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JUL 26 2005

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

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1. Name of Property

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historic name Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum

other names/site number Northwest Park

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2. Location


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street & number 3400-3500 NW 36th Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Oklahoma City vicinity N/A  
state Oklahoma code 109 county Oklahoma zip code 73112

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide  locally. ( N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

7-25-05  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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 commenting or other official

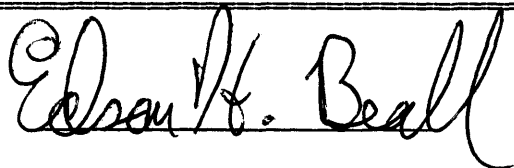
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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): \_\_\_\_\_

 9.7.05

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>17</u>	<u>10</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>23</u>	<u>12</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	<u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u>	Sub:	<u>Outdoor Recreation</u>
	<u>AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE</u>		<u>Horticultural Facility</u>
	<u>LANDSCAPE</u>		<u>Park</u>
	<u>LANDSCAPE</u>		<u>Garden</u>
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	<u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u>	Sub:	<u>Outdoor Recreation</u>
	<u>AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE</u>		<u>Horticultural Facility</u>
	<u>LANDSCAPE</u>		<u>Park</u>
	<u>LANDSCAPE</u>		<u>Garden</u>
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS / Late Gothic Revival  
OTHER: Park Service Rustic - CCC  
MODERN MOVEMENT / Moderne / Modernistic  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>STONE: Sandstone</u>
walls	<u>GLASS</u>
	<u>METAL: Steel</u>
roof	<u>GLASS</u>
other	<u>CONCRETE</u>
	<u>METAL: Bronze</u>

(see continuation sheet)

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

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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

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

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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Period of Significance 1933 - 1954

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Significant Dates 1933  
1936  
1940  
1954

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8. Statement of Significance (continued)

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Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Walter, Henry (City Horticulturist)  
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (Designer)  
Oklahoma City Parks Department (Designer)  
CCC (Builder)  
WPA (Builder)

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

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: Will Rogers Park Headquarters

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property Approximately 32

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>629060</u>	<u>3930290</u>	3	<u>14</u>	<u>628595</u>	<u>3930090</u>
2	<u>14</u>	<u>629000</u>	<u>3929970</u>	4	<u>14</u>	<u>628595</u>	<u>3930280</u>
	<u>n/a</u>	See continuation sheet.					

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

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

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11. Form Prepared By

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name/title JoAnne E. Vervinck, Landscape Architect/Historian

organization Oklahoma Horticultural Society date April, 2005

street & number 3340 NW 19th Street telephone 405 / 943-7069

city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73107-3828

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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

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Property Owner

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

name City of Oklahoma City (Mayor's Office)

street & number 200 N Walker Ave, 3rd Floor

telephone 405 / 297-2424

city or town Oklahoma City

state OK

zip code 73102

cc:

name Mr. Wendel Whisenhunt, Director, Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department

street & number 420 W Main St, Suite 210

telephone 405 / 297-3882

city or town Oklahoma City

state OK

zip code 73102

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Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum  
Oklahoma County, Oklahoma

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**Materials**

walls	<u>STONE: Sandstone</u>
	<u>BRICK</u>
	<u>WOOD</u>
roof	<u>WOOD: Shake</u>
	<u>WOOD: Shingle</u>
other	<u>METAL</u>

**Summary**

Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum is a section of the much larger Will Rogers Park. Located in near northwest Oklahoma City, Will Rogers Park consists of approximately 118 rolling acres built around the near-headwaters of the Deep Fork River. The resources addressed in this nomination are limited to the northern portion of the western section of the park. The nominated area contains approximately 32 acres and is located in the park's northwest quadrant, east of the southeast corner of North Portland Avenue and NW 36th Street.

The nominated area is bordered as follows: Beginning approximately 200 feet east of the southeast corner of Portland Avenue and NW 36th Street, follow the chain link fence southward (paralleling Portland Avenue) to the edge of the Tennis Center, turn eastward along the continuous chain link fence and follow its jogs south and east to a point near the Senior Citizens Center where a continuing straight line connects to the north curb of Pat Murphy Drive; continue east along Pat Murphy Drive to N. Grand Boulevard; follow N. Grand Boulevard north to NW 36th Street, and turn west on NW 36th Street back to the point of beginning.

This boundary delineates the approximately 32 acres within the park devoted to horticultural features, as contrasted to the sports and picnicking enjoyed in the rest of the park. This area is set apart because of its distinctive usage, dedicated to plants and beauty. However, outside the boundary, scattered throughout the remainder of the park are other related historic CCC resources, such as an amphitheater, clubhouse, stone culvert, etc.

Roadways divide the park into three distinct areas with appreciably different physical character and usage patterns. Interstate 44, running diagonally across the park, splits it into eastern and western sections. The eastern section of the park is cut off from the rest of the park by I-44. Major land uses east of I-44 include an Oklahoma City Parks District Maintenance facility and a grassy flood retention basin. The open space of the retention basin is used by the public for soccer, baseball, sledding, and flying kites.

The western portion of the park attracts the most public use. Three park roads provide ample access. Scattered picnic areas, a frisbee golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool, playground, recreational open space, natural areas, nature trails, and amphitheater provide active and passive recreation typically found in municipal parks.

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Although the entire park was developed according to a master plan during the 1930s, alterations, additions and other changes to the "recreational" section of the Park have compromised its historic integrity. Because of a lack of contributing resources due to recent age or adaptive change and due to the specialized nature of the gardens and arboretum, the eastern section of the Park and the southern portion of the western section will not be included in this nomination.

Many of the structures and elements in the nominated portion of the park were designed by the Oklahoma City Park Department and constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA). The horticultural components were designed by Henry Walter, a long-time employee of the Oklahoma City Park Department, whose many beautiful display gardens were created and maintained for the purpose of edifying and educating the visiting public.

The centerpiece of the horticultural portion of the park is the formal Rose Garden, flanked by two small lakes, anchoring the even more formal horticultural gardens and Lord & Burnham Conservatory on the one side and the completely informal arboretum on the other. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps, guided by the City Horticulturist from the Oklahoma City Park Department, began the work of shaping the land and damming a stream to create one of the two lakes. Work by the WPA and possibly the CCC continued during the latter half of the 1930s under the cooperation of the Oklahoma City Park Department and the National Park Service, guided by the City Horticulturist, leaving a legacy of beauty and grace in the garden designs, plantings, small lakes, an assemblage of idyllic scenic views so characteristically valued in the 1930s, and native red sandstone walls and structures built to enhance the gardens' formality and delightfulness. The lakes, rolling terrain, and red sandstone park structures constructed during that era remain basically unaltered today, resulting in a setting familiar to the public for decades. Later additions to the gardens have continued the original theme of horticultural gardens, expanding the plantings and repeating the construction materials used initially. Later repairs, alterations, and additions by the City Park Department, some not matching the original in quality of workmanship or materials, do not overwhelm the visual impact of the original intent and execution of the design.

The nominated portion of the park contains many original historic elements, as well as a few newer elements faithful to the original intent of the design. The sites, elements, objects, and structures contained within the nominated area's boundaries comprise the Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum historic district. All of these resources relate to the planned horticultural character of this portion of the park, an anomaly in the generally naturalistic character usual to CCC/WPA-built parks.

Contributing resources created by the combined efforts of the CCC, WPA, Oklahoma City Park Department and National Park Service in the nominated portion of the park include 3 buildings, 2 sites, 17 structures, and 1 object. Noncontributing resources include 2 buildings and 10 structures excluded because of recent age, extensive alteration, and/or use of architectural materials not matching those used in the original design.

In its physical setting, Will Rogers Park is bisected by Interstate 44, running north/south and slightly elevated above the park, and its access roads, which are partially elevated and partially at grade with the park. Two

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east/west park roads provide interior access. The park's rolling topography is broken by the Deep Fork River, here still a creek only a mile and a half from its headwaters. Several smaller creeks flow into small, dammed lakes before merging with the Deep Fork. Shade trees and evergreens dot the slopes. Along with the typical venue of municipal park activities, Will Rogers features a large area dedicated to horticultural displays.

The park is surrounded by neighborhoods of 1950s-era brick single-family housing, 1930s-era wooden single-family housing, a two-story apartment complex, a shopping center, two small strip malls, single-business commercial buildings, and an elementary school. Once located on the outer fringe of the city limits, it is now a much-needed open space located on the fringe of the inner city.

### **Description**

The nominated portion of Will Rogers Park is a rectangle of approximately 32 acres devoted to horticultural displays and pursuits, located in the northwest quadrant of the park. It was designed by City Horticulturist Henry Walter of the Oklahoma City Park Department. Early design was a cooperation between the City Park Department and the National Park Service. CCC and WPA crews did the early work on the lakes, gardens, and structures. The area contains a 15-acre Arboretum; 15 acres of specialty gardens for irises, daylilies, peonies, butterflies, herbs, tropical hibiscus, and cannas; and the 1.63-acre Charles E. Sparks Memorial Rose Garden, which until the 1970s was reputedly the second-largest rose garden in the United States; two small lakes and dams; CCC/WPA garden structures of local red sandstone, a Lord & Burnham conservatory; and several other structures used in the propagation, growth, care, and enjoyment of plant material.

The success and enjoyability of the park is evident by the City Park Department's continued maintenance and expansion of the gardens during the post-WPA era. Nearly 40 years of Henry Walter's guiding hand has resulted in a continuity of vision, design elements, and materials. Such consistency is a luxury seldom found in park design. It results in a landscape pleasing to the senses and peaceful to the soul.

Approximately the western half of the nominated area is occupied by an arboretum that was developed by Henry Walter over the course of many decades. Its stands of mostly mature deciduous and evergreen specimens are grouped by genus. Some are native; many are rare cultivars diligently searched out by Henry Walter and obtained by trading plant material with nurserymen and botanical gardens from far and near.

The centerpiece of the nominated area is the formal rose garden, anchoring the even more formal horticultural gardens and Conservatory on the one side and the completely informal arboretum on the other. The rose garden is bounded on two sides by the small lakes, and at the rear by a running stream. Deliberately designed as an "island" configuration with large formal entry gates, it stands apart from the rest of the park as a focal area. The interior of the rose garden is designed with flowing, organically shaped rose beds separated by wide grass panels. The formality of this area, although pronounced, has a freeform feel to it, contrasting with the rigid, straight-lined, hardscape-dominated beds comprising the horticultural gardens to the east. The arboretum, to the west,

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feels extremely informal by contrast, although it was carefully laid out with groves of deciduous and evergreen trees, each grove being one genus, splashed across a large rolling meadow.

