

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

COLUMBUS PARK

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Columbus Park

Other Name/Site Number: Park #209

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Bounded by W. Adams Street, S. Central Avenue, Eisenhower Expressway, and S. Austin Boulevard

Not for publication: ___

City/Town: Chicago

Vicinity: ___

State: Illinois County: Cook Code: 031

Zip Code: 60644

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___
Public-Local: X
Public-State: ___
Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): ___
District: X
Site: ___
Structure: ___
Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1
1
7
2
11

Noncontributing

8 buildings
0 sites
10 structures
2 objects
20 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 10

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Historic Resources of Chicago Park District

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Landscape Sub: Park

Current: Landscape Sub: Park

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Late 19th & Early 20th Century American Movements/ Prairie School

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: stone

Roof: ceramic tile

Other: vegetation

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 4

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Columbus Park is considered the masterpiece of nationally renowned landscape architect and conservationist, Jens Jensen. Designed between 1915 and 1920, the park reflects the mature expression of his Prairie style philosophies in terms of both landscape architecture and programming components. Much of Jensen's original vision for the park was realized and remains intact. Columbus Park retains very strong historic integrity.

Columbus Park is a 135-acre property located in the Austin neighborhood on the west side of Chicago, Illinois. It was conceived by the West Park Commission in 1912 as part of an expansion effort to develop recreational and cultural facilities for the unserved densely populated neighborhoods, which were increasingly shifting westward. The commissioners were inspired by a revolutionary system of neighborhood parks that had opened on the south side of Chicago in 1905. Providing an array of athletic, educational, and social services to the surrounding tenement neighborhoods, these parks were designed by the nationally renowned firm, the Olmsted Brothers. Jensen did not like the rigid designs and amount of paved areas in the seminal Olmsted Brothers' neighborhood parks. Jensen believed that "playgrounds would gain much by more green and less gravel, by more freedom and less supervised play."¹ Although he did design some neighborhood parks, he only had limited opportunities to explore his naturalistic philosophy in them because the sites were so small.

The first large park established by the West Park Commission since 1869, Columbus Park was expansive enough to allow Jensen to respond to programming needs while also conveying an idealized interpretation of the natural prairie. In his memoir, *Siftings*, Jensen wrote:

For years the message of great prairies had appealed to me. Every leisure moment found me tramping through unspoiled bits of these vast areas. I wanted to understand their force, their enchantment that had called on and on. Then came the opportunity to build a large park on the prairies, at the edge of a great metropolis. No one can realize what such an opportunity meant to me at that time in my life.²

After years of experimentation in both public and private practice, Jensen achieved a full and mature expression of his Prairie style in his design for Columbus Park.

Jensen's Prairie style of landscape architecture was a distinctly Midwestern expression inspired by the natural scenery of the region. Like Chicago's Prairie School architects, Jensen emphasized the broad horizontality of the prairie landscape and celebrated the beauty of its indigenous materials. This style included a series of elements that were evocative of natural scenery. A highlight of the style was the use of native plants (a practice that was followed by only a few other landscape gardeners at that time, such as Ossian Cole Simonds at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago). Other elements of Jensen's style were natural-looking waterways that he called "prairie rivers," horizontally layered stonework emulating natural Midwestern bluffs, and meadows that could be large areas representing the prairie or smaller intimate open spaces within a wooded area, known as "sun-openings" or "clearings."

Jensen was masterful in his treatment of ephemeral aspects such as views and vistas, the play of light and shadow, color, and seasonal changes. In fact, he designed to appeal to every sense. Not merely to be seen, his landscapes surrounded one with the smells of trees and flowers, the feel of the sun and the wind, and the sounds of trickling water and songs of birds. In fact, years after Jensen had designed Columbus Park, he noted that the

¹ Jens Jensen, draft of the *Siftings* manuscript, n.d., Jens Jensen Collection, The Morton Arboretum.

² Jens Jensen, *Siftings*, rev. ed. (1990; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990), 82.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 5

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

park's vegetation had "attracted the great blue heron," a species of bird that was becoming endangered.³

Today, Columbus Park retains all of these significant elements of Jensen's design style. The Chicago Park District continues to follow Jensen's plant palette, using native trees such as hawthorn, oaks, and linden; shrubs such as sumac and witch-hazel; and wildflowers including wild geranium and columbine. The prairie river exemplifies Jensen's masterful use of water. His signature stonework is evocative of natural stone outcroppings characteristic of the Midwest. Notable examples of this element in Columbus Park include the stone paths, the children's shelter, the council ring, and the waterfalls. Among the meadows in the park is the golf course, a metaphor for the broad prairie landscape, which he sited towards the setting sun. Known as a players' green, the stage is a small meadow flanked by two clearings that provided back-stage changing areas. The lawn for the audience is a smaller meadow that slopes down toward the prairie river, providing views towards the stage.

In addition to its numerous significant landscape elements, the site includes architecturally significant elements that also reflect Jensen's design intent. These include a pair of entry lanterns by Schmidt, Garden and Martin, and a playground shelter that may have been designed by architect John S. Van Bergen. There are also two buildings in the park that were constructed during Jensen's tenure but do not reflect his stylistic preferences. These are two eclectic Revival style buildings, a 1917 stable designed by James Dibelka that was moved from its original location in the 1950s, and a 1918 field house designed by John Christensen. There were also some additions made after Jensen's final dismissal from the West Park Commission in 1920. These include the 1922 Mediterranean Revival-style refectory and an archery building and comfort station constructed by the Chicago Park District in the 1930s.

Between the 1930s and the present time the park has experienced additional modifications, alterations, and the loss of original fabric in response to numerous and frequently changing community needs. In spite of these changes, Columbus Park retains very high integrity. It has numerous nationally significant features reflecting the work of Jensen, and these aspects continue to provide the majority of the park's character defining features. The locally significant historic features were added without compromising the integrity of Jensen's design.

In order to clearly describe Columbus Park and show that it retains sufficient integrity to be listed as a National Historic Landmark, three corresponding plans are submitted: Jensen's 1918 plan [A], a 1939 record drawing [B], and a current plot plan [C]. Individual features have been keyed onto the three plans. For convenience, features have been numbered in the order that they are discussed in the narrative. As some planned features were never implemented and other features have been removed, all numbers do not appear on each plan.

Columbus Park is bounded on the north by W. Adams Street, on the south by the Eisenhower Expressway, on the east by S. Central Avenue and on the west by S. Austin Boulevard [C]. The park's original boundaries were generally the same with the exception of its southern boundary, which was Lexington Avenue [B]. The boundary change was caused by the 1953 construction of the Eisenhower Expressway [C]. The southernmost nine acres of Columbus Park were lost as a result.

