

Simmons Island Beach House
Name of Property

Kenosha County
County and State

Wisconsin

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined eligible for the
National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined not eligible for the
National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
___ removed from the National
Register.
___ other, (explain):

Beth Boland

2/20/03

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as
as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

contributing	noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 total

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

Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE/sports facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th/20th Revivals/Tudor Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation concrete

walls brick

roof slate

other wood

Narrative Description

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

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The Simmons Island Beach House (opened in 1935) is located on the shore of Lake Michigan in the southeastern corner of Kenosha, a medium-sized city in the southeastern corner of Wisconsin. Not far from the Illinois border, Kenosha is a lakeshore community with a long industrial and commercial history that dates back to the earliest era of settlement in Wisconsin. Recently, due to migration from the Chicago area, whose northern suburbs are only about 30 miles away, Kenosha has seen a large influx of new residents, many of whom commute to the Chicago area. A commuter rail link and easy access to Interstate 94 makes such a commute possible. This influx of new residents has meant considerable development of some areas on the outskirts of the city, but there has been less of an impact on the older part of the city itself. The most significant new development of the older city has been redevelopment of the lakeshore, just east of downtown. This area, once the site of a large industrial complex, has been and is currently being developed into residential housing and expanded harbor facilities.

Less than a mile north of this lakefront development is the large Simmons Island Park. Once known as Washington Island, it was an area of the earliest settlement in Kenosha. In 1916, industrialist Zalmon G. Simmons, who had acquired much of the land on the island, donated it for a park. Although some landscaping was done between 1916 and 1930, little formal work was accomplished in the park until the 1930s, when Great Depression-era relief workers executed a formal landscaping plan for the park and built the Simmons Island Beach House.

The park consists of almost 40 acres of rolling land that slopes down to the Lake Michigan shoreline. A long beach runs along the east edge of the park and the Simmons Island Beach House is located near the center of this beach. The park is formally landscaped with curving asphalt paved drives, concrete sidewalks, and many mature trees and shrubs. Much of the formal landscaping and planting was completed during the mid-1930s. On the west and south sides of the beach house, the park is landscaped with trees, shrubs, and lawn. A paved drive runs in front of the building and concrete sidewalks are located along the west and south sides of the building and a large sidewalk runs from the main entrance in the west elevation to the drive. Across the drive in front of the building is a circular bed of shrubs and conifers, a memorial marker, and a flagpole. Near the beach house there are large paved parking lots.

On the east elevation of the building, a concrete patio separates the building from the beach. The patio is defined by large concrete piers that are decorated with recessed panels of red bricks laid in a diagonal bond. Heavy chains are attached to many of the piers, creating a "fence" between the patio and the beach. More piers are located along the south side of the building bordering a sidewalk. The beach, itself, is relatively flat and appears to be in good condition. Although the beach house, except for the toilets, is closed, the beach is still used today for swimming or recreation.

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DESCRIPTION, EXTERIOR

The Tudor Revival Simmons Island Beach House consists of a rectangular main block with two equal sized rectangular ells projecting off of the main block's north and south walls. The main block is one and one-half stories in height with a steeply-pitched intersecting gable roof. The gable-roofed ells are one-story in height. Along the west walls of each ell are rectangular enclosures with no roof. These enclosures are open-air dressing rooms. The entire building is constructed of recycled cream bricks, probably from old brick houses and/or factories (see Section 8). Other materials were used to accent the walls of the building and they will be described below.

The roof of the main block and the wings is covered with slate tiles that were also recycled from an older building. Massive brick corbeled chimneys project from each end of the ell roofs. Two small shed roofed dormers project on each side of the roof of the main block. The dormer openings are enclosed with plywood, but according to the original plans for the building, they were filled with leaded glass casements in a criss-cross pattern on the west elevation and with multi-light openings on the east elevation.

On both the east and west elevations, the main blocks have matching steeply-pitched gables. The gables have wide clapboards covering the gable peak with the remainder of the gable covered with half-timbering of vertical and diagonal boards and a stucco finish. At the lower edges of each gable, the stucco is replaced with a veneer of old bricks laid in a horizontal or diagonal bond. At the center of the gable on the west elevation, there is a very shallow bay with openings enclosed with plywood. According to the original plans, these openings also featured leaded casements. On the east elevation, the bay is replaced with a set of sashes that are not enclosed with plywood, but once were filled with multi-light sashes.

Aside from the above-mentioned main gable, the west elevation of the main block of the building is dominated by a shallow-projecting entry pavilion. The entry pavilion and the flanking walls of the main block are clad with limestone veneer. The limestone veneer is made up of primarily light colored stones with occasional dark stones as accents. Between the large gable and the stone-veneered walls is a beam that is inscribed "Anno Municipal Bathhouse 1934." Although the inscribed date indicates 1934, the bathhouse was not officially opened until June of 1935 (See Section 8).

The main entrance in the entry pavilion consists of a pair of double doors. The doors are constructed of vertical wood boards and feature wrought iron strap hinges and wrought iron doorknobs and plates. A small square window sits in the upper portion of each door. A set of

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wide brick steps with large stone edges leads up to these doors. The other openings of the main block include two long rectangular windows sitting right under the roof eaves. These windows are filled with glass blocks, but were originally filled with leaded glass windows in a criss-cross pattern. On the shallow side walls of the main block, there are entrances into the restrooms that are not accessed from the interior. Near these entrances are the entrances into the open-air dressing rooms from the west side of the building. These entrances consist of plain wood doors topped with flat brick lintels. There are no other openings along the walls of the dressing rooms.

The north elevation of the building is made up of the plain wall of the open-air dressing room and the end wall of the projecting ell. A large double-door constructed of wood sits at the center of this end wall. The gable peak of the ell, as well as the gable peak of the main block, which rises above the ell, is clad with clapboards like the peak of the main gables on the east and west elevations of the main block. The south elevation is identical to the north elevation, except that in place of the large double doors on the end wall of the south ell, there is a window opening enclosed with plywood.

The east elevation has similarities to the west elevation. The large gable peak, the dormers, and the limestone veneer covering on the first story of the main block are the same features seen on the west elevation. The only difference is that the large gable on the east elevation projects over a recessed porch that covers an entrance into the main block. The gable is supported by two massive square timbers and by large curved brackets. A chain-link fence spans this opening to prevent entry into the building. Under the porch is an entrance into the main block and several adjacent openings that are enclosed with plywood. The openings all have flat brick arches and, according to the original plans, the openings were filled with eight-light sashes. The entry door was originally a wood panel door with a multi-light opening.

The ells of the east elevation have entrances leading into various rooms on the interior. The north ell has a simple entrance leading into the men's shower room and windows lighting other rooms. The south ell has three entrances, one leading into the first aid room, one leading into the tool room, and the third leading into the women's shower room. A large window opening spans much of the south ell's east wall. This opening was used for the concession stand and originally was filled with plain sashes. The entrances were originally filled with wood panel doors with four-light openings. Windows were filled with multi-light sashes. All of the openings are decorated with flat brick lintels.

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DESCRIPTION, INTERIOR

Like the exterior of the building, the interior has had few changes either to the floor plan or to the interior details. Beyond the double doors of the entry pavilion is the lobby, a small rectangular area that is decorated with Tudor Revival-inspired details. The floor of the lobby is paved with bricks laid in a diagonal bond and bordered by horizontally-laid bricks. The large wall surfaces of the lobby are covered with large, dark-stained wood panels that are made up of diagonal boards that form a diamond pattern. The center diamonds are all painted white and are decorated with a raised carving of arrows in a pattern that suggests leaves. Framing the large panels are plain horizontal moldings and thick, heavy baseboards, and an arch with scroll-like carvings. Topping the panels and running around the entire lobby are horizontal boards carved to resemble a row of dentils. Above the dentil-inscribed boards are wall surfaces covered with thick, rough plaster. The same plaster covers the ceiling of the lobby. It is decorated with exposed wood beams. All of this wood is stained with a dark finish.

