 11, 1985, pp. 1 and 35; Stern, Robert A. M., et al. *New York 1930: Architecture Between the Two World Wars*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1987, p. 716; “Young, Old Get into the Swim,” *Newsday*. June 29, 2003; \_\_\_\_\_, plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.

<sup>30</sup> Koch Mends Fences...” p. B2.

<sup>31</sup> New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, 1986.

<sup>32</sup> To the north of the entrance lobby could be found the mechanical systems for the swimming pool complex, including the filter room, boiler room and treatment tank. To the south of the entrance lobby could be found offices, life guard locker rooms, as well as concession and general storage areas. Additional storage space was located along the interior of the rear (west) facade of the complex, taking advantage of the site’s topography.



## **FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION**

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Interior 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 Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Interior is one of a group of eleven immense new outdoor swimming pool complexes which were opened in the summer of 1936 by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses; that it was the only one of the eleven pools sited in a primarily minority neighborhood; that it was constructed with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration; that the grandeur of the cathedral-like vaulted interior lobby matches the monumental two-story design of the bath house exterior; that soaring vaults, Gothic arches supported by limestone corbels, exposed brick walls featuring bas-relief panels, cascading staircases, and an oblong ticket booth projecting seamlessly from a full-height attached buttress, add to the grandeur of this interior space; that it is the only one of the eleven bath houses to strongly evoke the architecture of another era; that the original and creative use made of modest materials and forms, make it a distinguished, individual design; that the vast scale and elegant detailing of the lobby make it a particularly notable interior space; and that the complex, along with the other WPA-era pools, was a major accomplishment of engineering and architecture, and is recognized as being among the most remarkable public recreational facilities ever constructed in the United States.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Interior, first floor interior consisting of the vaulted entry foyer and the two staircases leading to the second floor locker rooms, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, ticket booth, bas-reliefs, signage and metal grilles, Bradhurst Avenue between West 146<sup>th</sup> Street and West 147<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2052, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair

Stephen Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Thomas F. Pike, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners

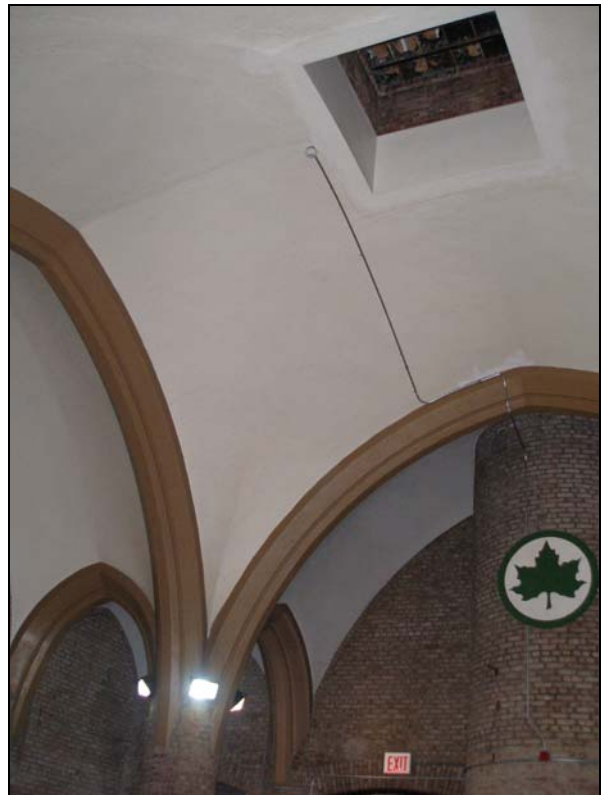


**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Rear (West) Wall and Northern Stairwell, Borough of Manhattan** *Photo: Jennifer Most, 2007*



**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Northern Cascading Stairwell, Borough of Manhattan** *Photo: Jennifer Most, 2007*





**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Rear (West) Wall and Southern Stairwell (l), Borough of Manhattan**