The park's interior circulation system consists of three vehicular roads and numerous pedestrian pathways. Overall the roads and paths continue to reflect the originally implemented design, which was generally based on Jensen's plan. With the inclusion of a continuous access road around the perimeter of the park, the Jensen plan would have diverted traffic from Harrison Ave. on the west side of the park in a northerly direction to Jackson Blvd. and in a southerly direction to Lexington Avenue [A]. The southern interior road was not implemented [1]. The north interior road linking Harrison St. and Jackson Blvd. was implemented as Jensen's plan indicated [2].

³ Jens Jensen, "The Naturalistic Treatment in a Metropolitan Park," *American Landscape Architect* 2 (1930): 37.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 6

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The east side linkage road, later named Jensen Drive [3], was connected with Harrison Ave. on the east side of the park until 1953, when it was shortened to allow for the relocation of the men's gym [4]. Because the shortened road led only to a dead end, in the early 1990s the Chicago Park District removed the remaining Jensen Drive roadway. The asphalt was removed and sod was planted, leaving only the adjacent path. The surrounding landscape has good integrity and the area affords beautiful views of the prairie river. Subsequently, this has become a popular spot for fishermen and picnickers.

The west side linkage road, which was called Mason Drive, was also removed in the 1950s [5]. Sometime after 1953 the west entrance to Columbus Park on Jackson Blvd. was also reconfigured to allow for a CTA bus turn-around. A small limestone comfort station [6], located on the eastern end of the turn-around, was probably constructed when the road was reconfigured. More recently a plexiglas bus shelter was added.

Jensen had intended for Golf Drive, the vehicular road west of the lagoon, to be a pedestrian path. The implemented plan placed Golf Drive in Jensen's proposed location but as a vehicular road [7]. It was also later widened in areas to allow for parking. With the exception of these alterations, most of the drives appear today much as they did when they were first constructed. In addition, the pedestrian circulation system that ran parallel to the drives remains true to the original configuration [B, C].

Between Jackson Blvd. and W. Adams Blvd., the northern boundary, is a narrow strip of parkland conceived by Jensen as a long strolling lane with tennis courts placed inconspicuously at its outer eastern and western edges [8, 9]. The eastern tennis courts, which were anticipated in the Jensen plan, were finally implemented in the 1950s [9]. The grassy walk, trees, shrubs and benches of the strolling lane are all intact. While some of the original vegetation is no longer intact, the park district is currently discussing the possibility of re-introducing the missing shrubs and wildflowers with the residents who live on W. Adams Blvd., adjacent to this area of the park. A soft surface playground has been added towards the center of the strolling lane without diminishing the integrity of the area [10]. There is a strong possibility that this will be removed in the near future, when additional plantings are added.

Flanking the western entry to the park on Jackson Blvd., the Chicago Park District recently installed a small garden of native shrubs and flowers with a pair of limestone urns on pedestals. Flanking the eastern entry to the Park on Jackson Blvd. are a pair of massive Prairie-style lanterns designed by Schmidt, Garden and Martin [11]. Though these lamps do not appear in Jensen's 1918 plan, they clearly reflect his design intent. In fact, they are identical to those he used in the 1907 design for the Boat House, Music Court, and Rose Garden areas of Humboldt Park. The lamps are composed of a tall square concrete base, a cast iron luminaire screen, and a low pitched hipped roof. They were restored in the mid-1990s.

South of the Jackson Blvd. eastern entrance, just west of Central Ave. is the historic children's playground area. Today, this area retains a great deal of original fabric and strongly reflects Jensen's design intent. Specifically meant for noisy free play, the playground was placed beneath the gently sloping ridge that provided a natural buffer from the quieter interior of the park. The historic topography is intact. It includes the ridge that slopes down from the path adjacent to the prairie river to the children's playground area and the gently sloping berms that divide the children's playground area from what was originally designated as athletic fields. In spite of a great reduction in vegetation and the deteriorated condition of features, this area has strong integrity.

The children's playground elements were all part of Jensen's original plan. These include a clearing for free play; a council ring and its stepping stone path; a children's shelter and sand courts; and a wading pool with rocky ledges. The stepping stone path leads to the council ring, which is slightly elevated above the space for free play [12]. Unlike some of Jensen's other council rings that were composed of solid benches of stratified stones, this

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 7

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

one has piers of stratified stones placed at intervals, topped with a continuous flat stone for the seat. There is a flat hearthstone in the center of the ring for camp fires. The council ring is in poor condition; however, much of the original stone is still on site. The stone seat has been knocked off and now sits on the ground, and the stone piers are deteriorated. The Chicago Park District has developed restoration plans for this area and has recently applied for grants to undertake the work.

The children's shelter structure, possibly designed by John S. Van Bergen, is composed of stone piers, open walls, and a low gable roof [13]. The heavy piers have thin horizontal slabs of stratified limestone, in which the mortar joints are recessed. This beautiful Prairie-style shelter is similar in appearance to sketches that were done by Van Bergen for the refectory building. The structure sits on a platform of irregularly placed field stones. Adjacent to the shelter and sand courts is the original children's wading pool [14]. This was converted to a spray pool in the 1960s without loss of the original fabric. The pool is tear-drop shaped and has rocky ledge edges. Although water originally cascaded down the side of the stratified stone walls, the pool has been dry since the late 1990s and is in need of restoration.

Originally Jensen designed the park's two swimming pools [15, 16] as country swimming holes with stratified stone walls surrounded by vegetation. Those pools, one shallow and one deep, were replaced with a regular Olympic size pool and a round concrete wading pool with concrete benches in 1955 [17, 18]. The swimming pool complex is adjacent to the field house [19].

The fieldhouse is an eclectic Revival style building designed by John Christensen in 1918 [19]. Composed of light brown brick laid in Flemish bond and clad with a green ceramic French pan tile roof, it is a U-shaped building with a two story center section flanked at forty-five degree angles by one-and-a-half story wings. The center section of the building has a hipped roof with two cross gables and three gabled dormers. In the upper portions of the front facade, beneath the gabled ends, there is half timbering with stucco fill. The two wings have hipped roofs. The Chicago Park District is currently installing a new clay tile roof that matches the original. The fenestration consists of casement windows and an elaborate front entranceway composed of a massive Colonial Revival door beneath a brick segmental arch surround and stone entablature. Between the entablature and arch is a terra cotta panel with a shield motif featuring the initials of the park. The building fronts onto Central Avenue and in recent years a small annual garden has been installed between the street and the entryway.