The formality and historic feel of the Rose Garden are enhanced by its structural elements, all built by the CCC/WPA: the formal entry gateway, "Temple of Love", Rose Arbor structure, fountain and pool, and lake overlooks. These structures are visually unified by the use of native red sandstone as a construction material, and temporally unified by being elements that obviously would not be constructed in today's economic and philosophical climate.

North of the Rose Garden, a hillside covered with azaleas is a spring showstopper. A nature trail allows easy access to view the beautiful plants up close, and also gives access to the Native Tree Meadow, which conceals several memorials and showcases mature native trees.

East of the Rose Garden, a variety of horticultural gardens spotlight many kinds of annual and perennial flowers and shrubs. Arranged in an L-shape along the east embankment of the lake, these gardens invite wandering visitors to enjoy many different plant cultivars and bed layouts.

Adjacent to the horticultural gardens, a compound of buildings associated with plant growth and maintenance is nearly concealed by the screening plantings and by the way the buildings are grouped together. The compound is a hive of activity for the horticultural workers; there are vehicle garages, four greenhouses, a headhouse, and a bulb storage facility, but most park visitors are barely aware of them. A few more facilities lie to the north along the private maintenance driveway: a lath house, hoop house, additional garage, and a parking/storage lot.

East of the greenhouses, a lovely old Lord & Burnham conservatory, holding tropicals, succulents, and cacti, is open to the public. Of classic design and nearly one hundred years old, the conservatory is a delight to visit and a graceful reminder of an era gone by. It was moved to the site in 1936 by the WPA.

North of the conservatory, a large brick Garden Exhibition Center replaces the original Garden Club building built in the late 1930s. Its non-conforming modern design, brick exterior, and recent age make it a noncontributing resource. Its two parking lots are also noncontributing resources; one is new this year, and the other has been altered to the extent that the WPA-laid red sandstone curbing standard on the park's original parking lots was destroyed.

The nominated area is located in the park's northwest quadrant. It is bordered on the west by the chain link fence located several hundred feet east of and parallel to Portland Avenue, running south to the edge of the Tennis Center, turning east along a second chain-link fence to a point near the Senior Citizens Center where a continuing straight line connects to the north curb of Pat Murphy Drive; continuing east along Pat Murphy Drive to N. Grand Boulevard; following N. Grand Boulevard north to NW 36th Street, and going west on NW 36th Street to the point of beginning.

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This boundary delineates the area in the park in which horticultural displays are emphasized. They were based on the dream of one man, Henry Walter, an employee of the Oklahoma City Park Department from 1932-1971, whose guiding hand can be seen in the park area's unified thematic composition: horticultural displays in a beautiful setting, for the purpose of edifying and educating the visiting public. The sites, structures and elements located in this 32-acre horticultural portion of Will Rogers Park were designed by the Park Department and constructed by the CCC and WPA. In a setting familiar for decades, the two lakes, rolling terrain, red sandstone park structures, gardens, and garden structures constructed during that era remain basically unaltered. Only this portion of the park retains the historic integrity to be considered for the National Register. Many of the sites, structures, and elements in the rest of the park have been altered in the years since their initial design.

### Contributing Resources

**1. Ed Lycan Conservatory (building):** This elegant late-Victorian steel-framed wood-and-glass building was designed by the world-famous New York firm of Lord & Burnham. In 1970, it was named to honor Ed Lycan, City Florist for the Park Department between 1904-1954. His close involvement in the City's horticultural efforts and its municipal greenhouse complex provided a historical continuum from the construction of the City's original municipal greenhouse/conservatory in 1907, its move to the State Fair Grounds in 1923 and replacement with the Lord & Burnham Conservatory, its move to Will Rogers Park in 1936, and for nearly two decades beyond.

Set atop a low red sandstone knee wall built by the WPA and reminiscent of the CCC stonework elsewhere in the park, the Conservatory features a spacious, nearly square center section with glass walls and a soaring curved-eave glass roof flanked by two long, narrower, lower-roofed glass side wings. Its wood and metal frame is painted white. Long hinged vents open along the roof ridges of all three portions. Glass side panels and roof panes are whitewashed periodically to limit interior solar heat. A bronze plaque on the left of the building's front door cites the Department of Public Property, the Park Board, and a 1924 date. A bronze, shield-shaped plaque on the right of the front door reads "USA 1936-37 WPA".

The Conservatory's central portion, wider and taller than its long north and south wings, features side walls of tall glass panels topped by short glass panels. The north and south wings have side walls of the tall glass panels only; therefore, their eaves and roofs are lower than those of the central structure.

The central portion boasts an wood-trimmed, glass-paneled, curved-eave vestibule. The vestibule's double front doors with glass panels are abutted by panels of clear glass. Its side walls match the glass panels of the building's central portion behind it. Its front gable, topped with a roof of clear curved glass, is decorated with a wooden sunburst in front of a clear glass pane and a wooden ball-on-pedestal finial.

The long north and south wings each have a single wooden door at their far ends. The north door is wood with a glass panel; the south door is a replacement of wood only. Four glass panes are arranged vertically on both sides

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of each door. Both doors are topped with front-facing gables of decorative wooden framework supporting a narrow, clear-glass roof, although the glass roof is missing above the south door. Two curlicued metal supports hold the gable frames. Each gable is topped with a wooden ball-on-pedestal finial. The north door is accessed by eight steps cut down through the adjacent red sandstone retaining wall. Abutting the retaining wall, two sandstone cheekwalls line both sides of the steps and extend on to become the knee wall surrounding the conservatory.

Considerable confusion has existed regarding the origin of the L&B conservatory. Oklahoma City's first conservatory was erected at Wheeler Park, the City's first gardens and zoo, in 1907 (the year of Oklahoma's statehood) at a cost of \$3,000. Available photographs and a undated map showing the Wheeler Park "Greenhouse," all predating 1910, indicate a shape and style different from the L&B. A second greenhouse was built in 1911. The 1922 Sanborn map illustrating Wheeler Park's greenhouse floorplan verifies that the L&B did not exist at Wheeler Park. Instead, the greenhouse complex at that time is thought to be the long-used Greenhouse #1, a double-peaked structure distinctive for its interior vertical support poles.

1923's severe flood prompted the relocation of the municipal greenhouse (this same term was used through the years to refer to a single greenhouse, a conservatory, a complex of structures, and to the civic institution) from Wheeler Park to the (original) State Fair Park (now Douglass Park/ High School). Reports at the time used both the terms "new" and "moved" to describe the fairgrounds facility. Old Greenhouse #1 was moved to the fairgrounds site. The L&B was built new there "at great expense". It was expected to be "one of the best municipal greenhouses in the southwest" and was reported to "add considerable to the attractiveness of the [fair]grounds". As the 1924 fair's municipal greenhouse featured 100,000 plants, compared to 74,000 grown at Wheeler in 1919, it seems reasonable that Greenhouse #1 and the L&B conservatory had both been completed onsite by that time and involved together as a greenhouse complex in order to contain that many plants. Earliest available photographs of the L&B conservatory show it in 1927 and 1934 looking very much as it appears today.

By 1935, newspaper reports tell us that "vibrations from oilwells" and plant-harming fumes from the surrounding Oklahoma City (Oil) Field necessitated a change in location. In 1936, through the efforts of City Parks employee Ed Lycan, the L&B and Greenhouse #1 were moved from the fairgrounds to Will Rogers Park. Both were erected onsite as part of a "new" municipal greenhouse (complex) by the WPA in 1936-37; a footing plan was dated 1936, but work was halted to await more federal funding for completion.<sup>1</sup> A 1944 boiler fire in the Headhouse caused a very small amount of quickly-repaired damage to the center portion of the L&B. Today, the Conservatory houses many outstanding specimens of tropical plants and an enviable world-wide collection of rare

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<sup>1</sup>Unknown author, "Park Commission and Horticulture", The Oklahoman, 1 Jan 1907, 6; Unknown author, "City Grows 74,000 Plants," The Oklahoman, 1 Jan 1919, 12; Unknown author, "City's Flowers Slumber in Warm Beds as Chilly Blasts of Winter Blow," The Oklahoman, 2 Dec 1923, 12;. Unknown author, "Gates Swing Open to Fair Worth Comparison With Nation's Best", The Oklahoman, 20 September 1924, 16; Unknown author, "18th State Fair Gates Swing Open [l] Thorobreds [sic] Take Track Today," Oklahoma News, 9 Sept 1924, 1; Unknown author, "But Wait Till the Crowds Come," The Oklahoman, 25 Sep 1927, 114; Blackburn, Bob L. and Paul B. Strasbaugh, A History of the State Fair of Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1994, 102; Johnson, Cullen, "City 'Builder, Grower' Hailed," The Daily Oklahoman, 24 Dec 1964, 18; Unknown author, "Plans Completed for Park Project," The Oklahoman, 17 Oct 1935, 16; Unknown author, "Greenhouse to be Ready in November," The Oklahoman, 7 Aug 1936, 19; Unknown author, "New City Greenhouse Near Completion," The Oklahoman, 4 Nov 1936, 9; Unknown author, "More Cash Needed for Park Project," The Oklahoman, 26 Dec 1936, 9.

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and unusual cacti and succulents donated by the Charles Polaski family in 1987, thanks to Polaski's respect for the work of Henry Walter, the staff, and the conservatory facility at Will Rogers Park.

**2. Headhouse/Office (building):** Connected to the rear of the conservatory by a short hallway, the Headhouse, where work with seeds, cuttings, and potting was done, was built in 1936 when the Conservatory was moved onto the site. Its red brick walls are inset with decorative red sandstone panels and corners, reminiscent of the historic red sandstone construction material used frequently throughout the park. A tall cone of mortared rock buttresses the northeast corner of the building, a decorative element often present in WPA work. A tall exterior metal boiler stack rises near the corner. On the south wall, eight large windows with vertical dividers overlook the interior space of the four attached greenhouses. Repairs were made after a 1944 boiler fire burned a small portion of the Headhouse potting area. In 1965, a one-stall garage and an office were added to the west end of the building, and the cone-shaped rock buttress on the northwest corner of the building, twin to the one on the northeast corner, was removed.

**3. Garage (building):** Tucked away behind the Conservatory and adjacent to the Headhouse/Office, this concrete-floored, 6-bay, red brick garage was built later than the 1936 Greenhouses and Headhouse but appears on a 1941 aerial photograph. It was rebuilt after a fire in 1944. The east wall sits atop a red-sandstone sustaining wall similar to that of the Conservatory. The west wall is composed mostly of overhead doors separated by wooden pilasters, each with a decorative red sandstone block at the base. The north gable is covered with board and batten slats. It has a shingle roof with exposed rafter tails. Although its nonconforming architecture sets it apart from the park's historic structures, its utilitarian function contributes to the overall daily working facilities needed by park labor for maintenance of the park, and its out-of-sight location is a design typical of the National Park Service during the Depression era.