The openings of the lobby are trimmed with plain wide moldings. The tops of the doors are further decorated with a Tudor arch that and more of the scroll-like carvings found above the large wall panels. The ticket office sits across from the main entrances. It features an opening that is covered with a metal grill with stylized Art Deco influenced geometric motifs. The counter sits on a shallow projection that is clad with a wood panel with a diamond motif like those on the walls. In the center of this wood panel is also the same arrow-leaf decoration. The panel is surrounded by simple wood moldings and a thick baseboard. Unlike the wall panels, the ticket office panel is painted white and the center diamond is stained a dark color, as are the moldings. The counter is of wood construction, painted white.

The inside of the ticket office is more simply decorated with a concrete floor and plain smooth plaster walls interrupted by a simple molding a little over half way up the walls. On the other side of the ticket office grill there is a curved, painted wooden counter supported by wooden and metal brackets. Two entrances on each side of the ticket office exit into hallways that lead into the men's and women's dressing room areas. These doors are wood and have one large lower raised panel, one rectangular central panel and four-light glazing, similar to the doors used on the original exterior of the building. The doors are painted.

There are two large restrooms that flank the lobby, but they cannot be accessed from inside. Rather, they are restrooms for general park use and are accessed from the outside. The restrooms have plain walls and ceilings, wooden stalls, concrete floors, two sinks and two toilets. In the women's restroom, the third stall contains a toilet, while in the men's room, the third stall contains two urinals.

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Back near the ticket counter, the two hallways that lead into the interior men's and women's dressing rooms are reached via doors that are similar to those of the ticket office, but the décor becomes more utilitarian than that of the lobby. In this area, the walls are unfinished brick and the floors are concrete. The open vaulted ceilings have exposed beams attached to rough boards covering the roof. The hallways turn sharply left or right at a partial brick wall that is further closed off with a modern grill, keeping people out of the rest of the building.

The hallways turn through large, round-arched openings decorated with massive round brick arches. At the end of the hallways are the large wooden doors that lead into the open-air dressing rooms for men and women. Both dressing rooms have concrete floors and some benches, but are otherwise undecorated. Also off of the hallways are entrances into the men's and women's restrooms and shower rooms. The restrooms have toilets (and urinals in the men's room) and a sink. The shower rooms have concrete floors with large drains and glazed brick wall surfaces. The original showerheads have been replaced by piping and attached large shower heads. A small vestibule through an arched opening leads to the entrance to the beach.

On the east side of both open-air dressing rooms are narrow rooms known as "shelter" rooms on the original plan. They were probably used for "shelter" in inclement weather when the open-air rooms could not be used. On the south side behind the women's dressing rooms, there is also a tool room, first aid room, and concession room. A similar "shelter" room is also on the north or men's side of the building, along with a room used for lifeguards and a utility or boiler room. These rooms are all simply decorated with plain walls and concrete floors.

At the center of the building is a large room that was not normally open to the public. It can be accessed only through an entrance out of the ticket office or from the outside entrance under the porch on the east elevation of the building. Known as the check room, it could have been used to both check in valuables or check out equipment for the beach. This large room has unfinished brick walls, an open vaulted ceiling with exposed beams and large criss-cross timber supports, a concrete floor, and two decorative staircases.

The two staircases are constructed of wood timbers that are stained dark. The white painted balustrade is made up of reversed "gothic" picket style boards with circular cut-outs. On the east side or beach wall, the staircase leads to a small landing in front of the gable opening. It could possibly have been used for a lifeguard lookout. Opposite this staircase is the other staircase that leads to a mezzanine story. The mezzanine consists of a balcony that spans the back wall of the check room. Off of the balcony is an entrance into a small finished room that could have been used as an office. This room has a floor covered with narrow wood boards, smooth plaster walls

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and ceilings, a wide baseboard, and simple moldings around doors and windows. On each side of this room there are plain, vertical, wood board doors that lead into unfinished attic space.

The Simmons Island Beach House is currently closed, except for the restrooms that have exterior entrances, which are open to park and beach patrons. Due to budget constraints, maintenance on the beach house has been limited and the building is in need of considerable refurbishing. On the whole, though, the building is sound and its historic details have been little compromised over the years. Studies of the beach house and its potential renovation and uses are on-going in the City of Kenosha.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1934-1935

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Borggren, Chris

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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The Simmons Island Beach House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. It is being nominated under criterion A, for significance at the local level in the area of planning and community development. The building was part of a decades-long planning and community development process that, by 1940, resulted in a large system of parks and recreational facilities in Kenosha. Beginning with individuals who pressured the city to establish parks as a means to create the "city beautiful" and to provide public recreation for all citizens at the turn of the twentieth century, the movement grew and developed during the 1920s and park planning was extensively covered in the 1925 Harland Bartholomew city plan for Kenosha. For the next 15 years, the ideas suggested in this plan were carried out, particularly during the 1930s, when the city used work-relief money from the federal government to formally landscape all the parks and to build recreational and service facilities to support them. The result was a first-class park system that was the result of historically significant planning and development efforts made by individuals, the Bartholomew city planning team, and, especially, by local parks director and planner, Floyd Carlson, during the 1930s. The construction of the Simmons Island Beach House was a historically significant event that is part of the history of the planning and development of Kenosha's park system and its facilities. Because of the significance of the construction project as a means to achieve city planning goals, the period of significance corresponds with the construction dates of the Beach House, 1934-1935.

The beach house is also being nominated under criterion C, as an example of the Tudor Revival style designed by a noted city parks architect of the 1930s, Chris Borggren. The building has typical Tudor Revival details executed in a building that is well proportioned, elegant and functional. One of the most intriguing elements of the building is that it was constructed with recycled materials: brick, wood and slate tiles taken from old houses and/or factories. The use of old materials gives the building an added historic or "authentic" appearance that period revival buildings tried to emulate. The interior details are also finely crafted and unusual. They carry the style into the building and add interest to a very efficient and functional facility. The building's stylistic elements, unusual building materials, and high level of integrity all combine to make up an architectural gem on Kenosha's lakefront. The period of significance for architecture is the date of the building's completion, 1935.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In late 1834, a group of New Yorkers met to form the Western Emigration Company, a land company whose members were interested in acquiring land opening up for settlement on the west side of Lake Michigan in what would become Wisconsin. Company members Wartens Towslee, Sydney Roberts, and Charles Turner left New York in March of 1835. After arriving

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in Chicago, the group traveled up and down the Lake Michigan shore looking for a suitable area to make a land claim for their company. The men eventually found a site in June of 1835, when they arrived on Simmons (Washington) Island and found the mouth of Pike Creek. The men established claims and Kenosha was born.¹

Through the summer of 1835, additional settlers came, establishing a fledgling community, at first called "Pike" after Pike Creek. Some were settlers associated with the land company, while others came on their own or traveled further inland, looking for farms to claim. Included among the earliest Kenosha settlers was John Bullen, Jr., who was meant to be part of the original land company settlers, but was delayed leaving New York state. He was eventually joined by three generations of the Bullen family. The early settlers established the tiny community of Pike largely between Lake Michigan and 13th Avenue on the west, and between 45th Street on the north and 60th Street on the south. The settlers set about to create a lake port and the settlement's second name, "Southport," reflects this plan. One of the first projects the settlers undertook in the new community was to build a primitive road to connect the lake and the village.²