The fieldhouse has been subject to some minor additions. In 1936 a new boiler room was constructed at the far end of the east wing and a passageway was added to the rear extending between the two wings. Originally, a pergola composed of concrete columns and an open wooden lattice roof wrapped around the west wing. Other missing features are the original leaded glass casement windows and an extensive metal skylight along the southern slope of the hipped roofs over both wings. Most of this original fabric was removed during a 1953 rehabilitation project undertaken to move the men's gym building from the expressway site and link it to the field house with a brick arcade corridor [23].

The area between the children's playground and the fieldhouse had been designated in the Jensen plan as an athletic field. It is separated from the children's playfield by a series of berms. Originally implemented as a simple open field [20], softball cages were added in this area in the 1940s. In 1953, a driveway and small parking lot and basketball courts were placed at the south end of the athletic field [21]. In 1988, the softball cages were removed and a large soft surface playground was placed in the center of what had been the athletic field [22].

Originally located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Lexington Street and S. Central Avenue, the gymnasium building was built as the Columbus Park stables and barn structure in 1917. Designed by James Dibelka, the building has a modified U plan and is composed of light brown brick interspersed with darker brown

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 8

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

bricks and a slate roof with metal ridges and valleys. Two stories in height, the building has a center, a north and a south pavilion. The center pavilion has a gabled roof with a cross gable over the original carriage doors and five hipped dormer windows on both the east and west facades. The north pavilion has a hipped roof, and the south pavilion has a clipped gable. There are two cupolas with metal roofs, one over the central pavilion and the other over the north pavilion. The remainder of the roof is composed of slate.

In 1934 the building was converted into a gymnasium. Utilitarian areas such as the stables, laundry, and coal room were converted to men and women's locker rooms and gyms, clubrooms, social rooms, and offices. On the exterior a vestibule was added to the east facade. The three doors leading out of the stables were converted to windows. Other modifications were made in 1953 when the structure was moved to its present location. In addition to the arcade corridor, the vestibule was enlarged and a new entrance and porch were added to the west facade. More recently, a minor addition was constructed on the northeast side of the building to provide an elevator. As the building now offers a preschool program for under-privileged children, a small tot lot was added just to the north of the arcade. In spite of the fact that the stables building was moved from its original location and has had some insensitive treatments such as original windows having been bricked or boarded up, the building has good integrity. In addition to clearly conveying its original purpose, the building retains much original fabric.

The third major building in Columbus Park is the refectory [24]. As explained in the significance statement, Jensen's intent for this is somewhat unclear [25], although it is certain that he intended for a Prairie style building to be constructed. Instead a Mediterranean Revival-style building was constructed. Designed by Chatten and Hammond between 1920 and 1922, the refectory has a modified L-shaped plan consisting of a long rectangular enclosed section with a shorter perpendicular loggia. Both sections are composed of reddish brown brick and stone trim and have low pitched hipped roofs of red Spanish clay tile with overhanging eaves. Most of the building sits on a platform with low stairs, balustrades, and urn planters.

Both the north and south facades of the long rectangular portion of the building are divided into six bays defined by fluted stone Doric pilasters. The two end bays are projecting. All six bays have arched openings. The end bays have double door entrances with sidelights, transoms, and fanlights. The four central bays have large arched windows with in-swinging double doors and wide patterned molding. Over the entrances and windows is decorative brick in either a fluted or woven pattern.

On the west facade an enclosed hipped end block extends from the long rectangular portion of the building and meets with the loggia. The loggia section is an open pavilion of arched bays divided by stone Doric pilasters. The kitchen extension on the east wing has a flat roof with parapets, is divided into four bays by brick pilasters, and topped by twelve pre-cast concrete urn finials. A one-story boat dock extends into the lagoon from the east facade. Above it is a terrace with a balustrade and nine ornamental lampposts composed of cast concrete.

The refectory building underwent an extensive restoration in the early 1990s and is now a popular site for weddings and special events. Today, the refectory appears largely as it was originally constructed. It retains a great deal of original fabric, including the interior terrazzo floor, lighting fixtures, and other decorative details. The restoration project was successful at reconstructing missing details as well as meeting universal accessibility standards without diminishing the building's historic integrity.

The refectory overlooks the lagoon that was designed by Jensen as a "prairie river" inspired by the site's ancient beach. This natural-looking waterway is edged with native aquatic vegetation as originally envisioned by Jensen. Historically, it was used for boating, and today, the prairie river is regularly stocked with bass, blue gill, and catfish as part of the Chicago Park District's Urban Fishing Program. This waterway [26] begins at two waterfall

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 9

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

sources [27] that join near the refectory and passes adjacent to the dammed lily pond [28], which also has a small rocky waterfall. Just beyond the lily pond, the mouth of the lagoon is formed, which then gently curves and ends somewhat abruptly in front of the gymnasium building. Originally, the prairie river continued to flow to the southern portion of the park. The lagoon was truncated during the park's 1953 program to accommodate the construction of the expressway. Today, the southernmost tip of the original lagoon still exists [29]. Ball fields were placed on the filled section of the lagoon [30].

The two waterfalls [27] at the ends of the two tributaries of the prairie river are among the park's most impressive features. Jensen designed the waterfalls to represent the source of the prairie river. The water cascades over layers of stratified stone. Similar to the other stone features of the park's design, the mortar joints are recessed. This emphasizes horizontality and makes the waterfalls appear as though they were formed naturally rather than man-made.

The space between the waterfall tributaries is players' hill [31]. Jensen designed this as an outdoor theater with three "clearings," or spaces of carved out vegetation, one for the stage and two for outdoor dressing rooms. There are beautiful stepping stone paths leading from the stage area to both of the "backstage" clearings. Masses of native shrubs and wildflowers line the paths. Large boulders mark the left and right sides of the stage area, adjacent to the stepping stone paths. One of the boulders is a tribute marker that was dedicated to Jensen by the Friends of Our Native Landscape in 1960 in honor of what would have been his 100th birthday. Jensen's plan included a council ring at the very top of players' hill, but this was never implemented [32]. The players' hill area is separated by a stepping stone path that crosses the waterfalls [33]. Across the brook from the stage area is a meadow area designed as a lawn for the audience [34].

Over the years, the waterfalls, players' hill, and surrounding landscape fell into an advanced state of decline. Thousands of native trees and shrubs surrounding the prairie river and waterfalls had dwindled to a total of only forty-eight trees. Weeds had invaded the river and encroached upon the players' hill. Many of the original stone paths were buried and some of the waterfall stonework was damaged or missing. The waterfalls were dry, inoperable, and littered with debris.

