

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 John G. Shedd Aquarium

and or common Same

2. Location

street & number 1200 S. Lake Shore Drive

not for publication

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

state Illinois

code

county

code

3. Classification

Category

☒ district
☐ building(s)
☐ structure
☐ site
☐ object

Ownership

☒ public
☐ private
☐ both

Public Acquisition

☐ in process
☐ being considered

Status

☒ occupied
☐ unoccupied
☐ work in progress
Accessible
☒ yes: restricted
☐ yes: unrestricted
☐ no

Present Use

☐ agriculture
☐ commercial
☐ educational
☐ entertainment
☐ government
☐ industrial
☐ military

☐ museum
☐ park
☐ private residence
☐ religious
☐ scientific
☐ transportation
☒ other: Recreation

4. Owner of Property

(Aquarium)

name Dr. William P. Braker, Director, Shedd Aquarium

street & number 1200 S. Lake Shore Drive

city, town Chicago

vicinity of

state Illinois 60605

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number Cook County Courthouse

city, town Chicago

state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title John G. Shedd Aquarium:

Preliminary Summary of Information

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date December 6, 1976

☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Commission on Chicago Historical & Architectural Landmarks

city, town Chicago

state Illinois

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☒ unaltered
☐ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The aquarium's plan may be described as a Greek cross with the corners between the four arms of the cross filled in, giving the building the shape of an octagon. The central rotunda is surmounted by an octagonal tower roofed with a pyramidal skylight of thick translucent glass set in a steel armature. Like the Field Museum, the aquarium is covered with white Georgia marble, and is set on a modest elevation, surrounded by a terrace with a broad flight of steps leading to the entrance. The entrance portico is in the form of a Classic Doric temple. The other exterior detailing of the building principally derives from the same source. At the roofline, however, the detailing takes the form of stylized waves. The marine motif is maintained on the tower which is capped at the point of its roof by a tall trident, symbol of the Greek god of the waters, Poseidon.

The entrance, which faces west toward Lake Shore Drive, leads into a central foyer in one of the four main wings of the building. To one side of the central hall are administrative offices. On the other is the octagonal Balanced Aquarium Room, decorated in the manner of an Oriental courtyard. It contains a special exhibit of tropical fish. In the center of the room is a kiosk containing seven large tanks; sixty-five smaller tanks line the walls.

At the intersection of the four wings, under the tower, is an octagonal rotunda which originally contained a circular pool surrounded by a rock garden inhabited by small reptiles and amphibians. In 1970 the pool was replaced by a large coral reef tank in which various types of Caribbean sealife live, fed twice a day by divers. The six exhibition galleries that radiate from this room are in parallel pairs in the three wings, with exhibit tanks lining the outer edges of each gallery. The galleries are covered by low vaulted ceilings; skylights and artificial lights above the 200 display tanks illuminate the tanks while keeping the galleries dark enough for optimum viewing. Behind and between the galleries are work spaces and offices. Under the exhibition floor is the Aquatic Science Center, built in a former mezzanine storage area and opened in 1975. It includes classrooms, laboratories, and the aquarium's library.

A highly complex water storage and circulation system operate behind and beneath the exhibition galleries. Maintaining a great variety of fish requires a range of water conditions, and the water tanks are divided into five groups, according to the temperature and salinity of the water.

The decorations of the building's interior are derived from aquatic plant and animal forms. A clock hanging between the foyer and the rotunda has sea creatures in place of numbers. Light fixtures on the walls are in the shape of sting rays, and there are standing lights in the shape of nautilus shells resting on shafts of seaweed. Mosaics of fishes decorate the walls at eye level. Brass radiator grills and railings inside the entrance are made in the form of

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1929 **Builder/Architect** Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The Shedd Aquarium, the first inland aquarium in the United States to maintain a permanent collection of both fresh-water and salt-water fishes and other aquatic life, was constructed in 1929 and opened to the public in June 1930.¹ With its neighbors, the Adler Planetarium and the Field Museum, it forms a significant cultural complex that enriches a visitor's knowledge of the sky, the earth, and water, a connection enhanced by the spectacular lakefront setting of the complex, which evokes each of its components.

The structures that house these institutions offer eloquent testimony to the way in which recreation enhances and ultimately enriches knowledge. Furthermore, they are, along with Soldier Field, the prime remaining structures surviving on-site from "A Century of Progress" (1933-34), the second great Chicago exposition. They all slightly predate the exposition, but, integrated into it, served as the northern anchor for the exposition, which stretched southward along the Chicago lakefront in Burnham Park. Thematically, they fit well with the exposition, which was dedicated to the grand concept of "a century of the growth of science, and the dependence of industry on scientific research."

