

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received **FEB 7 1983**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Elizabeth Park

and/or common Elizabeth Park

2. Location

street & number Asylum Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Hartford ~~West Hartford~~ vicinity of N/A

state Connecticut

code 09

county Hartford

code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Hartford, Department of Parks and Recreation

street & number 25 Stonington Street

city, town Hartford

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Municipal Building

Town Hall

street & number 550 Main Street

28 South Main Street

city, town Hartford, CT

West Hartford, CT
state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See continuation sheet

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Overview

Elizabeth Park occupies 101 acres in the shape of a rectangle, running in an east-west direction for three-quarters of a mile along the south side of Asylum Avenue. The park is bounded on the east by Whitney Street and on the west by Steele Road. Prospect Avenue, the dividing line between Hartford and West Hartford, runs through the park in the north-south direction. The 82 acres west of Prospect Avenue are in West Hartford, while the 19 acre east of Prospect Avenue are in Hartford. (See Sketch Map A.)

The terrain of Elizabeth Park is relatively flat. Serpentine drives lead through the trees, lawns and gardens and around a central lake, following a plan drawn in 1900 by Theodore Wirth, Hartford's Superintendent of Parks. The best-know feature of the park is its rose garden, located in the section that projects to the south. (Nursery Grounds in Sketch Map A.)

Charles M. Pond left his residence and grounds to the City of Hartford for use as a public park, with the stipulation that it be named in memory of his wife, Elizabeth, who had pre-deceased him. The house was located just west of Prospect Avenue (see Sketch Map A) until it was demolished in 1956. While the Board of Park Commissioners over the years adjusted the boundaries by buying and selling small parcels of land, the shape and size of the park today are essentially the same as those of the Charles M. Pond estate.

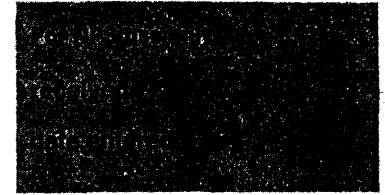
Development

In the first years of the park, extensive work was needed to make the land suitable for park use, particularly at the western end which was swampy. Several miles of drain pipe were laid, and grade at Asylum Avenue was lowered nine feet near the intersection of Steele Road.¹ Drives and walks were laid out; trees, shrubs and flowers were planted. Rustic wooden bridges and then stone bridges were constructed over the streams. (Photograph 1.) The Pond farm buildings were moved and brought together in an area called the Farmstead where they and their successors continue to function for storage and utility purposes in connection with the nursery, greenhouses and gardens. (Photograph 2 and 3.) The East Lawn, in Hartford, is essentially open space with a border of trees. (Photograph 4), while the larger West Hartford section contains diversified elements.

The upper rooms of the Pond House served initially as the residence of the Superintendent of Parks, with the ground floor open to the public as a refectory and for community uses such as wedding breakfasts, card parties, musicales and the like. By 1956 the physical condition of the structure had deteriorated to the point where demolition was thought to be the best course. Accross Prospect Avenue from the house a semi-circular flower garden was built, with a scenic view toward the city. The demolition of the house and the disappearance of this overlook are the chief changes that have occurred over the years in the physical layout of the park.²

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park Item number 6 Page 1

Hartford Architecture Conservancy's
Survey of Hartford Architecture

1979

x State

Stowe-Day Library

Hartford

Connecticut

State Register of Historic Places

1983

x State

Connecticut Historical Commission

Hartford

Connecticut

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park

Item number 7

Page 1

Rose Garden

The rose garden, on the Nursery Grounds, was planted in 1903 with some 190 varieties.³ It immediately became a great popular success and continued to draw tens of thousands of visitors annually for many decades. It was enlarged in 1911 and 1938. By the 1970s, due to budgetary considerations, the condition of the rose garden had sharply declined. It has been refurbished and upgraded in the 1980s in part through the work of a group of concerned citizens known as the Friends of Elizabeth Park.⁴ (Photograph 5.) The rose garden today has the same general appearance as it did early in the century. There is a central arbor with beds laid out in parallel lines around it. A system of paths in a radial pattern centered on the arbor cuts through the beds. The paths are lined with arches of climbing roses.