In 1992, the Chicago Park District undertook a \$750,000 project to restore the waterfalls, players' hill, and surrounding landscape. The landscape architect fully documented and analyzed the landscape through field studies and archival material in the Chicago Park District Special Collections and University of Michigan Jens Jensen Archive. Construction included dredging the brooks adjacent to the waterfalls and laying a weed barrier system. To recapture the outdoor stage area, invasive weeds were removed and the area was re-seeded. New plumbing made the waterfalls function again and allowed for an irrigation system. Stone paths were excavated and reset and missing or broken waterfall stones were matched and replaced.

New planting relied upon Jensen's original palette of indigenous trees such as oaks, ashes, elms, maples, and hawthorns. Shrubs such as elderberry, witch hazel, and sumac were reintroduced for the first time in at least two decades. Woodland wildflowers were also included.

In addition to recreational and cultural features, such as players' hill, that were Jensen's innovations, the West Park Commission modified the 1918 plan to include other favored sports. For example, a lawn bowling green was created south of the audience meadow of players' hill. While this lawn bowling area does not appear in Jensen's plan, it is original to the park [35]. Today, this fenced area is used for permitted picnics and other special events. It is no longer used for lawn bowling.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 10

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The golf course, which comprises the majority of the western half of the park, is a well-maintained large expanse of green space in the park [36]. As one of the most important original program elements, the golf course provided Jensen with a vehicle to symbolize the broad horizontal prairie. He had created a "checker board" effect by breaking up fairways with scattered oak trees and native shrubs. Many mature oaks are still intact, and missing vegetation has been replaced in a manner that honors the irregular placement of trees.

On the eastern edge of the golf course adjacent to Golf Drive are two structures. One is a relatively new golf maintenance facility [37]. The other building is a comfort station [38] that was included in the WPA program for the park. Constructed in 1936, the building's "Standard Brick Colonial" design was also used in several other parks under WPA-funded improvements. It is a small rectangular structure with a gable roof. Constructed of brick and limestone, it has several decorative elements including brick coursework, limestone quoins, and a keystone piercing the arched door openings.

The golf course configuration was affected by the 1953 expressway construction. The first tee, starter shed, and concession stand had to be relocated. As a result, some original green space was converted to a parking lot across from the refectory, and a starter shed and concession stand were constructed [39]. In spite of the loss of green space, the two ridges created by Jensen to provide a sense of enclosure at the south end of the park were not affected. In addition, in the mid-1990s a bike path [43] was added at the south end of the golf course. Like the original south end of the park's circuit drive, this bike path provides beautiful views of the golf course and access to this section of the park for non-golfers for the first time in many years.

At the southwestern corner of the park adjacent to the edge of the golf course is an archery building, an archery range, and soft ball fields. The archery building was constructed as the Austin Blvd. comfort station in 1936 [40]. This WPA building's design, which was supposed to emulate an English country house, was also repeated in other parks. Clad with brick on its lower half and half-timbering and stucco fill above, the building is basically rectilinear with a cross-gabled tripartite bay window projection facing onto the west or street elevation. The east elevation resembles a New England Salt Box because of its extended roof-line and two gabled dormers. The building was extensively renovated in 1966. Today, though it is used for archery storage, most of the building's openings are boarded up.

The archery range and softball field area were originally improved in 1922 after the surrounding roads and landscape had been finished [41]. The area was designated as softball and baseball fields. However, this corner of the park underwent a significant transformation due to the construction of the Congress Expressway. The ball fields had to be made smaller. The archery range, added to the east side of the park by 1939, was relocated to the softball field, here, in 1961. This occurred to allow for a new parking lot on the park's southeast corner after the stables building was moved.

Despite the changes caused by the 1953 construction of the Congress Expressway, Columbus Park strongly reflects its historic appearance and clearly conveys Jensen's brilliant design intentions. Although the landscape fell into neglect in the 1970s and 1980s, the Chicago Park District began significant restoration efforts in the 1990s. Throughout the park, new trees have been planted that follow Jensen's original palette. The restoration of the player's hill and landscape surrounding the waterfalls won a 1993 merit award from the Illinois Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. The refectory building has also had a substantial restoration project and has solid bookings for weddings and other popular events. The field house and gymnasium buildings are both currently undergoing roof restorations. The Chicago Park District plans to restore the children's playground area including the shelter building, council ring, and landscape in this area in the near future. Today, Columbus Park remains as one of the most intact Jensen-designed landscapes in the United States.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A x B C x D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Theme(s): Expressing Cultural Values
 5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

Areas of Significance: Landscape Architecture
 Social History
 Entertainment/ Recreation

Period(s) of Significance: 1915 -1920

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Jens Jensen (1860-1951)

Historic Contexts: XVII. Landscape Architecture

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 12

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Located seven miles from downtown Chicago is beautiful Columbus Park, a landscape of wildflowers, waterfalls, stepping-stone paths, and a prairie river. Although appearing to be a natural site, it is actually the masterpiece of Jens Jensen, one of the most significant figures in the history of American landscape architecture. Today, Jensen is recognized as creator of Prairie style landscape design and father of the Midwestern conservation movement.

Nationally renowned architectural historian Carl Condit described Jens Jensen as “the most remarkable man in the history of American landscape art,” in *Chicago 1910- 1929: Building, Planning and Urban Technology*. In a 1951 New York Times obituary, Jensen was named “dean of American landscape architecture.” Jensen’s contributions were recognized during his own period as well. The celebrated Prairie School architect Frank Lloyd Wright, with whom Jensen had collaborated on several residential projects, said: “In Jens Jensen, the landscape architect, Chicago has a native nature poet ... a true interpreter of the peculiar charm of our prairie landscape.”⁴

The largest park of the West Park Commission's early twentieth century initiative to expand its system, Columbus Park provided Jensen with an important opportunity. After many years of improving existing landscapes and creating small neighborhood parks for the West Park Commission, while also designing landscapes for clients through a busy private practice, Jensen had the chance to create an entirely new and expansive West Side park between 1912 and 1920. Jensen used this opportunity to express his fully evolved Prairie style ideology, poetically conjoining design ideas with progressive responses to the community's social needs.

Columbus Park is one of Jensen’s most significant and intact works. It is the premier example of his park designs. The only other public Jensen-designed landscape that has a similar level of importance and integrity is the Lincoln Memorial Garden in Springfield, Illinois. While this site is also worthy of national recognition, its intent was to emulate the kind of landscape that would have existed during Lincoln’s life. In contrast to this specialized memorial landscape, Columbus Park represents the culmination of Jensen’s career. It represents his keen interest in creating democratic public spaces that honored the Midwestern native landscape and helped bring people closer to nature.