**4. The "Cave" (structure):** This windowless red sandstone root cellar designed by Henry Walter in 1945 provides a naturally climate-controlled space for storing bulbs. Built into a hillside, its ceiling, 8-inch thick walls, and floor are concrete. Mortared sandstone blocks enframe the vestibule with its wooden door. Dry-stack red fieldstone retaining walls edge the south and west sides of the large turfed mound covering the structure. Unobtrusive clay tile weepholes in the wall drain the mound. The "Cave" is vented with a 10-inch hooded tile protruding through the top of the mound and has interior electrical lighting, water, and gas.

The dry-stack red fieldstone wall partially encircling The "Cave" continues eastward as a retaining wall. Near the maintenance Garage, it is penetrated by a flight of nine cut and mortared red sandstone steps with concrete treads. East of the steps, it functions as a sustaining wall on the north and east sides of the maintenance Garage. At the Conservatory, it becomes a low sustaining wall, or knee wall, built to hold the Conservatory's glass side walls. Before demolition of the old greenhouses, the cut and mortared red sandstone wall continued as a knee wall the original greenhouse complex. The knee wall's purpose was to help reduce heat loss in winter, keep under-bench plants cooler in summer, and provide an additional shaded growing environment for plants requiring low light levels. At the northeast corner of the Conservatory, the wall continues eastward for several yards as a retaining wall below the rear of the Garden Exhibition Center.

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**5. East Parking Lot (structure):** The asphalt parking lot located east of the Rose Garden and south of the Ed Lycan Conservatory is edged with rough-cut red sandstone curbing, which also surrounds a large planting island in the center of the parking lot. Designed in 1938, this curbing is typical of all of the park's early roadways and parking lots.

**6. Arboretum (site):** City Horticulturist Henry Walter's plans for the park's 11.6-acre arboretum began in the late 1930s. Planting took place over the course of many years. Walter believed that the rolling terrain, various soil types, water and native prairie areas of Will Rogers Park made it a perfect natural setting for the Arboretum. His design, with twin themes of beauty and public education, featured groves of shade trees, flowering shrubs and woody plants suitable for naturalization and providing an endless source of inspiration to gardeners. At its heyday, the Arboretum boasted over 900 varieties of deciduous and evergreen woody plants. Many of the first plants were donated by the South Great Plains Field Station in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Some came from the United States National Arboretum. Others were donated by nurserymen or found by Henry Walter on his travels and planted to see how they would do in Oklahoma. The arboretum became known for its many rare and unusual plants. Even today, some of its evergreens can be found nowhere else. The plants are grouped by genus and labeled with botanical and common names.

**7. Charles E. Sparks Memorial Rose Garden (6 structures, one object):** The Rose Garden came about through the cooperative efforts of the Oklahoma Rose Society and the Oklahoma City Park Department. It was designed in the 1930s by City Horticulturist Henry Walter, installed in 1938, and "modernized" by the Oklahoma Rose Society in 1950. Its 1.67 acres contain over 250 varieties of nearly 3,000 roses displayed in a formal design. Created to be scenic, the Rose Garden is planted on high ground between two lakes. Entering from the formal entry gates on the south end, the most immediately visible entity is the wide central grass panel, which divides the rose beds into east and west groupings and leads the eye straight ahead toward the tall statue on the Culbertson Fountain, the garden's focal point. Large old cedar trees beyond the fountain and tall deciduous and evergreen shrubs edging the west side of the garden stop the visitors' panoramic view, forming a majestic but visually neutral backdrop to the garden. Narrow, concrete-curbed chat paths circumvent the edges of the rose garden. The informality of their paving material and serpentine shape are in stark contrast to the formality of the rigid grid of grass panels bisecting the rose beds. In a complicated, yet simple-looking design, two parallel strings of rose beds appear to spill out of the Rose Arbor at the northwest corner, then separate, swinging around two sides of the Culbertson Fountain to line the east and west sides of the garden, swelling and narrowing to fit the lay of the land. Seen as a whole, their shape becomes sinuous and organic as it flows across the garden. The long strings of rose beds are made up of 21 small elongated free-form rectangular beds, surrounded with concrete curbing, and separated by panels of grass to form groupings of twos and threes. This layout of freeform rectangles reflects the modernization done to the Rose Garden in 1950. Although the overall external outline of the rose beds remained unchanged, the original beds had been subdivided by numerous intertwining curving walks into many small intricate shapes. This pattern can still be seen in the two bed sections nearest the Rose Arbor. The change to bed design is a supporting aspect and impact is minimal; the character-defining aspect of the original overall design remains intact and unchanged.



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The Rose Garden's contributing resources consist of 6 structures and 1 object.

**Structures:**

- A. Formal Entry** to the Rose Garden is on the south side, along Pat Murphy Drive, where two imposing rectangular red sandstone pillars enclose black metal double gates, replacements for the original wooden ones. Each pillar is flanked by a tall red sandstone wall, arcing into a quarter circle toward the Rose Garden. Twin red sandstone benches, overlooking the rose garden, are built into the north face of the two arcing walls. Outside the gates, Pat Murphy Drive's north lane widens slightly, and its standard concrete curbing changes to a curb of mortared red sandstone blocks. To address the importance of the entry, a wide, flared concrete walk leads to the gates. No parking is available at these gates; therefore, pedestrians often use the much less grandiose East Entrance gateway because it connects to the nearest parking lot via a long concrete walk atop the dam of the East Lake.
- B. Rose Arbor:** A wood and red sandstone garden structure graces the northwest corner of the Rose Garden, at the head of the parallel strings of rose beds. The structure is flanked on each side by a long, walk-through redwood arbor set on sandstone piers. Called the "Rose Arbor" on 1938 design drawings, the structure has cut red sandstone walls on its east and west sides, but its north and south sides are completely open to the arbors. Its walls are topped by a wooden plate of large timbers that support a hipped shake roof with exposed rafters. Tall, narrow keyhole arches pierce the east wall on each side of the entrance from the Rose Garden. A large opening cut into the west wall forms a glassless window overlooking the arboretum. At the east entry opening and the west "window" opening, half-walls, capped with red-orange brick rowlocks, are set with square timber posts enframing views of the Rose Garden's Culbertson Fountain and the arboretum. The structure has a concrete floor. Design plans called for a drinking fountain with a 12-inch pool on the west wall; today, only the pool wall and spigot holder remain. The original wood members of the walls and roof were replaced in 1998-99 in a duplication of the originals and painted dark brown.

Each of the flanking arbors is built with two parallel sets of masonry supports underpinning the wooden arbor members. Each set of supports is composed of four rectangular red sandstone piers, each pier capped with red-orange brick rowlocks and set with two wooden posts linked by horizontal wooden members creating a vertical ladder-like effect. The posts are topped with heavy timber arbor joists to which the arbor rafters are attached. The back (west) sets of piers are joined by a low sandstone wall capped with red-orange brick rowlocks. The front (east) sets of piers are joined by a square wood rail set on the diagonal; beneath the rail, a heavy chain loops between the stone piers. The arbors have a gravel floor between the two sets of supports, allowing visitors to walk beneath them. Non-climbing roses are planted on the Rose Garden side of the arbor, leaving its structure uncovered and therefore visible; tall trees to the west create too much shade for successful rose plantings along the back side. The flanking arbors were constructed as part of the original Rose Garden design in 1938. Their original wooden

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members were removed sometime between 1982 and 1989, and rebuilt in 1998-99, guided by historic photographs so as to mimic the original plans as closely as possible. Because the replacement/replication of the original members does not constitute the entirety of the resource, the sympathetic treatment does not detract from the structure and it remains a contributing resource.

- C. Temple of Love:** On the south end of the Rose Garden, a small but lovely WPA structure overlooks West Lake. Named the "Temple of Love" on 1937 and 1938 drawings, it was reduced to the label of "shelter" on Henry Walter's 1950 planting plans and has lost its poetic connotations. Cut and mortared red sandstone corner pillars connect red sandstone half-walls, which are capped with red-orange brick rowlocks. Large square timber posts enframe scenic views toward the Rose Garden and the West Lake through the side openings above the half-walls. A corbeled stone bench is built into the west wall.

The north and east sides have entrances from the Rose Garden. The structure has a concrete floor and a pyramid shake roof. The original wood members of the walls and roof were replaced in 1998-99 in a duplication of the originals and painted dark brown. Because the replacement/ replication of the original members does not constitute the entirety of the resource, the sympathetic treatment does not detract from the structure and it remains a contributing resource.

- D. East Entrance to Rose Garden:** Two tall rectangular pillars of mortared cut red sandstone abut the concrete walk leading from the East Parking Lot to the Rose Garden via the top of East Lake's dam. The pillars were designed by the Oklahoma City Parks Department in 1938. Original plans called for a double gate of chain link fencing topped by three strands of barbed wire. An attached fence of 6-foot chain link, topped with three strands of barbed wire, was to run along the east side of the rose garden. Today, the heavy chain link fencing on the gate looks original, but there is no barbed wire atop it or the attached galvanized chain link fence (which does not look original).
- E. South Overlook:** A small terrace on the eastern edge of the Rose Garden, overlooking the East Lake, gives park visitors a place to enjoy peaceful scenery and quiet contemplation. From a limestone screenings walk in the Rose Garden, three red sandstone entry steps with gravel treads lead down to a concrete floor. Its wide, low red sandstone walls have prominent stone corners, and walls are capped elsewhere along the top with red-orange brick rowlocks in a running bond pattern. It was designed in 1939, soon after the construction of the East Lake.
- F. North Overlook:** Similar in size and design to the South Overlook, this small terrace is also surrounded by wide, low red sandstone retaining walls with prominent stone corners, and capped elsewhere along the top with red-orange brick rowlocks in a running bond pattern. From a chat walk in the Rose Garden, three red sandstone entry steps lead down to a chat floor. The North Overlook is slightly larger than the South Overlook, and its east front wall overlooking the lake is curved outward instead of straight like the South Overlook's. The North Overlook was also designed in 1939, and gives park visitors a vantage point from which to view the two Memory Gardens across the lake.