History

John G. Shedd, whose philanthropy made the aquarium possible, was born in New Hampshire in 1850. At seventeen he decided that farm life was not for him and he found work as a clerk in a grocery store. After similar jobs he decided in 1872 to go west to Chicago "to work for the biggest store in town." He found work in the Field, Leiter and Company store. He began in the stockroom and shipping room at ten dollars a week, but soon became a salesman. By 1893 he was a partner in the firm, which had by that time become Marshall Field and Company. Eight years later, when the company incorporated, Shedd was named first vice-president, a post he held until 1906 when, on Marshall Field's death, he became president. From 1921 until his death in 1926, he served as chairman of the board of the company.

Shedd was involved with a number of charitable activities during his life, but his most prominent contribution was the aquarium he endowed just before his death. He made an agreement with the South Park Commissioners in 1925 by which he would provide \$2,000,000 for an aquarium to be built on park property adjacent to the Field Museum of Natural History, which had been completed in 1921. When the final cost estimate for the aquarium showed that more money would be needed, Shedd added \$1,000,000 to his gift.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 10

Quadrangle name Jackson Park

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	6
---	---

4	4	9	0	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	6	3	5	0	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

B

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

C

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

D

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

E

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

F

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

G

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

H

--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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 August 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

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number 4

Page 1

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

<u>Name</u>	Chicago Park District		
<u>Street & Number</u>	425 E. McFetridge Drive		
<u>City, Town</u>	Chicago	<u>State</u>	Illinois

(The Park District holds title to the land on which the Shedd Aquarium stands, but not the building, which is the aquarium's property.)

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number

7

Page

2

fishnets with plants around their bases and fish around the borders. In the central hall, doorways are topped with glazed tiles of fishes and plaster turtles, and shells decorate the panels of the high coffered ceiling. All this ornament is well integrated with the simple Classic lines of the building, and does not detract from the main attraction: the forms, colors, and movements of its living aquatic inhabitants.

Footnote

¹The description is an edited version of that in Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, "John G. Shedd Aquarium: Preliminary Summary of Information," December 6, 1976, pp. 1-3.

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

2

The architectural firm chosen to build the aquarium was Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. Ernest R. Graham had joined the firm of Daniel Burnham and John Root in 1888. Root died in 1892, and after Burnham's death in 1912, Burnham's two sons and Graham reorganized the firm as Graham, Burnham and Company. When the two Burnhams left to start their own firm in 1917, Graham established a new firm with three other members of the original Burnham firm. Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, still in existence today, has been one of the most prolific firms in American architectural history. Among many other buildings, the firm was responsible for the Field Museum of Natural History. They were commissioned to do the new aquarium, just across Lake Shore Drive from the Field Museum, in a manner which would harmonize with the museum.

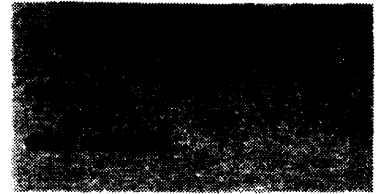
The aquarium is appropriately located on the shore of Lake Michigan, and contains not only rare and exotic fish, but also those of Lake Michigan, with exhibits explaining the ecology and problems of the lake today. The Shedd Aquarium has always been a popular place. With the Field Museum and Adler Planetarium nearby, it is a part of one of the world's great cultural complexes in which anyone may study the earth, the sky, and the seas.

Footnote

¹This edited text derives from Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, "John G. Shedd Aquarium: Preliminary Summary of Information," December 6, 1976, pp. 1-3.

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

Bibliography

Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks. "John G. Shedd Aquarium: Preliminary Summary of Information." December 6, 1976. 3 pp.

Condit, Carl. Chicago, 1910-29: Building, Planning and Urban Technology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Shedd Aquarium. Guide to the John G. Shedd Aquarium. Chicago, 1985.

VERBAL BOUNDARY

The aquarium site is bounded on the west and southwest by the northbound lanes of Lake Shore Drive, on the north by a line drawn due east to the lakefront from the point at which Lake Shore Drive diverges into north and southbound lanes, on the north and east by the lakefront, and on the south by a line drawn west along the east-west axis of the water edge of the causeway to the Adler Planetarium until it intersects the northbound lanes of Lake Shore Drive.