In recent years, Columbus Park has begun to receive national attention. The park was featured in a film entitled *Connections: Preserving America’s Landscape Legacy* and is the subject of the first in a series of interactive CD-Rom educational materials for students entitled *Cultural Landscapes as Classrooms*, a web-based tool to educate users about historic landscapes (produced by the Cultural Landscape Foundation). Columbus Park is also highlighted in *A Force of Nature: The Life and Work of Jens Jensen*, the first large-scale exhibition on Jensen, held at the Chicago Cultural Center from March 9 through July 28, 2002.

A number of scholars have identified Columbus Park as Jensen’s premier work. In the article “Jens Jensen and the Midwest Landscape,” Malcolm Collier describes his stylistic elements, suggesting, “These qualities found their most perfect expression in Jensen’s design of Columbus Park.”⁵ Landscape historian Norman Newton

⁴This quote originally appeared in a publication entitled *Chicago Culture* and was reprinted in Eaton, Leonard K., *Landscape Artist in America: The Life and Work of Jens Jensen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 52.

⁵Malcolm Collier, “Jens Jensen and the Midwest Landscape,” *Morton Arboretum Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 53.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 13

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

asserted that Jensen achieved “magnificent results” in his “large parks such as Columbus Park in Chicago.”⁶ Even Jensen considered this project his greatest design achievement. In 1930, towards the end of his design practice, Jensen wrote that Columbus Park was “as much an attempt to realize a complete interpretation of the native landscape of Illinois” as he had ever done.⁷

Born into a prosperous family in Slesvig, Denmark, Jens Jensen (1860-1951) immigrated to the United States in 1884 with his fiancée, Anne Marie Hansen. After brief periods in Florida and Iowa, the young couple settled in Chicago, where Jensen found employment as a laborer for the West Park Commission. Soon promoted to foreman, Jensen planted a formal garden of exotic flowers. In 1888, after observing that, “foreign plants didn’t take kindly to our Chicago soil,”⁸ he took a team and wagon into the countryside and gathered an array of wildflowers, most of which were then considered weeds. Jensen transplanted the wildflowers into a small corner of Union Park, creating the *American Garden*. Although few park visitors had ever seen a wildflower garden before, the *American Garden* became quite popular. Working his way through the park system, Jensen was appointed superintendent of the 200-acre Humboldt Park in 1895. However, by the late 1890s, the West Park Commission was entrenched in corruption. After refusing to participate in political graft, Jensen was ousted by a dishonest park board in 1900.

During this period, Jensen became involved in several organizations devoted to improving the city and conserving natural areas. He was an active member of the Municipal Science Club, a group that in 1898 sponsored a presentation by Jacob A. Riis, an influential photojournalist and social reformer from New York. Riis’ speech inspired the Chicago City Council’s formation of a Special Park Commission the following year. This committee was composed of prominent businessmen, attorneys, design professionals, and social reformers appointed by the Mayor as well as representatives of the city’s three existing park systems, the West, South, and Lincoln Park Commissions. Jensen was appointed to the Special Park Commission in 1903 or 1904.

The Special Park Commission sought to study Chicago’s existing open spaces, create playgrounds in the city’s most densely populated neighborhoods, and develop a systematic plan for parks and recreational areas throughout the metropolitan area. Over a one year period, Jensen and his friend and colleague, the Prairie School architect Dwight Perkins, conducted an exhaustive study. This influential report not only recommended a whole series of new parks and playgrounds in the inner city but also the protection of thousands of acres of land. In 1903, Jensen had created a map entitled “Proposed System of Forest Parks and Country Pleasure Roads” that was hand-drawn “over a geologic map showing ancient beach ridges in the Chicago area.”⁹ He incorporated this concept into the Special Park Commission’s report, published the following year. The report identified significant natural areas in the Des Plaines River Valley along the banks of the Little Calumet River and within the Skokie Marsh region along the north shore of Lake Michigan. Jensen and Perkins’ recommended the creation of a belt of natural lands at the perimeter of Chicago.

Although there was broad interest in creating a system of nature preserves, the initiative was mired in politics and progress was slow. To help bolster the cause, Jensen and Perkins enlisted the support of Chicago’s renowned architect and planner, Daniel H. Burnham, who incorporated their ideas into his seminal 1909 Plan of Chicago. After several more years of political debate on this subject, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County was finally established in 1915. Within its first ten years, the new agency had accumulated 24,000 acres of land.

⁶ Norman Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 435.

⁷ Jens Jensen, "The Naturalistic Treatment in a Metropolitan Park" *American Landscape Architect* 2 (January 1930): 35.

⁸ Jens Jensen (as told to Ragna Bergliot Eskil), “Natural Parks and Gardens,” *The Saturday Evening Post* 20, no. 36 (March 8, 1930): 19.

⁹ Robert E. Grese, *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 64.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 14

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Despite financial struggles, the turn of the twentieth century proved to be an exciting time for Jensen. With the help of some former park commissioners he established a private office designing estates on Chicago's north shore and in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Although he had only a handful of commissions, these private projects allowed him to experiment with design ideas. During this period Jensen spent a great deal of time taking excursions into the unspoiled countryside. He became acquainted with Henry Cowles, a University of Chicago botanist who published an important scientific text entitled "The Ecological Relations of the Vegetation on the Sand Dunes of Lake Michigan." Together, Jensen and Cowles "rambled through the sand dunes of Illinois and Indiana along the shores of Lake Michigan, and hiked the prairie, woodland, and wetland areas of the Chicago region."¹⁰

In 1905, a new reform-minded governor, Charles S. Deneen, dismissed the whole West Park Board of Commissioners and appointed a progressive and honest board. The newly-appointed board president, Bernard A. Eckhart, selected Jensen as chief landscape architect and general superintendent of the entire West Park System. When Jensen returned, he found the parks in terrible condition. Deteriorating landscapes and features in Humboldt, Garfield, and Douglas Parks allowed him to experiment with his evolving naturalistic style. Jensen demolished the small Victorian conservatories in the three parks that had each existed for less than twenty years, but had all suffered terrible deterioration. He replaced them with a larger, centrally located Garfield Park Conservatory. Designed in conjunction with Hitchings & Co., a New York engineering company that specialized in green houses, the new Garfield Park Conservatory was considered revolutionary when it opened in 1908.

