

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 Crotona Play Center

other names/site number X010 Crotona Park

2. Location

street & number 1700 Fulton Avenue [] not for publication

city or town Bronx [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Bronx code 005 zip code 10457

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 as 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.)

Kurtis J. Purpant

DSHPO

2/23/10

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
State or 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

4-28-15

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property

Bronx, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
1		sites
1	2	structures
		objects
4	2	TOTAL

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE/ outdoor recreation

LANDSCAPE/ park

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE/ outdoor recreation

LANDSCAPE/ park

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/ moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

Concrete & Stone

roof Brick & Concrete

other _____

Narrative Description

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

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property

Bronx, New York
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 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 that 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 boxes that apply.)

- 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

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Landscape Architecture

Community Planning and Development

Period of Significance:

1934-1936

Significant Dates:

1934-1936

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Herbert D. Magoon, Architect; Aymar Embury II,

Consulting Architect; Gilmore D. Clarkem Landscape Architect

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 Building Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: _____

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property

Bronx, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 9.32 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 592921 4521577
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

2 18

4 18

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 Michelle Langlie

organization NYC Department of Parks & Recreation date 4/12/2010

street & number Olmsted Center – Flushing Meadows Corona Park telephone 718-760-6677

city or town Flushing state NY zip code 11368

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 SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name NYC Department of Parks & Recreation

street & number Olmsted Center telephone 718-760-6549

city or town Flushing state NY zip code 11368

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, D.C. 20503

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

Crotona Play Center – Description

Summary Paragraph

The following narrative is quoted from:

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report (LP-2232)* (New York: City of New York, June 26, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Crotona Play Center Bath House Interior Designation Report (LP-2233)* (New York: City of New York, June 26, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most

Set amidst the rock outcroppings characteristic of Crotona Park, the Crotona Play Center is considered one of the great WPA Art Moderne structures of the Depression era in New York. The main entrance, a towered monumental arched gateway composed of robust geometric forms, is reached from Fulton Avenue by way of an imposing stairway. The entry courtyard features a second-story gallery edged by a decorative brick railing that repeats the half-circle patterning employed for the balconies on the gateway facade. Quarter-round cast-concrete buttresses and arched clerestory windows are notable features of the exterior of the locker room sections of the bath house. The main entrance to the pools from the bath house is distinguished by the decorative brickwork of its segmental arch, and by the ibis-topped center post designed by Frederick G. R. Roth. The bas-relief roundels depicting humorous swimming-related subjects on the rear walls of the seating niches along the eastern edge of the pool complex, also sculpted by Roth, further illustrate the close relationship of fine art and architecture in the WPA-era pools. The decorative arched openings and buttresses of the adjoining filter house reiterate some of the forms utilized for the bath house. Subsequent changes to the complex included the filling-in of the diving pool (1995) and the alteration of the rectangular wading pool into a hexagonal-shaped wading pool that was later filled in (post-1980s). In 1996, the former wading pool area, which was renamed the Bathgate Playground, underwent \$1 million in renovations under the administration of Mayor Giuliani, during which swings, play equipment, safety surfacing, wrought iron fencing, and the asphalt pathways were added to the area. Also added as part of the 1996 renovations of the former wading pool area were the three freestanding sprinklers modeled on the original Roth-designed ibis sculptures. Significant subsequent changes to the Crotona Play Center bath house interior include the replacement of the bath house's original casement windows, the introduction of additional doors and doorways, the shortening of window openings to accommodate the doorways of the south wall of the women's locker room and the north wall of the men's locker room, and the painting of surfaces including the undersides of the arched buttresses and the floors.

Plan and Circulation

The Crotona Play Center is bounded roughly by 174th Street to the north, 172nd Street to the south, Fulton Avenue to the west, and Crotona Park to the east. Due to the rocky character of Crotona Park and the presence of a naturally hilly landscape, the Play Center complex is located above grade, accessible via the stairs of the main entrance along Fulton Avenue at 173rd Street. Both the bath house and pool deck can be accessed through this main entrance, as well as via additional entry points along the boundary walls of the pool deck area. Gauged brick archways beneath the north and south towers of the main entrance offer access to additional areas of the bath house, including offices lining the second story gallery of the entrance courtyard, and a small rooftop viewing area above the first aid building to the south. Entry to the bath house is also possible from the pool deck, as well as from the former wading pool area to the north (now Bathgate Playground).

Upon ascending the main entrance stairway and passing beneath the soaring brick archway of the bath house west facade, patrons of the Crotona Play Center will find themselves in an open-air entrance courtyard. Originally, admission tickets to the Play Center complex were purchased at a ticket booth

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

located along the rear (east) wall of the entrance courtyard. Patrons would then be led through one of two gauged brick archways on either side of the ticket booth to the men's and women's locker rooms. Unlike those in the other play centers, the men's and women's locker rooms of the Crotona Play Center bath house interior are arranged as adjoining mirror-image spaces. Each is dramatically articulated by a series of arched buttresses which, springing from low lateral supports, span the entire width of the space. Arched clerestory windows and glazed terra-cotta tiling further characterize each of the voluminous double-height spaces. After changing into swimsuits and storing clothes and valuables with clerks in the available basket space, male and female patrons would pass from the mirror-image locker rooms, through the mandatory shower rooms, past the required footbaths, and finally under the ibis-topped archway of the bath house south facade, before arriving on the pool deck. The two pools found here, the main swimming and former diving pools, are surrounded by ample promenades, an expanse of concrete bleachers, and a series of seating niches.

Like the Play Center bath house, the former wading pool area is similarly located above grade, accessible via staircase at Fulton Avenue just north of 173rd Street. Entry to the former wading pool area is also possible from pedestrian pathways within Crotona Park to the north and to the east. The former wading pool was rectangular in plan, surrounded on all sides by an ample promenade lined with trees and benches. The filled-in wading pool area is currently used as a children's playground. Access to the bath house facilities, including a women's bathroom, and originally a boy's bathroom, is possible from the former wading pool area. An extensive network of pedestrian pathways is found throughout Crotona Park. Laid to complement the natural topography of the park, the pedestrian pathway that forms the eastern boundary of the designated landmark site follows a curved trajectory before joining the pedestrian pathways to the north and to the south of the Play Center complex.

The Bath House

The design of the Crotona Play Center bath house is particularly striking due to its position high above the grade of Fulton Avenue. At the top of the granite staircase of the main entrance, two towers rise from the robust geometric forms of the north and south entry pavilions, united by a soaring brick archway marked with the words "CROTONA PLAY CENTER" in bronze lettering. The first four risers of the granite staircase extend beyond, and curve in a quarter-round to meet the massive rectangular sidewalls of the stairway. As is typical for all of the Play Center's brick surfaces, the sidewalls are laid in a modified English bond of header courses separated by two stretcher courses and capped with cast stone coping. A brick-paved landing laid in a basket weave pattern and edged with granite block meets patrons at the fourth riser.

The north and south entry pavilions, located at the top of the main stairway, are nearly identical. On the west facade, each pavilion features a segmental gauged brick arched opening at the second story, distinguished by a decorative brick balconette railing in a half-circle patterning with cast stone coping and a cast stone base. At the first story, the north pavilion features a segmental gauged brick arched window opening with a flush cast stone sill that is narrower than the second-story balconette. The south entry pavilion differs with a full-height opening that is similar in width to the second-story balconette, but also features a segmental gauged brick arch. The rooflines of both the north and south pavilions are lined with cast stone coping.

Geometric towers, rectangular in plan, rise out of the north and south entry pavilions of the Play Center. Each features a brick corbel that begins flush with the tower just above the second-story roofline of the pavilions and cants outwards until the point at which it is capped by a matching cast stone detail. This feature is repeated on the four sides of each tower, with slightly wider corbels and cast stone details on the north and south faces. Spanning between the cast stone details and above the cast stone coping of each tower are two horizontal cast stone fins resembling floating louvers. Two bronze clocks, which are currently missing hands, hang from the exterior-facing facades of each tower at roughly the height of the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 3

cast stone fins. Above the fins, each tower is capped with a rectangular glass block enclosure that is several feet in height. The archway of the main entrance to the Play Center spans between the two towers and is capped by a thick cast stone band featuring three semicircular details at its center. The curved underside of the arch features brickwork laid in an intricate herringbone pattern set within a slightly recessed panel. Three diamond-shaped cutouts centered under the arch originally lit the entranceway.

