

6004

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

For NPS use only

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

received **MAR 19 1986**
date entered **APR 28 1986**

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

1. Name

historic Banneker Recreation Center

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number 2500 Georgia Avenue, N.W. not for publication

city, town Washington vicinity of

state District of Columbia code 11 county District of Columbia code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Recreation

4. Owner of Property

name District of Columbia Department of Recreation

street & number 3149 Sixteenth Street, N.W.

city, town Washington vicinity of state D.C.

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number Sixth and D Streets, N.W.

city, town Washington state D.C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date _____ federal state county local

depository for survey records _____

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Banneker Recreation Center, located opposite the urban campus of Howard University, was built in 1934. It was erected on steeply sloping ground, and the resulting "banked" construction causes the building to read as a single story on the east (street) side, but two stories on the west. The latter elevation rises above a large swimming pool set in a broad expanse of concrete. Symmetrically arranged near the northwest and southwest corners of the pool are two pumphouses, small rectangular structures with brick exteriors and steep hipped roofs. Beyond the pool lie tennis courts. The various facilities are demarked by chain-link fences.

The recreation center consists of two hipped-roofed wings flanking a central gabled pavilion, with overall dimensions of approximately 160' x 36'. Each wing is six bays long and three bays deep. Exterior walls are laid up in 5-course common bond brick, with the corners of the pavilion, and the end bays of the wings, articulated with rusticated brick quoining. The regularly-spaced window openings have concrete sills, brick jack-arch heads with concrete keystones, and pairs of eight-light casements below four-light transom panels. The main entrance (modern glass and metal) is set within a very tall, round arch featuring a small keystone and impost blocks of concrete. The wing and pavilion roofs are covered with slate shingles. The pavilion gables are partially returned, and feature narrow wooden dentil cornices. A slender, octagonal cupola, with louvred openings and tall finial, is centered on the pavilion roof ridge.

On the poolside elevation, the first story of the pavilion is fully rusticated. A broad entry at ground level is surmounted by a round-arched window of the same scale as the entrance arch on the street elevation. Flanking the central pavilion on the pool side are two-story, flat-roofed infill sections, inserted into the re-entrant angles formed by the projection of the pavilion beyond the wall plane of the wings.

The ground floor of the building is symmetrically arranged to contain various changing and shower rooms. The interior of the upper (street) level consists essentially of three rooms of clear span, the walls of which are covered in ochre glazed tiles for about 3/5 of their height, with plain plaster above. All three rooms are open to the roofs, which are carried on large timber trusses, the members of which are held together with metal rods and bolt plates. The trusses spanning the central pavilion are of a modified king-post type, while the trusses in the wings feature vertical center posts flanked by diagonals in a configuration similar to that of the Warren truss type. Above the trusses, the ceilings are finished with narrow beaded boarding.

(Continued)

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1934 - Present **Builder/Architect** National Park Service

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Banneker Recreation Center is significant for its role as a focal point in the development of the black community in Washington, D.C. Named for Benjamin Banneker, the black surveyor who worked with Andrew Ellicott in surveying the District of Columbia, it was the premier black recreation center in the period during which municipal facilities in the district were segregated. Although it was not one of the centers selected for experiment in inter-racial recreation programs in the summer of 1949, it was among the first centers declared "open", or desegregated in the spring of 1954. The tension between the Department of Recreation and U.S. Department of Interior in the late 1940s, moreover, parallels the ongoing issue of home rule for the District of Columbia, which has distinguished its political history. In terms of architectural value, the Banneker Center represents a utilitarian adaption of stylistic themes promoted from Colonial Williamsburg to the functional requirements of a public recreation facility. The Banneker's success as architecture lies less in formal or aesthetic qualities, and more in its utility, which has proved viable for 50 years and should continue to do so in the future.

Banneker Recreation Center was built in 1934. It is located in the limits of the Freedman's Bureau Subdivision, across from Howard University, and by its location, reflects its historic significance in Washington's black community.* In 1942, it was chosen by the local black community for extensive renovation in order to serve as a year-round facility for black servicemen. During the war, Banneker served as a U.S.O. Club and a ROTC training facility for Howard University.