Jensen thought that most conservatories looked like palaces or chateaux and were too fanciful and pretentious. In contrast, his new structure emulated the simple form of a haystack. Many other conservatories displayed plants in pots placed on pedestals or in large groupings in the center of a room. Within the Garfield Park Conservatory, however, Jensen designed interior rooms to look like outdoor landscapes. Jensen placed plants directly in the ground and framed views by keeping the center of each room open with a fountain or a naturalistic pond as the centerpiece. "He also hid exposed pipes and mechanical systems by tucking them behind beautiful walls of stratified stonework. Unlike the mounds of volcanic stone used in Victorian conservatories, Jensen's horizontal stonework resembled the bluffs and outcroppings found along rivers in the Midwest."¹¹

Unfinished areas within all three parks also gave Jensen the opportunity to create impressive gardens and naturalistic landscapes. In Humboldt Park, he extended the existing lagoon into a long meandering waterway. Inspired by the natural scenery he saw during trips to wetland landscapes in Illinois and Wisconsin, Jensen designed hidden water sources that supplied two rocky brooks. He edged this "prairie river" with native grasses and established emergent plants in the water such as arrow root, lotus, and cat tails. Nearby, Jensen created a circular garden of roses, other perennials, trellis-like pergolas, sculptures, and ceramic urns. Between the rose garden and the prairie river, he created a naturalistic perennial garden with masses of native flowers. "Similarly Jensen introduced formal gardens in Douglas and Garfield parks that deviated from tradition by including native plants and Prairie style architectural elements."¹²

In addition to improving the three large existing parks, in 1907 Jensen also began designing new small parks for congested neighborhoods on Chicago's West Side. This initiative was inspired by a revolutionary system of South Side neighborhood parks designed by the Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects, and D.H. Burnham &

¹⁰Ibid., 52.

¹¹Sniderman Bachrach, Julia, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago's Parks* (Harrisonburg, VA: The Center for American Places in Association with the Chicago Park District., 2001), 15.

¹²Ibid., 17.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 15

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Company, architects. Conceived by the South Park Commission in 1903, the first ten pioneering new parks opened in 1905 to provide breathing space as well as social, recreational, and educational services to the tenement districts within that agency's jurisdiction. So successful were these parks that President Theodore Roosevelt considered them the "most important civic achievement in any American city."¹³

The need for such facilities was even greater on Chicago's West Side, which had "a population of approximately 885,000" and "the existence of only two small municipal playgrounds."¹⁴ As part of the West Park Commission's reform efforts, there was interest in creating a system of parks similar to those of the South Park Commission. In May of 1905, months before Jensen's appointment as superintendent, Governor Deneen approved an act of the Illinois State Legislature allowing the West Park Commission to issue bonds for the creation and maintenance of new small parks within the district.

Jensen began designing the first three new sites, Eckhart, Dvorak, and Stanford Parks, in 1907. While this was an exciting opportunity, it was also quite a challenge due to the small size of the three sites. Land acquisition was difficult in such congested neighborhoods. For instance, the construction of 8-acre Eckhart Park required the demolition of 200 homes and relocation of approximately 3,000 people.¹⁵ Although expansive elements such as broad meadows or meandering waterways could not be included in the compact sites, Jensen followed his naturalistic philosophies by using native plants in informal arrangements, small sun-openings as gathering and play spaces, and Prairie-style architectural elements. In addition, the "programming agenda for the new neighborhood parks required that most of the space be devoted to playground equipment and recreational facilities."¹⁶ Jensen did not like the rigid approach taken by the South Park Commission. He had hoped to lessen the amount of gravel and pavement used in the south side neighborhood parks and included larger areas of green space.

Unlike the social reformers who shaped the development of the South Park System's neighborhood parks, Jensen felt that opportunities to commune with nature could better improve the lives of urban dwellers than structured recreation. He asserted that:

There are multitudes who rarely get beyond the City limits and who obtain a great amount of physical exercise in their daily work but lack mental stimulus. They need the out-of-doors, as expressed in beauty and art for a greater vision and a broader interest in life. They need the quietude of the pastoral meadow and the soothing green of grove and woodland in contrast with the noise and glare of the great city. They need the things that bring joy and beauty into their souls and give them a fuller enjoyment of life.¹⁷

This sentiment led Jensen to begin exploring ways that programs could be incorporated into neighborhood parks to educate people about nature. One of the first of these ideas was to introduce community gardens into the designs for some of the new small parks in 1909. Tended by neighborhood children, these gardens were so successful that they yielded produce for their families as well as for orphanages and other charities.

Jensen's belief in the social benefits of communing with nature and his evolving style led him to design a new neighborhood park in 1914 that was quite unlike any of the earlier ones. Although it was only 8 ½ acres, nearly

¹³ As reprinted in the *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners* (Chicago: South Park Commission, 1909), 37.

¹⁴ William W. Tippens, "Synthesis of Reform: The Development of the Small Park in Chicago's South and West Park Commissions," unpublished Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1988, 53.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶ Sniderman, Julia, "Bringing the Prairie Vision into Focus," *Prairie in the City: Naturalism in Chicago's Parks 1870 - 1940* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1991), 28.

¹⁷ West Park Commission, *Forty-ninth Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commission*, 1917, 18.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 16

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

the same size as Eckhart Park, Franklin Park was considered a “radical change” from Jensen’s other neighborhood parks.¹⁸ A field house was purposefully omitted from the plan. Instead, Jensen was able to devote the park’s space to various outdoor features such as an open field for “regular play and large public gatherings”; room-like clearings for free play; naturalistic swimming and wading pools; an “old folks corner”; a bird garden; and a council hill designed “in the spirit of Indian lore” for outdoor dramatics.¹⁹ The design relied upon a palette of indigenous plants. Although this was clearly his most naturalistic neighborhood park, the compact site was still not large enough to fully express his emerging design philosophies.

Jensen presented many of his most progressive ideas in a 1920 report entitled *A Plan for a Greater West Park System*. Resulting from an exhaustive open space study conducted by Jensen in 1917, the plan called for thousands of acres of new parks, boulevards, greenways, and community gardens. To Jensen’s great disappointment, the plan was not implemented. However, the creation of Columbus Park responded to the plan’s call for a new large park on the western limit of the city.

In 1910, the West Park Commissioners sought to acquire the “largest single piece of vacant property on the West side” as part of a proposed expansion of the West Park System.²⁰ Although he had hoped for three or four hundred acres, the 144-acre site was approximately the same size as the existing Humboldt, Garfield, and Douglas Parks. Located on the westernmost border of Chicago, the property was called *Warren Woods* or the *Austin Site*. It boasted fields, wooded areas, and traces of sand dune. The Catholic Archbishop of Chicago had purchased most of the property several years earlier to build an extensive seminary. After Archbishop Feehan passed away, however, his successor decided to abandon the plan.²¹

In 1911, the West Park Commission introduced a bill in the Illinois Legislature to authorize acquisition of the site. The following year, the board sold bonds and purchased the property for \$560,000. A small portion of the property had to be acquired through condemnation proceedings, and in 1915 the West Park Commissioners took full possession of the site. Improvements to the new park progressed slowly because Harrison Street, which cut through the site, had to be vacated and street-car tracks had to be removed from the property.