The open-air courtyard at the top of the main entrance stairway repeats many of the same motifs found on the west facade of the main entrance. Directly beneath the archway of the main entrance, on the interior facing walls of the north and south tower, flat arched openings at the first-story feature stepped brick corbels and support second-story balconettes with the same half-circle patterning and cast stone details found on the west facade. Recessed pilasters featuring decorative brickwork help support the segmental gauged brick arches of the second-story openings. At the base of the north tower, to the right, a cast stone cornerstone reads "AD 1936." A soldier course of brick lines each brick face of the entrance courtyard, at both the first and second stories, stopping shy of each corner where they would otherwise meet. The brick paving of the courtyard area is laid in a basket weave.

The rear (east) wall of the entrance courtyard is characterized by a wide, flat arched opening at its center, which contained the original ticket booth for the complex, and which is flanked on either side by the segmental gauged brick archways that lead to the men's and women's locker rooms. The northern and southern walls of the entrance courtyard are a mirror image of each other and feature a full-width segmental gauged brick archway leading to the first-story gallery. A stepped cast stone band lines the galleries between the first and second stories. Overhead, the second-story gallery is edged by a decorative brick railing that repeats the half-circle patterning employed on the balconettes of the main entrance. The railings are capped by cast stone handrails. Small cast stone posts further subdivide the central span of the rear (east) gallery railing. A series of cast stone capped, rectangular brick columns surround the second-story gallery and support a sloped wooden roof with overhanging eaves. Surrounding the second-story gallery, four office doorways feature flat gauged brick arches. Additional full-height openings on the north and south walls of the second story feature segmental gauged brick arches and either the same balconettes found on the west facade of the main entrance or non-historic wrought iron fencing. In places, damage to the half-circle patterning of the balconette railings has resulted in the loss of some original material.

Beyond the open-air entrance courtyard lies the actual bath house structure. Essentially rectangular in plan, the two longer sides of the bath house run parallel to 173rd and 174th Streets, with the shorter sides parallel to Fulton Avenue. The four facades of the bath house are constructed of brick laid in the typical bond for the site and originally featured cast stone coping, which is currently obscured by metal coping. Both the north and south facades of the bath house are edged by a granite base trim. The rear (east) wall of the entrance courtyard is also the west facade of the bath house structure.

The south facade of the bath house faces the pool deck of the Play Center complex. Segmental gauged brick arches span nine single-story brick pilasters along this facade, subdividing the wall into seven recessed bays. Cast stone blocks and quarter-round buttresses top the seven central pilasters, while cast stone coping lines each of the bays. Each of the pilasters is further detailed by slightly canted brick edging. Arched clerestory window openings with simple cast stone sills sit atop gently canted brick panels that are further recessed beneath the arches of each bay. The double door entry to the women's locker room, located beneath the clerestory window of the rightmost (eastern) bay is a later addition. The recessed second story of the bath house structure is also subdivided into seven bays, demarcated by the quarter-round buttresses. Each of the second-story bays contains two rectangular windows beneath a flat gauged brick arch. The two rectangular louvered vents edging the central bay are original to the bath house structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 4

Two imposing box-like pavilions flank the south facade of the bath house to the east and to the west and are distinguished by decorative brickwork and sculptural cast stone details. Each of the pavilions features a recessed central panel containing a vast segmental arch composed of gauged brick and bluestone courses and trimmed by cast stone. Sculpted cast stone pilasters support each of the arches. The central pilaster of the righthand (eastern) pavilion, which is divided into two bays, is especially notable for the stylized ibis sculpture that sits atop it, designed by sculptor Frederick G. R. Roth. The left-hand (western) pavilion is divided into three uneven bays by two simpler geometric pilasters. The right-hand pavilion features rolling steel doors that lead to the men's and women's shower rooms, situated on either side of the ibis-topped pilaster, and a pair of louvered vents above. Three granite blocks, approximately two-feet in height and three-feet in depth, project outwards from the cast stone pilasters of this pavilion. The left-hand pavilion features rectangular window openings atop recessed concrete panels and a trio of louvered vents above. Rectangular cast stone blocks sit flush against the facades of each pavilion, a few feet below the roofline, above which the corners of the building are clipped.

Further to the east, the bath house continues at a single-story height, recessed from the main facade. Housing the men's shower room, this portion of the south facade is characterized simply by two flat gauged brick arched window openings and simple cast stone sills. To the west, the bath house continues, similarly, at a single-story height, recessed from the main facade. Housing office space, this portion of the south facade contains only a single flat gauged brick arched window opening with simple cast stone sill.

The north facade of the Crotona Play Center bath house faces the former wading pool area and is a mirror image of the south facade, with a few notable exceptions. The single-story, recessed area to the east of the left-hand (eastern) pavilion of the north facade features an entrance to the women's bathroom and is characterized by a flat gauged brick arched doorway which sits beneath a cast stone band reading "GIRLS" and a rectangular glass transom. A second opening in this wall is comprised of a flat gauged brick arched window opening with flush cast stone sill. In place of rolling steel doors, the ibis-topped, left-hand pavilion of the north facade features two doors, which originally led to a "mother's room" and a "director's office." A narrow window opening with a flat gauged brick arch with a flush cast stone sill also pierces the wall of the left-hand pavilion. Similar narrow window openings are located on either side of the right-hand (western) pavilion. The central bay of the right-hand pavilion originally featured an entrance to the boy's bathroom, but is now filled in with a concrete panel beneath a rectangular window. The single-story recessed area to the west of the right-hand pavilion features a single flat gauged brick arched window opening; the west facade of this area features two similar window openings.

Due to the slope of Crotona Park east of the Play Center complex, much of the east facade of the bath house is not readily visible. A narrow ramped service walkway located between the east facade and the retaining wall of the park, however, makes it possible to view the entire facade at a close distance. This walkway allows for entry into service areas of the bath house at the basement level, as well as entry to the pool deck area to the south, currently closed off by a wrought iron gate. Similar to the north and south facades of the bath house, segmental gauged brick arches span between a series of pilasters along the east facade, subdividing it into six bays that sit high atop the concrete basement wall. Arched clerestory window openings with simple cast stone sills rest similarly above gently canted brick panels that are further recessed beneath the arches of each bay. A double door service entrance is located at the basement level of the third bay from the south (left), while basement-level windows at the first and second bays appear to have been filled in. To the left and right of the series of bays, projecting brick panels mimic the box-like pavilions of the north and south facades. Each projecting panel features a narrow, slightly recessed gauged brick arched window opening with a simple cast stone sill that sits atop gently canted brick panels at a slightly lower height than the clerestory windows of the bays. At the ground level, returns from the granite base trim of the north and south facades are visible.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 5

Locker Rooms

Unlike the locker rooms of the other WPA-era pool complexes, the men's and women's locker rooms of the Crotona Play Center are arranged as adjoining mirror-image spaces, with the men's locker room situated to the north and the women's locker room to the south. Each of the locker rooms is dramatically articulated by a series of arched buttresses which, springing from low lateral supports, span the width of the space from north to south, and support the flat roof of the bath house structure above. Running from east to west between each of the arched buttresses, five shallow concrete beams help support the roof. Rectangular in plan, the four walls of each of the locker rooms is tiled to a height of 6'-5" with glazed terracotta tiles that project from the wall approximately one inch, and which feature rounded edges where they meet the wall. The remaining wall areas are white-painted cement plaster. Each of the locker rooms is divided into seven bays by the six arched buttresses.

At the first-story of the double-height interior space, each of the bays along the south wall of the women's locker room is punctuated by an arched clerestory window opening. Each sill of the clerestory windows is notched into the glazed tile paneling below. The double door entry to the pool deck area from the women's locker room, located beneath the clerestory window of the leftmost (eastern) bay, is a later addition. At the second-story of the double-height space, the south wall projects forward several feet into the women's locker room. Similarly subdivided into seven bays by the six arched buttresses, each of the bays of the second story is punctuated by a pair of rectangular clerestory window openings, recessed into the wall above an extremely sloped sill. The two rectangular louvered vents edging the central bay are original to the bath house structure.

