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NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Gaston Park Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1046 South Third Street (Walker and Third) not for publication
city, town Memphis vicinity
state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38106

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<u>1</u>	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Memphis Park and Parkway System

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. 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. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer - Tennessee Historical Commission
Date 5/11/89
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. 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:)

[Signature] 7/3/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE - Park
RECREATION - Sports Facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE- Park
RECREATION - Sports Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT SHINGLE , COPPER
other STONE, CONCRETE

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Gaston Park is an 8.3 acre park located south of downtown Memphis at South Third Street and Walker Avenue. The park is surrounded on the north, east and south by an early 20th Century residential neighborhood. Across Third Street to the west is mixed commercial, residential and industrial development.

The park is shaped like a rectangle running north to south, and is bounded by Third on the west, Patton on the east, Walker on the north and by private property (multifamily residential and commercial) on the south. It is a small grassy park with mature trees, including oak, elm, magnolia and several species of evergreen. Asphalt walks border the park (originally these were granolith). Park improvements include a picnic table, playground equipment, softball diamond, outdoor basketball court and the Gaston Community Center, which dominates the northern section of the park. There is also a landscaped parking lot on the west, north and east sides of the Community Center.

The park was designed to serve the surrounding neighborhood. The walks curve around all four sides of the park, forming a "U" at the southern end. The center is left open for a playground and other sports. Trees are grouped along the edges and in the far corners of the park, as is seen in the original plan by Kessler, framing it and providing a shady area from which activities can be watched. At the south end of the park, the walks extend out to Third Street and Patton Street. A later asphalt walk was put in across the middle of the park. (The Park Commission minutes of April 21, 1915 mention the problem of people cutting across the park, but it is not known when this walk was put in).

Kessler believed that the improvement of small playgrounds should be simple, including " a convenient border of pleasing outline, the plantation of shade trees sufficient to cover a portion of the ground, and possibly screens of hardy shrubs; perhaps small shelter buildings, a convenient sand-pile for the babies, and abundance of seats." (Report of the Board of Park and Boulevard Commissions of Kansas City MO, 1893, Report of the Engineer pp 65-67).

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Gaston Park was donated to the City of Memphis in 1900 by John Gaston, the founder of the Gaston Hotel, who accumulated a fortune in Memphis. His donation was in consideration of his deep concern for the people of Memphis. The Park Commission took over responsibility for the park in 1901, and in the following years undertook its development based on a plan submitted by the Commission's landscape engineer George Kessler, who served as a consultant to the Commission between 1901 and 1914. The original acreage of the park was approximately six acres, the lot being 600 feet long by 400 feet wide. In 1934 the park was enlarged by the addition of the lot to the north, which had been the property and home of John Gaston. This addition added 300 additional linear feet to the length of the park, or about two and a half acres, making the total park 8.3 acres. The section that was added was where the Gaston Community Center was built.

A plan for Gaston Park was published in the 1907-8 Memphis Park Commission Annual Report. The design is essentially the same as is seen today except for the addition of the aforementioned asphalt walk across the middle and the additional acreage. The original plans show no improvements to the park other than the walkways, which was typical of Kessler's park plans. The Park Commission's minutes show that Kessler later advised as to the kinds of improvements that were made in parks and the Sanborn Maps show that the park at one time had a pavilion from circa 1915 to 1934.

The present improvements in the Gaston Park are representative of those incorporated into parks in the first forty years of operation by the Park Commission. The most significant change is the addition of the Gaston Community Center in 1934. Probably at the same time, the walkways at the northern edge of the park were changed to provide access directly to the Community Center rather than to the street.

Gaston Community Center was constructed in 1934 with Civil Works Administration (CWA) funding. A later addition was made to the north side of the building in 1978 to add a day care center and library. In terms of its function as a recreation and community center, its association with the Park Commission, and its architectural style, it is regarded as a contributing element of the park. The community center is a masonry veneer structure with a barrel vault roof and veneer front. The building has Beaux Arts and some Egyptian Revival details. The front has three bays with

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three recessed two door entrances which are not original. The doors are painted steel. There are large stone daisy flower panels above each door with windows above the panels. The windows have had the original glass replaced with plexiglass; the original windows were nine over nine double hung sash. The cast stone window surrounds have egg and dart molding and dentilation.