*Photos: Daniel Avila, 2006 (l), Jennifer Most, 2007 (r)*



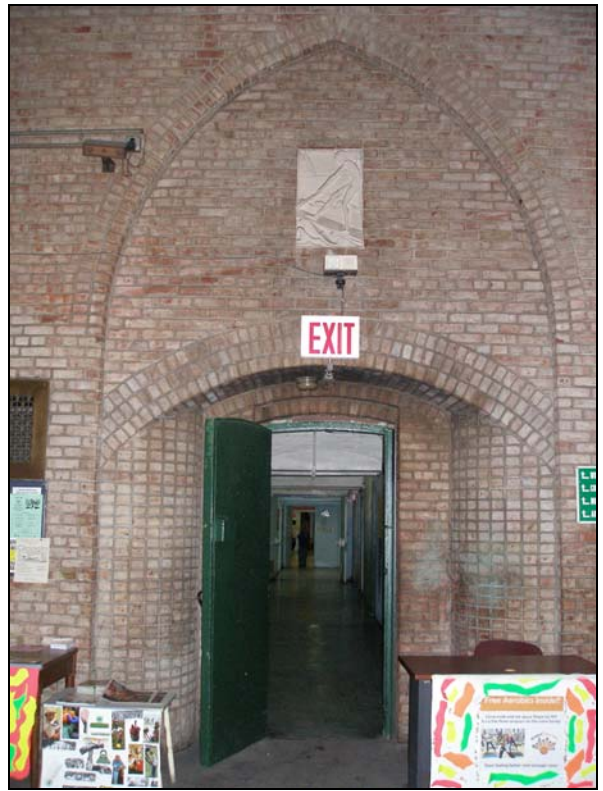
**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: View Looking Northeast with Ticket Booth, Borough of Manhattan**

*Photo: Jennifer Most, 2007*





**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Service Area Entry (North) (l), Service Area Entry (South) (r), Borough of Manhattan**



*Photos: Jennifer Most, 2007*



**Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Service Entry Reveal Detail (South) (l), Bas Relief Detail (North) (r), Borough of Manhattan**



*Photos: Jennifer Most, 2007 (l)  
Daniel Avila 2006 (r)*





Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Front (East) Wall and Ticket Booth, Borough of Manhattan