The north wall of the women's locker room is also subdivided into seven bays by the arched buttresses, and also features a projecting second story. While the north wall does not have any fenestration at the first story, each of the second-story bays is punctuated by a pair of rectangular clerestory window openings, recessed into the wall above an extremely sloped sill, similar to the second-story windows of the south wall. Along the north wall, the second-story window openings face onto a shallow, recessed channel that runs between the two locker rooms, allowing more light into the space. A counter for checking clothing and valuables originally ran almost the entire length of the north wall, but has since been removed. Unit heaters continue to run overhead along this wall today. Towards the right extent of the north wall, a single doorway leading to the men's locker room is a later addition.

Two openings pierce the east wall of the women's locker room. A projecting brick-framed segmental arch characterizes the larger of the two openings, located to the right of center along the east wall. Originally unenclosed, this archway has been filled in to accommodate a non-historic, flat arched double door. Two projecting, tiled pilasters flank this doorway, concealing piping to a height of approximately

seven feet, but are non-original to the site. Further to the right, a single doorway leading to a storage area does not appear on original plans for the Play Center bath house; the tiles lining the locker room walls, however, do wrap around the door frame, indicating that the plans were either changed previous to construction, or that the tiles may have been re-laid. The louvered vent centered high on the east wall is original to the locker room interior.

The west elevation of the women's locker room features a flat arched niche with rounded reveals, recessed from the wall approximately three inches. Within the niches, a set of double doors leads to the women's shower area. To the left of this doorway, a water fountain sits recessed within a shorter and deeper niche featuring similarly rounded reveals and lined with a lighter colored glazed tile.

The north and south walls of the men's locker room are mirror images of their counterparts within the women's locker room. Unlike the women's locker room, however, the men's locker room did originally

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 6

feature an entrance beneath the arched clerestory window of the rightmost (eastern) bay of the north facade, leading to the former wading pool area. Both the west and east elevations of the men's locker room are also similar to those of the women's locker room, differing only slightly in the placement of the openings along the walls. Towards the left extent of the east wall of the men's locker room, an additional doorway leads to a flight of service stairs. The glazed tiles lining the locker room walls wrap around this doorframe.

Used as gymnasiums in non-summer months, the floors of each of the locker room interiors have been painted. The floor of the women's locker room is painted for use as a basketball court in a scheme of blue, red, yellow, and white, while the men's locker room is painted for hop-scotch and other youth-oriented games, using similar colors. Two non-historic, freestanding basketball posts are currently located within the women's locker room. The arched buttresses of the women's locker room interior have been painted green along their underside, while the arched buttresses of the men's locker room interior have been painted entirely orange. Non-historic acoustic tiles line the undersides of the projecting second stories of the north and south facades of the women's and men's locker rooms. The same non-historic acoustic tiles line the underside of the flat ceiling, in the spaces between the shallow beams. Non-historic parks signage, lighting, and fire safety equipment have been hung from all of the interior facades. Additional non-historic light fixtures hang from the ceiling. The rows of free-standing metal lockers found throughout the space are removable.

Pool Deck Area

The pool deck area of the Crotona Play Center is composed of a rectangular main swimming pool and a semicircular former diving pool, located to the south of the bath house structure. At the northwest corner of the pool deck area, a flat-roofed overpass featuring a brick facade and concrete support beams projects from the south facade of the bath house, connecting the bath house to a building still used as a first aid station, and under which patrons may pass to access the handicap ramp along Fulton Avenue. A single doorway with a flat gauged brick arch pierces the south facade of the bath house beneath the overpass, while a mirror image of this doorway pierces the northern wall of the first aid building. The pool-facing elevation of the overpass features a massive concrete lintel that is flush with the brick facade. The pool-facing elevation of the first aid building, which sits slightly forward from the overpass, is characterized by a large window opening beneath a flat gauged brick arch with a flush cast stone sill. The Fulton Avenue-facing elevation runs continuously with the west facade of the bath house structure. Cast stone coping and granite base trim run the length of the facades of both the overpass and the first aid building.

Abutting the first aid building to the south are massive concrete bleachers, which line the main swimming pool to the west and follow continuously along the semicircular curve of the former diving pool until the point of abutment with the south facade of the filter house. The bleachers take the form of exaggerated concrete stairs with a rounded profile. The first riser of the bleachers overhangs the east facade of the first aid building and the west facade of the filter house by approximately one foot. Six staircases can be found along the bleachers, created by tucking smaller concrete risers between the larger bleacher stairs. One of the staircases abuts the first aid building to the north and originally led to an opening in the otherwise blank south facade that formerly offered access to a rooftop viewing area, now closed off. A narrower staircase to the west of the main swimming pool appears to be solely for ease in climbing the massive bleachers, while the remaining staircases lead to ancillary exits, all of which have been either gated or permanently blocked. The ancillary exits, located to the west of the main swimming pool, are flanked by large rectangular brick piers that are capped by cast stone. A wrought iron fence sits atop the concrete curb that runs along the bleachers, denoting the western and southern boundaries of the pool deck area. Several hexagonal concrete piers located along the top riser of the bleachers may have originally held historic lampposts.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 7

At the northeast corner of the pool deck area is a brick retaining wall that is capped by cast stone and features a soldier course at its base. At a distance of approximately 20 feet south of the rectangular pier at the northern extent of this retaining wall, the wall turns sharply 90-degrees to the west before curving back to the south and continuing along the east side of the pool deck until the point at which it overlaps the west facade of the filter house. A wrought iron fence runs the length of the retaining wall above the cast stone coping, terminating at the point where it abuts the northern facade of the filter house. Recessed within this retaining wall are twelve seating niches separated by massive rectangular brick piers. A streamlined overhanging canopy runs continuously along the length of the twelve niches, featuring rounded ends that extend approximately three feet past the first and last of the seating niches. On the rear walls of each niche are twelve bas-relief roundels depicting humorous swimming-related subjects. Squat brick piers support wooden benches within each niche. Small cutouts centered over each bench may have originally lit the spaces.

South of the seating niches, to the east of the main swimming pool, sits the filter house, a single-story brick structure that replicates many of the forms and motifs of the bath house. Segmental gauged brick arches span between brick pilasters, subdividing the west facade of the filter house into seven recessed bays. Fluted, rounded cast stone and brick details cap each of the six pilasters, rising more than two feet above the roofline of the filter house, and back a depth of more than five feet. Each of the pilasters is further detailed by slightly canted brick edging. Arched clerestory window openings with simple cast stone sills sit recessed beneath each of the arches, resting above solid concrete bands that were originally obscured by a marquee suspended from tiebacks. The window openings of the first, central, and last bays have been filled in to accommodate nonhistoric rectangular louvered vents. Beneath the smooth concrete bands run fluted cast stone strips. A series of glass block windows originally sat recessed beneath the fluted strips, but have been replaced by concrete panels. Above a granite base trim, an additional band of granite sits within each bay. A pair of granite blocks featuring a curved profile also sits within each bay, originally supporting a series of wooden benches, none of which remain.

Similar to the bath house, box-like pavilions flank the west facade of the filter house to the north and to the south. A vast segmental arch composed of gauged brick and bluestone courses spans the recessed area between the broad pilasters of each pavilion. Recessed beneath the larger arches are gauged brick arches of a considerably shallower depth. Full-height glass block windows sit further recessed beneath the shallower arches. Rectangular granite flower boxes with rounded corners, no longer used for this purpose, rest at the base of each glass block window, coming to the same height as the granite base trim of the rest of the filter house.

Further to the south, the filter house continues at a slightly lower height, recessed from the main facade, and featuring a single doorway demarcated by a flat gauged brick archway and a raised granite threshold. To the north, the filter house steps back twice, as well as twice down in height. The portion of the facade just north of the left-hand (northern) pavilion of the filter house features a pair of non-historic double doors beneath a rectangular transom, on a raised granite threshold.

