

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

For NPS use only

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

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Cincinnati Zoo Historic Structures (Herbivore House, Monkey House and Aviary)

and or common

2. Location

street & number vicinity of 3400 Vine Street not for publication

city, town Cincinnati vicinity of

state Ohio code county Hamilton code

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name See continuation sheet

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Hamilton County Courthouse

street & number Court and Main Streets

city, town Cincinnati state Ohio

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date January 27, 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records National Register of Historic Places, 1100 L Street, NW

city, town Washington state DC 20005

7. Description

| | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site | Herbivore & Monkey Houses |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved | date Aviary <u>part 7</u> 1974-75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

Two buildings at the Cincinnati Zoo, the original Monkey House (present Reptile House) and the Herbivore (Elephant) House are the zoo's earliest surviving structures. The remnant of a third structure, the Aviary (later Monkey House) also survives, although it has been moved a short distance from its original site. The Aviary and Monkey House were completed before 1880; the Herbivore House in 1902.¹

These structures are fine examples of early zoo buildings and notable for the functional aspects of their design, for they provide excellent light and space for the species they were designed to house. They are important as early zoo structures, of which few remain in the United States, and for their interesting architecture.

Most other buildings in the zoo were built after 1940. Many of the earlier buildings were replaced with open grotto areas that shelter animals in seasonable weather. Overall, the zoo retains its park-like setting. It includes a lake, picnic areas, and tree-lined hillsides.

Monkey House (present Reptile House)

This round stone structure is 60 feet in diameter and has pedimented entryways projecting at right angles from the main block. Each entryway holds a double door flanked by small windows. A 2-stage round dome, 40 feet in height, crowns the building. The lower section of the dome is encircled by small 4-pane windows near the roofline; its upper portion has a series of hexagonal louvered openings around it. Except as noted below, the structure is largely unchanged.

Originally, there were 16 cages ranged around the interior wall. Each was skylit by windows in the dome and filled with lush green plants. The monkeys had access to outdoor "summer" cages through openings in the wall.²

The Monkey House was remodeled in 1922. The outdoor summer cages were removed and the interior ones modified. A flat-roofed stone addition on the north side, of unknown date, encloses the former entry on that side. All the doors and windows are now aluminum frame; the interior walls and floors are their original reinforced concrete.

Herbivore (Elephant) House

This concrete structure resembles an East Indian temple. It is 175 feet long and 75 feet wide. Five adjoining round domes pierce its flat roof. Each dome has vast semi-circular windows on its outer sides. The central one, 70 feet high, is conical with an octagonal base. There are six chimneys on each long face, evenly spaced.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates Herbivore House 1902 **Builder Architect** Aviary: James McLaughlin
 Monkey House & Aviary - before 1880 Monkey House: probably James McLaughlin
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Herbivore House: Unknown

Summary

The Cincinnati Zoo, which opened to the public in September 1875, only 14 months after the Philadelphia Zoo, is the second oldest in the United States. It is significant not only for its antiquity and the richness of its collections but also for its efforts in the propagation and nurture of rare and endangered species. The zoo also became well-known as the home of the last passenger pigeon and for several of its other celebrity animal residents.

History

A caterpillar plague infesting the Cincinnati area in 1872 played a role in the founding of the Cincinnati Zoo, although the idea had been suggested as early as 1868 by Andrew Erkenbrecher.¹ Erkenbrecher was a successful starch manufacturer in the city, who had a particular passion for collecting birds. The caterpillar plague led him, with several friends and other concerned citizens, to form the Society for the Acclimatization of Birds. The Society imported about 1,000 insect-eating birds from Europe to combat the caterpillars. The release of the birds put an end to the caterpillar threat.

Erkenbrecher and his associates hoped to continue the Society's work by opening a European-style zoological garden, transplanting to the United States the current Continental rage for such permanent outdoor animal exhibitions, which some viewed as stationary circuses. They consulted Dr. A.E. Brehm, a famed naturalist of Berlin, Germany, who encouraged their efforts. Not long thereafter, in July 1873, Erkenbrecher and his associates formed the Zoological Society of Cincinnati, a private stock corporation, to build and operate a "zoo." A 67-acre site in Avondale, then a suburb of Cincinnati, was secured. Construction began on the rugged site in October 1874, but progress on the buildings and animal enclosures was slow.