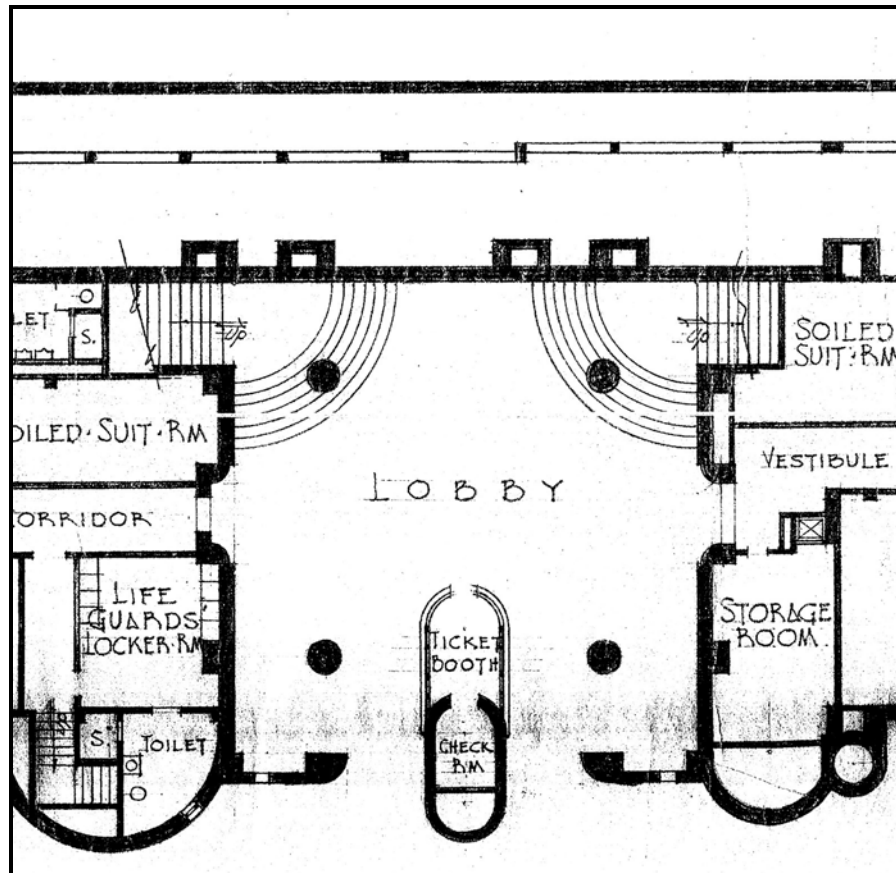
*Photo: Jennifer Most, 2007*



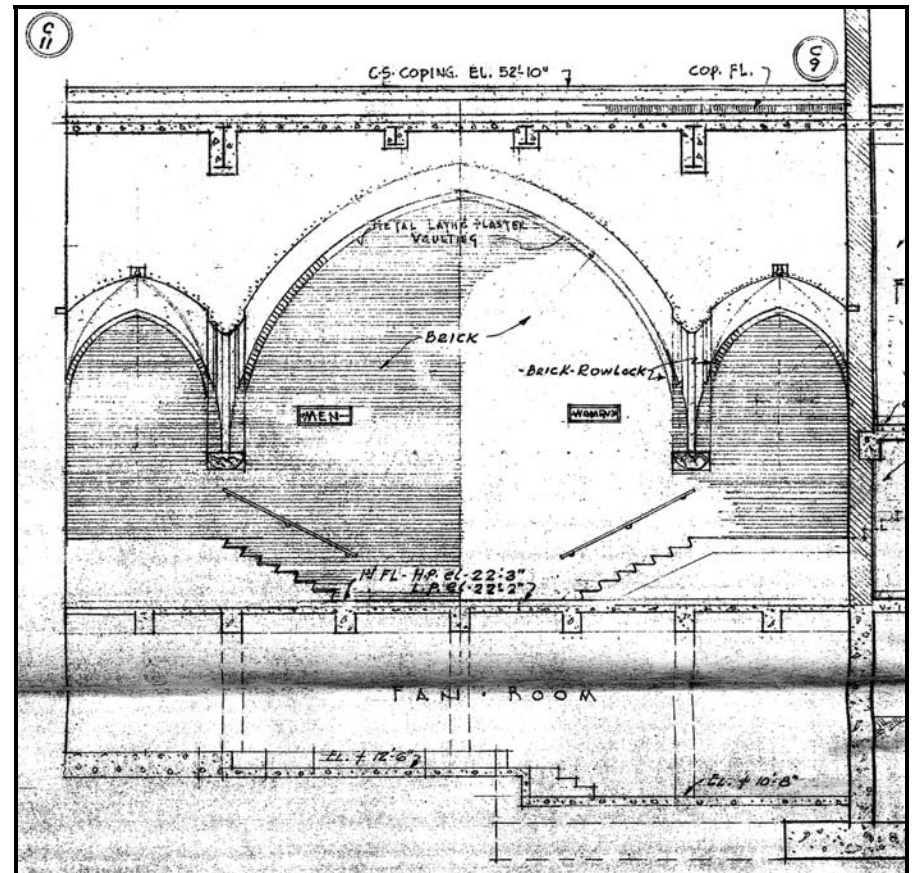
Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Bath House Interior: Ticket Booth (l), Floral Corbel Detail (r), Borough of Manhattan