The south facade of the filter house abuts the massive concrete bleachers of the pool deck area. The eastern two-thirds of the facade is recessed slightly from the rest of the facade and features a single, semicircular gauged brick opening above a flush cast stone lintel. Although currently filled in with concrete, the opening originally contained a semicircular casement window with moveable sash. The north facade of the filter house is essentially a blank brick wall laid, as the rest of the filter house, in the typical bond for the site. The four facades of the filter house retain their original cast stone coping.

The east facade of the filter house, which is not visible from the pool deck area, is largely obscured from view by fencing and vegetation within Crotona Park. Each of the facade's nine bays features a recessed brick panel flanked by shallow brick pilasters. Originally centered within each bay were nine round

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 8

casement windows with hinged bottom sashes. Due to the slope of Crotona Park and the presence of a large service entry, only the basement and first stories of the first three bays can be readily observed. The windows of these bays were placed slightly higher on the facade than the windows of the other bays, while the granite base trim that runs along the facade to the north here becomes a band that separates the basement from the first story. The second bay from the left (south) features a double door service entry at the basement level, and its original portal window has apparently been replaced by a rectangular louvered vent. Beginning at the left pilaster that flanks the second bay, a concrete ledge protrudes from the granite trim, below which the brick facade juts out approximately one foot from the rest of the facade. Further to the south, the basement level of the filter house is recessed back from the main facade and continues as the foundation of the pool deck area bleachers. The east facade of the filter house retains its original cast stone coping.

Evenly spaced along the west promenade of the pool deck are eight non-historic lampposts. Five non-historic lampposts line the promenade to the east of the main swimming pool as well as the semicircular promenade surrounding the former diving pool, while an additional two lining the promenade between the main swimming and former diving pools. A possibly historic flagpole sits between the main swimming and former diving pools, where the diving boards were once located. Lining the main swimming pool to the north and to the east, as well as the former diving pool area, are several non-historic metal guard rails. The main swimming pool has also been made handicap accessible by means of a ramp and railing at the northwest corner. Two hexagonal, conical filters sit in their original positions, centered within the main swimming pool. Three water fountains can be found on the pool deck area - in front of the first aid building, by the curved retaining wall, as well as by the former diving pool. Currently a chain-link fence separates the areas of the pool deck containing the main swimming and former diving pools.

Former Wading Pool Area

Located along Fulton Avenue between 173rd and 174th Streets, the former wading pool area of the Crotona Play Center complex is bounded by non-historic pedestrian pathways to the north and to the east, the bath house to the south, and a series of low-rising brick retaining walls to the west. The southernmost retaining wall, which abuts the north facade of the bath house, runs northwards along the western

boundary of the former wading pool area, turning 90-degrees to the west at the point where it becomes the northern wall of the service building along Fulton Avenue. A foot-high concrete curb continues along the western boundary of the former wading pool area until it abuts another retaining wall south of the staircase landing, which in turn becomes the southern sidewall of the former wading pool area entrance stairway. A matching retaining wall to the north breaks for the entrance to the handicap access ramp. The various retaining walls of the former wading pool area are laid in the typical bond for the landmark site and feature granite base trim and cast stone coping, topped with non-historic wrought iron fencing.

Some time before the 1980s, the original rectangular wading pool was altered into a smaller, hexagonal-shaped pool. Although it is unclear when the altered pool was ultimately filled in, a \$1 million renovation project completed in 1996 under the administration of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is largely responsible for the appearance of the former wading pool area today. The 1996 alterations to the former wading pool area included the addition of swings, play equipment, safety surfacing, wrought iron fencing, and the asphalt pathways that form portions of the northern and eastern boundaries of the wading pool area. Also added as part of the 1996 renovations are the three free-standing sprinklers modeled on the original Roth designed ibis sculptures found on the north and south facades of the bath house. Other notable features of the former wading pool area are the planted trees, non-historic park benches, water fountains, flag pole, and chess and checker tables. The brick landing at the top of the entrance stairway to the former wading pool area is laid in a herringbone pattern. A granite plaque inset identifying the area, known today as Bathgate Playground, is set with the herringbone landing at the top of the staircase.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 9

The Surrounding Park

The entrance stairway to the former wading pool area is located along Fulton Avenue between 173rd and 174th Streets. Like the main entrance stairway to the Play Center complex, the granite stairs of the former wading pool area are flanked by brick sidewalls featuring cast stone coping and granite base trim. At street level and at the seventh riser, brick landings are paved in herringbone patterns and edged with granite. The sidewalls of the stairway continue as brick retaining walls, curving to the north and to the south of the stairway. To the north, a handicap access ramp was integrated seamlessly into the site as part of the 1996 renovations of the former wading pool area. The design of the handicap access ramp is mimicked by the retaining walls of the enclosed grassy area south of the stairway, including the two square cast stone capped piers that mark the entry to the actual ramp to the north. The southern end of this retaining wall abuts a similar brick pier at the point where it meets the retaining wall of a freestanding service pavilion. Two curving brick and cast stone capped retaining walls flank either side of the service pavilion, which was likely constructed after 1940. The facade of the service pavilion building features two cast stone capped pilasters between which spans a cast stone beam reading "SERVICE." A pair of double doors sits beneath the beam, while a slightly peaked roof sits above. South of the service pavilion, another brick retaining wall continues southwards, abutting a massive, square cast stone capped pier to the north of the main entrance to the Crotona Play Center. A matching cast stone pier lies to the south of the main entrance as well.

South of the pier located to the south of the main entrance, a concrete handicap access ramp with iron handrails was incorporated into the site during the 1984 renovations. Beginning south of the handicap access ramp, and continuing to the southern boundary of the landmark site at the approximate intersection of Fulton Avenue and 172nd Street, a steeply sloped grassy area, characterized by the jagged rock outcroppings typical of the rest of Crotona Park, is enclosed by a low-rising wrought iron fence atop a concrete curb. Two L-shaped ancillary staircases are set into the slope, adjoining the ancillary exits atop the pool deck bleachers to the west of the main swimming pool. Both of the granite ancillary staircases are lined by tall brick and cast stone capped sidewalls featuring brick soldier courses at bases of the interior-facing sides, and granite base trim on the Fulton Avenue-facing elevations. Closer to Fulton Avenue, each staircase features a large brick pier capped with cast stone and featuring granite base trim that originally supported a flagpole. Each of the staircases features two brick landings laid in a herringbone pattern and edged with granite. Above the sidewall of the left-handed (northern) ancillary staircase, a rough-cut masonry retaining wall is visible along the retaining wall of the pool deck bleachers. To the south, the upper landing of the right-most (southern) ancillary staircase runs continuously into the semicircular pedestrian pathway that lines the southern extent of the former diving pool area. The staircase sidewall also curves continuously along this pathway, descending into the ground until it is ultimately embedded within the hillside.

Approximately 90 feet east of the southeast corner of the filter house, an asphalt pedestrian pathway sinks below grade, forming a forked service entry to the filter house. The massive curved concrete retaining walls of the service entry are covered in a brick veneer that replicates the typical bond of the landmark site. The walls are capped with cast stone and lined with a projecting concrete curb. A chain-link fence runs along the top of the walls. The northern fork of the service entry terminates at a dead end, while the northern retaining wall of the west fork abuts the eastern facade of the filter house. To the south, the wall forms a flat archway that abuts the eastern facade of the filter house, leading to additional service space. A chain-link gate ultimately blocks the public from access to these service areas of the filter house.

The pedestrian pathways found to the south and to the east of the Play Center complex were originally installed during the WPA-era. The semicircular pedestrian pathway that lines the southern wall of the former diving pool area retains many of its original asphalt hexagonal paving blocks. The rectangular landing that lies south of this pathway, where a freestanding brick concession stand once stood, also retains many of its original hexagonal blocks. A series of metal panels hang from the wrought iron fencing

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 10

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

of the former diving pool, and have been painted with scenes of aquatic wildlife by local school children. Several louvered vents encased in concrete boxes are set into the ground along the eastern portion of the retaining wall of the former diving pool area. The vents likely provided ventilation for the service areas of the filter house located beneath the former diving pool bleachers.