The number of varieties in the rose garden grew from the initial 190 to 1000 or more in mid-century, and had now been built back up to this level. Conditions such as black rot and freezing take a heavy toll of roses; maintenance and replacement in a rose garden are constant, expensive problems. While some of the more exotic and expensive varieties have not been replaced, the garden continues to include hybrid tea, hybrid perpetual, floribunda, polyantha, shrub, climber and pillar roses, among others. Six beds in the east and in the west sections are set aside as test areas for rose plants submitted by growers for a two year period, after which they are replaced by new plants.⁵

An annual festival known as "Rose Time," in June, continues to draw thousands of visitors to the park.

Social and Community Uses

While enjoyment of the open space, the vegetation and the vistas has always been the principal reason drawing people to the park, from the first Elizabeth Park has lent itself to other, more organized social and community purposes. From the early years, the pond was used for ice skating and hockey. A section was set aside for curling. At the time of World War I a lawn was made into a bowling green, and tennis courts have been added. The principal uses of the acreage east of Prospect Avenue for many years have been as a play ground and area for baseball and other sports.

In 1933 a brick clubhouse, 20 x 40 feet in size, was built for the bowling green. Another building dating from the Great Depression is the 30 x 55-foot brownstone structure of 1935 that houses the public restrooms. (Photograph 6.) Its ashlar masonry, round-arched doorways, deep window reveals and slate roof, reflect craftsmanship from an earlier era when brownstone was an important building material in the Hartford area.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park

Item number 7

Page 2

After the demolition of the Pond residence, a replacement structure to fulfill its former functions was built at the western edge of the lake. Called the Elizabeth Pond Memorial, it was built to the design of Hartford architects Huntington & Darbee, with Richard Johnson as builder, and was dedicated June 6, 1959. A brick structure, its principal section is a 36 x 96 rectangle with low-pitched gable roof that houses an auditorium with stage and a seating area for the food counter that is in the wing to the south. (Photograph 7.) The tall east wall of the restaurant seating area, facing the lake, is almost all glass. A plaque in the building states that it "replaces the former residence of Charles M. and Elizabeth Pond as a gathering place for those who come to enjoy the beauty of this garden park."

In 1977 the Knox Parks Foundation established its offices and display areas in the former Pond superintendent's house. (Photograph 2.) It oversees city-wide horticultural programs from this headquarters where the second floor houses the Bunnell Library of the Connecticut Horticultural Society.

Summary

In Elizabeth Park the elaborate and extravagant gardens planned and installed by Theodore Wirth no longer survive, with the exception of the rose garden and a nearby annual garden. The park function continues unimpaired, however, with the addition over the years of several pleasant buildings that add to the enjoyment of the irreplaceable natural vistas. (Photograph 8.)

1. Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of Hartford, April 30, 1900, p.43.
2. The East Circle and West Circle contemplated by Wirth at the intersections of Asylum Avenue with Whitney Street and Steele Road never were executed.
3. The cost of the rose garden was \$2,500. By comparison, the cost of a 32-foot, rustic stone bridge in 1905 was \$3,350. See report of the Park Commissioners for 1906.
4. The Friends of Elizabeth Park, formed in 1977, is a voluntary group of concerned citizens who have raised money to help restore the rose garden and who sponsor musical and other events during the summer at the park.
5. Interview, July 15, 1982, with James McIsaac, Superintendent of Elizabeth Park.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1900

Builder/Architect Theodore Wirth

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion C

Elizabeth Park is an example of a skillfully-planned, turn-of-the century public park that embodies principles of formal planting in contrast to the more popular picturesque planning found in other Hartford parks. The popularity of the park throughout the 20th century and the fact that it has been so little changed testify to the proficiency and good judgement of both its landscape architect, Theodore Wirth, and the Board of Park Commissioners.