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**Objects:**

1. **Fountain:** In 1955, the donated J. J. Culbertson Fountain was placed as a focal point at the north end of the lawn opposite the grand entry gate into the rose garden. The fountain consists of a walled pool containing a large World War I-era imported bronze Richard Aigner statue of a nude mother and daughter, with the mother holding just above her daughter's reach a fish symbolizing life's ideals worth striving for. The pool is made of red sandstone with red sandstone cap and base and a concrete interior. The sculpture is centered in the pool atop a tall pedestal of mortared red sandstone. A bronze plaque at the fountain notes that it was "presented to Oklahoma City by Mr. & Mrs. John Culbertson 1930. Relocated in Municipal Rose Garden 1955." Near the fountain to the east, a low red sandstone wall encircles a large manhole cover, part of the fountain's original plumbing system. The fountain overflows into the East Lake. In the early 1980s, the sculpture was taken in for repairs; no changes were made. Concrete pockets for water lilies were added to the pool floor. The fountain was given new plumbing.
  
8. **Two lakes (2 structures):** Two small tributaries of the Deep Fork were impounded to create two large ponds, or "lakes" as they are called on the original construction plans. The lakes, located on the east and west sides of the rose garden, create visual interest and serve to separate the rose garden from the rest of the park. Originally used for public swimming, a function taken over by the municipal swimming pool in 1954, they are now home to the park's many ducks, geese, and turtles, which entertain the wildlife watchers along their shores.
  - A. **The West Lake:** Located just west of the Rose Garden, the West Lake is about a half acre in size, but gives the visual impression of a larger body of water. The CCC began work on it late in 1933, immediately after establishing its camp at the park. Shorter and wider than the East Lake, its waters form a long, placid curve. Viewed from the Rose Garden's "Temple of Love," the lake is very scenic and peaceful; compared to the East Lake, it has less easy access, less people, less urban aspect, and more visible wildlife in the form of geese families, turtles, and the occasional heron. Water lilies cover a large portion of the lake. The weir on the south shore is not readily apparent; the shoreline there with its mature trees gives the impression of a naturally occurring lake instead of an artificial one.

The inlet to the West Lake arrives underground, emerging through haphazard concrete rubble from a culvert beneath a grass-covered earthen dam in the arboretum. Even when not flowing, the good-sized stream backs up from the lake to the culvert. Upstream from the earthen dam, the ground is sculpted into a grassy bowl, which serves as a much-needed water impoundment area. A long arching metal bridge with a wood plank deck crosses where the stream enters the lake.
  - B. **The East Lake:** The East Lake, constructed in 1936, is nearly an acre in size. It is shaped like the front half of an alligator with its mouth wide open; the northern shore is a V-shaped peninsula separating two widened creek beds on each side. A dry-stack red sandstone wall forms a waterfall where the smaller eastern creek enters the lake. Its construction date is remembered as definitely after 1952 and probably in

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the early 1960s. A 1989 short wooden footbridge on the Henry Walter Azalea Trail crosses the top of the waterfall. Above the waterfall, the seasonally dry creek is enhanced with recirculating plumbing to create a continuous waterfall. With its gravel bottom and red sandstone boulder edging, the creek looks very naturalistic. Below the wooden bridge/waterfall, the lake fork is spanned by an arching brown-painted metal footbridge with a concrete deck, somewhat Japanese in style and formerly painted bright red to bring out its pleasing architectural features. On the western side of the peninsula, a larger, curving live creek enters the East Lake beneath a flat, metal, concrete-decked footbridge. Both of these bridges, walks lined with red sandstone boulders, and two sets of concrete steps are needed to connect the Rose Garden on the west side of the Lake with the rest of the horticultural gardens on the east side of the Lake. A high-shooting water feature aerates the lake. Erosion along the east and west shoreline has become problematic. The south shoreline contains the dam.

**9. Two dams (2 structures):**

- A. The West Lake Weir:** The West Lake's original c. 1933 dam was replaced by a weir designed by OKC Parks Department Civil Engineer Bruce Gallop in 1938, and probably built by the WPA. The 6-inch concrete weir is on the south end of the lake, tightly abutting Pat Murphy Drive. Original plans called for a concrete weir 6 feet wide across the front, with sides tapering back at a 45-degree angle into the lake bank. The weir was topped with a 1-foot wire mesh fish screen to keep the fish in the lake. Behind the weir, two 24-inch culverts, their mouths also covered with fish screens, took the outflow beneath Pat Murphy Drive. Today, the fish screens are absent. The shoreline above the weir is still rimmed with red sandstone boulders. A low plank deck has been built above the weir inlet, its southern edge cut to conform to the shapes of the boulders. Original plans called for a rustic guardrail between roadside and lake, composed of slender logs set into notches on large sandstone boulders. There is no guardrail today.
- B. The East Lake Dam:** Located on the south end of the East Lake, the dam was designed by the Oklahoma City Parks Department in the fall of 1936. The plan was revised in the spring of 1937. The dam was to be dirt fill on each side of a clay core, approximately 130 feet long and 16.4 feet from bottom to top, with a 3:1 slope on the water side and a 2:1 slope on dry side. The plan's Mechanics of Construction notes, "The dam [is] to have native red clay core, 3'-0" thickness and extend from a point 2'-0" below natural contour to the full height of the dam. This clay is to be very thoroughly puddled by adding water as it is placed & driving teams the length of the core. The water side of the dam is to be a natural fill wall planted with grass roots. The dry side of the dam is to be terraced with native red stone placed rip-rap style as per section leaving dirt pockets for planting." Today, the dam is edged with concrete faced with red sandstone boulders. It is topped with a long concrete sidewalk that connects the Rose Garden with the East Parking Lot.

Original plans indicate that this lake was to have two separate outlets for moving its water downstream. Normal drainage flow was to occur through a 4-inch galvanized pipe near the bottom of the dam near its

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west end. On the east end of the dam, at a much higher elevation than the galvanized pipe, a large culvert piercing the dam would handle floodwater.

Today, two sets of culverts empty into two separate, deeply cut small creeks on the south side of the dam. At the western outlet, two metal culverts protrude from a dry-stack stone wall, spilling into a rubble-filled waterway. At the eastern outlet, a single metal culvert protrudes from the center of a very large, roughly made concrete retaining apron doubling as a retaining wall. At the bottom of the apron, a fast-flowing live stream exits through the dam. Not culvertized, it appears to be a leak, and has caused severe erosion damage behind the concrete apron and beneath the sandstone steps above it. The two outlet streams join just north of Pat Murphy Drive and cross beneath it as one stream.

On the dam's dry side, between the two sets of culverts, four tiers of dry-stack red sandstone retaining walls create several levels of planting terraces. Unplanted now, the terraces with planting pockets were part of the dam's original design, as was a rock spillway for overflow, indicated at east end of the dam by the culvert.

Leading down from the back side on the east end of the dam, the trailhead for the Will Rogers Nature Trail begins as a restored wide red flagstone landing above the culvert/spillway. From the landing, two broad steps lead down to a small, mortared red flagstone terrace against the south side of the dam. A dry-stack red sandstone retaining wall with a concrete cap edges the back, or north, side of the terrace. A flight of narrow, mortared red sandstone steps leads down from the terrace alongside its high retaining wall to the bottom of the embankment, where the trail heads south along the wooded swift-running stream toward Pat Murphy Drive.

**10. Iris Garden (structure):** The iris garden is located on high ground on the east side of East Lake, south of the Conservatory and greenhouses. It was designed by Henry Walter in 1937, at the same time as the Rose Garden. Throughout the interior of the garden, curving concrete walks outline the beds, shaping them into informal, organically flowing beds reminiscent of the Rose Garden's original bed shapes. Along the walks, the beds are lined with hundreds of irises; their centers are filled crape myrtles, perennials, and deciduous and evergreen shrubs. Daylilies, estimated at a thousand plants, have a large separate section. Many plants are labeled, and one garden area is labeled as a section for plants that butterflies love. At the main entrance (from the East Parking Lot), low red sandstone retaining walls capped with mortared red brick rowlocks line the entry walk and surround the beds. The remainder of the beds do not have retaining walls.

**11. Two Memory Gardens (2 structures):**

**A. Will Rogers Memory Garden:** This small garden, planned by Henry Walter and installed in 1954, is carved out of the steep embankment on the eastern edge of the East Lake. At the northern edge of the garden, a steep flight of concrete steps descends between high walls through a narrow cut in the embankment to a split-level concrete terrace below. The terrace, its landing curving to the south and

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descending two curved concrete steps to the terrace proper, is surrounded by low red sandstone walls capped with orange brick rowlocks and a sturdy metal railing. The back of the garden above the terrace is formed by a high, curved, random ashlar retaining wall set into the embankment. In the planting bed at its base, overlooking the East Pond and Rose Garden, is a concrete bust of Will Rogers by sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens and a bronze plaque honoring Rogers' memory. The bust was donated by the Auvergne Chapter of Demolay, Tulsa. The front wall of the plaza, bulging out in a great curve, rises out of the lake. An original lower-tier sidewalk, connecting the terrace with the Memory Garden (below), has subsided into the lake.

- B. Memory Garden:** Formal design, slightly curved straight-edged hardscape, and use of identical hardscape materials visually tie the Memory Garden with the Will Rogers Memory Garden. Physically linked to the Will Rogers Memory Garden by a long red sandstone retaining wall capped with orange rowlocks and running along the lakefront edge, the Memory Garden appears at first to be an extension of that garden. Above the low wall, however, the empty expanse of a high mulched embankment creates an obvious visual separation. Like the Will Rogers Memory Garden just south of it, the Memory Garden is constructed on a sloping embankment on the East Lake. A series of slightly curved, tiered retaining walls stepping down the embankment form five levels of linear planting beds separated by five levels of concrete sidewalks. An original lower tier sidewalk has subsided into the lake. A curve in the center of the topmost retaining wall forms a concrete-paved alcove containing a bench overlooking the Rose Garden and intervening East Lake. In a newspaper interview at the time of construction, Henry Walter noted that the garden design would contain a fountain cascading into the lake. The paved alcove on the top level once contained a round pool where a water jet squirted three feet into the air. The overflow from this pool was piped underground to trickle from the mouth of a mossy, wall-mounted metal dolphin into a half-circle pool set into a tiny alcove in a lower retaining wall. From there, an overflow pipe carried the water into the East Lake. The fountains and waters no longer run, and the two pools have been filled in with concrete, but the dolphin still graces the wall in the lower alcove. The beds are planted with a few specimen trees, shrubs, and groupings of annual and perennial flowers. A bronze plaque commemorating the gardens as "dedicated to the Charter Members of Garden Flower Club, the first garden club in Oklahoma, organized 1921." The garden was the gift of the Shepherd Foundation, which also paid for the long footbridge crossing the creek entering East Lake between the Memory Garden and the Rose Garden. Although this garden was constructed in 1964, it was designed and installed by Henry Walter, the park's original designer, and reflects his intent to create a park featuring many horticultural gardens.