Between 1836 and 1840, the population of "Southport" grew from 84 to 337. Aside from the usual challenges of a new community, the early settlers were having difficulty developing their hoped-for lake port. The natural harbor was not very good and dredging was necessary to make it large and deep enough for schooners to dock. In 1840, the United States Congress appropriated funds to dredge Southport's harbor and a substantial pier was built, giving the village an economic boost. During the 1840s, additional money was acquired for harbor improvements, helping the little community grow. By 1850, Southport was a notable port along Lake Michigan and the settlement, now officially a village, had grown to over 3,400 people.³

For several decades, Kenosha was a successful lake port, but constant dredging was needed to keep the port operational. As the nineteenth century progressed, other communities with better natural harbors, in particular nearby Racine and Milwaukee, were able to compete more effectively for lake traffic. And, the development of rail lines during the 1850s and 1860s meant that the importance of lake transportation declined. Even so, Kenosha continued to grow during this period and by 1880 the city had a population of 5,000. Much of this growth was related to the city's location near good farmland and its strategic location along the lake. But after 1880, the most important growth in the community took place when the city made a transition from

¹ Carrie Cropley, *Kenosha From Pioneer Village to Modern City 1835-1935*, Kenosha: Kenosha County Historical Museum, 1958, pp. 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-9.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

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lake port and commercial center to a successful industrial center during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The industrial boom began in the 1880s as some small companies grew into major industries. The Bain Wagon Works was an example. Wagon-making was dominated by small shops during the mid-nineteenth century, but during the late nineteenth century, the industry was consolidated into a few large firms, Bain being one of these companies. The N. R. Allen Sons' Tannery was developed from a small factory into a major leather-making industry. Similar growth occurred in the Simmons Manufacturing Company, makers of wire mattresses. Other firms that were important to Kenosha included brass works, clothing manufacturers, and companies making a variety of metal goods. The new factories both employed and attracted new immigrants to the city during this period and Kenosha developed numerous ethnic European neighborhoods. The new immigrants came primarily from eastern and southern Europe and joined the many German, Norwegian and Irish people already in the city.⁴

The effect of this industrial growth on the city can be seen in the following statistics. Between 1900 and 1905, factories doubled, the city extended its boundaries, and more than 1,000 houses were built. In 1907, the factories of Kenosha employed over 6,000 men, over 1,000 women and 300 boys and girls under 16. A 1914 manufacturing census showed a 22 percent increase in industrial activity in Kenosha since 1909. In 1916, employment in Kenosha topped the 10,000 level. One of the companies that developed during this time had a profound impact on the city a few years later. The Jeffery Company began producing automobiles after 1900, then, in 1916, Charles Nash and a partner purchased the company. Nash Motors became a major producer of automobiles during the next few decades and was the fourth biggest auto company after World War II. Other companies continued to grow during the early twentieth century, including the Simmons Manufacturing Company, the Chicago Brass (American Brass) Company, Black Cat (Allen A) textile company, and Coopers (Jockey) underwear company.⁵

The growth of industry in Kenosha resulted in the development of a powerful group of wealthy families and a growing middle class. Like many middle and upper-class people at the turn of the twentieth century, some of these Kenoshans became interested in social and political reform. This group tended to support prohibition, feeling that saloons were a powerful force for moral decay, particularly in regard to immigrant groups. They also felt that some politicians fostered corruption and easily manipulated immigrant groups for their own purposes. They were generally supporters of the Progressive Movement, which worked for civil service reform, honest government, and other social and political reforms.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 89-90.

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At the turn of the twentieth century, some Kenoshans formed a Citizen's League to try to curb saloon abuses. In 1906, the Civic Federation was incorporated to lobby for a stricter enforcement of local laws and to fight gambling. Some of the members of the Civic Federation supported a change in government from the mayor-council system to a commission system as a means to end what they saw as local political corruption. The reformers' efforts continued during the 1910s and were successful in getting the commission form of government on a referendum in 1914, although it was defeated. In 1917, Kenosha's reformers pushed a referendum for another change in government, this time to the council-manager form, but the state government did not allow such a change for cities at that time. But, in that same year, the reformers made gains when the city council and Chamber of Commerce formed a city planning committee and funded a brief planning report. In 1922, political reform was successful when Kenosha voters approved a change to the council-manager form of government. Although the mayor-council form of government would return to the city a few decades later, much in the way of civic reform was accomplished during the council-manager era.⁶

It was within this reform context of the first three decades of the twentieth century that the development of Kenosha's parks took place. Many of the individuals involved in developing Kenosha's park system were the same reformers that changed the political landscape of Kenosha. Their interest in city planning was part of their interest in overall city reform. The reformers not only wanted to change the ideas that ran the city, but also change the physical landscape of the city. They were influenced by landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted, who had designed elaborate city parks and new suburban "garden" communities that rejected the grid plan and emphasized open, natural landscaping.

The reformers in Kenosha were also influenced by the "City Beautiful" movement. This movement stressed the idea that cities and their buildings should be planned with a unity of design, a magnitude of purpose, and include monuments, arches, and statues in public spaces to instruct citizens in the importance of civic virtue. Another element of the city beautiful movement was the improvement of city landscaping through formally designed parks and public open spaces. The city beautiful movement also embraced the return to classical architecture that was being practiced by most of the nation's prominent architects at the turn of the twentieth century. The city beautiful included large, classical buildings that were suitable to house the new, planned and clean governments ushered in by reformers.⁷

⁶ Nelson Peter Ross, "Architecture, Planning and Transportation," in John A. Neuenschwander, ed., *Kenosha County in the Twentieth Century: A Topical History*, Kenosha: Kenosha County Bicentennial Commission, 1976, pp. 430-431.

⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District, 1988, on file in the Historic Preservation Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

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Classical architecture and city beautiful ideals came together at the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. At the exposition, Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham was the chief designer of the major buildings and their landscaping. He created the famous "white city" of classically-influenced buildings painted white centered around formal green spaces, pools and fountains. According to Burnham and others, this "white city" was the epitome of what a city could be. The Classical Revival architectural style soon became popular for institutional buildings across the nation, as architects tried to create the city beautiful idea in their own communities.⁸

Because of Chicago's proximity to Kenosha, it is likely that many of Kenosha's wealthy and middle-class citizens attended the exposition, and there is direct evidence that the "white city" influenced Zalmon Simmons, a wealthy industrialist and philanthropist. In 1899, Simmons, a proponent of free public library reform, donated money to build a public library for Kenosha. The building was erected on the old "commons," later known as Library Park. The architect Simmons chose for the building, completed in 1900, was none other than Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago and Columbian Exposition fame. Burnham created an outstanding Classical Revival library building that embodied his vision of what important city buildings should look like.⁹

Simmons was also one of the early proponents of park development in Kenosha. He was the first president of the Kenosha Park Association, formed in 1906. He had also been responsible for bringing noted landscape architect O. C. Simonds to Kenosha to design the grounds around the new library in 1900. Later, he acquired much of the land on Washington Island (Simmons Island) and donated 40 acres to the city in 1916 for Simmons Island Park. Also noted in the parks movement was the wife of industrialist George Yule, who in 1905 gave a speech entitled "The Town Beautiful." In this speech, Mrs. Yule advocated clean streets, better architecture, more landscaping, and a park system.¹⁰

After Kenosha changed to the council-manager system of city government, many planning and city beautiful ideas were implemented during the later 1920s and during the 1930s. A civic center of classical buildings was started during the 1920s and completed during the 1930s when the old Beaux Arts style post office was moved to form the fourth side of the center, joining the Kenosha County Courthouse, the old Kenosha High School, and the new post office building. These four classical buildings were Kenosha's version of the "white city" of the Columbian Exposition.¹¹

⁸ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District.

⁹ Ross, p. 391.

¹⁰ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District; Ross, p. 433.