President Harry S. Truman desegregated the armed forces after his stunning victory over Thomas E. Dewey in 1948, and in the late 1940s, federal agencies, including the National Park Service, which maintained many of the District of Columbia Playgrounds, adopted policies ending racial segregation. The division in jurisdictions within the Recreation Department led to a series of legal confrontations in 1948 and 1949 over racial policy. The U.S. Department of the Interior owned many of the playgrounds and sought to deny the D.C. Department of Recreation access to them since the recreation department maintained a segregationist policy. Finally, in 1953, the recreation department announced a policy of progressive desegregation, and Banneker was one of seven units operated on an "open" basis (Annual Report 1953:3). In May 1954, the department was reorganized, espoused a policy of full integration and moved to obtain control over properties owned by the U.S. Department of Interior.

*A preliminary site history is presently under preparation by Ms. Laura Henley, Thunderbird Research Corporation (Personal communication, August 24, 1984).

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 12.23

Quadrangle name Washington West, D.C.-MD.-VA.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	3	2	4	6	2	5	4	3	0	9	9	2	5
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

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D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The resource at Banneker Recreation Center includes the field house and

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

(continued)

state District of Columbia code 11 county District of Columbia code 001

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Amy Friedlander, Ph.D., Senior Historian & Martha Bowers, Architectural Cultural Resources Group Historian

organization Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. date August 31, 1984

street & number 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W. telephone (202) 466-4000

city or town Washington state D.C.

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

Carol B. Thompson

Director,

title Dept. of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

date January 8, 1986

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

Patricia Andrews

date 4/28/86

Keeper of the National Register

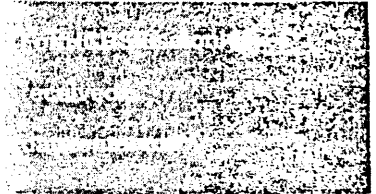
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Use of Colonial Revival style in public and private buildings was extremely common in the 1930s. Its presence has been documented at numerous Federal military installations, for example (see LeeDecker et al. 1983; U.S. Air Force 1984). Although use of trusses to support the roof was an appropriate, albeit not uncommon method of spanning wide spaces, thus preserving an interior expanse appropriate for recreational use, contemporary observers complained that the ceiling was too low for basketball to be incorporated into the center's program. "It is to be regretted," wrote one student of Washington's recreational facilities, "that the field house offers so few opportunities for indoor sports. . .available space for a complete and well-rounded community center program is hopelessly lacking. It has been said that the field house represents a magnificent monument to inefficiency in planning and construction" (Evans 1936:44).

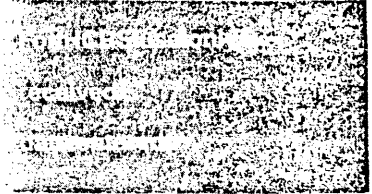
Historically, the center's program encompassed table tennis, shuffle board and volley ball. Its purpose, like that of other recreation centers, was to provide leisure time activities for adults and supervised play for children. Specific activities included athletics, drama, mothers' centers, music and dance (Annual Report 1934:8-10). Historic photographs in the possession of the Office of Development and Planning, Department of Recreation, indicate that track and field activities were popular, and the swimming pool, a feature of the facility since its construction, was a "center of activity in season" (Evans 1936:43). In 1946, the swimming pool was considered the "No. 1 outdoor facility for Negroes" in Washington (Washington Star Collection, "Recreation 1940-49" File, Martin Luther King Library).

The educational functions undertaken by the center's program reflect the reformist impulse of the Department of Recreation since its inception in the early twentieth century. This is characteristic of urban progressivism, which sought to bring order to municipal agencies as a means of eliminating political corruption as well as to maintain social order by educating the citizenry and inculcating "good" habits (Wiebe 1967). The first municipal recreation facilities in Washington were opened in June 1910 with a total of 11 properties (Martin 1912:24). The reform-minded philosophy of the department is most clearly stated in the Annual Report for 1914:

Every child has a right to a place to play. The same sense of duty should impel the municipality to provide playgrounds which impels it to provide public schools. For the child in the city one is as essential as the other. . .If no other place is available it [i.e., the child] will resort to the streets, and it is expecting too much to hope that the child who is driven to this extremity will make as good a citizen as it would if its time were given over to wholesome games and its energies directed

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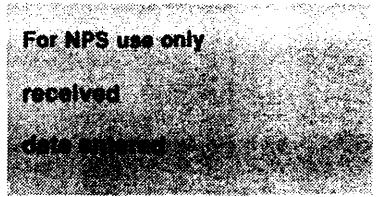
in proper channels. Fresh air, congenial companions, and suitable occupation are prime requisites for growth both in body and mind, and playgrounds minister directly to that end (D.C. Department of Recreation 1914:15).