**12. Other Horticultural Gardens (structure):** North of the Iris Garden, nestled between the Headhouse/Greenhouse complex and perched above the embankment of the East Lake with its Memory Gardens, lie a series of concrete walks, grass panels, shrub-and-perennial borders, and perennial display gardens for cannas, herbs, peonies, tropical hibiscus, and other collections. With its use of grass panels, the design of this wedge-shaped garden area differs greatly from that of the Iris Garden, where none are used, and also from the Rose Garden, where grass panels are long and linear. Here, a change in basic design layout produces repeated grassy ovals surrounded by concrete-edged beds with shrubs and perennials. Concrete walks, one in the shape of a tight oval,

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are not contiguous throughout the area; some of the grass panels are meant to carry pedestrian traffic. A simple post-and-roof octagonal gazebo on a brick floor, designed by Charles E. Sparks in the early 1970s, dominates a square of grassy lawn.

These gardens were planned and established by the park's original designer, Henry Walter, but differ in several respects from his earlier garden designs in the Iris and Rose Gardens. The design of the horticultural gardens area is as formal as that of the Rose Garden, but in a more rigidly geometric, less organically flowing way. Also different from the Iris Garden and the original bed layout in the Rose Garden, where visitors walked among the plants on concrete walks winding through the beds, visitors to this series of horticultural gardens walk next to the plant displays instead of through them; these gardens were to be viewed from a short distance away and are not as intimate as the Iris or original Rose Gardens. Like the other gardens in the park, these gardens reflect the perpetuation of Walter's intent to create a park with horticultural gardens focusing on collections of perennial plants.

**13. Native Tree Meadow (site):** Lying to the north of the Henry Walter Azalea Trail, and visible from it, is this sun-dappled grassy meadow ringed with many large native trees, several of which are marked with memorial plaques. Its coupe de grace is a large white oak marked with a 1950 Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs plaque noting it was "presented to the clubs as a gift of appreciation from France for the train load of wheat received by France from citizens of the United States following World War II."

**14. Rock Garden (structure):** Northeast of the Rose Garden and south of the Native Tree Meadow, informal tiers of red sandstone boulders slope steeply down the embankment of a wide, curvy live creek just before it enters the East Lake. The boulders were dragged into place by teams of horses and artfully placed to appear naturalistic. Planting pockets were formed between the boulders. Called the Rock Garden, this area was designed by Henry Walter and planted in 1952-4. It showcased perennials and Oklahoma native wildflowers gathered from all over the state, naturalized and classified for study, before tall-growing trees shaded them out. The Rock Garden requires extensive hand maintenance and has been not been planted for many years. Even without the plantings, the intrinsic design of the boulder formation is strong enough in itself to hold an intrigue often expressed by park visitors.

#### Noncontributing Resources

The following are noncontributing resources. They all relate to the horticultural theme of the park. However, the two gardens are recent, designed to showcase themes (xeriscape, legacy) instead of specific plant cultivars (iris, daylily, etc.) showcased in the older gardens designed by Henry Walter. The two buildings, modern replacements, are recent in age and do not conform to CCC/WPA architectural design or materials. Of the adjacent parking lots, one is extremely recent and the other is very much altered. Only one of these resources was designed by Henry Walter.

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**15. Greenhouses (4 structures):** Located immediately to the west behind the Conservatory are four greenhouses, grouped in pairs and separated by an open-air space running the entire length between the two center greenhouses. This configuration differs slightly from the original, although the footprint remains the same.

The four original angle-iron frame, glass greenhouses (Greenhouse #1, built in Wheeler Park, was moved to the [original] state fairgrounds after the 1923 flood, then moved a second time in 1936 to Will Rogers Park; the other three were built onsite in 1936) were demolished in 1993. They were replaced by two new greenhouses and a plant propagation house, all top-of-the-line, aluminum frame, double wall polycarbonate construction, complete with computerized heating and cooling systems. The westernmost greenhouse, built in 1965, is connected to the others. It retains its original frame and concrete knee wall, but was reskinned with polycarbonate when the other greenhouses were built in 1993. The greenhouse complex, no longer used, stands empty. Although their visual effect remains the same as the original, the new materials have created new structures; therefore, the Greenhouses are a noncontributing resource.

**16. Garden Exhibition Center (building):** This 11,300 square feet modern building was erected in 1963 as a replacement for an earlier Garden Club "club house" designed by locally famous architect Leonard H. Bailey in 1938. With its round-and-rectangular shape, wide overhanging eaves, and red brick walls with starkly-white preformed-concrete buttresses and jutting rooftop decorative elements, its style is a complete departure from the architecture found elsewhere in the park. The building is a visual intrusion, which is not compatible with the Victorian style of the Conservatory just behind it.

**17. Two Garden Exhibition Center Parking Lots (structure):** The lot nearest the Garden Exhibition Center was one of the park's original parking lots, and once sported the distinctive native red sandstone curbs installed by the WPA. A 2004 redesign and resurfacing project removed the original sandstone curbing along with the interior planting island. A second parking lot, built as an expansion in 2004, is too recent to qualify as a contributing resource.

**18. Garage and Storage Facility (building):** Designed in 1962, this mortared concrete-block flat-roofed structure stands next to the now-raised 1937 "Horticulturist's Cottage" where Henry Walter lived on the park property, and is diagonally across the maintenance road from a graveled maintenance parking and materials storage area. It is a replacement for a previous building, probably frame, and probably used for the same purpose.

**19. Lath House (structure):** Designed by Henry Walter in 1951 and completed in early 1952, this long, rectangular structure was used for growing out plants requiring shade instead of full sun. Its angle-iron framework was sided with 3-3/4 inch vertical redwood laths (slats) spaced 3-3/4 inches apart to allow necessary air circulation via natural breezes and a proper combination of shade and light for the plants held inside. Its gravel floor facilitates drainage for pots, and three parallel concrete walkways providing access between the plant-holding ground beds keep horticulture workers out of the mud. 1964 plans called for lengthening the lath house by nearly 2/3 of its original length. A concrete sill with angle-iron roof bracing divides the original building from the newer addition. The floor plan in the addition has two parallel concrete walkways accessing the graveled ground bed sections instead of three. A side addition indicated on the plan does not exist now. In 1996-67, the



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original redwood siding was stripped and new pressure-treated pine siding installed to the original specifications. The Lath House is a noncontributing resource because the size of the addition overwhelms the original.

**20. Hoop House (structure):** Moved from the Cow Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant c. 1993, this unprepossessing structure next to the lath house was used to harden off tender plants and as a staging area for plant pickups by trucks.

**21. Henry Walter Azalea Trail (structure):** Planned by Henry Walter in 1967, the so-called "Henry Walter Azalea Trail" actually designates both the trail and the azalea-planted area surrounding it. The trail begins along the north side of the Memory Garden, crosses the waterfall on a 1989 footbridge at the north end of the East Lake, and mounts a hill to an area of large native trees north of the rose garden. Planted with large groupings of azaleas, ferns, and hostas beneath a soaring canopy of tall treetops, this trail is beautiful in the springtime. In contrast to the formality of the rose garden, the design effect is naturalistic, and the touch of the designer is very subtle so as to appear that the area emerged on its own. The hillside of azalea beds is informally terraced with red sandstone boulders. More than 2,000 azaleas were planted with the help of two Sears grants. At the top of the hill, a small concrete plaza, edged with red brick, contains two concrete-and-metal benches and very large red sandstone boulder with a bronze plaque stating, "This azalea trail is dedicated in honor of Henry Walter for his long and distinguished service to Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs 1967." Although this garden was constructed late in the park's history and differs from other gardens in design style, it was established by the park's original designer and reflects his intent of creating a park featuring horticultural gardens. At the small plaza, a later-era trail spur turns south along the center of the East Lake peninsula to connect with the path between the Rose Garden and the Memory Gardens. This portion of the trail is chat edged with railroad ties, and very few azaleas are left. Leading west from the small plaza, a second later-era trail spur, wearing a Joseph's Coat of many different kinds of paving materials, passes the tiny 1994 Mayberry Garden with its collection of viburnums, then crosses the creek to connect with the Arboretum and Rose Garden.

**22. Xeriscape Garden (structure):** A joint project by the City of Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department and the Water and Wastewater Utilities, this 1991 educational garden showcases a wide variety of landscape plants with low water demands. Located at the south end of the Conservatory, it is designed with gravel pathways, railroad tie bed edges, and quantities of educational signage.

**23. Legacy Garden (structure):** This narrow garden extends outward from the Garden Exhibition Center along the west edge of its parking lot. The Legacy Garden was part of a nationwide program to honor the Constitution of the United States, and installed in 1987, the year of the Constitution's 200th birthday. It celebrates a legacy of America and the American spirit of community cooperation. Embodying that spirit of community cooperation, the garden, under the auspices of the Oklahoma City Park and Recreation Department and the Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs, was privately designed and planted. Horticulturist/designer George Vaclavek chose plants illustrating high survivability and year-around color. Spaces were left for perennials to be inserted by the daylily and iris clubs and showy bulbs and annuals by the Council of Garden Clubs. Local nurserymen, members of the now defunct Oklahoma City Nurserymen's Association, donated all of the plants and soil amendments and

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planted the garden in one day. Nearly 30% of the garden was removed during 2004 construction of an adjacent parking lot. Planting design and replacement plant installation should take place during 2005.

The nominated portion of the park has been in use since the 1930s as a horticultural showplace and production facility devoted to providing public beauty and horticultural education. Public usage and enjoyment increased as a result of improvements by the CCC and WPA in the 1930s. The area's continued popularity is evidenced by the continued expansion of the gardens and arboretum since that time. The design wrought by the CCC, National Park Service, and Oklahoma City Park Department is very much evident. The CCC and WPA materials and the workmanship that went into creating the park are evident and in good condition. It retains its integrity of location, setting, association and feeling. It remains an excellent representation of a community park designed by the National Park Service and created by the CCC, yet expresses its own individuality with its historic devotion to horticultural displays and areas of formal design.

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## Summary

Will Rogers Park Gardens and Arboretum are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A & C as being significant in landscape design and as part of the City of Oklahoma City's park system plan. The historic gardens and arboretum are the work of primarily one man's vision, that of City Horticulturist Henry Walter. The specialized horticultural nature of the Gardens and Arboretum distinguish them from the recreational aspects of the balance of Will Rogers Park and all other city parks in Oklahoma City.

Will Rogers Park is an important site in its local context. Oklahoma City was founded April 22, 1889, as the result of a land run. It grew from a work crew at the Santa Fe Railroad station to a city of 10,000 people in one day. By 1910, it had grown to a population of 64,000 and built a flourishing stockyards. Fresh money from the stockyards and the optimism created by the new wealth inspired a two-year building boom culminating in 15 downtown "skyscrapers" that made the city look grand and its citizens feel proud. Adding fuel to the fire was the winning of the 1910 capitol city election and procurement of the State Seal: fast-growing, big-money Oklahoma City dominated its rival cities and became the capitol of Oklahoma. The glory spilled over into desires of becoming a grander, more splendid city. One of the ways it chose to achieve this was by the creation of a large-scale park system for its citizens.