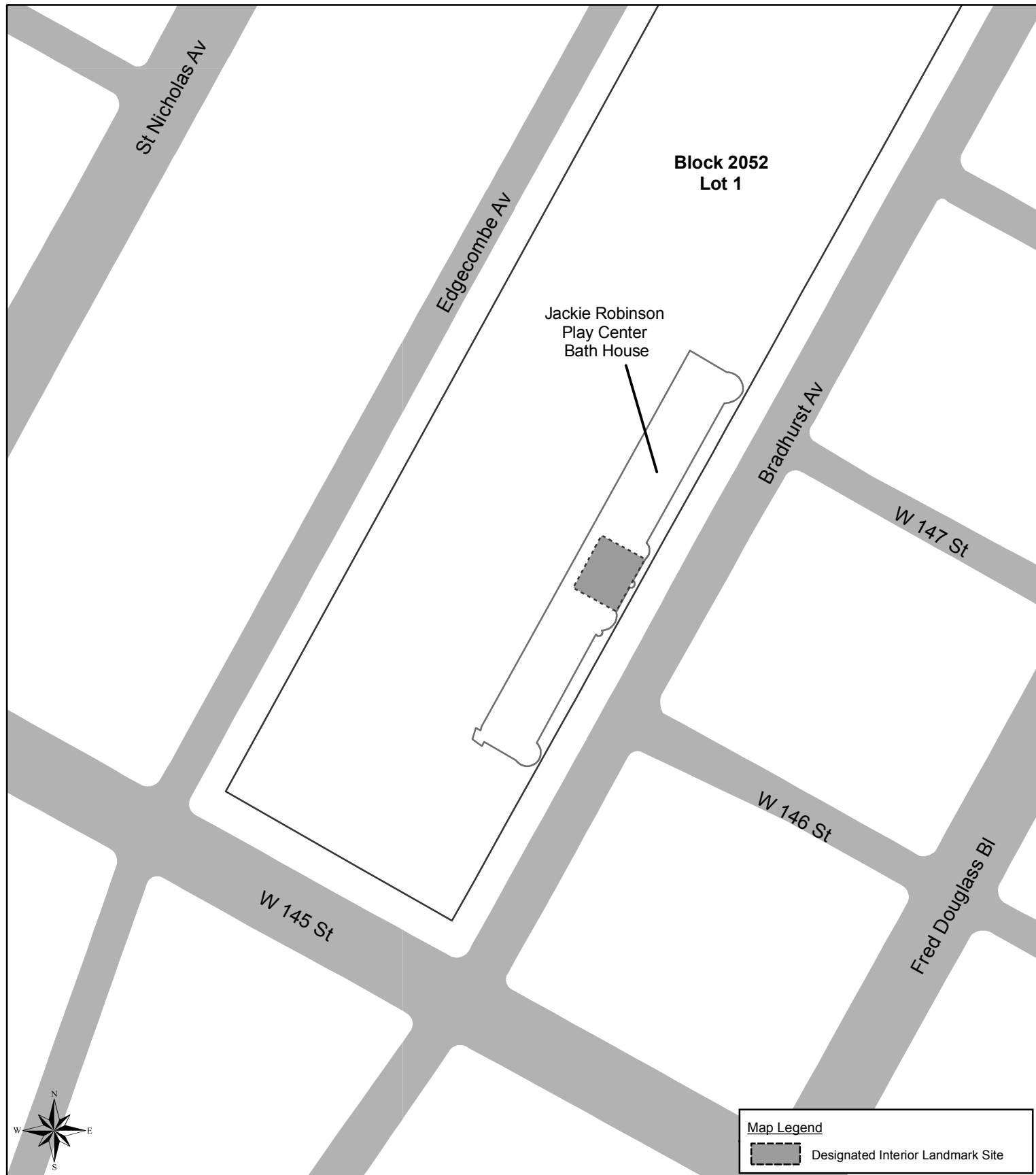
*Photos: Jennifer Most, 2007 (l), Daniel Avila, 2006 (r)*



Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Bath House  
 First Floor Plan, Lobby  
 Prepared by Harry Ahrens, July 1936  
 (Portion of Drawing No. MA-14, N 400/500)  
 Courtesy of Parks Department Archives, Flushing, Queens



Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Bath House  
 Section Looking West, Lobby  
 Prepared by Harry Ahrens, October 1936  
 (Portion of Drawing No. MA-14, N 509)  
 Courtesy of Parks Department Archives, Flushing, Queens



# **JACKIE ROBINSON (COLONIAL PARK) PLAY CENTER BATH HOUSE INTERIOR (LP-2239)**

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 2052, Lot 1 in part,  
consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

Designated: April 10, 2007