The details at the top of the facade include two figures in stone relief at each corner representing a male basketball player and a female tennis player. The figures are abstract and face directly outward, holding the tools of their respective sports. Engaged fluted columns flank either side of the entrance and are topped by large acanthus leaves, which are also present in miniature form around the mail entrance. At the top of the roof are wood finials with copper bases and copper acanthus leaves.

For the most part, the building is constructed in brick with a running bond pattern. The building had large window along the front, sides and back which have been blocked up with large concrete panels. The window openings appear intact behind the concrete panels. The original steps to the building were apparently removed in 1978 when the he windows were blocked up. The steps were replaced with concrete handicapped ramps and a large concrete pad. A one story brick addition was made to the building in 1978 which is fairly inconspicuous and does not detract from the overall integrity of the main building. The addition lies to the north side of the original building.

The interior of the original 1934 structure contains a 115 X 99 foot basketball gymnasium, which is used by the Memphis Park Commission. It also contains athletic rooms and clubrooms. The only other significant features are the stage at the end of the room, and the steel superstructure supporting the vaulted ceiling, which appear to be original.

The park as a whole retains a substantial portion of the original plan for the walkways and open space. The addition of the Gaston Community Center at the north end of the park added to the acreage of the original park and expanded its uses. Although the integrity of the Community Center is compromised by some of the alterations made in 1978, overall the building remains intact, and contributes to the park. Gaston Park as a whole, has retained its original

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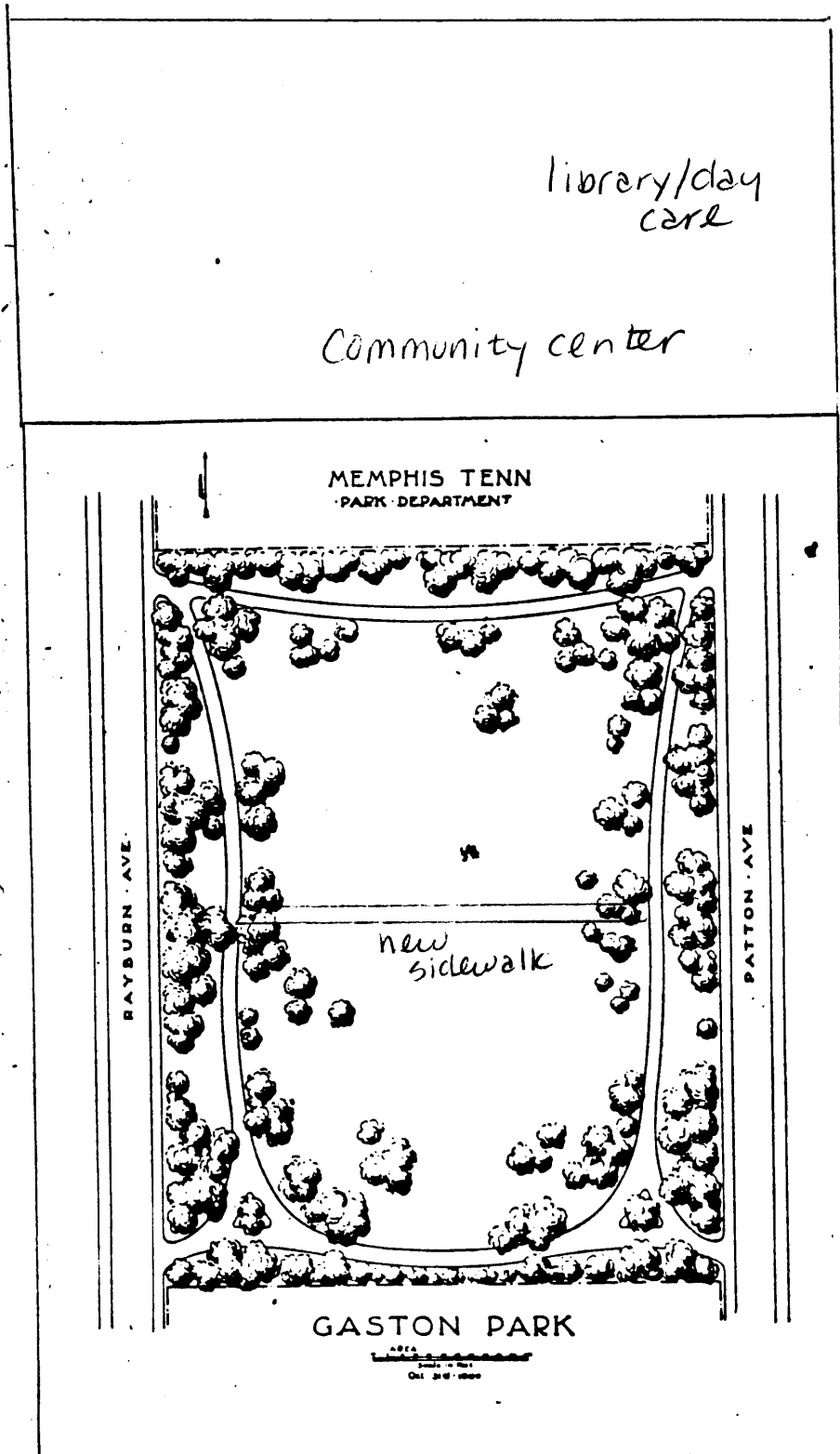
character and integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, and association, and continues to serve its original function as a neighborhood park. Also located in the park is a circa 1975 brick library/day care building (NC)