To the east of the Play Center complex, a curving pedestrian pathway forms the eastern boundary of the landmark site. Although this pathway was likely originally paved with the same hexagonal blocks found to the south of the former diving pool, it is now paved with asphalt and lined with concrete curbing. The grassy area between this pathway and the eastern boundary of the pool deck area is characterized by the rock outcroppings found elsewhere throughout Crotona Park. An additional pedestrian pathway and stone staircase that intersected with this pedestrian pathway at roughly the northern boundary of the bath house was removed in the 1990s. The asphalt pedestrian pathways that comprise the north and northeastern boundaries of the landmark site are modern. Non-historic lampposts and fencing can be found along the numerous pedestrian pathways and retaining walls of the designated landmark site.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 1

Crotona Play Center: Significance

As the seventh of eleven WPA-funded pools that opened across New York City during the summer of 1936 to improve the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, the Crotona Play Center is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its association with the political, planning, and development interests of Fiorello La Guardia, at the time Mayor of New York, New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. The Play Center also has significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. A team of designers, landscape architects and engineers assembled to execute the eleven new pool complexes and was comprised largely of staff members and consultants who had earlier worked for Robert Moses at other governmental agencies. The Art Deco Play Center and Pool was designed by a young Parks Department staffer named Herbert Magoon, also the architect of the bath houses at Jones Beach, and was designed utilizing low-cost building materials, specifically brick and cast stone.

Summary of Significance Under Criterion A

The Crotona Play Center is locally significant under Criterion A for its association with Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded public works. The Crotona 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 Parks 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.

Summary of Significance Under Criterion C

While each of the 1936 swimming pool complexes is especially notable for its distinctive design, the eleven facilities shared many of the same basic components. The complexes generally employed low-cost building materials, principally brick and cast stone, 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 seventh of the complexes to open, the Crotona Play Center was the only one of the WPA-era pools sited in the Borough of the Bronx. Set amidst the rock outcroppings characteristic of Crotona Park, the Crotona Play Center is considered one of the great WPA Art Moderne structures of the Depression era in New York. The main entrance, a towered monumental arched gateway composed of robust geometric forms, is reached from Fulton Avenue by way of an imposing stairway. The entry courtyard features a second-story gallery edged by a decorative brick railing that repeats the half-circle patterning employed for the balconies on the gateway facade. Quarter-round cast stone buttresses and arched clerestory windows are notable features of the exterior of the locker room section of the bath house. The main entrance to the pools from the bath house is distinguished by the decorative brickwork of its segmental arch, and by the ibis-topped center post designed by Frederick G. R. Roth. The bas-relief roundels depicting humorous swimming-related subjects on the rear walls of the seating niches along the eastern edge of the pool complex, also sculpted by Roth, further illustrate the close relationship of fine art and architecture in the WPA-era pools. The decorative arched openings and buttresses of the adjoining filter house reiterate some of the forms utilized for the bath house. The elevated terrace once occupied by a large wading pool on the north side of the bath house is now used as a children's playground.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 2

The following narrative is quoted from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report (LP-2232)* (New York: City of New York, June 26, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most, pages 3 – 11.

History of the Crotona Play Center Site

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

The Crotona Play Center is located along the western boundary of 151 acres of picturesque parkland in the southeast Bronx known as Crotona Park. The majority of the land for the park (135.36 acres) was acquired by the City of New York in 1888, around the same time it acquired 4,000 acres of land for eight other parks and parkways in the Bronx, including Van Cortlandt Park, and the Bronx and Pelham Parkways. 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. Although the city had originally planned to name the park "Bathgate Park" after the family that had long owned the land, a dispute with the Bathgate family led the Parks Department to name the park instead after Croton, an ancient Greek colony famed for its Olympic athletes and also the name of the old New York City aqueduct.

At the time of its acquisition, the area comprising Crotona Park was already famous for its views, trees, and its pond. The site was considered the "eastern crown" of the area, and offered a breathtaking range of views, from the Palisades of New Jersey to the west, to the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge to the south. In a report to the New York State Legislature by the commission selected to locate lands for public parks in the Bronx, it was noted that the Crotona Park lands already had the "indispensable requisites for a park," including "beauty and variety of surface." The committee commended the site for its "luxuriant growth of forest" which provided ample shade even on a "hot summer noon," and commented on the beauty of the "interlacing branches" of the native oak, elm, and magnolia trees, which gave "an impression of solitude and isolation totally at variance with the idea of proximity to a great commercial center [i.e. Manhattan]." The Crotona Park site was also considered a choice location due to its accessibility by means of the Harlem Railroad, the Elevated Railroads, as well as by horse cars. The committee also noted that projected routes of the Suburban Rapid Transit Company along the eastern and western boundaries of the park would ensure that setting aside these grounds as parkland "would not offer any impediment to the growth of the city."

Few improvements were made to Crotona Park before the turn of the century. In the early 1900s, the Parks Department paved the perimeter of the pond and installed a wooden warming hut and concession stand for ice skating purposes. Around this same time, parts of the park were drained and flowering shrubs planted. A new grandstand was also built, to be used for ball games and musical concerts. In 1909, an attempt by the New York State Legislature to locate an arsenal for the National Guard within the park was challenged by local residents and ultimately vetoed by New York City Mayor George B.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 3

McClellan Jr. Any such seizure of parkland was considered an unacceptable encroachment on city parks, with the incident declared in the *New York Times* as reinforcement of "the need for continual alertness to preserve the parks." Additional parkland was acquired by the city to complete Crotona Park in 1907 and 1911.

By the 1930s, Crotona Park had begun to decline. In 1934, the *New York Daily Star* reported that the park was suffering from "the deprecations (sic) of the surrounding population," "a wasteland of destroyed land, trampled shrubbery, dying trees, and devastated (sic) erosion." Under the auspices of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and his legendary Parks

Commissioner, Robert Moses, made major changes to Crotona Park during the Depression years, including what the *New York Times* referred to in 1938 as a "full-fledged face lifting" that took advantage of available Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds. By 1941, Moses had installed numerous new features in the park, including a boathouse on the east side of the pond, five baseball diamonds, 20 tennis courts, 26 handball courts, nine playgrounds, four comfort stations, various picnic and sitting areas, and, of course, the Crotona Play Center complex. In the early 21st century, Crotona Park remains the largest recreation area in the southeast Bronx, and the sixth largest park in the borough.

Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert Moses and the New Deal

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, 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 Parks 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 20th century, led by such men as President Theodore Roosevelt and the lesser-known

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 4

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. 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 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 playgrounds, 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 Parks 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." 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 is 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 60 people, an architecture unit made up of 60 architects and draftsmen, and an engineering unit of about 50. 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. 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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 5

color, and reputedly tried to restrict access to many of his recreational facilities, including the WPA-era pools.

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 or in the process of being designed. Among them was the Crotona Play Center in the Bronx.

History of Swimming in New York City

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 New York City's rivers was still strong at the middle of the 19th 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 pools 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 an 1895 state law requiring the construction of such facilities in cities with populations of 50,000 or more. By 1911, twelve new bath houses had been constructed in Manhattan, mostly sited within immigrant neighborhoods. 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 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 had not aged well.

When Robert Moses became Parks Commissioner in 1934, only two outdoor pools remained, one at Betsy Head in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and the other at Faber Park on Staten Island. Moses, however, considered the Betsy Head pool "unsanitary" and often lamented its "unattractive, inadequate, and impractical bath house." Moses, a strong believer in the need for safe bathing in the city, consulted with the heads of the New York City Health and Sanitation Department in July 1934. Finding that only an increase in the number of swimming pools could ease the existing burden, Moses wrote the following in a press release picked up by the *New York Times*:

"It is no exaggeration to say that the health, happiness, efficiency and orderliness of a large number of the city's residents, especially in the summer months, are tremendously affected by the presence or absence of adequate swimming and bathing facilities. We are providing additional wading pools for children as fast as we can... This, however, does not meet the problem of any but small children... It is one of the tragedies of New York life, and a monument to past indifference, waste, selfishness and stupid planning, that the magnificent natural boundary waters of the city have been in large measure destroyed for recreational purposes by haphazard industrial and commercial developments, and by pollution through sewage, trade and other waste... We must frankly recognize the conditions as they are and make our plans accordingly."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 6

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 and quickly gained recognition as being among the most exceptional public facilities constructed in the country. All of the pools featured new bath houses, with the exception of Hamilton Fish and Betsy Head. After the completion of the WPA-era pool complexes, no new public swimming pools were constructed in New York City until the 1970s. Over 1.65 million bathers are thought to have used the new swimming pools in their first summer of use.