As noted earlier, the property on which the recreation center is located was historically contained in the Howard University Sub-division, and relationship to the McMillan Plan, which set forth acquisition of parks as a means of improving the city's aesthetic character, has not been established. Prior to acquisition by the U.S. National Park Service in the early 1930s, the property was occupied by a series of row houses, probably very similar in nature to those that define the northern boundary of the playing fields (Approach plan, Banneker Recreation Center Project File, D.C. Department of Recreation, Office of Planning and Development). Although constructed during the Depression, inquiry at both the Cartographic Center, National Archives, and at the National Park Service, has failed to locate original plans documenting the relationship of this building to various Depression-era Federal building programs.

However, siting the Banneker Recreation Center took place in the context of the Department of Recreation's system plan, which was formulated in 1930. This plan called for construction of a series of centers of 10 to 20 acres each; these were to be located approximately 2 miles apart. These centers were to be augmented by a number of smaller playgrounds, which were located approximately one-half mile apart. Centers were to be constructed where feasible in association with a Junior or Senior High School, and playgrounds were to be associated with elementary schools (D.C. Department of Recreation 1932:21). According to Evans (1936:43), Banneker was initially considered a playground, although the care with which the center was built, the presence of extensive grounds and the swimming pool, suggest that a more important role was envisioned. Association with the nearby school (now Banneker High School) and the improvements that were implemented during World War II may have resulted in the changed status to a recreation center. Both for its association with Washington's black community and its location, the center can be seen to reflect the development of a community-based recreation system in the city.

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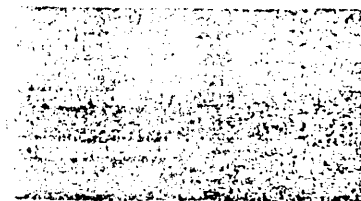
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Banneker Recreation Center continues to serve as a focus for Washington's black community. It maintains an active community-based program. The Howard University tennis team practices on the recreation center's courts, and the center has access to the university's bowling alley.

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Continuation sheet 3.

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Baist's Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia
1896 Vol. 3. C.W. Baist & Sons, Philadelphia.

1925 Vol. 3. C.W. Baist & Sons, Philadelphia.

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1943- Project Files. Office of Development and Planning.
1976 Plan Files. Office of Development and Planning.

1934 Annual Report.

1953 Annual Report.
10 Years of Recreation Progress, 1942-1952.

Evans, The Rev. Ferdinand A.
1936 A Study of Recreation Facilities and Juvenile Delinquency
for White and Colored Children in Eight Census Tracts in
the District of Columbia. M.A. Thesis, Catholic University
of America, Washington, D.C.

Henley, Laura
Personal Communication, August 24, 1984.

LeeDecker, Charles H. et al.
1984 A Cultural Resource Survey and Management Plan for Fort
Belvoir, Virginia. Report on file at the National Park
Service, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

Martin, Edgar S.
1912 The Playground Movement in the District of Columbia. On
file at the Office of Development and Planning, Department
of Recreation, Washington, D.C.

Thomas, Maxine
Personal Communication, August 24, 1984.

U.S. Air Force Regional Civil Engineer-Ballistic Missile Support
1984 Architectural Survey, Vol. I: Architectural History, F.E.
Warren Air Force Base. Draft report on file at U.S. Air
Force and Department of Defense, Washington, D.C.

Washington Star Collection, Martin Luther King Library,
Washington, D.C.
"Playgrounds, 1940-1949" File
"Playgrounds, 1950-1959" File
"Recreation, 1944-49" File
"Recreation, 1950-59" File

Wiebe, Robert H.
1967 The Search for Order, 1877-1920. Hill and Wang, New York.

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the modern swimming pool, as well as the two brick pump houses that have been constructed with Georgian Revival elements (e.g., quoins, brick) and suggest the coherence with which this facility was designed.

The boundary of Banneker Recreation Center includes the entire square 2880 bounded on the north by Euclid Street, on the east by Georgia Avenue, on the south by Barry Place and by 8th Street (a closed street) on the west; and a portion of square 2882, part 936, east of 9th Street, measuring 849.50 ft. south from Barry Place north along 9th Street, to the southwestern corner of Banneker Junior High School property, and 200 ft. east along the southern border of Banneker Junior High School, towards 8th Street.