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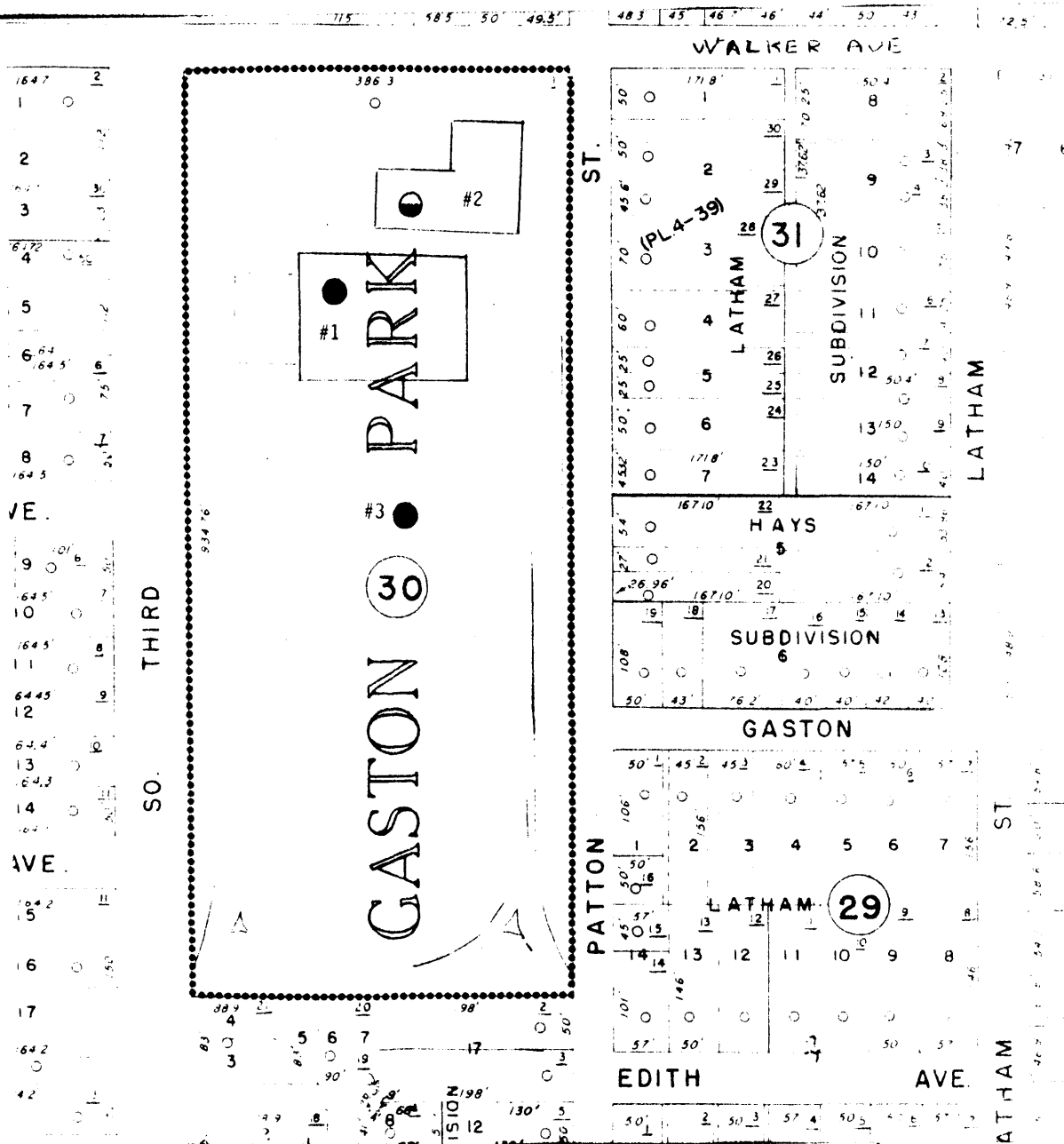