The Swimming Pools, Moses, and Segregation in New York City

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. 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 was well known to have been insensitive to people of color. This attitude towards minorities probably had an impact on the 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 (Jackie Robinson) Play Center, at which the mayor offered the facility as proof that his administration was in fact "building and doing things for Harlem." 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 Play Center, 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 allegedly kept the water heating system turned off, believing that the cold water would not bother Caucasian swimmers, but would somehow deter non-whites.

It has also 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 "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." 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." Such claims are supported by photographs and video footage from the era, showing that, largely, white and black New Yorkers swam in different pools. 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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 7

The Design and Construction of the Crotona Play Center

The Crotona 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 Parks 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. 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. There had to be underwater lighting for night swimming, 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. 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 stipulations 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 for 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 the summer of 1935, a rectangular wading pool to the north of the Crotona Play Center bath house, measuring 110 feet by 110 feet, had already opened to the public. Plans for the brick bath house structure, with its monumental entrance gateway along Fulton Avenue and its accommodations for 4,265 bathers, were filed in August 1935, noting an estimated cost of \$563,000. Plans for the one-story filter house were also filed at that time, noting an estimated cost of \$230,000.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 8

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. 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 Crotona Play Center opened on July 24, 1936, the seventh of the WPA-pools to open that summer, and the only one of the pools that was sited in the Bronx. The main swimming pool measured 330 feet long by 125 feet wide, and required, by some accounts, more than a million gallons to fill.

Five-thousand people attended the Friday evening opening of the Crotona Play Center. The *New York Times* reported that an additional 10,000 hopeful entrants had to be turned away. At one point during the evening, Bronx Borough President James Lyons jokingly suggested a race between himself, the Mayor, and Moses, making an indirect reference to the incident which had occurred earlier in the week, during which the Mayor ordered Moses be restrained by police from demolishing a municipal ferry terminal. Lyons was quoted as having said: “...In such a race, we would have to remember that the Parks Commissioner is something of a speed demon. At times it even takes the Police Department to stop him from speeding ahead with what he considers his civic duty...”

Since its opening, the completed Crotona Play Center has been considered one of the great WPA Art Moderne structures of the Depression era in New York. Featuring compulsory footbaths and one of the most advanced water filtrations systems of its time, the Crotona Play Center was also considered the pinnacle of technological modernity. The monumental two-towered geometric design of the main entrance, set high above the street level, has a striking presence on Fulton Avenue, while the open-air entrance courtyard, lined with its whimsical brick railings repeating the half-circle patterning employed elsewhere on the facade, grants the swimming complex a true sense of place. The repeated motifs of arched bays flanked by box-like pavilions on the facades of the Play Center bath house and filter house help create a cohesive unit from the disparate elements comprising the landmark site. Together with the other WPA-era park improvements, the Crotona Play Center complex was clearly a major achievement of the New Deal in New York City.

The Designers Behind the Planning of the Crotona Play Center

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 9

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 600 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, 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.

The design of the Crotona Play Center is most commonly attributed to Herbert Magoon, a young staff member who Moses had previously handpicked to design the bath houses at Jones Beach, which opened in 1929. Frustrated with the unimaginative designs submitted by famous architects for the Jones Beach bath houses, Moses was appreciative of Magoon's austere, but nicely detailed proposals. The design of the bath house at Sunset Park, which opened only four days before the Crotona Play Center, is also attributed to Magoon. Born in Milton, Wisconsin in 1898, Magoon graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Minnesota in 1924, after which he was employed by the firm B.G. Goodhue Associates from 1924 to 1928. After his tenure at the New York City Parks Department during the 1930s, Magoon started two firms of his own, Magoon & Barone and Magoon & Salo. By 1962, it appears that Magoon had relocated to Los Angeles, where he was employed as a project architect for William Woollett.

Although Magoon is widely accepted as the designer of the Crotona Play Center, the majority of the architectural plans and construction drawings on file at Olmsted Center Archives in Queens for the bath house and filter house were prepared by Joseph L. Hautman, while those on file for the pool deck area, including the diving pool and the bleachers, were prepared by Harry Ahrens. Hautman was born in Cincinnati in 1903, attended the University of Cincinnati from 1922 to 1923, received his degree in architecture from MIT in 1926, and later studied at the Atelier Gromort Ecole de Beaux Art in Paris from 1927 to 1928. Between 1933 and 1936, Hautman was "Chief of Architecture" for the Parks Department, and served as assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Designs for the New York Worlds Fair of 1939. Hautman joined the already established firm of Voorhees, Smith, Smith & Haines in 1942, where he remained an architect at least through the 1960s. Ahrens was born in New York City in 1896, received his degree in architecture from Columbia University in 1916, and 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. William H. Latham is noted as the supervising engineer on many of the drawings for the bath house, filter house, and pool deck areas, while an assortment of other names appear on the drawings as well.

Gilmore D. Clarke, to an unknown degree, was directly involved with the landscape design of the Crotona Play Center, as well as the areas of Crotona Park that surround the complex. While the signature of one A.H. Funnell is found on many of the landscaping drawings, they do often bear Clarke's signature of approval. Clarke (1892-1982) was born in New York City and studied landscape architecture and civil

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 10

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

engineering at Cornell University, from which he received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1913. He served as an engineer in the army during World War I, receiving many citations and decorations, and remained in the Army Reserve Corps until 1939. During the 1920s, he served on several local, state, and federal commissions as landscape architect, including the Architectural Advisory Board for the United States Capital, the New York State Council of Parks (which was headed by Robert Moses), and the Westchester County Park Commission, among many others. For his work in Westchester County, which included the Rye Beach Playland, the Saw Mill River Parkway, and the Bronx River Parkway, Clarke was awarded the Gold Medal of Honor in Landscape Architecture from the Architectural League of New York in 1931. By the time of the Great Depression, Clarke was already established as the most popular landscape architect in public works in America.

Clarke's career advanced during the 1930s. Besides being hired by Robert Moses as the Consulting Landscape Architect to the New York City Parks Department, he also became a member of the National Commission on Fine Arts, the New York State Planning Council, and the Board of Design for the 1939 New York World's Fair. In addition to Astoria Park, his work for the Parks Department included Bryant Park, Central Park Zoo, City Hall Park, Orchard Beach in the Bronx, and the Henry Hudson Parkway. He taught landscape architecture at Cornell University from 1935 to 1950, serving as dean from 1939 until his retirement in 1950, and wrote several articles for trade periodicals. In 1935, Clarke joined Michael Rapuano, an engineer and landscape architect, establishing the New York civil engineering and landscape architectural firm Clarke & Rapuano, Inc. Clarke was president of the firm from 1962 until his retirement in 1972. Later in his career, Clarke worked as a consultant on the construction of the United Nations Headquarters in New York and became a Trustee for the American Museum of Natural History.

Frederick G. R. Roth is responsible for the designs of the sculptural elements found throughout the Play Center complex, including the ibis-topped pilasters of the bath house, and the bas-relief roundels located within the seating niches of the pool deck. Roth was born in Brooklyn in 1872 and studied art privately both in Vienna and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin. By the time he completed his studies in 1894, Roth had already begun an active professional career as a sculptor. In 1934, Roth began working as the chief sculptor for the Parks Department through the WPA. In that year, Roth oversaw a team of artisans who carved the limestone reliefs that adorn the animal houses of the new Central Park Zoo. Roth's numerous

other commissions can be found throughout the parks and playgrounds of the five boroughs. Roth died in 1944, less than a decade after completion of the Crotona Play Center.