¹¹ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District.

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The implementation of the city beautiful movement also included the development of the Kenosha park system, which reached fruition during the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to the 1910s, only a few small open spaces existed as public parks. In 1839, two small "town squares" were included in the city's original plat; the "commons," later Library Park, south of downtown, and a public square, Union Park, north of the downtown. In the very late nineteenth century, the small Bain and Eichelman Parks were donated to the city. During the 1910s and 1920s much of Kenosha's existing park system land was acquired, much of it in large tracts acquired by wealthy individuals who donated it to the city or gave the city generous terms of repayment for the land.¹²

The development of the park system is part of the important planning and community development era that occurred in Kenosha during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s and will be discussed under the Community Planning and Development Area of Significance. This information will complete the history of the park system and the building being nominated, along with providing the context for the historic significance of the building.

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Simmons Island Beach House is historically significant at the local level because its construction was an important event related to the history of community planning and development in the city of Kenosha. The planning and development of the beach house was part of a long history of park development and planning that took place in the city during the first four decades of the twentieth century and was part of an overall city reform effort that occurred at almost the same time. Beginning around 1900, civic reformers, "city beautiful" adherents, and progressive-minded citizens in Kenosha began social and political reform efforts that had a significant impact on the growth and development of the twentieth century city. Some of their accomplishments included a change in government to the council-manager form, the development of a city plan, the construction of a civic center, and the development of a large park system. During the 1930s, the city of Kenosha used the federal government's work relief programs to continue the civic improvements begun during the previous decades, and, in particular, to continue the planning and development of city parks and their facilities.

Historic Planning

There is a long history of community planning in the United States. Some early colonial towns, such as Williamsburg and Philadelphia, were planned or designed communities. One of the most important features of these early city plans was the designation of areas set aside for public use,

¹² Ross, pp. 432-433.

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specifically “town squares” or “commons.” The idea of town squares was taken across the United States with Yankee settlers who included this feature in new town plats. But, other than carrying “Yankee” style town plats west, there was little progress in the area of formal planning until the late nineteenth century.¹³

Between 1893 and 1930, progressive-thinking engineers began developing the planning profession and introducing urban areas to the idea of comprehensive city planning. The new planning ideas were embraced by civic reformers in the early twentieth century as a way to control what they felt were cities that had grown in an unattractive and poorly organized manner. Many chambers of commerce in the country sponsored planning as an aid to business. By the 1920s, many cities were engaged in planning activities and enacting zoning and building regulations. The federal government’s Standard State Zoning Enabling Act of 1922, the U. S. Supreme Court’s 1926 decision upholding the constitutionality of zoning regulations, and the 1928 federal government’s Model City Planning Act all moved city planning efforts forward. It was also during the 1920s that the profession of planning reached maturity and planners like John Nolan provided comprehensive plans that suggested ways for cities to control growth, reorganize existing conditions, and beautify the environment.¹⁴

During the Great Depression years of the 1930s, planning efforts shifted largely from local communities to the federal government. The federal government’s planning efforts, including model communities, resettlement, and natural resource planning, helped states and local communities at a time when they had few resources for planning efforts. After World War II, there was a period of accelerated growth in the United States that lasted into the 1960s. In order to bring some order to this growth, all levels of government engaged in planning activities. While some of these efforts at planning brought important gains in land use regulation and environmental preservation, in the area of historic preservation, many of these efforts were harmful. Urban renewal projects were supposed to improve “blighted” areas, but the way these projects were carried out, leveling large urban neighborhoods and rebuilding, destroyed many historic buildings and ethnic areas that would have benefited from a less radical approach. The urban renewal approach had one positive result, though. By destroying so many historic buildings, the projects brought a heightened interest in historic preservation.¹⁵

¹³ *The Plan for Planning: City of Janesville Comprehensive Planning Program*, Janesville: City of Janesville Planning Department, 1982, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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Historic Planning in Kenosha

The first formal planning effort in Kenosha involved establishing a building code. In 1909, the City Council appointed a committee to draw up building regulations, but never approved them. In 1913, the local fire department lobbied for a code, and in 1915, with state law behind it, the department began inspecting public and commercial buildings for fire hazards. In 1916, the council finally passed the building code and approved the appointment of a building inspector.¹⁶

The new council-manager system of local government, established in 1922, embraced the idea of planning. In 1925, the Kenosha city council hired a planning professional to prepare a comprehensive city plan. Their choice, Harland Bartholomew, was trained as an engineer, as were many early planners. In 1916, he was working as a planning engineer in St. Louis and by 1919, he had established his own practice. He practiced during the formative years of professional city planning and had an impact on the development of the profession. Between 1920 and 1926, Bartholomew's firm wrote 20 of the 87 plans developed for cities. Although Bartholomew was not an innovator in city planning like John Nolan, he was a leader in the field and made an impact on the profession as a teacher and writer.¹⁷

The plan that Bartholomew prepared for Kenosha was one of the first he did for a small city. Bartholomew's associates, Earl O. Mills, L. D. Tilton and William D. Hudson did much of the work for the plan under Bartholomew's supervision. Fred Graf prepared the drawings. The plan was a major accomplishment not only in the history of planning in Kenosha, but also in the history of urban reform in the city during the early twentieth century. Bartholomew's plan addressed several major areas: streets, mass transit, transportation, recreation (including parks), zoning, and civic art. Each section included an analysis of current conditions and proposals for the future.¹⁸

The streets section of the report suggested that the city establish major arterial streets running both north-south and east-west, along with major arterials in the downtown. Arterial streets would be widened and have no dead ends or major curves. This part of the plan was enacted and to further organize the city streets system, street names were changed to a number only system. All north-south streets were changed to numbered avenues and east-west streets were renamed to numbered streets. This system was continued throughout Kenosha County. As was the fashion of the time, the plan also suggested a parkway along Pike Creek for beautification and recreation. In the mass transit and transportation sections of the report, Bartholomew suggested a streetcar

¹⁶ Ross, 431-432.

¹⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Civic Center Historic District.

¹⁸ Ross, 436-438.

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system that would serve the entire community and was easily expanded. His plan concentrated on rail transportation and how it could best serve the community, especially industry. In the area of zoning, the plan primarily supported the city building code and zoning ordinance, one of the most comprehensive zoning ordinances in the state. Under the heading of civic art, Bartholomew suggested a plan for beautification of the community in the form of tree planting, street cleaning, removal of utility poles and wires, beautification of personal property, and development of the area's natural beauty along the lake shore.¹⁹

A large section of the plan discussed recreation and parks, the most relevant section related to this nomination. Bartholomew supported the activities Kenosha had already achieved in this area, but encouraged an even greater and more systematic program for recreation and parks. He emphasized the development of playgrounds close to schools and in existing and new parks. He encouraged the development of all types of parks, including small neighborhood parks, a lake front park, large parks, and pleasure drives. The plan suggested that parks should include a myriad of recreational facilities including golf courses, beaches, floral displays, a zoo, and community centers. It also encouraged expanding existing parks and acquiring park land beyond the city limits.²⁰

Early Development of the Kenosha Park System

As indicated in the historical background section, several small parks existed in Kenosha prior to 1900, but, by the time Harland Bartholomew's city plan was published in 1926, the city of Kenosha had acquired a considerable amount of park land, although much of it was undeveloped. The acquisition of this park land came as a result of another movement related to city planning, a private citizen-led movement of community development meant to beautify the city. This movement was related to the social and political reform movements in Kenosha described in the historical background. Some of the same individuals involved in those reform movements were involved in developing a park system.