W. H. Dunn, a landscape architect and Superintendent of Parks in Kansas City (much admired for its beauty), was hired to develop its first Parks Plan. His 1909 plan called for a "Grand Boulevard" to encircle the city several miles distant from the downtown, with a major park set at each of the four "corners." The parks were called Northwest (renamed Will Rogers), Southwest (renamed Woodson), Southeast (renamed Trosper) and Northeast (renamed Lincoln). These parks were to differ from the City's existing parks in that they were much larger and were expected to draw people from across the region instead of merely within their own neighborhoods. The Grand Boulevard Plan was implemented years later upon the recommendation of Kansas City planning consultants Hare and Hare's 1930 "The City Plan for Oklahoma City." Historically, these four parks have given Oklahoma City its special footprint; once marking the city's outer edge, they now encircle and demark the city's inner core.

In its historical setting, Will Rogers Park appeared on city maps since 1909. Development was put off until the 1930s, when Hare & Hare's City Plan gave impetus to begin. Guided by the dreams and physical efforts of City Horticulturist Henry Walter, employed at the park from 1932-1971, plans were drawn up by the Oklahoma City Park Department and National Park Service and executed by the work force supplied by the CCC and WPA. Together, they dammed two creeks and created a naturalistic landscape of small lakes, rolling hills, curving roadways, amphitheater, retaining walls, picnic shelters, rose and iris gardens, an arboretum, and many structures built from native red sandstone. In 1936, the Ed Lyman Conservatory was moved to the park. Its adjacent greenhouse complex was once the center for annual plant propagation for citywide beautification of public areas. In this capacity, Will Rogers Park continued the historic legacy of first Wheeler Park, and then the original State Fairgrounds; in these three places, the City Parks Department has carried on a tradition of nearly one hundred years of growing herbaceous plants to beautify the city's parks and other public spaces.

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Well-preserved examples of work done by the CCC and WPA during the 1930s and early 1940s add to the historical significance of this public park. After the CCC and WPA completed their work, expansion of the horticultural gardens and arboretum continued under Henry Walter until his retirement in 1971. Since then, the Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department has maintained the park, making minor additions, alterations, and repairs. In addition to the 15-acre Arboretum, the Will Rogers Horticultural Gardens now cover 15 acres of specialty gardens for irises, daylilies, peonies, butterflies, herbs, tropical hibiscus, cannas, and the 1.63-acre Charles E. Sparks Memorial Rose Garden, which until the 1970s was one of the largest rose gardens in the United States<sup>2</sup> (reputedly the second-largest).

### Criterion C - Landscape Design

From 1933-1935, design for Will Rogers Park was done by the Oklahoma City Park Department and implemented by the CCC. From 1936-1938, park design was done jointly by the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service cooperating with the Oklahoma City Park Department and was implemented by both the CCC and WPA.

A phenomenon of the 1930s, Civilian Conservation Corps was set up to provide work for men, usually young, who met certain qualifications of need. They provided needed labor for municipal projects. The National Park Service provided design plans for the projects, usually working with the local municipality's designers and administration. The National Park Service also provided skilled supervisors to oversee the work, skilled workmen to provide instruction to the unskilled CCC laborers, and a roving inspector to report on camp and project conditions. US Army staff ran the CCC camps where the workers lived. Camps were usually made up of 200 men. The men lived a supervised life in NPS temporary wooden barracks with electricity, sewage, and water, but had more freedom than actual soldiers. The men were paid, but most of their money went to their families at home. Meals were provided, usually better food than was available elsewhere during the Depression, women's visits were restricted and chaperoned, clothing and shoes were issued, and desertion was permitted. Athletic equipment and evening education classes were provided. The camps underwent periodic inspections to note camp conditions, adequacy of supplies, health and morale of men, lists of one week's daily menus, and the relationship between the camp and neighboring citizenry.

The Will Rogers Park project was designated SP-3-O. "SP" stood for State Park, the number referred to the specific camp, with each camp receiving its own number, and the "O" stood for Oklahoma. Company 868 of the Civilian Conservation Corps was assigned to Will Rogers Park. Camp was set up in the southwest corner of Will Rogers Park. The first enrollees arrived October 12, 1933. Six were from Colorado, 81 were from Oklahoma, and 119 arrived later from Fort Sam Houston. First camp commander was Philip H. Kernan, 1st Lt. 20th Infantry, Fort Sill; others in charge were Ralph H. McKee, 1st Lt. Inf. Res., Shirley N. Rogers, 1st Lt. 379 Inf.

<sup>2</sup>Website: Oklahoma City / Will Rogers Park. [http://www.okc.gov/parks/will\\_rogers/history.html](http://www.okc.gov/parks/will_rogers/history.html)

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Res., and Arthur P. Pence, Sergeant. William L. Charteris, Contract Surgeon, was the Army doctor provided, along with a hospital. Special Inspector M. L. Grant reported very good conditions at Camp 868 and no problems except mud in the buildings after a heavy rain because the camp was located on a clay hill. Favorite sports at this camp were basketball and boxing.

The NPS onsite Project Superintendent was the Forestry Service's John Best (Landscape Architect & Work Project Supervisor), who received a gross salary of \$220.00 per month. Henry Walter of the Oklahoma City Park Department was Cultural Foreman, with a salary of \$167.02 per month. Other project supervisors included an engineer, structural foreman, several cleanup foremen, a landscape foreman, architect, mechanic, and blacksmith, with salaries ranging from \$117.65 to \$167.65 per month. Six months later, everyone but Superintendent Best had received a raise of just under \$3.00 per month.

The first CCC camp's work involved six projects:

Project I: Digging, laying and backfilling approximately 1,000 feet of 6-inch sewer line.  
Digging, laying and backfilling approximately 4,000 feet of 3-inch sewer line.

Project II: Surveying, consisting of

1. Locating boundaries of park
2. Locating boundaries of Grand Boulevard
3. Locating and cross-sectioning lake and dam
4. Locating and cross-sectioning amphitheater

Project III: Soil erosion control consisting of:

1. Grading to approximately 3 to 1 grade on stream park [sic]
2. Filling washes to approximately 3 to 1 grade on stream back
3. Opening drainage ditches to stream

Project IV: Tree culture consisting of:

1. Removing dead trees
2. Trimming out dead wood
3. Pruning of trees

Project V: Cleanup work consisting of:

1. Cutting of weeds
2. Hauling trash to dump ground

Project VI: General:

1. Organization of enlisted men
2. Checking and care of tools
3. Checking and supervision of motor equipment
4. Repairing tools, etc.
5. Erecting approximately 1/4 mile electric light line
6. Hauling rock for rip-rap<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Camp Inspection Reports, Oklahoma City (SP-3-O) November 9, 1933, National Archives (microfilm, Roll 4). Located at Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

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A March 1934 camp inspection report indicated that Superintendent Best was pleased with the quality of work performed by the men in the camp.<sup>4</sup>

The CCC 6-month work period, scheduled to end April 15, 1934 with a move to Perry, was extended to June 30. Superintendent Best wanted an additional three months to truly finish the entire improvement program at the park; available records do not indicate whether that desire was gratified.<sup>5</sup> In 1936, park improvement work was continued or augmented by the WPA, which moved the Conservatory onto the grounds. A flurry of design plans were drawn between 1936 and 1938, all bearing the joint logo of the Oklahoma City Parks Department and the National Park Service. These plans include the park's East Lake and dam, Rose Garden, and native red sandstone structures found throughout the nominated area and the park as a whole. This period of time corresponds to the time and workmanship of the WPA and/or continuing CCC work, although records do not indicate how long the WPA worked at Will Rogers Park, or whether the CCC continued to work alongside them. By 1941, as indicated by an aerial photograph, the CCC camp's barracks and associated buildings had been removed from the site.

In the decade before the advent of the CCC and WPA, Charles J. Punchard Jr., NPS landscape Engineer (park designer) established a program of landscape design and review that guided the NPS well during the 1930s, when its policy was to work closely with onsite park superintendents, giving them design ideas through rough sketches, finished drawings, and written reports. In 1937, the NPS divided the country into four districts. Oklahoma was in District III with Herbert Maier, an architect, in charge. An expert at designing park structures, he outlined the design principles and produced standardized drawings of every park structure built by Division III. Division III designs used stone construction. He was strict about adherence to the design principles, but encouraged local adaptation of the designs to prevent tiresome look-alikes. Maier at first was based in Denver, but then moved his headquarters to Oklahoma City. Maier and H. H. Cornell, an inspector for the NPS, had a very pleasant and successful working relationship with Donald L. Gordon, Superintendent of the Oklahoma City Park Department. Together, they discussed and gave approvals to City Horticulturist Henry Walter's designs for Will Rogers Park, and all four men corroborated on approvals for NPS designs of park structures. This partnership was based on the NPS policy of promoting teamwork in park design and construction.

The National Park Service strongly advocated a set of design principles to which it adhered in the design of every park. It prized unspoiled natural beauty, maximizing scenic views, keeping service roads and buildings

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<sup>4</sup>*Camp Inspection Reports, Oklahoma City (SP-3-O) March 3, 1934, National Archives (microfilm, Roll 4). Located at Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma.*

<sup>5</sup>Reid Holland, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the City: Tulsa and Oklahoma City in the 1930s," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. LIII, p. 373 indicates in a footnote that Camp Inspection Reports for the Will Rogers Park CCC camp continue through October 1935. However, these reports were not located with the November 1933 and March 1934 reports (there were only these two) on the National Archives microfilm at Oklahoma State University. No corroborating materials have been found to indicate when the Will Rogers camp vacated the premises, remaining an entire year and three months past its initial 3-month extension, or if the presence of only two reports would indicate that the camp broke up at the end of its (first) extension on June 30, 1934.

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inconspicuous, and using native materials as the key to harmonizing park structures with each other and their surroundings.

Will Rogers Park design follows typical guidelines of the NPS/CCC/WPA in many ways, but varies sharply from standard design in other areas. For example, NPS preferred the use of stone, especially native stone, as a primary construction material. Thus, the park's extensive use of native red sandstone is very typical of a CCC/WPA preferred construction material. The method of assembling the stone so that the horizontal mortar joints form irregular patterns instead of straight lines is also typical. However, the park's extensive use of brick as a capping material for sandstone walls is rare.