The public, however, was anxious to see the new zoo, and thus the Society opened it as scheduled, on September 18, 1875, although few of the animal shelters were then complete. The first exhibits included an aviary, dog kennels, and bear pits. The aviary housed a fine collection of birds, including 400 collected by Erkenbrecher. The rest of the entire collection consisted of three deer, eight small monkeys, one buffalo, a tiger, a lion, an ancient hyena, a talking crow, a pair of elk, an alligator, a pair of grizzly bears, six racoons, and an old elephant ("Conquerer," who was purchased from a circus).²

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than 1

Quadrangle name Cincinnati West

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

B

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

C

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

D

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|------|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
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| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

F

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|------|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
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| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

H

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|------|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

Only the structures specified and their modest garden spaces out to the public pathways around each of them.

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

| state | code | county | code |
|-------|------|--------|------|
|-------|------|--------|------|

| state | code | county | code |
|-------|------|--------|------|
|-------|------|--------|------|

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date March 1985

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

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

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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Mrs. Paul W. Christensen
President
Zoological Society of Cincinnati
3400 Vine Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Honorable Arn Bortz
Mayor, City of Cincinnati
City Hall, 801 Plum Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

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Projecting entryways (for human access) on the narrow ends of the building have ogee-arched openings. Wood trim divides the two long sides of the building into five sections; in each section, large rectangular doors permit the animals to browse in outdoor garden areas on both long sides of the building.

Both the interior of the Herbivore House, which features large animal enclosures along both its long walls, and its exterior are essentially unaltered from their time of construction. The structure also still serves its original function.

Aviary or "Old Bird Run" (later Monkey House) [partially demolished]

Andrew Erkenbrecher, one of the zoo's founders, was a collector of rare birds and it is likely through his influence that the Aviary, a series of structures in a picturesque Japanese style, was the first facility to be completed. The Aviary encompassed seven rectangular pagoda-type, tile-roofed buildings in a complex 320 feet long. These structures were connected by wire summer cages. The center building, larger than the others, was more elaborate, with pediments on each facade, and a short square tower capped with a pseudo-onion dome. The roofs of all the buildings had copper birds on their peaks, representing the species housed. Remodeled in the 1940s, the Aviary afterward served the zoo's monkeys.

The six smaller units of the Aviary were demolished in 1974-75. The large central pavilion was retained. Moved approximately 50 feet to the northwest of its original site, it has been restored.

This surviving building was the final home of Martha, the last passenger pigeon, who died in 1914. It serves as an exhibit on endangered species and as a memorial to the passenger pigeon and the Carolina parakeet, another extinct species, the last known specimen of which perished at the zoo in 1918.

FOOTNOTES

1

This description includes data from the National Register of Historic Places nomination form.

2

Engravings of the Monkey House and Aviary that appeared in Album, Zoological Garden of Cincinnati (Cincinnati: Krebs Lithographing Co., 1878) were compared with current views to determine the extent of alterations to the Monkey House and Aviary.

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Despite the instant popularity which greeted it, the zoological garden, which began as a profit-making venture, saw its early years marred by financial problems and finally went bankrupt in 1898. From then until the establishment of the present-day Zoological Society in late 1932, the zoo's financial status was often precarious. The Cincinnati Transit Company, which ran a trolley line to the gates, purchased a controlling interest in 1901 and operated the zoo until 1916. In that year, the zoo was rescued by large donations secured from two prominent citizens, Mrs. Mary Emery and Mrs. Charles Taft, who agreed to match public contributions.

In the late 1910s and the 1920s, the Cincinnati Zoo enjoyed a measure of prosperity. Its collections grew and its national reputation spread. New buildings were added. Ancillary activities at the zoo also brought it added attention. For example, in 1920, the Cincinnati Summer Opera began giving performances at the zoo. These were eventually broadcast nationally by NBC, and, while they were elite functions, offered the amusing spectacle of the opera stars occasionally having to compete with vocal animals.