original plan

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NAME: Gaston Park
 Memphis, Shelby County, TN
 MAP: 1 inch equals 75 feet

- contributing
- non-contributing
- boundary

↑

#1 - Community center
 #2 - library/day care
 #3 - park site

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1902 - 1934

Significant Dates

1902
1934

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kessler, George
Mahan, George Jr. and Woods, Evertt

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Gaston Park is significant under Criterion A as an original component of the Memphis Park and Parkway System, which is representative of a local expression of the City Beautiful Movement and Community Planning; and, as a good example of the federal government's participation with the City in providing employment and recreation during the Depression. Gaston Park was part of the larger park and parkway system developed and operated by the Memphis Park Commission to meet a variety of recreational, social and aesthetic needs of the surrounding neighborhood between 1900 and 1939. The 1930's movement was an important part of the later development of this system. Gaston Park has always been a heavily used park, and its development over the years has added to its value to the community.

Additionally, Gaston Park is eligible under Criterion C for its association with the Park Commission's landscape architect and planner, George Kessler, who developed a plan for the park in 1902, and oversaw its implementation. It is the best known example of a small to mid-sized park designed by Kessler that retains integrity, and it reflects Kessler's ideas for use of smaller parks. The addition in 1934 of four acres and Gaston Community Center on the north side of the park minimally affected his original design.

Kessler believed that the park system of a city could be divided into various classes, including "the great rural or scenic parks"; "pleasure grounds", which were large parcels that could support large numbers of people; playgrounds for "opportunity for enjoyment of outdoor games and athletic sports; and "smaller local play-grounds (sic) ... for children and often a resting-place where a tired mother can enjoy a few hours in the open air when neither could go to the large parks." Gaston Park seems to characterize this latter category. (Report of the Board of Park and Boulevard Commissioners of Kansas City, MO, Report of the Engineer, 1893, pp 65-67).

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- 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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Memphis Landmarks Commission
Memphis Public Library

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 8.3 acres

UTM References

A 116 768470 3890030
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

404SE SW Memphis

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Begin at the intersection of the eastern line of South Third Street and the southern right of way line of Walker Avenue; go due south for 934.7 feet to the point of intersection with the north property lines of the parcels immediately to the south of the property here described; go due east 386.3 feet to the intersection with the west boundary of Patton Street; go due north to the intersection with the south boundary of Walker Avenue; thence go west to the point of beginning.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary for Gaston Park Historic District includes the entire city lot that has been historically associated with the park, including the original site deeded to the city in 1900, and the parcel to the north which was added to the park in the 1930's.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathy Bruner, Staff

organization Memphis Landmarks Commission date 2/25/89

street & number 701 N. Main Street telephone (901) 576-7370

city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38107

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Gaston Park was one of the first neighborhood parks developed by the Memphis Park Commission, and it is frequently mentioned in the Park Commission Minutes. It was donated to the City in 1900 by John Gaston, a wealthy hotel owner and philanthropist. As the park continued to serve the surrounding neighborhoods, the Park Commission added various improvements, including playground equipment, benches, picnic tables, lighting, a pavilion, and in 1934, the Gaston Community Center, built with Civil Works Administration (CWA) funds. Bickford Park, which served a similar function in the north Memphis neighborhoods, has lost integrity due to new construction and alterations in the 1970's.