The two WPA-built 1938 structures in the Rose Garden exhibit both rare and usual construction materials. The structures' hip and pyramid roofs, shakes, exposed rafter tails, and built-in stone seats are typical of many other CCC/WPA structures. The large doorless and windowless wall openings illustrate a design found in many CCC/WPA structures, but the short, square timbers inserted vertically at the sides of the windows and doorway are unusual for their shape and decorativeness. Customarily, timbers would function structurally as support posts and be round in shape, looking like the trees they came from. The Rose Garden structures are built of the typical red sandstone, but low walls are capped with brick. The straight vertical lines of their exterior walls are in contrast to the typical CCC/WPA exterior stone walls that flare at the base to make the structure look like it grew up out of the ground.

The Rose Garden's two Overlooks were constructed with typical stone steps and low walls with raised stone corners. Again, atypically, the walls are capped with brick. Elsewhere, the Headhouse boasts one exterior corner heavily buttressed with a cone of stone, an element of NPS standard design; however, its exterior walls use alternating panels of brick and red sandstone, definitely not an NPS standard.

Henry Walter's theory of landscape design matched that of the NPS. The NPS paid careful attention to creating pleasing views. Long scenic vistas were created by removing obstacles. Undesirable backgrounds were screened with plant material to hide them from view. Plant material was also used as screening to create and separate intimate small landscape areas that interrelated with each other. The screening made it possible for a park user to go around a corner and see a completely different theme, a surprise unseen on the approach but apparent upon arrival. These design principles are evident in the gardens' spatial layout and the pedestrian progression from one garden to the next. In the Rose Garden, for example, the grass panels allow an unobstructed view from the Formal Entry Gates to the Culbertson Fountain. Behind the roses, trees and tall shrubs blocked vision into other parts of the park, creating an "outdoor room" where one's concentration was focused only on the beauty of the Rose Garden. Similar treatment was given to the Iris Garden and the grouping of horticultural gardens west of the Greenhouses. Recently, screening plantings have been removed from the east side of the Rose Garden and the west side of the Iris Garden.

Elsewhere, the placement of the greenhouse/headhouse/garage complex is typical of the NPS standard that maintenance buildings and their associated activities should be out of public view. Standard design dictated that

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the "layout of maintenance areas in quadrangles in which garages and shops were connected to form an enclosed central court where maintenance activities could be screened from the view of the general public."<sup>6</sup> The Conservatory and Greenhouses face the public areas of the park. The maintenance Garage and Headhouse are tucked away behind them, where large trucks do not intrude into visitor enjoyment and workers' activities are not noticed. Vehicular access to the maintenance area is limited to an employees' entrance drive that is not accessible or visible from interior park roads used by the public. The interior of the maintenance complex, tucked down below The Cave, contains an employees' parking lot hidden from public view by surrounding greenhouses, Conservatory, screening plantings, and a deliberate change in elevation meant to conceal employee activities. Where the horticultural gardens extend north of the greenhouse complex, berms have been built and heavily planted to thoroughly screen the buildings and their workers from the visitors in the gardens.

The most radical departure from standard NPS design philosophy is the formality of much of the park's horticultural design. The National Park Service adhered to the English school of landscape thought, fervently desiring to create a naturalistic design of rolling topography, scenic views, man-made objects, and other alterations to nature to blend seamlessly into the natural landscape. The formality of design and brightness of the colors in the Rose Garden, Memorial Gardens, and other horticultural gardens of the park do just the opposite. The flowers leap to the attention of the viewer. The eye is also drawn to the straight lines and hard edges of the many retaining walls in the horticultural gardens. This landscape is designed to display, not to blend in with nature.

By the early twentieth century, people began to become concerned that nature and the "natural" landscape were becoming engulfed by cities and disappearing. To give respite from increasingly hostile man-made environments, gardens were designed to be pastoral, with curving organic lines, "natural" lakes and meadows, and clusters of trees and colorful flowers.

A clear example of Early Twentieth Century Gardens, the gardens at Will Rogers Park show a distinct stylistic departure from the French and Victorian gardens preceding them. Garden elements so popular in Victorian Gardens are not found here: no carpet beds; no fences, benches, gazebos, statues of ubiquitous Victorian cast iron; no boxwood-edged parterres filled with roses; none of the ever-present Victorian vases, urns, or pots. Likewise, there is no influence from the rigidity of the French gardens, where plant material was manipulated into man-made shapes: no allées, clipped hedges, parterres, or topiaries of evergreens sculptured into balls and cones.

The Will Rogers Park gardens and arboretum exhibit many of the earmarks of an Early Twentieth Century Garden. Trees in the arboretum are not in rows or randomly scattered; they are planted in the picturesque clusters so popular in earlier English landscapes. Common to the period, the gardens are divided into many different compartments, or "outdoor rooms", surrounded and separated by walls of shrubs or masonry, and each is planted differently from the next. Clean-lined, finely wrought stone or bronze statues of classic figures were popular in gardens of this era; they were often set as a focal point in the garden, or at the end of an axis. The

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<sup>6</sup>Linda Flint McClelland, *Presenting Nature: The Historical Landscape Design of the National Park Service 1916 to 1942*, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993), p. 88.



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Rose Garden's Culbertson Fountain is a good example of this kind of statuary, and its placement is typical. Summer houses or tea houses were popular; the Rose Garden has its Temple of Love. Pergolas or exedras, some thickly planted with vines or climbing roses, were common as garden focal points or backdrops; the Rose Garden's Rose Arbor fulfills this function. The imposing architecture of the gateway to the Rose Garden reflects the common practice of entering an estate through "a magnificent gate with appropriate posts and finials." Other elements prominent in Early Twentieth Century Gardens in use at Will Rogers Park include grass panels, walls, steps, terraces, gardens on several levels, wall fountains such as the one in the Memory Garden, and the use of perennial borders edging the walks (although somewhat limited at the Will Rogers Park gardens). Also during the early twentieth century, rock gardens came into vogue. Large rocks, carefully arranged to look naturalistic, would be placed along a slope and interplanted with specialized or mixed plants. The creekside wildflower rock garden at Will Rogers Park was a typical example of this style.<sup>7</sup>

The Will Rogers Park gardens do differ from many other Early Twentieth Century Gardens in an important way. The planting style reveals the purpose underlying the creation of the Will Rogers gardens. These gardens are not organized to showcase striking focal points of specimen plants, or to present drifts of color visible from long distances. Instead, their layout presents the plants in a way similar to a plant catalog. Plants are clustered in blocks stressing different cultivars and hybrids of the same plant. Because the purpose of the gardens was to provide a learning experience, visitors are thus given the opportunity to observe and compare the cultivars and hybrids for their performance, color, height, and suitability for their own gardens.

### **Criterion A - Community Planning and Development**

The nominated portion of the park has been in use since the 1930s as a horticultural showplace and production facility devoted to providing beauty and horticultural learning for those who seek it. Its extensive public gardens have brought the citizens of this city the immense benefit of an open space designed for the luxury of peaceful, contemplative strolling in an environment of nature, beauty, and color.

In addition to the twin gifts of beauty and psyche restoration that the gardens and arboretum provided to the public, there were other, less tangible gifts. In a spirit hard to recapture in this day and age, the horticultural staff at the park formed close, cooperative relationships with local nurserymen, with botanical gardens and nurserymen across the country, and with the general public.

Over the years, Will Rogers Park was blessed with a highly trained horticultural staff that was very skillful in producing and caring for plants. They knew the proper time to collect seeds, methods of treatment to make them sprout, depth to plant them, and timing of planting for spring production. They knew how and when to make cuttings of plants best propagated by non-seed methods. They knew how and when to make plants grafts,

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<sup>7</sup>Rudy J. Favretti and Joy Putnam Favretti, Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1978) 45-71.

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creating both useful and novelty plants. Such skills are developed over long periods of teaching, observation, trial-and-error, and time.

These people kept the public gardens in Will Rogers Park and all over the city humming during times of low budgets, when knowledge, resourcefulness, initiative, and unique relationships were needed to fill the gaps left by elusive money. Besides developing the arboretum into a living plant museum, they used the arboretum as a bartering tool to stretch their cash flow by trading their plants across the country for other plants they did not have. They also used it as a tool of good will by supplying hard-to-find plant specimens for local nurserymen struggling to complete architect-specified contract plantings, and by providing nurserymen with plant cuttings for propagation. The nurserymen, in turn, exchanged plant information with the staff and donated their own plants for the gardens and arboretum.

Since the days of Henry Walter, the staff's good relationships with the Garden Clubs have helped to enhance the park's gardens. They encouraged the Oklahoma Rose Society's participation in planting and maintaining the Rose Garden. The Iris Society has furnished all the irises for the beds in the Iris Garden. For decades, after blooming is over, they have dug the multiplied rhizomes and held an annual sale. Profits are used to improve the Iris Garden (its sidewalks, shrubs, and perennials were added this way) and update the iris beds by replanting with the newest and best older cultivars. Because of personal connections, the staff was able to obtain the world-class Charles Polaski collection containing rare and unusual specimens of cacti and succulents still on display in the Conservatory. The collection is still maintained by the Central Oklahoma Cacti and Succulent Society.

Until recently, Will Rogers Park's greenhouse complex was the center for annual plant propagation for citywide beautification of public areas. The park's production greenhouses have had a long history of providing colorful flowers for the park as well as the city's other parks, municipal buildings, and public flower beds. In 1979, city employees planted flowers in about 1,500 beds.<sup>8</sup> As recently as 1994, the greenhouses were producing an estimated 80,000 bedding plants per year from seeds, in addition to an estimated 25,000 cuttings taken, tended, and grown out by park staff.<sup>9</sup>

Fueling public participation and interest, the staff sometimes took in favorite large exotic plants that people could no longer keep in their homes, giving them places in the Conservatory. They grew exotic plants that would not normally be seen, such as the ponderosa lemon with its huge elliptical fruits (measured at 19 inches long) and an African baobab tree coaxed from its seed by Henry Walter, a success that many considered a minor phenomenon. Their whimsically grafted plants, such as the Chinese hibiscus with flowers of many different colors and the grapefruit tree bearing grapefruit, oranges, and lemons, made the Conservatory an interesting place to visit. The public was also welcome to visit the working greenhouses, an opportunity often not available to the public in

<sup>8</sup>Sutter, Ellie, "Men Recount Years of Service," Daily Oklahoman and Times, 12 February 1986, Sec. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Connel, Cathy, Horticulture Supervisor, Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department (at Will Rogers Park 1989-2003), oral interviews, August, December 2004, January 2005.

Money, Jack, "Conservatory Renovation Completed," Daily Oklahoman, 28 September, 1994, Community III, 1-2.