The effects of the Depression hit the zoo hard and in 1931 it once again rested on the brink of financial disaster. Another rescue effort was mounted. The zoo's long-term future was finally assured only when the city purchased it in 1933. The zoo was transferred to the city's Board of Park Commissioners with the understanding that a society formed of appointed members and citizen volunteers would manage it as a non-profit organization. This organizational arrangement remains in effect at the present time.

Through all of the financial vicissitudes and other difficulties of the zoo's early growth, one individual remained inextricably linked with its fate and its rise to national esteem. This was Sol Stephan, who came to the zoo as the trainer of "Conquerer," the zoo's first elephant, in 1874 and remained until 1937, the last 51 years as general superintendent.

Stephan was a resourceful individual, who was sometimes reduced to carrying the zoo's expenses out of his own pocket. Something of a showman at heart, he built recreational facilities, including an ice rink, a dance hall, and a music pavilion, and installed a carousel³ and a small roller coaster.⁴ He also staged spectacular events that drew crowds to the zoo.

On the other hand, Stephan also administered the zoo well and promoted its central purposes effectively. Among events illustrating his latter role are: the first exhibition of Cape hunting dogs in the United States (1889); the birth of the first giraffe in the country (1889); and the first exhibition, in the United States, of Prewalski horses (1904). One reason for Stephan's "firsts" and other successes was that he was long the sole North American agent for the sales of animals by the Hagenbecks of Hamburg, Germany, a renowned circus and zoo family.

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Stephan also showed a solicitous attitude toward the zoo's animals. He tenderly cared for individuals, such as Martha, the last passenger pigeon, from 1902, when the zoo acquired her, until her death in 1914. For a decade before, a reward of \$1,000 stood to anyone who could come forward with a mate for her. Fulfilling a promise made earlier, Stephan donated her to the Smithsonian, where she remains on display. One of the new stars in his last days at the zoo was Susie, the world's first trained gorilla and long the only one in captivity; she lived on at the zoo until her death in 1947.

In recent years, conservation has become a more express focus of the zoo's management. Rare Siberian tigers, snow leopards, sand cats, caracal, and pampas cats have all been successfully bred here, the latter three species for the first time in captivity.

Today, Cincinnati's mammal collection is one of the largest in the United States. Its feline collection surpasses even the fabled collection in Philadelphia. The zoo's special accent is on rare small animals.⁵

FOOTNOTES

¹This historical treatment, except where noted, is a condensation of the accounts that appear in Oliver M. Gale, "The Cincinnati Zoo -- 100 Years of Trial and Triumph," Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin, 33, 2 (Summer 1975), pp. 85-119, and Susan Hartle, "Cincinnati Zoo History," 1984, pp. 1-6.

²Gale, op. cit., p. 108.

³Charles Jacques, Jr., "Two Great America Parks," Amusement Park Journal, 3, 2 (Spring 1981), p. 32, traces the later history of this carousel, which remained at the zoo for 56 years.

⁴Charles Jacques, Jr., "The Coasters of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company," Amusement Park Journal, 6, 1 (1984), p. 36.

⁵Rosl Kirchshofer, ed., The World of Zoos, A Survey and Gazetteer (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 236.

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Cincinnati Zoo District

Key to Map:

- A Herbivore House
- B Monkey House (presently named the Snake House)
- C Aviary (present location)

- 1 Administration Building
- 2 Education Building
- 3 Carnivore House
- 4 Amphitheater
- 5 Primate House
- 6 Aquarium
- 7 Health Center
- 8 Bird House
- 9 Flight Cage (open)
- 10 Restaurant
- 11 Flight Cage (open)

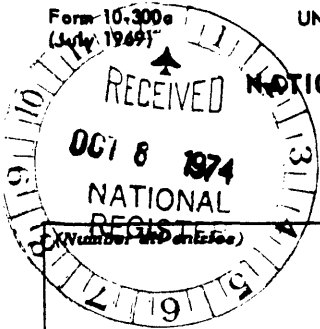
Form 10-300a
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

| | | |
|------------------|-------------|--|
| STATE | Ohio | |
| COUNTY | Hamilton | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE | |
| | JAN 27 1975 | |



Cincinnati Zoo District