Subsequent History

The Crotona Play Center officially opened at 8:30 PM on Friday, July 24, 1936, the seventh of the eleven pools to open. A rectangular wading pool located to the north of the bath house was already open at this time, having opened in 1935 as part of Moses' campaign to provide safer bathing options for city residents. Few alterations were made to the Play Center complex in the years immediately following its opening.

In 1960, the Crotona Play Center was the unexpected site of a tragedy when a six-year old boy was found drowned in the main swimming pool. In 1965, already showing signs of its age, the Play Center was slated for reconstructive work as part of a \$6.3 million plan for library, park, and playground projects under the administration of Mayor Robert F. Wagner. In 1966, the swimming pools at Crotona were kept open until midnight, alongside those of Sunset Park, Astoria, Joseph Lyons, and several other pools, offering an escape from a particularly stifling heat wave. During the winter of 1971, a group of vandals stripped the Play Center of thousands of dollars worth of piping, valves, and electrical fixtures, striking the play center at Thomas Jefferson as well - the first such incidents of their kind. Ultimately, it cost the city between \$25,000 and \$70,000 in supplies and took nearly 40 men working daily to repair the pool. All of the bath house and filter house windows were filled in at this time to lessen the likelihood of a repeat incident. For

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 11

the Parks Department, however, reopening the pool remained a priority, as decades after its initial opening, with New York's boundary waters and oceans more polluted than ever, people continued to rely on the urban oasis for relief from the summer's heat.

By the late 1970s, many of the WPA-era pools, Crotona included, had become badly run down, partially the result of the fiscal crisis of the 1970s which hit the Parks Department particularly hard, and which affected the neighborhood surrounding Crotona Park as well. In 1977, the Parks Department began a capital restoration project to restore the pools. The 1978 Parks Department capital budget, however, was a mere \$6.7 million, and by March 1981, the department's 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 conditions of many of its facilities.

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. Moreover, Crotona Park had acquired a reputation of being a dangerous place frequented by drug addicts. In 1982, the Parks Department capital construction program swelled, allowing for one of the largest capital expenditures since the days when Moses was Parks Commissioner. By the fiscal year's end in 1982, the Parks Department had spent \$76 million on projects that included the sprucing up of neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and ball fields, a \$1.3 million rehabilitation of Belvedere Castle in Central Park, renovation of the Coney Island Boardwalk, and the rebuilding of the sea wall along the Shore Parkway in Brooklyn. More than \$100 million in additional capital improvements was expected for the 1983 fiscal year, which would be used for the rehabilitation of the Crotona Play Center, among other city pools. The Crotona Play Center was closed throughout the summers of 1982 and 1983 while the restoration efforts were underway.

The newly renovated Crotona Play Center was re-opened on August 2, 1984, to the great relief of neighborhood residents. The \$6 million restoration, which included improvements to Crotona Park as well, restored the pool complex to its original appearance. The numerous improvements included the replacement in kind or with appropriate substitution materials of deteriorated or missing architectural elements, the installation of a new roof, windows, electrical systems, lockers, showers, water fountains, a new wrought iron fence around the perimeter of the pool, and a new automatic filtration system. All of the Play Center facilities, including the entrance, pool ramp, toilets, and locker facilities, were made handicap accessible. Graffiti was also removed from both the interior and the exterior of the building, while all surfaces were newly painted, and the artwork surrounding the pool cleaned up. The existing ticket window was removed and a new booth constructed along the south wall of the entrance courtyard. During the rededication ceremony, Mayor Edward I. Koch declared, "...so extensive has the restoration been that we can say this is a brand-new facility;" Koch also cited the pool as an example of what people meant when they would say "the Bronx is coming back," before shedding his clothes to reveal a pair of swimming trunks, and joining nearly 200 children for an inaugural swim.

Financial troubles continued to plague the Parks Department, and 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 unwillingly fondled. In 1993, a 17-year old boy was arrested for molesting a 14 year-old girl at the Crotona pool. Several similar 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,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 8 Page 12

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.

Subsequent changes to the complex included the filling-in of the diving pool (1995) and the alteration of the rectangular wading pool into a hexagonal-shaped wading pool that was later filled in (post-1980s). In 1996, the former wading pool area, which was renamed the Bathgate Playground, underwent \$1 million in renovations under the administration of Mayor Giuliani, during which swings, play equipment, safety surfacing, wrought iron fencing, and the asphalt pathways were added to the area. Also added as part of the 1996 renovations of the former wading pool area were the three freestanding sprinklers modeled on the original Roth-designed ibis sculptures. Today, the playground is in constant use by children from a nearby charter school, while neighborhood residents enjoy the "Puppets in the Park" show that is presented at the renovated facility each year.

The Architecture and Site of the Crotona Play Center

The New Deal construction projects within New York City, such as the Crotona 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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated resource is located in Bronx County, New York. The site fronts Fulton Avenue and is within Crotona Park. The boundary encompasses the play center and the landscape features associated with its 1934 date of construction. See enclosed map.

Boundary Justification

The Crotona Play Center is located on the lands historically associated with its 1934 date of construction.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center

Name of Property

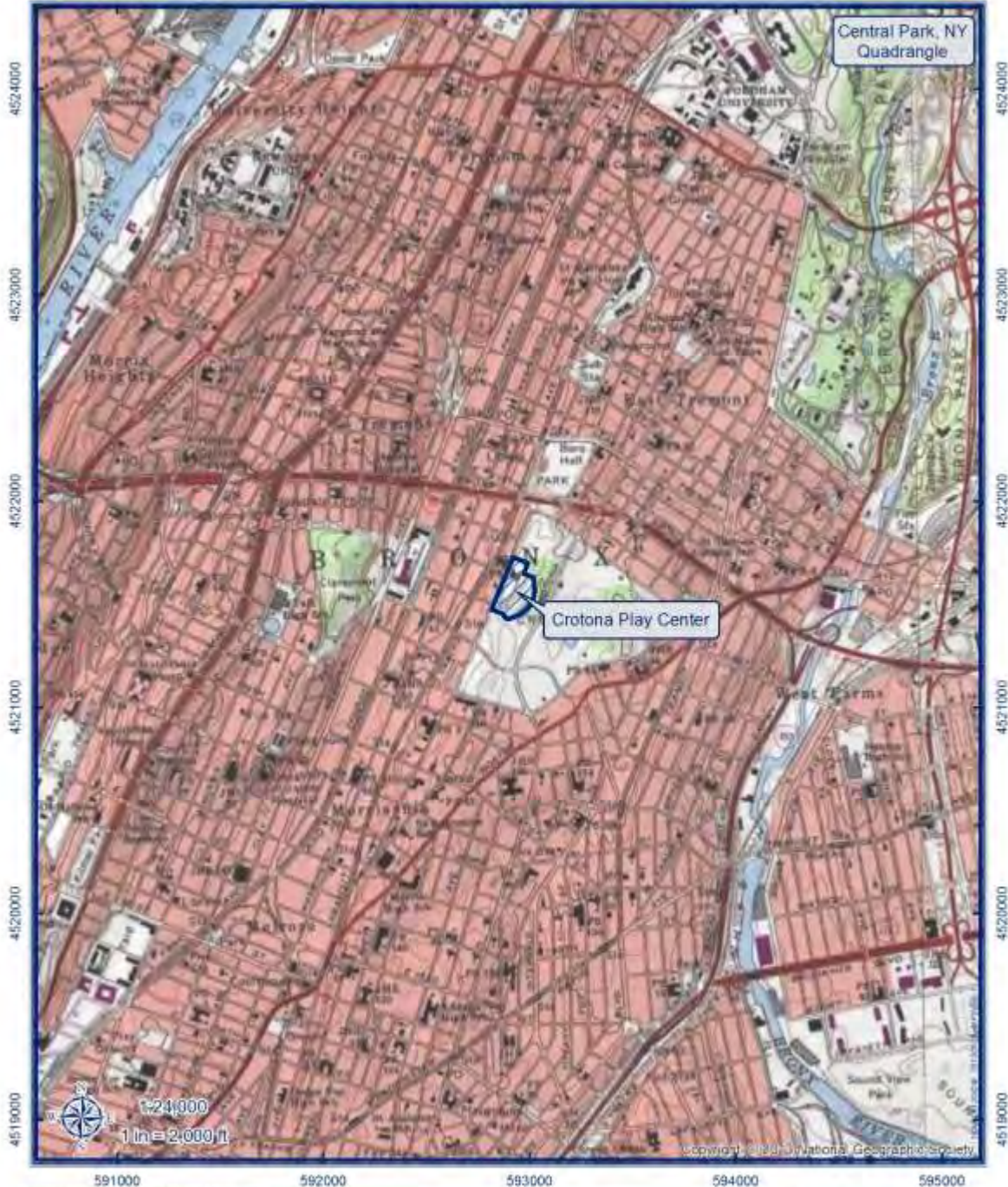
Bronx County, New York

County and State

Section 10 Page 2

Crotona Play Center
Bronx, Bronx Co., NY

1700 Fulton Ave.
Bronx, NY 10457



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Tax Parcel Data: gis.nyc.gov/dolt