In 1906, these citizens organized the Kenosha Park Association, and with the help of both private donations and taxpayer money, important land acquisitions were made during the 1910s. In 1911, the city purchased five acres for Baker Park, and between 1912 and 1915, the city borrowed money to purchase 120 acres of park land, including Columbus Park, Lincoln Park, and much of Washington Park. In 1912, a park commission was established. In 1916, the park system was given a major boost with the donation of much of Washington Island (Simmons Island). The Simmons family donated the 40 acres making up this park, land that was worth

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-441.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

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several hundred thousand dollars. Simmons Island, with its fine lakefront footage, was the jewel in the crown of early park development, but most of the park system activity during these early years revolved around land acquisition. Some park facilities were built in the parks, but they were few and largely utilitarian, such as a small bath house on Simmons Island, and rustic park shelters. Some trees, shrubs and flowers were also planted in the existing parks.²¹

During the 1920s, additional park land was acquired and more formal park development took place, especially after the 1925 city plan was developed. In 1920, over 20 acres of landfill were acquired for Lake Front Park. In 1923, the council appointed the first parks director and, in 1924, Pennoyer Park, lake front land on the north side of the city, was acquired. The most important development in park facilities occurred in 1922, when the city built the Washington Park golf course and a small rustic clubhouse.²²

After Bartholomew's plan was finished in 1925, the parks department began more formal park development. A zoo, sunken garden and new landscaping improved Lincoln Park. More neighborhood playgrounds were developed near schools, and the council passed an ordinance requiring new subdivisions to have a set-aside of at least 5 acres for new parks. In 1928, Floyd Carlson took over the position of parks director. It was under Carlson's leadership that most of the formal planning and development occurred in Kenosha's parks. Because of the Bartholomew plan and Carlson's planning and management skills, Kenosha was able to take advantage of the federal work programs of the 1930s to develop Kenosha's parks and recreational facilities, including the building being nominated.²³

One emphasis of the Bartholomew plan was to take advantage of the natural resources of Kenosha for recreational purposes. Carlson followed through on this suggestion by promoting more lakefront land acquisition for parks. Adding to the existing Simmons Island, Eichelman and Lake Front parks, in 1928, the city arranged to purchase an additional 120 acres of lakefront property that W. H. Alford and A. H. Lance had acquired for this purpose in 1924. Later, this park was named after Alford. During the late 1920s, the city purchased another 25 lake front acres on the south side of Kenosha, forming the core of Southport Park. During the peak development era of the mid and late 1930s, additional park land was donated to expand Southport and Washington parks and new recreational facilities and new landscaping were added to both existing and new parks, completing much of the vision of the Bartholomew plan.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 433; Cropley, pp. 103-106.

²² Ross, pp. 453-454; information on the development of the Washington Park golf course in the files of the Kenosha Parks Department, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

²³ Ross, pp. 453-454.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 454.

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The pace of park development dramatically changed once Carlson became the parks director and in the 1930s, when federal money became available for projects. Right after Carlson took over the park system, he began making formal landscape plans for undeveloped areas in new or existing parks. In 1929, Carlson published his landscape plan for Simmons Island. This plan included curved drives lined with numerous plantings, a large beach house along the lake front, tennis courts, playground equipment, a small amphitheater, a memorial, and a large lagoon. The plan was not completed right away, but the work was started in 1929. Park workers graded and seeded some areas of the island, built tennis courts, and installed ornamental lighting. In 1928 and 1929, recreational facilities were improved at Lincoln and Pennoyer parks, and a putting green was added to the Washington Park Golf Course. Other park work was primarily in the area of maintenance.²⁵

Park Planning and Development During the Early Years of the Great Depression

In 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, the city's annual report suggested that the parks had been a great asset to the city, "acting as safety valves for unrest and ease of mind," in "periods of economic changes." But, the city had yet to use park work for relief efforts. In the 1930 report, Carlson published a plan of the city showing the locations of all the major parks and their facilities. At that time, the Kenosha park system consisted of almost 20 parks that totaled over 420 acres. Most parks had some recreational facilities. The large parks at the time included Lincoln, Washington (including the golf course), Simmons Island, and Pennoyer. Alford and Southport existed, but were undeveloped. Smaller parks included Columbus, Sheridan and Eichelman, and smaller still were the older Union, Bain, Library, and Civic Center parks. Several miscellaneous parks completed the system. New parks were not established during the 1930s; instead, the city concentrated on development. Two donations from W. H. Alford added land to existing parks in 1934: 12 acres for Southport and 20 acres for Washington.²⁶

The major projects completed in the park system during 1930 included improvements to the Lincoln Park gardens; the construction of a sprinkler system on Simmons Island; landscaping with hundreds of trees, shrubs and plants also on Simmons Island; and, most important, a comfort station in Washington Park. This comfort station was built to blend in with the neighborhood of period revival style homes. It was built in the Tudor Revival style with brick walls, stone accents, and leaded windows. This attractive building would be a precursor of the larger, more elaborate buildings erected in the parks in the years to come.²⁷

²⁵ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Eighth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1929, pp. 62-69.

²⁶ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Ninth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1930, p. 61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-69.

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The parks report for 1931 showed little change from 1930. The parks were not yet formally using relief workers and the slowing economy appeared to have an impact on the amount of money the city spent for projects in the parks. The small projects completed in that year included improved recreational and playground equipment, and some landscaping in existing parks. Nothing was done in undeveloped parks, such as Alford and Southport. The only new project was at Lake Front Park, the park located on landfill along the lakefront near downtown. A preliminary design was published for the park that showed that it would be a sports park with an athletic field that could be used by the high school. The only physical work completed was adding more fill to this park. What was important in relation to this park was that it showed that Floyd Carlson was continuing to implement the 1925 Bartholomew city plan, which recommended more lake front parks and more systematic recreational facilities.²⁸

The increasingly poor economy had an even more serious effect on development in the Kenosha park system in 1932, and for the first time, people on local work relief were used for the few park projects that were done. Floyd Carlson oversaw the preparation of landscape and development plans for Washington and Alford parks, but little work in the parks was actually accomplished. Instead, only a few physical improvements were made to parks, including a parking lot on Simmons Island, more landscaping at Lake Front Park, and some clearing of wild areas in Alford Park. The work at Lake Front and Alford parks was done by relief workers and wood cut at Alford Park was given to families on relief who could use it. It was probably the lowest point in the development of parks in Kenosha since the parks movement had begun.²⁹

After Franklin Roosevelt took office in March of 1933, his "New Deal" administration quickly pushed through new federal programs meant to help the economy and the unemployed. One of these early programs was the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Because Floyd Carlson had done considerable planning for the park system, following the guidelines of the Bartholomew city plan, Kenosha was able to quickly take advantage of this new program and submitted applications for park projects to be funded by the CWA. Although the new CWA program did not take effect until November of 1933, Kenosha's quick action got some federal money at the end of the year and was able to provide work relief in the parks to some of the unemployed. The park projects included building a gravel road, constructing three picnic shelters, initial construction on two lagoons, and some landscaping. Since Kenosha was a largely industrial city,

²⁸ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Tenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1931, pp. 39-47.

²⁹ "1932 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file at the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 22-26.