During the planning of the new park in 1915, the commissioners reported that it would offer swimming, football, baseball, skating, and tennis and would also have an assembly hall, boathouse, natatorium, golf shelter, and children’s playground.²² The site was large enough to include these indoor and outdoor programming components, which had gained wide popularity by this period, as well as areas for Jensen’s programs to bring people closer to nature, and beautifully designed landscape areas for rest and relaxation. Responding to the immediate demand for athletic facilities, the commissioners opened a temporary nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and football fields in 1915 while Jensen began designing Columbus Park.

Jensen’s vision for Columbus Park was inspired by the site’s natural history and topography. Traces of sand dune led him to believe the area was once an ancient beach formed by glacial action. Describing the unimproved site, Jensen wrote that the “tract of land on which the park was to be built was crossed by an ancient beach dating back to the glacial age. There was nothing very dramatic about this beach. In its earlier days it had been covered with trees and had perhaps been a dry passage for the Indians in the long ago.”²³ Following that

¹⁸ West Park Commission, *Forty-sixth Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commission*, 1914, 21-22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ West Park Commission, *Forty-third Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commissioners*, 1911, p. 12.

²¹ William E. Golden, “History of Columbus Park – Formerly Warren Woods,” Sept. 1, 1925. Unpublished document at the Chicago Historical Society.

²² West Park Commission, *Forty-seventh Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commissioners*, 1915, p. 16

²³ Jensen, *Siftings*, 1939, p. 75.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 17

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

theme, Jensen designed a series of berms, reminiscent of glacial ridges, encircling the flat interior portion of the park. He densely planted the ridges with canopy trees such as oak, maple, linden, and elm, with an undergrowth of native shrubs and wildflowers. At the park's southern border, the ridge and its plantings provided a protective enclave concealing a railroad right-of-way. The western border was given the same treatment to create a sense of containment and to form a buffer between the park and the surrounding neighborhood.

Also inspired by the ancient beach, Jensen created a meandering lagoon along the sandy area in the center of the site. This waterway was meant to emulate a natural prairie river. Two waterfalls of stratified stonework represent the source of the prairie river. Jensen described these as "prairie bluff of stratified rock along the river."²⁴

Near the juncture of the two brooks, Jensen created a slightly elevated outdoor stage for theatrical performances with a lawn for the audience across the stream. Jensen said: "I always elevate the stage and I call it 'players' hill' for I believe the stage should be looked up to rather than depressed as the Greek stage was."²⁵ Jensen hoped that this simple but poetic outdoor stage would inspire a new, completely endemic American drama. Jensen was interested in the performances of allegorical plays called masques to heighten peoples' awareness of nature. Photographs from the Chicago Park District Special Collections of a late 1930's production of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" reveal that at least some traditional theater was performed on the player's hill.

The edges of the stage area were thickly planted with elms, ash, maples, hawthorns, crab apples, sumac, hazel, and wildflowers. On each side behind the stage, a stepping stone path through these heavily planted areas leads to two "back stage" changing-areas for the performers. These sun-openings, or clearings, were a favorite element of Jensen. He asserted that a clearing in a woodland setting would let in "the smiling and healing rays of the sun."²⁶

Jensen also created a clearing in the children's playground area to promote free play. He kept playground apparatus to a minimum, and tucked it into the edge of the clearing to protect the view. Jensen also placed one of his favorite design elements in this clearing, a circular stone bench known as a council ring. The bench was meant to provide for small gatherings, particularly story telling. With origins that were "partly Indian and partly Nordic," the council ring was charged with meaning for Jensen²⁷:

A ring speaks of strength and friendship and is one of the great symbols of mankind. The fire in the center portrays the beginning of civilization, and it was around the fire our forefathers gathered when they first placed foot on this continent.²⁸

In the center of the Columbus Park council ring, Jensen created a stone slab for campfires.

On the edge of the children's playground, Jensen included a beautiful Prairie-style shelter composed of stratified stonework.²⁹ Near the shelter structure, Jensen created a rocky-ledged wading pool to provide relief from the summer sun. Jensen described this as a "little stone ledge with the forest growth in the background."³⁰

²⁴ Jensen, Jens (as told to Ragna B. Eskil), "Natural Parks and Gardens," *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 8, 1930, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁸ Jensen, *Siftings*, 1939, 66.

²⁹ It is uncertain as to whether an architect was involved in designing this building. It is possible, however, that Jensen's friend, Prairie School architect John S. Van Bergen, may have had some input because the playground shelter bears resemblance to his sketches for the Columbus Park Refectory and Boat House.

³⁰ Jens Jensen, "Swimming Pool and Playground at Columbus Park," *Parks & Recreation Magazine* 11 (May-June 1928): 345.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 18

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Jensen's original design of Columbus Park included a swimming pool complex that was large enough to accommodate as many as 7,000 swimmers per day. The two huge adjoining round pools offered a deep side and a shallow side. The entire complex was edged with horizontal rock ledges evocative of natural stone outcroppings and the surrounding area was enclosed with dense plantings. Jensen asserted:

My idea in bringing the native rock in the building of the swimming pool at Columbus Park was a practical solution of stone wall and protection, as well as symbolizing a bit of native Illinois along our rivers so to give the city dweller and especially youth something of his native land that he otherwise would never see.³¹

He also explained that the pools were known as "swimming holes, as that name seemed more appropriate to pools shut in by natural rock walls and surrounded by natural planting."³² The original pools were replaced by a modern facility in the 1950s.

In the same manner that he accommodated the other recreational elements, Jensen used the golf course as a means to convey his vision of the native landscape. To Jensen, the broad horizontal expanse of the golf course symbolized a prairie meadow. Most of the space remained open, with small groves of trees interspersed to "...break its monotony and furnish shade for the players, at the same time forming the oasis of the prairie landscape."³³ Jensen oriented the golf course on the west side of the park, to take advantage of the setting sun.

In 1920, when Governor Frank Lowden removed all seven West Park Commissioners from office, Jensen lost political support once more and severed his ties with the park system for the final time. Jensen's private practice was thriving, however, as he designed parks, golf courses, and grounds for schools, hospitals, hotels and resorts, as well as estates for notable businessmen including Henry and Edsel Ford, Harold Florsheim, and Ogden Armour.