Soon after receiving the park, the Commission requested Kessler to develop plans for it, which were complete in December of 1903. Apparently, the park was slow in being developed, as in March of 1906 the Commission was still resolving to confer with Kessler on the walks. On April 8, 1908, the 13th Ward Civic League petitioned the Park Commission to do more work in the South Memphis area, and complained that they were not receiving their share of the park tax. They asked the Park Commission to spend \$40,000 in improving Gaston and Riverside Parks. By this time there were walks and a pavilion in the park, but the Park Commission approved adding playground equipment at their next meeting.

During this period, the importance of playgrounds was increasing in the public mind. In 1906 the National Playground Association of America was formed, and in Memphis, residents around the smaller inner city parks frequently attended Park Commission meetings and requested the Commission to install playground equipment. This need was recognized by Kessler, who specifically addressed it in the 1907-8 Annual Report of the Park Commission.

The Gaston Community Center was built in 1934 on land donated to the City by the John Gaston Hospital, which had intended to use the site for a hospital. The City of Memphis persuaded the Hospital Board to construct the hospital closer to downtown, and built a community center on the site instead, which had once been the home of John Gaston. At the time it was built, it was considered one of the most modern community centers in the south, and it was the largest community center in the city for many years. It housed a variety of activities, including sewing, home economics, drama and folk dancing classes as well as indoor athletics.

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The Community Center was constructed with CWA funds under Mayor Watkins Overton. Edward H. Crump and Senator Joseph McKeller were in congress at the time, and helped to obtain the funds. The cost was approximately \$100,000 of which \$25,000 came from the City. The architects for the building were George Mahan, Jr. and Everett Woods. This was one of seven community centers operating in February, 1937. Gaston was the largest and had a winter staff of six from the City and four from the WPA. The parks as a whole employed forty-seven in the winter and many had WPA workers.

Later alterations and additions to the building were designed by Bologna and Associates and were made with Community Development Block Grant Funds through the Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development. The Community Center has always been owned and operated by the Park Commission, and today operated a full array of activities for the youth in the neighborhood, as well as providing day care and library services.

Throughout its history and use, Gaston Park has retained its original character and integrity of association, location, setting, design and workmanship. Although conditions in the area have changed, its continues to serve a vital need, and it remains a neighborhood park used by residents and youth of the adjacent neighborhoods. As a neighborhood park, it served a smaller area of the community than did Overton and Riverside Parks, and it is one of the best examples of such in Memphis.

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Photographs
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PHOTO KEY LIST

Gaston Park Historic District
1046 South Third Street
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee
Photo by: Cathy Bruner
Date: March, 1989
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission, Nashville, Tennessee
View: Facing east/northeast, west elevation of Gaston
Community Center
#1 of 12

Facing east/southeast, Gaston Park playground area
#2 of 12

Facing northeast, west and south elevations of Gaston
Community Center
#3 of 12

Facing southeast, north and west elevations of Gaston
Community Center
#4 of 12

Facing east/southeast, west elevation of Gaston Community
Center Daycare Building (noncontributing)
#5 of 12

Facing south, north elevation of Gaston Community Center
Library (noncontributing)
#6 of 12

Facing south/southwest, Gaston Park grounds, playground area
#7 of 12

Facing south, Gaston Park grounds along Patton Street walk
#8 of 12

Facing west/northwest, Gaston Park grounds
#9 of 12

Facing north/northwest, Gaston Park grounds and south
elevation of Gaston Community Center
#10 of 12