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with a high level of unemployment at the time, the fact that the city could quickly apply for federal work relief grants to do park work was a great help to many people in need.³⁰

In March of 1934, the city of Kenosha applied for more federal aid through work relief projects, which were now being run under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Under the FERA provisions, the federal government paid for 70 percent of wages, with the local government paying 30 percent. The local government would also have to provide materials. This provision was of particular importance in relation to the buildings constructed under this and future federal programs. Of the nine projects that the city applied for in 1934, eight involved work in the parks, including the construction of the Simmons Island Beach House.³¹

The Simmons Island Beach House was planned in the spring of 1934 and construction began that summer. Much of the building was completed by the fall of 1934, but there was still work to be done on landscaping and finishing, so the official opening of the building was scheduled for June of 1935. Built in the Tudor Revival architectural style, the new beach house was lauded in the press as a modern facility that included open air dressing rooms, showers and restrooms, a check room, and spacious rooms for lifeguards, concessions, and first aid. The most interesting detail was that most of the building was constructed of recycled materials. Because the city had to pay for materials, they came up with the idea to use recycled materials from condemned houses and factories. The relief workers would also get jobs demolishing the old buildings, as well as building the new ones. In fact, in January of 1935, the city announced that it now had a formal plan to "eliminate" decrepit buildings that had salvageable materials and that some buildings that had been removed had already been used in FERA projects.³²

The opening of the Simmons Island Beach House was the first major triumph of the development of the parks using federal work relief money. And, it was a testimony to the expert leadership and planning of Floyd Carlson, parks director, that the building was constructed so soon after the first federal programs became available. Building on this achievement, Carlson continued to stay abreast of the changing federal programs, adding more and more projects each year until the start of World War II. In the city's annual report for 1935, Carlson described how local and federal work relief programs had helped both unemployed men and the park system. He also indicated that the federal government had funded most of the projects.³³

³⁰ Summary of Parks Department Annual Reports, unpublished outline on file in the Parks Department, City of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

³¹ "City Applies to Continue CWA Projects," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 29 March 1934, p. 7.

³² "New Building for Beach is Nearly Ready," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 27 September 1934, p. 2; "City in Plan to Eliminate Old Buildings," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 10 January 1935, p. 2.

³³ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Fourteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1935, p.29.

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The WPA Years of Park Development

Aside from completing the Simmons Island Beach House in 1935, other projects in the parks that year included smaller scale recreational facilities, hardscaping and utility work, and landscaping work. In August of 1935, the federal government consolidated and expanded all of its work relief programs into the Works Progress Administration (WPA). According to the 1935 parks department report, one of the changes that came with the new WPA program was a more precise and thorough application process. Carlson's planning expertise was probably a factor in Kenosha successfully competing for federal dollars. Because he had an overall plan and vision for much of the city's park development, Carlson was able to direct his staff of engineers, architects, and supervisors to prepare as many applications for park projects as possible. And, given the scale that WPA projects would take on in Kenosha during the next few years, Carlson and his staff's work paid off.³⁴

The following three years were peak years of WPA work projects in Kenosha parks. In 1936, alone, several major projects were begun that would be completed in the coming years, including the development of Southport and Alford Parks. In both 1936 and 1938 park projects totaled over \$1,000,000 and employed an average of over 1,000 men per month. In 1937, projects totaled around \$600,000 and employed over 700 men per month. During this time period, landscaping work was extensive, especially in the previously-undeveloped Southport and Alford parks, but more impressive was the size and number of buildings constructed during this era. These buildings included the large Art Deco style Lincoln Park foot bridge, the Tudor Revival style Washington Park Golf Course Clubhouse and Golf Course Warehouse, the Alford Park Warehouse and rustic comfort stations, and the Art Deco style Fieldhouse and Stadium for the Lake Front sports park.³⁵

Several of the above-mentioned projects were completed or neared completion in 1936. Lake Front Park's fieldhouse and recreation facilities were completed except for finishing work. This project turned a former landfill into a sports park with two football fields, a baseball diamond, ¼ mile track, bleachers, broadcast booth, and a fine Art Deco style fieldhouse. The facility was dedicated in July of 1936. Unfortunately, these park facilities are no longer extant. Another sports facility nearly completed in 1936 was the new Washington Park Golf Course Clubhouse

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-35.

³⁵ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Fifteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1936, pp.38-43; "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Sixteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1937, pp. 36-41; "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Seventeenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1938, pp. 36-39; "1938 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 3-13.

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and improvement of the golf course. The new Tudor Revival clubhouse was, like the Simmons Island Beach House, built of recycled materials, but contained high-quality modern facilities such as a lounge, sun room, concession stand, kitchen, ladies locker room, and extensive locker rooms on the second floor for men.³⁶

The Art Deco style foot bridge in Lincoln Park was a major accomplishment in 1936. Restored in 1987, this bridge is an outstanding historic landscape feature in the park today. In 1936, work finally began on the development of Southport Park, a 39-acre lake front park that could serve the south side of the city as Simmons Island served the north side. WPA crews graded, excavated, and landscaped much of the park and installed utilities, roads, walks, parking areas, and small buildings. Construction on the Southport Beach House began and its design made it, arguably, the best building in the park system. The beach house was much larger than its counterpart on Simmons Island, and its English manor house-Classical Revival influenced architecture made an impressive architectural statement. Some picnic shelters and landscaping was done at Alford Park, but the major project was the beginning of construction on jetties for lakeshore protection. Twelve jetties of about 300 feet each were started to protect lakefront parks. These jetties would considerably ease lakefront erosion by slowing currents and causing sand deposits on the beaches.³⁷

In 1937, the cost of parks projects was slightly lower as fewer new projects were started. The most extensive work took place at Alford Park, where roads, parking areas, utility work, and landscaping were completed to more formally landscape the park. Comfort stations and shelter houses were started in Alford Park, as was the foundation for the park warehouse. Some finish work was done on the facilities at Lake Front Park, and excitement was generated when notable heavyweight boxer Joe Louis used the facilities in preparation for his fight with James Braddock in Chicago in that year. The new clubhouse at the Washington Park Golf Course was opened to the public in May of 1937, and additional work was done on the course itself. Work on the jetty system was part of the 1937 parks program, and work was done on the Southport Beach House.³⁸

In 1938, WPA work in Kenosha's parks again topped \$1,000,000, largely because of extensive work at Alford Park. Along with additional landscaping that included extensive planting of trees and shrubs, the WPA workers constructed three large comfort stations, three picnic shelters, a concrete and stone bridge, parking areas, utilities, and the Alford Park Warehouse building. A large storage building was also built for the Washington Park Golf Course, and maintenance and improvements were made to other parks during the year. At Southport Park, more landscaping

³⁶ *Fifteenth Annual Report*, p. 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-41.

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was completed, along with a small warehouse. Work on the Southport Park Beach House was completed to 90 percent, including much of the impressive Art Deco interior.³⁹

WPA Work in the Kenosha park system continued in 1939 and 1940, but not at the pace of previous years. One of the major changes was a transfer of funds to the construction of a sewage disposal plant at the edge of Southport Park. The funding for this project cut the amount of money available to develop parks and park facilities. Perhaps, at this time, after all of the park work that had taken place during the previous few years, the city determined that much of what Carlson wanted to accomplish in developing the parks in Kenosha had been achieved, and a sewage treatment plant was a greater need. In any event, some park work did continue with the help of the WPA.

In 1939, some finish landscaping was completed in Alford Park, including planting lawns, adding trees and shrubs, and fine grading of roads and parking areas. Other completion work was done on the warehouse and the comfort stations. Considerable landscaping was done in Washington Park and in Pennoyer Park. The construction of the sewage plant halted most work on the Southport Beach House and in fact, during the summer of 1939, the park was closed due to work on the sewage plant. In 1940, the warehouse and comfort stations in Alford Park were opened and more planting of trees and shrubs in that park was completed. In Southport Park, the landscaping was completed, including paved walks, roads, and parking areas. But, once again, work to complete the beach house was delayed until the fall of 1940, so it was not open during the summer. In the fall, the concrete balustrades around the beach house were completed along with other concrete work, and interior electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and decoration was finished. The beach house was finally opened to the public for the summer of 1941.⁴⁰

The year 1941 was a watershed year for the City of Kenosha and its parks. The country was already gearing up for World War II and Depression-era projects were ending as the economy was finally improving. At the end of the year, the country would be officially in the war, and Kenosha's factories geared up for war production, providing full employment to workers. Also in 1941, the third city manager, Harold Laughlin, one of the series of progressive city managers that served Kenosha between 1922 and 1941, left to work for the federal government. In November of 1941, the biggest blow to the parks department came when Floyd Carlson departed for a position as director of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, one of

³⁹ "1938 Annual Report of the Department of Parks."