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Geographical Data Item number

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UTM References

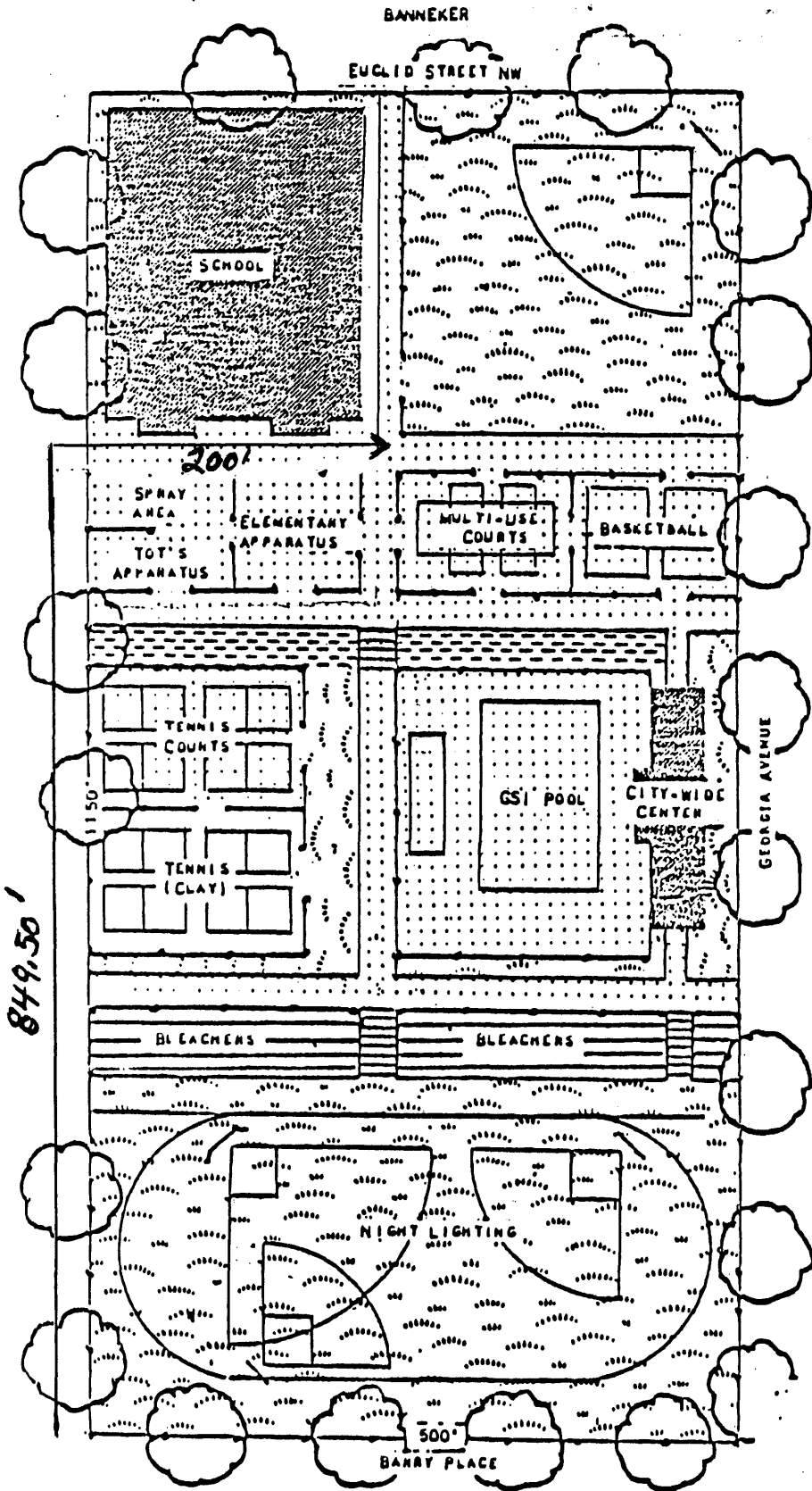
Starting with the NE Corner:

- A Zone 18
Easting: 324 600
Northing: 4310 080

- B Zone: 18
Easting: 324 660
Northing: 4309 740

- C Zone: 18
Easting: 324 510
Northing: 4309 720

- D Zone: 18
Easting: 324 480
Northing: 4310 060



Banneker Recreation Center
 2500 Georgia Ave., N.W., Washington, D. C.