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other cities. The staff became a public resource in horticulture information; they often gave sound horticultural advice to callers needing aid with their yards and gardens.

Today, this rich legacy is passing. Since 2002, a series of budget cuts and revised departmental policies have effected important changes in the plant propagation program and number of trained horticultural staff. In 2002, the Park Department eliminated a large percentage of the city-wide public annual flower beds, all tree-planting and maintenance, and all wildflower planting, and reduced the Field Horticulture Section of park employees. The elimination of the citywide public planting beds for which the Will Rogers Park plants were grown eliminated the necessity for the plant production. In 2003, the four large, still-pristine greenhouses were abandoned. Nearly all permanent skilled horticultural workers at Will Rogers Park were phased out. Reduced staff resulted in reduced park maintenance. Mulch is now substituted in place of the shrubs and flowers in several of the park's large planting beds and in city-wide planting beds that once bloomed with flowers from the Will Rogers Park greenhouses.

Since the 1930s, when the CCC erected the park's first clubhouse, Will Rogers Park has been home to Oklahoma City's many garden clubs. Its continued popularity is evidenced by the necessity for replacing the clubhouse with a much larger Garden Exhibition Building. Offering a well-stocked horticultural library, kitchen facilities, and versatility in its different-sized meeting rooms, the Garden Exhibition Building currently hosts 20 garden clubs, 26 hobby clubs, and 5 municipal groups meeting on a monthly basis.<sup>10</sup>

Will Rogers is more than a park; it is a living museum which is an integral part of Oklahoma's landscape. Oklahomans have benefited from the continuity of landscape management by Henry Walter, an extremely competent horticulturist who pioneered its planting configurations, plant selection, and plant placement in the 1930s, '40s, '50s, and '60s. Under his leadership, the park became a proving ground for many kinds of plants. It generated a long list of tried-and-true heritage plants that perform well under Oklahoma's trying climatic conditions; still an invaluable tool for local citizens seeking beautification today. Will Rogers Park is one of a select few Oklahoma parks with the diversity of documented mature plant collections. This makes it a landmark park with horticultural, educational, and historical significance that few parks in Oklahoma, and particularly in Oklahoma City, can match.

Changes over time reflect the park's adaptation to the society that uses it, firmly integrating the park into the lifestyles of the people it serves. New garden areas have been developed since Henry Walter's day. Even with its later additions, the nominated area of Will Rogers Park retains the basic design elements as conceived by the National Park Service and constructed by the CCC/WPA. The design wrought by the CCC, National Park Service, and Oklahoma City Park Department is very much evident. It is exemplary of the early design philosophy of the NPS as applied to a municipal park. Later additions enhance, rather than detract. These improvements, as part of planned changes over time, continue the park's beauty, usefulness, and history of contribution to quality of life for the citizens of Oklahoma City. It remains an excellent representation of a

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<sup>10</sup>Scott, Lewis. Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department: Oral interview, January, 2005.

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community park designed by the National Park Service and created by the CCC, yet expresses its own individuality with its historic devotion to horticultural displays and areas of formal design.

The collection of resources that comprises the Will Rogers Park Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. The District is also eligible under Criterion A for its importance in the planning history of the City of Oklahoma City.

#### **Appendix: A Brief History Of The Rose Garden**

1935 – Oklahoma Rose Society campaign to create a Municipal Rose Garden at Will Rogers Park.

1938 – First planting of 11,000 roses on 4 acres, making it the 4th largest rose garden in the USA at this time.

1940 – Through efforts by the Oklahoma Rose Society, the American Rose Society held its Annual Meeting in Oklahoma City, an astonishing first for easterners who did not believe roses could grow here. The Rose Garden was formally dedicated on October 20 during the convention, and a bronze plaque was placed in the garden.

1944 – During a severe drought, the Rose Garden's 5,000 roses were irrigated with water was pumped from the East and West Lakes at a rate of 100,000 gallons once a week.

1950 – After recognition that the rose garden had deteriorated during World War II because of late freezes, lack of maintenance money and lack of manpower, a widely-inclusive joint effort was made by the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Better Gardens committee, Oklahoma Rose Society, local gardening groups, civic groups, individuals, local nurserymen, and the Oklahoma City Park Department. Their inventory of the Rose Garden revealed that the shrubs forming the backdrop were still in good condition, and 195 roses from the original 1938 planting still survived (135 climbers, 27 Floribundas, 31 Hybrid teas, 1 Pillar, and 1 Specie). They then "modernized" the rose garden by keeping the overall outline of the planting beds but reshaping the beds inside the outline, removing the concrete walks throughout the beds, and surrounding them with concrete curbing to keep out Bermuda grass. At a cost of \$5,000, they planted on 8 acres 4,708 new roses in addition to the 195 preserved from the original planting in 1938. Their purpose was to make the rose garden as complete as possible and a "living catalog" for rose lovers. Special attention was given to acquiring roses from across a broad span of rose history: to display specimens of roses all along the time spectrum from the most recently developed to the ancient ones familiar for centuries. Newly patented Hybrid Tea roses and a very complete representation of the All American Rose Selections from the American Rose Society were planted. There were also 30 varieties of Floribundas and Polyanthas, an outer border of 82 (or 80) varieties of hardy climbing roses depicting a complete history of the hardy climbing rose development, and 174 (or 160) dependable old historic varieties, which included Hybrid Perpetuals, Hybrid Rugosa, French, Damask, Tea, Moss, Cabbage, China, and Specie roses; some of which were collector items dating back to the 15th Century. All together, the large collection represented a wealth of rose history and romance. After this planting, the Will Rogers Rose Garden was said to

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offer "one of the most extensive showings of all types of roses in any rose garden in the United States and perhaps in the world."<sup>11</sup> A bronze plaque set on red sandstone notes that the "Municipal Rose Garden modernization in 1950 was made possible through the generosity of [71 names]."

1955 – The J. J. Culbertson Fountain was placed as a focal point opposite the entry gate in the rose garden. J. J. Culbertson, Jr. had acquired the statue in Paris shortly after World War I. Along with the expensive bronze statue he had had cast in Paris for a Bavarian nobleman's baronial estate, Sculptor Richard Aigner of Munich found himself stranded there after the war. With his commission invalidated by the German defeat, the impoverished sculptor made Culbertson a good price on the statue. Culbertson brought it home to Oklahoma City and discovered it needed a larger setting than his back yard. In 1930, the statue was temporarily installed in Culbertson Park while awaiting a place "exactly right" for it. Twenty-five years later, it was moved to Will Rogers Park, where it and its pool became a focal point in the Rose Garden. 4,400 roses killed in two severely damaging late spring freezes were replanted.

1961 – The Oklahoma Rose Society and its president were instrumental in retaining the Culbertson Fountain in the Rose Garden despite efforts seeking its removal because of its content.

1978-1979 – Massive rose die-out was attributed to a hard freeze in 1978, which killed thousands of roses and left others visibly struggling, and the City Parks' decision to rejuvenate them with sewage sludge. The heavy metals in the sludge killed the remaining roses. By 1982 citizens complained about the rose garden's lack of blooms and general lack of maintenance.<sup>12</sup> City funding priorities eventually allowed the hiring of a full-time horticulturist in 1982 and plans to replant 1,000 roses in 1983.

1983 – Late spring snows and cold snaps prevented formation of buds and blossoms. The Spring Rose Show was canceled. Roses were replaced.

1986 – Early that year, All-America Rose Selections Inc. had placed the garden on probation for 1986 because of poor maintenance.<sup>13</sup> The Municipal Rose Garden became the Charles E. Sparks Rose Garden, named for the deceased park supervisor who had cared for it. 1,200 new roses were planted in anticipation of The American Rose Society's 1986 Fall Convention in Oklahoma City.

1990-91 – Just inside the south entrance, 980 square feet of rose beds were left empty after lake flooding washed out the roses. Lake drainage improvements eventually allowed replanting of some of the area, the miniature rose

<sup>11</sup> Miller, Lona Eaton, "Gardens," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 20 May 1951, 12.

Unknown author, "Oklahoma City Municipal Rose Garden Will Rogers Park," unattributed article, n.d. circa 1954. From Oklahoma City Council of Garden Clubs 1954 scrapbook located at Will Rogers Park.

<sup>12</sup> Hennigan, Vince, "Where have all the Roses Gone?" *Oklahoma City Times*, 13 May 1982, 10N.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from George E. Rose, Executive Director, All America Rose Selections, to Ray Moor, Unit Mgr. I, Municipal Rose Garden, February 26, 1986, City of Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation.

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areas were expanded, and an arched rose trellis was constructed for the many weddings held in the Rose Garden. 700 new roses were purchased. Widespread decline and death of roses exhibiting a classic example of herbicide damage prompted many tests by Oklahoma State University for a weed killer possibly contained in the cottonseed hulls used for mulch. The tests proved inconclusive.<sup>14</sup>

1992 – All roses were removed, a new drainage system was installed, new soil was added to the beds, and the garden was replanted with new roses. All-America Rose Selections, Inc. placed the garden on probation for the 1992 season.

1993 – The renovation was deemed successful, and the garden was taken off probation for the 1993 season.

1994 – Because of the Parks Department's staff commitment to improving the garden, a very showy display in 1994 earned the All-America Rose Selections, Inc.'s 1994 Award for Outstanding Maintenance.<sup>15</sup>

1999 – The Rose Arbor's original wooden arbors that were removed from their stone supports during the 1950s modernization were reconstructed according to the original design plans and replaced.

2003 – The Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department reduced the horticultural staff and park maintenance at Will Rogers Park and began replacing horticultural displays in the park with mulch.

2004 – Tests for decline among the roses revealed an unfavorably high soil pH of 9. Sulfur was added to amend the soil.

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<sup>14</sup> Memo from Larry Ogle, Manager Parks and Grounds Management Division Jo Ann Pearce, Director Parks and Recreation Department, July 2, 1991, City of Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation.

<sup>15</sup> Staff Report to the Board of Park Commissioners from Jo Ann Pearce, Director Parks and Recreation Department, April 19, 1995, City of Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation.

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The nominated area is bordered as follows: Beginning approximately 200 feet east of the southeast corner of Portland Avenue and NW 36th Street, follow the chain link fence southward (paralleling Portland Avenue) to the edge of the Tennis Center, turn eastward along the continuous chain link fence and follow its jogs south and east to a point near the Senior Citizens Center where a continuing straight line connects to the north curb of Pat Murphy Drive; continue east along Pat Murphy Drive to N. Grand Boulevard; follow N. Grand Boulevard north to NW 36th Street, and turn west on NW 36th Street back to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification:**

This area encompasses the historic gardens and arboretum section of Will Rogers Park. Excluded areas outside the boundaries are not related to the park's horticultural aspects.