⁴⁰ "1939 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 4-7; "1940 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 4-6.

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the first regional planning commissions in the country. In 1944, Carlson came back to Wisconsin, but as the City of Racine's planner and, later, as planner and director of parks. It is clear that the planning he accomplished as Kenosha's director of parks gave him considerable experience he was able to use as a full-fledged urban planner.⁴¹

During and after World War II, Kenosha took advantage of the first-class park system that had been started early in the twentieth century. Thanks to early twentieth century reformers and "city beautiful" proponents, the expertise of an early professional planner, the federal government's work relief programs of the 1930s and the professional planning efforts of the parks department staff that successfully exploited these programs, Kenosha built a park system that continues to serve the public today.

But, in recent years, the maintenance on the almost 70-year old park buildings constructed during the 1930s has become problematic. Budget concerns and changing uses and needs in the parks have meant that some of the buildings constructed during the Great Depression have been demolished, are currently underutilized, and/or are in need of considerable renovation. Current budget constraints make the preservation of these important resources a difficult task at best. Considerable planning and innovative solutions will need to be found so that these historically and architecturally significant park resources, built with considerable planning and innovation on the part of the parks department of the past, and with the labor of many citizens of the community, can be maintained for a future generation

Significance of the Simmons Island Beach House

The Simmons Island Beach House is historically significant at the local level for its importance in the area of planning and community development in Kenosha. The context given for this significance is broad, but its scope is important because it explains how the building fits into the overall history of park planning and development during the important development years of the city's park system. By itself, the Simmons Island Beach House would be a historically interesting recreation building. But, the historic significance of the building goes beyond its obvious historic function. Its construction was a notable event in the broad plan that developed the extensive park system in Kenosha. The plan began with the community development and reform ideas of a small group of progressive citizens, that was formally articulated and expanded on in the 1925 city plan. It was finally brought to fruition during the Great Depression under the guidance of an expert planner who was able to take extensive advantage of federal government programs to achieve the park system's goals. As such, the Simmons Island Beach House is

⁴¹ Ross, p. 480.

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important because it physically represents the historic planning and community development efforts that improved not just the city's park system, but the entire community.

The construction of the Simmons Island Beach House was the first of the major building projects of the park system and it represented the culmination of important planning goals of the city, many of which were specified in the 1925 Bartholomew city plan. These goals were to provide recreational facilities for the public, take advantage of the natural features of the city, especially its lakefront, and, during the 1930s, to take advantage of federal money to aid the unemployed in a time of economic crisis. The beach house is also one of the major achievements in the career of Floyd Carlson, the city's important parks director and parks planner between 1928 and 1941. For its significance to the history of planning and community development in Kenosha, the Simmons Island Beach House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and an important landmark in the community.

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: ARCHITECTURE

The Simmons Island Beach House is architecturally significant at the local level as a fine example of the Tudor Revival style. It is also an example of the fine work of a notable parks department designer, an example of high quality craftsmanship using a large amount of recycled materials, and a building with a high level of integrity, even after decades of intensive recreational use. The building was designed by parks department draftsman Chris Borggren in 1934 and constructed by relief workers who were not necessarily trained in construction. The result was an important recreational facility for Kenosha, but also a stylish period revival building that adds to the architectural landscape of the city.

The Tudor Revival style of architecture was one of the period revival styles popular between 1900 and 1940. They were based on historic architectural styles and included the Colonial Revival, Georgian Revival, Tudor Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean Revival styles, as well as some less well-known variations. As their names suggest, these styles revived historic Colonial, Georgian, Tudor, Spanish, and Mediterranean architectural details. Typical details of the Tudor Revival style included applied half-timbering in the gables, steeply-pitched rooflines, multi-paned casement or sash windows with label moldings, and decorative stonework. Some Tudor Revival buildings emphasized medieval details like half-timbering, while others emphasized details that suggested stone English castles. Still other Tudor Revival buildings had details that suggested the thatched roofs and eyebrow windows of English cottages. Some buildings combined many of these details for an eclectic appearance.⁴²

⁴² Barbara Wyatt, ed., *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II*, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Architecture, pp. 2-28--2-33.

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Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

The Simmons Island Beach House is a fine and interesting example of the Tudor Revival style. Its details, both inside and outside, are typical of the style and are executed in an attractive manner. The style is represented on the exterior primarily in the steeply-pitched roofline and the applied half-timbering in the gables. The stone veneer on the main block of the building is also a detail that suggests the style and the main entry doors, with their vertical board construction and wrought-iron strap hinges, evoke entrances into English buildings. Many of the window openings are of a size and type that are typical of the style, and although they are currently boarded up, their original infill of leaded glass casements or multi-light sashes were common Tudor Revival style details.

The interior of the building continues the Tudor Revival style of the exterior. The lobby, with its brick floor, beamed ceiling, and wood paneled walls, suggests the dark rooms of medieval English buildings. The other Tudor Revival features can be seen in the main hallways and the check room, including the vaulted ceiling of the main block with its massive exposed beams and cross pieces. Other Tudor Revival details in this area include the massive arches in the hallways and the "whimsical" English cottage staircases of the check room.

What is particularly interesting is that the Tudor Revival style was used for a utilitarian building, a bath house. The addition of the stylistic elements gives the building architectural distinction, making it stand out in the community. There are a number of fine and outstanding Tudor Revival style residences in Kenosha, in particular in the Third Avenue Historic District. What is significant about this building is that it is not a residence, yet its proportions, architectural details and quality of construction make it compare favorably to any of the fine Tudor Revival residences in the city.

A high quality of craftsmanship is evident throughout the building. Rather than create a simple, utilitarian building for the beach, the parks department decided to give the building the elegance and impressive quality that only style elements can provide. Also, there was no attempt to cut corners on stylish details. The front doors, for example, were given strap hinges when it was not necessary, and the staircases of the check room are much more elaborate than necessary for function. The vaulted ceiling could have been less elaborate, but the massive exposed beams and cross pieces add to the architectural style of the building. The high quality of craftsmanship is particularly interesting because it was done by relief workers, most of whom had no training in construction or had worked in outside jobs. Floyd Carlson, the parks director at the time, stated in one of his parks department reports, that the men on work relief projects in the parks had given a "good account of themselves," and this building is evidence of the high quality of work the relief workers put into the effort.

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Section 8 Page 20 Simmons Island Beach House
Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

Another feature that adds architectural interest to the building is the use of recycled materials. Recycled bricks or other materials were sometimes used for period revival buildings to give them an authenticity modern materials could not give. But, in the case of the beach house, the large amount of recycled bricks, wood and slate used would provide a challenge to workers and supervisors, alike. That the effort resulted in a building that was extremely attractive and stylish is of considerable note.

The high quality of the design came from Chris Borggren. Borggren was a native of Denmark and trained in architecture in Copenhagen and in Chicago. He was a draftsman for the parks department in the 1930s, but his work shows a skill equal to many architects of the period. His first designs were for simple picnic shelters in Alford Park in 1933 and they stood out for their high quality and innovative appearance. The Simmons Island Beach House was his first major work and it shows that he was well trained in the historic styles. Borggren used historic styles in this building and in the Southport Beach House (including an Art Deco interior), but he also designed the impressive Art Deco fieldhouse at the lake front park (not extant). That building, along with the interior of the Southport Beach House, shows that Borggren was not just adept at the historic styles, but the modern ones, as well.⁴³

Finally, what adds to the architectural significance of this building is its high level of integrity. There is no evidence of major alterations anywhere. The only change has been the boarding up of openings, which does not significantly detract from the building's overall integrity. Since original plans exist, it would be possible to restore these openings if they are not extant. It is surprising that major alterations were never made, since the building was used for decades as a bath house. Its original design, with well-planned interior space and efficient facilities, served the city and the bathing public well for many years, making the building not just an attractive feature at the lakefront, but a useful recreational facility, as well.