Columbus Park was largely completed at Jensen's departure. Nearly 10,000 native trees, shrubs, vines, and wildflowers specified in his plan had been planted. One project that had yet to be realized, however, was the refectory and boathouse structure. Jensen presented his vision for this building and an adjoining lily pool in a set of sketches published in the West Park Commission's Annual Report of 1919-20.³⁴ The sketches illustrate a T-shaped floor plan with long horizontal pavilions on each side of a center pavilion. The structure is shown nestled against the lily pond, an inlet of the lagoon. Jensen signed one of the sketches, and his Prairie School architect friend, John S. Van Bergen signed the other one. In Van Bergen's sketch, the structure is rendered in the Prairie style.

After Jensen's departure in 1920, the newly appointed West Park Commissioners began their efforts to implement the construction of the refectory and boathouse. Instead of following Jensen's plans, they hired architects Chatten and Hammond to design a Mediterranean Revival-style structure. Completed in 1923, this elegant building was published in *American Architect and Building News* and *Western Architect*.³⁵ Although the building is a considerable contradiction to Jensen's vision, its massive, arched windows provide breathtaking views of the landscape. In the mid-1920s, boats were available at the building's lower level during the summer, and ice skates could be rented in the winter.

³¹ Ibid., 343.

³² Jens Jensen, "The Naturalistic Treatment," *American Landscape Architect* (1930): 36.

³³ West Park Commission, *Forty-ninth Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commissioners*, 1917, p. 17.

³⁴ West Park Commission, *Fifty-first Annual Report of the West Chicago Park Commission*, 1919-20, pp. 50-51.

³⁵ *American Architect and Building News* 124 (November 1923); *Western Architect* 32 (October 1923).

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 19

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The Chicago Park District was formed in 1934 when the Great Depression caused the consolidation of the city's twenty-two individual park commissions. Between 1935 and 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded more than \$100 million in improvements, recreational facilities, cultural programs, and staffing to Chicago's parks. In Columbus Park, the park district converted the old stables building into a gymnasium, added new recreational features, reconditioned the golf course and ball fields, and replanted the landscape.

In 1953, the southern nine acres of Columbus Park were destroyed to make way for the Eisenhower Expressway. The south end of Jensen's prairie river was filled to relocate the ball fields, and the historic stables building, then used as a gymnasium, was moved west of the field house.

Despite the loss of land and the changes caused by the construction, Columbus Park still conveys Jensen's genius. His vision for the park was further captured in the 1991 award-winning restoration of the waterfalls, players' hill, and surrounding landscape. During the early 1990s, the refectory was also restored and is once again available for special events. Additional improvements to the landscape and field house, as well as upgraded park programs and operations have all helped to revitalize historic Columbus Park.

During his own period, Jensen garnered considerable attention and fame. Several professors of landscape architecture and landscape critics publicized Jensen's efforts during the early part of the twentieth century. These include Frank Waugh, a professor of landscape architecture at Massachusetts Agricultural College (now the University of Massachusetts) who published several books describing Jensen's work and advocating the use of native plants.³⁶ Jensen's efforts were also widely published by Wilhelm Miller, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Illinois and contributor to *Country Life in America*, *Architectural Record*, and other journals and magazines. Miller described Jensen as "the first designer who consciously took the prairie as a leading motive." Miller's circular, *The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening*, encouraged homeowners to employ Jensen's philosophies to their own residential grounds, roadways, and communities.

Since Jensen's death in 1951, his work has received increasing scholarly attention. Two books chronicle Jensen's contributions: *Landscape Artist in America: the Life and Work of Jens Jensen* by Leonard K. Eaton (1964), and *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens* by Robert E. Grese (1992). Recent interest in Jensen has inspired the formation of the Jens Jensen Legacy Project. An effort sponsored by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Chicago Park District, this organization seeks to educate the public about Jensen's significance and to encourage the restoration of his landscapes. The subject of Jens Jensen also has a growing popular audience. His work was featured in a June 2001 article in *House & Garden Magazine* entitled "On the Ground."

During Jensen's life and career he created hundreds of landscapes including parks, residences, school grounds, college and university campuses, commercial grounds, roadway improvements, subdivisions, governmental campuses, and hotel and resort grounds throughout and beyond the Midwest. His contributions are also still enjoyed through dozens of natural places he helped to conserve such as the Cook and Lake County Forest Preserves, many Illinois State Parks, and the Indiana Dunes.

This list of premier sites would include the Henry and Edsel Ford Estates in Michigan, representing some of the most important and intact residential landscapes. The Lincoln Memorial Garden in Springfield, Illinois, is a synthesis of Jensen's design and conservation ideas at the end of his life. Established in 1936, Jensen had volunteers rescue native vegetation from the wilderness to transplant in the park, and local Boy and Girl Scout

³⁶ Grese, *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens*, 58.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 20

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

troops planted groves of oak acorns there. Humboldt and Garfield Park also represent Jensen's early work in the Chicago Parks.

Of all of the possible landscapes to represent Jensen's significance, however, the strongest candidate is Columbus Park. It represents his fully evolved style as applied to property that would be enjoyed by the public, rather than an individual wealthy family. In 1939, Jensen wrote of Columbus Park:

It is not always granted that a landscaper can see the fruits of his work in near maturity, but such was my good fortune recently when I stood on the bank of the prairie river and enjoyed the peaceful meadow which stretched out before me in the light of the afterglow of the setting sun. My greatest joy, however, was to see that not I alone enjoyed this scene. Others saw the significance of it all, and their silence during nature's great pantomime at the end of the day was the greatest reward I could have received. My early desire to bring the city dweller a message of the country outside his city walls had become a reality.³⁷

Today, more than sixty years later, Columbus Park continues to convey Jensen's powerful vision and message, and remains as one of the nation's most significant historic parks.

³⁷Jensen, *Siftings*, 1939, p. 85.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 21

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 22

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 23

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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- Chicago Park District. New Golf Starter's Building, Columbus Park, June 14, 1962.
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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 24

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 25

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 26

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COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 27

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Chicago Park District W.P.A. Photographs. Columbus Park: 1935, 1937, 1938, 1940, 1947, 1955, 1956.
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 Previously Listed in the National Register.
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State Agency
 Federal Agency
 Local Government
 University
 Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 134.92 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	A 16	435730	4636230
	B 16	436540	4636250
	C 16	436550	4635610
	D 16	435750	4635560

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property is bounded by the north right-of-way line of the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290), the south curb-line of W. Adams St., the east curb-line of S. Austin Blvd., and the west curb-line of S. Central Ave.

Boundary Justification:

This is the remaining intact acreage of property historically associated with Columbus Park.

COLUMBUS PARK

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 28

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
July 31, 2003