Landscape Architecture

The Board of Park Commissioners engaged Theodore Wirth as Superintendent of Parks in 1896 at an annual salary of \$1,500. Theodore Wirth (1863-1949) was born in Winterthur, Switzerland, received his professional training there, and worked two years in gardens near London and two years in Paris, then coming to the United States in 1888 where he found employment in New York City and Niagara Falls before coming to Hartford. He left Hartford in 1906 to go to Minneapolis where he remained for the rest of his working life and where he was known as the "Founder of Minneapolis park system."¹

Wirth's formal approach to park planning, evident in Elizabeth Park, is in contrast to the picturesque planning favored by Frederick Law Olmsted and his followers. Elizabeth Park is noted for its ordered plantings, notably the great rose garden, while the Olmsted school favored natural settings. Wirth arranged flowers and shrubs in ornamental displays in an eclectic assemblage of styles and gardening techniques, in the opposite of the country manner. The masses of foliage and colorful blooms were fine examples of Victorian plantings, selected for their unique and showy characteristics and placed in balanced symmetry.

Yet Elizabeth Park is not free of the influence of the then-popular picturesque influence and, in fact, reflects a combination of both schools of thought in park planning. At the time Wirth was planning Elizabeth Park, the Olmsted firm was retained as consultants for the overall Hartford park system. The Olmsted influence is seen, for instance, in Keney and Goodwin parks where the picturesque reigns supreme, and Olmsted influence on Wirth is reflected in the serpentine roadways at Elizabeth Park. Wirth's training in English and French gardens found expression, nonetheless, in eclectic assemblage of plants and flowers in Elizabeth Park, offered in greater variety there than in any other park in the Hartford park system. Elizabeth Park was the "most beautiful park in the system in terms of flowers and shrubs arranged in highly ornamental displays, and it was never intended as a country park, nor true urban park, but more of an arboretum and botanical garden."² John Charles Olmsted, representing the Olmsted firm as

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 101

Quadrangle name Hartford North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References See continuation sheet

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the site is shown by the dotted line on Sketch Map B. This is the original boundary of the park with minor, early-20th-century adjustments.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
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state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title David F. Ransom, Consultant, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Connecticut Historical Commission date May 3, 1982

street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone (203) 566-3005

city or town Hartford state Connecticut 06106

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date January 31, 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 3/10/83


Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park

Item number 8

Page 1

consultants for all Hartford parks, regarded Elizabeth Park as a "gentleman's suburban residence ground."³ Wirth's gardens were examples of Victorian plantings, selected for their unique and showy characteristics. The formal plan included a perennial garden, an annual garden and a rock garden as well as the rose garden.

History

Elizabeth Park was established through the philanthropy of Charles M. Pond (1837-1894) who was a railroad magnate, banker and politician. Born in New York City, he succeeded his father as an officer of the Hartford and New Haven Railroad, holding that position until the line was merged into the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad in 1873. Pond also organized and was president of the Hartford Trust Company, served in the state House of Representatives and Senate and was state Treasurer in 1870. A widower at the time of his death, and having no children, he left his estate to the City of Hartford and a nephew and two nieces.⁴ Such an important gift to the municipality was not unique in those times. Public benefaction by specific gift directly to the City was a well-regarded practice. A contemporary example is the testamentary gift by Henry and Walter Keney to the City that made possible Keney Park. The practice of making substantial gifts to the City no longer is followed. The likelihood of a gift to the City like that made by Charles M. Pond now is remote.⁵

The value of the inventory of the Pond estate was \$116,350 in real estate and \$570,978 in personal property. The will provided that the residence and the grounds would go to the City as well as one half the residue, to be used to improve the grounds. The other half of the residue was to be divided among the three family heirs. The will was contested,⁶ and it was not until July, 1897 that the estate's executors were able to deliver the real estate to the Board of Park Commissioners.