The Simmons Island Beach House is architecturally significant at the local level because of its architectural style, its fine design by an important local designer, its interesting building materials, its high quality of construction, and its high level of integrity. The combination of fine Tudor Revival style elements and recycled materials give the building a distinctiveness. Rather than an institutional style bath house, the citizens of Kenosha were presented with an almost home-like building that was welcoming, as well as functional. The high quality of construction has withstood decades of use with few modern alterations, resulting in a high level of integrity. For all these reasons, the building is an important architectural landmark in the city, a landmark that anyone who helped build it would be still proud of today.

⁴³ Ross, p. 458.

Simmons Island Beach House
Name of Property

Kenosha County
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

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

1	16	433200	4715500	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

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)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Carol Lohry Cartwright	date	9/5/02
organization	prepared for the City of Kenosha	telephone	262-473-6820
street & number	W7646 Hackett Road	zip code	53190
city or town	Whitewater	state	WI

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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- "1938 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin.
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“Park Department,” *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Fourteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1935.

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Barbara Wyatt, ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Architecture.

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GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARY

The boundary of the Simmons Island Beach House is defined as follows: Beginning at the intersection of a line that runs 50 feet east of the east wall of the beach house, roughly parallel to the Lake Michigan shoreline, with a line that runs 50 feet south of the south wall of the beach house, then north along the line that runs along the east side of the building to the intersection with a line that runs 50 feet north of the north wall of the beach house, then west along this line to the curb line of the drive leading to the beach house, then south along this curb line to the intersection with the line that runs 50 feet south of the south wall of the beach house, then east along this line to the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary encompasses the site of the beach house while drawing out the other areas of the park surrounding it, which is outside of the scope of this nomination. The boundary reflects only the beach house and its immediate surroundings in the area where the beach house has sat in Simmons Island Park since its construction date in 1934-1935.

Simmons Island Beach House
Name of Property

Kenosha County
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

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

name/title	Art Strong, Director		
organization	City of Kenosha Department of Parks	date	9/5/02
street&number	3617 65 th Street	telephone	262-653-4052
city or town	Kenosha	state	WI
		zip code	53142

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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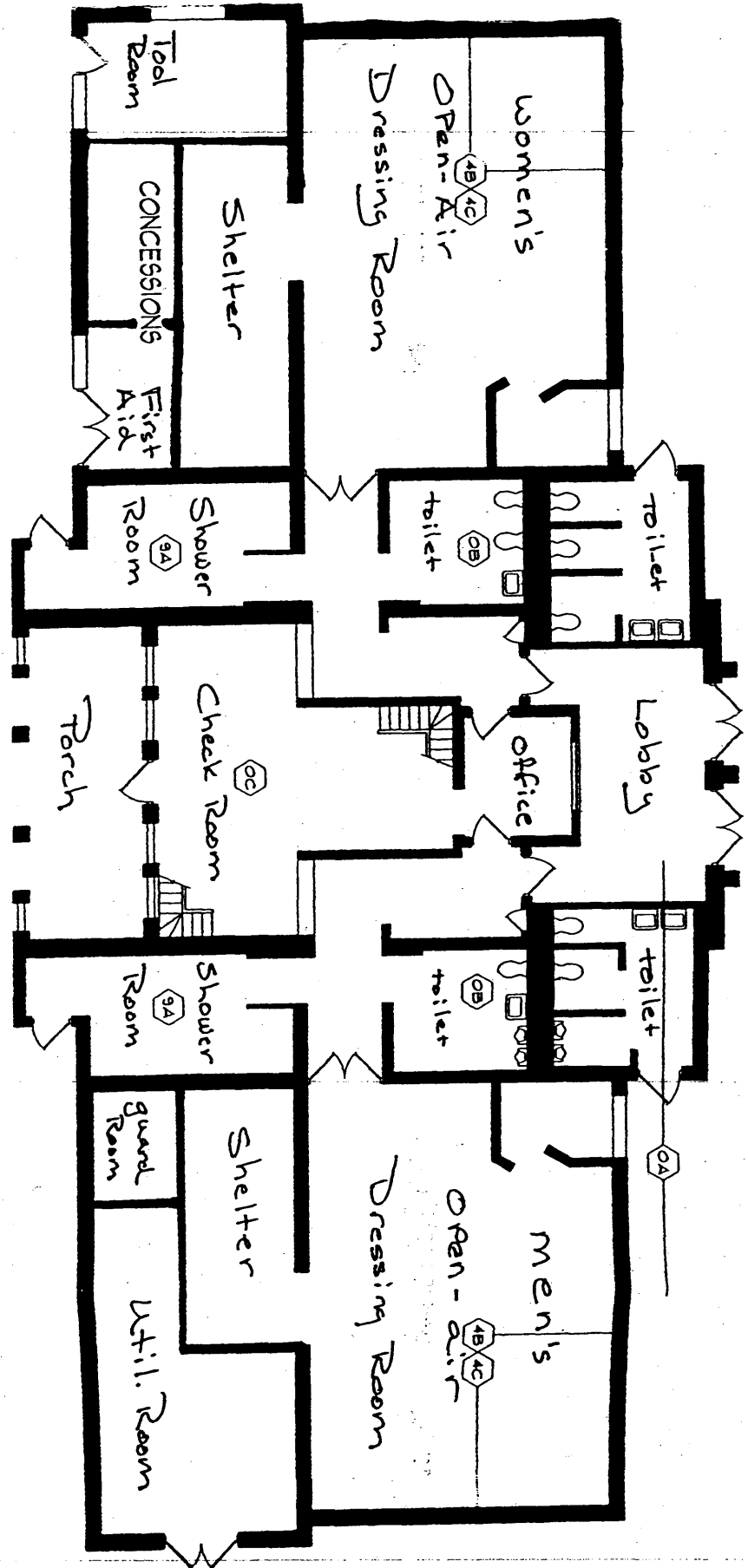
Section photos Page 1 Simmons Island Beach House
Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

SIMMONS ISLAND BEACH HOUSE, Kenosha, Kenosha County, Wisconsin. Photos by Carol Cartwright, July 2002. Negatives on file in the Historic Preservation Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

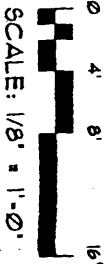
Views:

- 1 of 11: Site view, from the northwest.
- 2 of 11: Main elevation, from the west.
- 3 of 11: Close-up of main elevation, showing main entrance features.
- 4 of 11: South elevation, from the south.
- 5 of 11: East elevation, from the southeast.
- 6 of 11: East elevation showing features of bath entrances from the lake.
- 7 of 11: Interior, main lobby detail showing wall and floor surfaces.
- 8 of 11: Interior, main lobby detail showing ticket window.
- 9 of 11: Interior, main dressing room, view of east wall.
- 10 of 11: Interior, close up of east wall in dressing room.
- 11 of 11: Interior, close up of west wall showing balcony and office.

SIMMONS ISLAND BEACH HOUSE
KENOSHA, KENOSHA COUNTY, WI



FIRST FLOOR



SIMMONS ISLAND BEACH HOUSE
 KENOSHA, KENOSHA COUNTY, WI

MEZZANINE