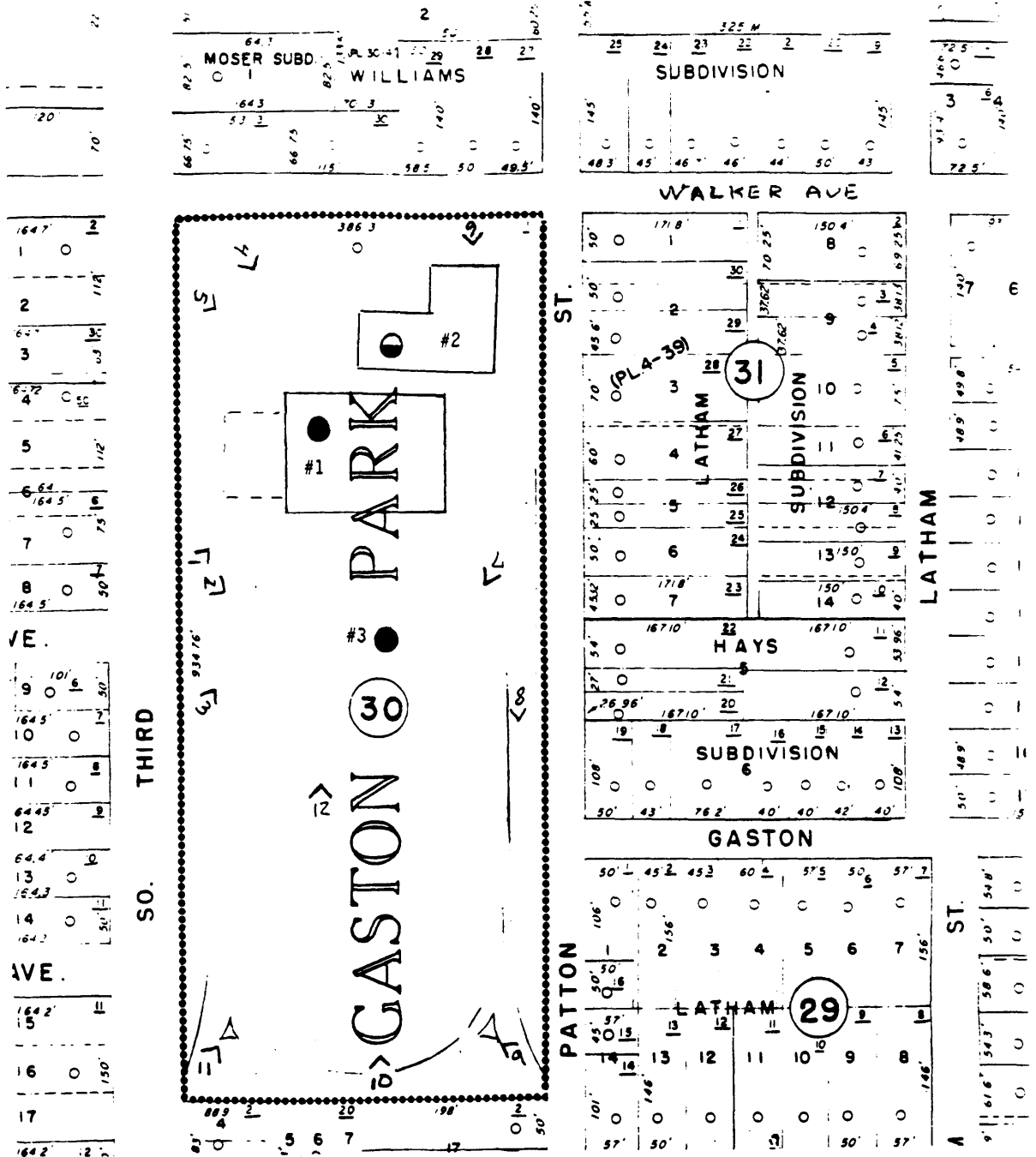
Facing northwest, Gaston Park grounds
#11 of 12

Facing north, Gaston Park grounds and south elevation of
Gaston Community Center
#12 of 12

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Gaston Park Historic District
Memphis, Shelby County, TN
PHOTO KEY MAP