The Board of Park Commissioners was a semi-independent body, that had its own tax receipts and enjoyed freedom from control by the Court of Common Council. The membership of the Board was made up of some of the City's most prominent citizens. At the time Elizabeth Park was laid out, the Board was composed of Lucius F. Robinson, lawyer, of Robinson, Robinson & Cole; Patrick Garvan, paper manufacturer and State Senator; Charles F. Gross, senior partner in Hartford's oldest law firm; Rev. Francis Goodwin, real estate developer; Dr. Gurdon W. Russell, director of the Retreat for the Insane; George A. Fairfield, automobile manufacturer; George H. Day, banker; Charles Dudley Warner, editor of the Hartford Courant; and Rev. Wm. DeLoss Love, pastor of the South Congregational Church. Their background, forcefulness and independence accounted in large measure for the establishment of the Hartford park system, in which Elizabeth Park was and is an important unit.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park

Item number 8

Page 2

As the 20th century wore on, the Court of Common Council gradually was successful in diminishing the power and independence of the Board of Park Commissioners, eventually terminating the Board's existence and thereby bringing management of the City's parks under the control of officials directly responsible to the electorate through the ballot.

Summary

The public loved Elizabeth Park from the first. It always enjoyed the most visitors of any Hartford park. In 1902, 10,000 people came to the park on a single Sunday; during the year 1906 there were 215,000 visitors.⁷ The annual rose festival and use of the Pond residence and memorial over the years for civic and social events has made Elizabeth Park an integral part of the community. The annual festival, now known as "Rose Time" continues to draw thousands of visitors to the park.

Elizabeth Park is exceptional in the Hartford park system because of its nonpicturesque original flower beds designed by Theodore Wirth. While it has lost many of its spectacular flower beds, its rose garden in recent years has been upgraded and, with its enchanting vistas and buildings that have been added during the 20th century, Elizabeth Park continues to serve the public, with which it has always been a favorite.

¹. New York Times, January 30, 1949, obituary.

². Alexopoulos, p.43. For a thorough account of the development of the Hartford park system see John Alexopoulos, The 19th-Century Parks of Hartford. Alexopoulos, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Connecticut, is the leading scholar on the history of Hartford parks.

³. Alexopoulos, p.43.

⁴. One of the nieces was Henrietta Porter Lippincott of New York who gave to Hartford a half-acre "park for small children and women" at the southwest corner of Wyllys and Groton streets. (See Broadside, "Hartford Park Department - 1981.") This land had been part of the estate of her grandfather, Solomon Porter, on Wethersfield Avenue that was adjacent to but pre-dated Samuel Colt's Armsmear.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Elizabeth Park

Item number 8

Page 3

5. Private gifts for public benefactions in Hartford do continue, using as a vehicle the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, one of the most successful charitable foundations of its type in the country. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has made grants to the Friends of Elizabeth Park.

6. The probate was appealed by Pond's brother, Anson Phelps Pond of New York City. (The Pond brothers were grandsons of Anson G. Phelps, native of Simsbury, Connecticut and a principal in Phelps Dodge Company, who founded Ansonia, Connecticut.) The appeal was tried in February 1895. The jury set aside the will. The judge set aside the jury's verdict "as manifestly against the weight of the evidence." The appeal from probate was withdrawn in December 1896, the sum of \$58,367 having been paid to Anson Phelps Pond by order of the City. See Municipal Register of the City of Hartford, 1896, p. 236.

7. See Board of Park Commissioners' reports for 1903 and 1908. A large manufacturer of post cards reported that he sold more cards of Elizabeth Park than of any other park in the country, including substantial sales in Europe. See Board's report for 1911, p. 34.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Bibliography

Item number 9

Page 1

Alexopoulos, John, The 19th-Century Parks of Hartford: A Legacy to the Nation, unpublished ms. (Copy at Hartford Architecture Conservancy.)

"Hartford Parks Department - 1981," broadside.

McIsaac, James, Superintendent of Elizabeth Park, interview with, July 15, 1982.

Municipal Register of the City of Hartford, 1896.

Park Commissioners of the City of Hartford, Annual Reports of, 1894-1922.

Photographs, 1899-1920, of Elizabeth Park. About 20 prints are at the Knox Parks Foundation offices in the park. Glass plate negatives are held by the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department.

Pond, Charles, M., obituary, Hartford Times, August 31, 1894, 4:2.

Wirth, Theodore, obituary, New York Times, January 30, 1949, 60:7.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Elizabeth Park

Item number 10

Page 1

UTM References

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