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 3

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Tax Parcel Data: gis.nyc.gov/dotf



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State

Section 11 Page 1

Additional Information

Name of Property: Crotona Play Center

City or Vicinity: The Bronx (New York City)

County: Bronx

State: NY

Name of Photographer: Michelle M. Langlie

Date of Photographs: 15 December 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: Olmsted Center, Flushing Meadow Corona Park, Flushing, NY
11368

Photo #1 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00001)

Bath House Main Entrance, Fulton Avenue. Camera facing east.

Photo #2 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00002)

Bath House West Facade, Main Entrance, Fulton Avenue. Facade Detail, camera facing northwest.

Photo #3 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00003)

Bath House West Facade. Main Entrance, Stairs, Towers and Retaining Wall, Fulton Avenue.
Camera facing northwest.

Photo #4 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00004)

Fulton Avenue Handicap Access Ramp, camera facing northwest.

Photo #5 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00005)

Bath House Main Entrance Archway and Retaining Wall, camera facing southwest.

Photo #6 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00006)

Service Building Entrance, Fulton Avenue. Camera facing east.

Photo #07 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00007)

Bath House North Facade, camera facing northwest.

Photo #8 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00008)

Pool Deck Area Bleachers, camera facing northwest.

Photo #9 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_00009)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State

Section 11 Page 2

Bath House South Facade, camera facing northwest.

Photo #10 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0010)
Pool, Decking and Bath House South Facade, camera facing north.

Photo #11 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0011)
Pool and Deck Area, camera facing south.

Photo #12 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0012)
Bath House South Facade, camera facing northwest.

Photo #13 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0013)
Pool Deck Area Seating Niches, camera facing east.

Photo #14 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0014)
Bath House Main Entrance Archway Openings from Second Story, camera facing south.

Photo #15 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0015)
Bath House Entrance Courtyard, Second Story Gallery, camera facing southwest.

Photo #16 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0016)
Bath House Main Entrance Archway from Second Story, camera facing west.

Photo #17 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0017)
Womens' Locker Room Interior, East Wall.

Photo #18 (NY_Bronx County_Crotona Play Center_0018)
Mens' Locker Room Interior, East Wall.

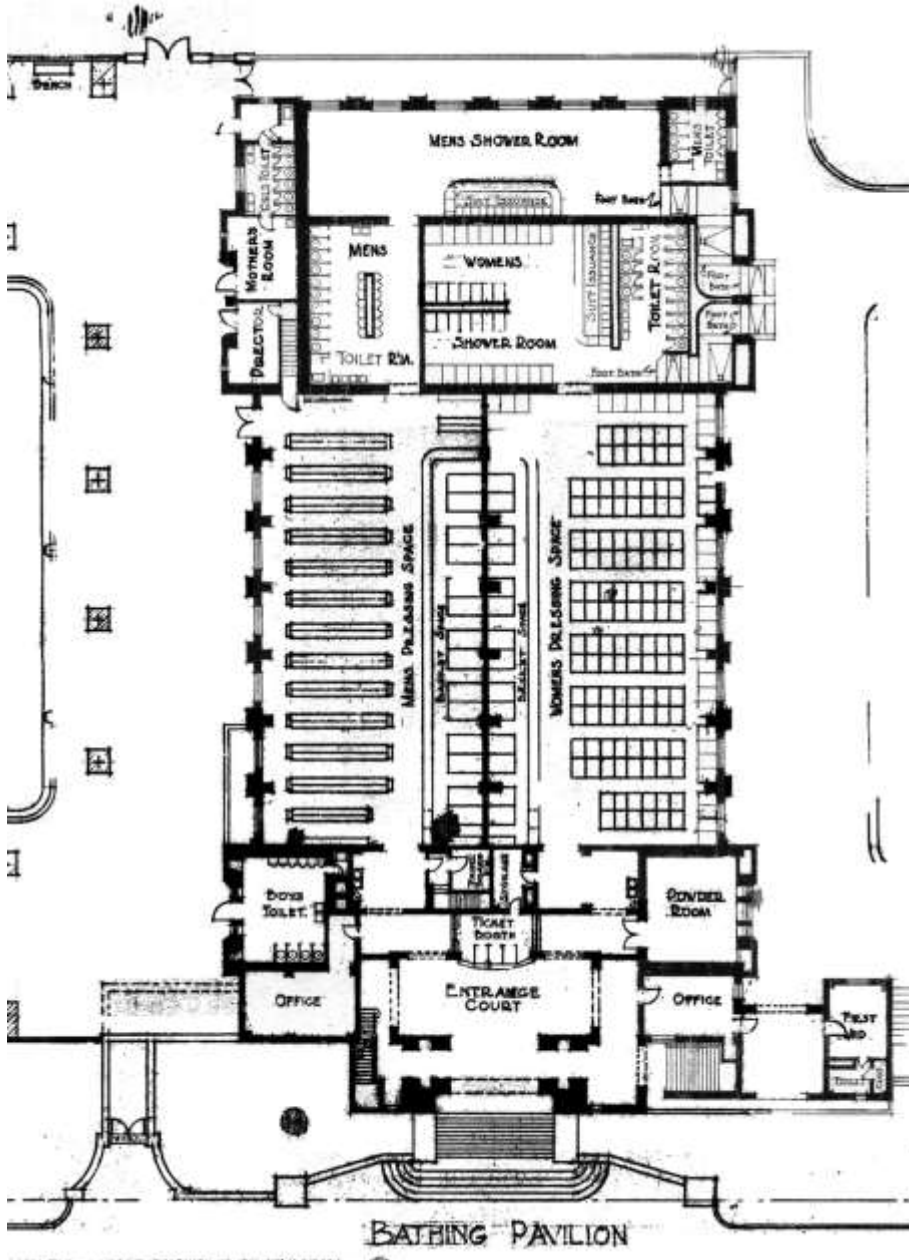
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Crotona Play Center
Name of Property
Bronx County, New York
County and State

Section 11 Page 3

Plan





CROTONA PARK

30

E 173 St



ONE WAY

1700 Fulton Avenue

PARKING

CASH



CROTONA PLAYO





1700 Fulton Avenue







SERVICE





MEN
HOMMES

1914

1914





4 FEET DEEP

4 FEET DEEP

3 FEET DEEP

2 FEET DEEP



4 FEET DEEP





MEN















DISORDERLY
CONDUCT IS
PROHIBITED
VIOLATORS WILL
BE PROSECUTED

NO SMOKING

EXIT

No Smoking

No Smoking

No Smoking

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Crotona Play Center

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Bronx

DATE RECEIVED: 3/13/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/08/15
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/23/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/28/15
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000177

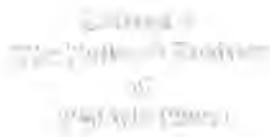
REASONS FOR REVIEW:

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 4.28.15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:



RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

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

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner



6 March 2015

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following two nominations, both on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Sylvester Manor, Suffolk County
Corona Play Center, Bronx County

I am aware that there has been a challenge to the ownership of Sylvester Manor. However, after examining the deed, the New York State Historic Preservation Office is confident that we have notified the correct owner. Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office