

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received APR 21 1987

date entered 10 987

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

1. Name

historic ROCKWELL PARK

and or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Dutton Avenue and Jacobs Street N/A not for publication

city, town Bristol N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name City of Bristol, Connecticut

street & number Municipal Center, 111 North Main Street

city, town Bristol, N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bristol Town Clerk

street & number Municipal Center, 111 North Main Street

city, town Bristol state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? 28 June 1979
 yes no

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town 59 South Prospect Street Hartford state CT

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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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

Rockwell Park is located at the western edge of the downtown area of Bristol, Connecticut, in a residential neighborhood with both single and multi-family houses dating from the late 19th century through the 1930s. The park is bordered by Dutton Avenue and Park Hill Place on the south, Brightwood Road on the east, a railroad right-of-way on the north, and other municipally owned land on the west. The park is about 104 acres in extent. Elongated in shape, it extends on both sides of the Pequabuck River, a swift-running, rock-strewn, shallow stream (Photograph 9) which flows easterly through the park. Four distinct areas are delineated by the river, a scenic drive, and a large artificial lake in the park's center. The northernmost area, rising steeply from Rockwell Drive, is a dense, mixed hardwood and pine forest undeveloped except for a system of hiking trails (Photograph 17). The second area lies between Rockwell Drive and the river; mostly level, it consists of two ponds and associated retaining walls and paths, a large lawn between the ponds, a sandy beach, and several distinctive cobblestone structures (Photograph 1). The third area directly borders the river and is largely wooded, with gravel paths leading through plantings in which hemlock and mountain laurel predominate. The fourth area consists of specialized recreational facilities, including basketball and tennis courts, a pool, two baseball fields, swing sets, and other playground equipment.

The park gets much of its character from its numerous rustic cobblestone buildings and structures. The most formal of these is the Summerhouse Pavilion (Photograph 6), whose round arches, roof finials, and larger whole stones distinguish it from the other historic structures built during the period 1914 and 1929. There are three entries to the park and one to the playground area, each featuring cobblestone walls and piers, with those at the Dutton Avenue entrance (Photograph 2) the tallest. Brass plaques commemorate the Rockwells, the park's donors, with larger free-standing granite monuments to Albert Rockwell and John C. Mack, donor of substantial funds for recreational activities (Photographs 15 and 16). The largest building, the lagoon bathhouse/concession building (Photograph 1), is a 1928 replacement of the original bathhouse which burned. The park also has some rather whimsical structures, including a bell tower, which was used to store playground equipment, and two vaguely medieval towers, one of which served as a support for a huge slide for the swimming lagoon (Photographs 1, 11, and 12).

The park's historic elements far outnumber features of modern construction. The park includes six contributing buildings and three noncontributing buildings; the latter are a 1978 playground pavilion, an administration building, and a large garage. There are seventeen contributing structures: these include the towers, the picnic areas, a springhouse, the entries, the trail, path, and bench systems, an original bridge, the Lagoon and associated retaining

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Representation in Existing Surveys (continued):

Bristol Architectural and Historical Survey

1978 - Local/State

Records deposited with Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

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Page 1.

Description (continued):

walls, Rockwell Drive, and a dam and valve structure associated with the provision of water to the lagoon. There are seven noncontributing structures, with all the modern playground equipment, courts, and fields counted as one noncontributing structure; a modern pool and pole-shelter are counted separately. The two monuments are two contributing objects. Not counted are the park's many minor structures and objects, such as equipment sheds.

The park's overall landscaping concept and its numerous cobblestone buildings and structures continue to reflect the park's historic appearance. Although ultimately developed somewhat differently from the original design, the basic components remain in exactly the same place today: an undeveloped woodland, scenic drive, swimming lagoon, walking paths along the river, and a playground were all part of the original plan. The chief divergence was that Rockwell Drive, not completed until the 1930s, did not ascend the bluff to a scenic overview as originally planned. The park was the subject of extensive work in the 1930s: besides the drive, the projects included plantings, curbs, improved paths, and picnic areas. After World War II, the city decided to fill in part of the swimming lagoon to conserve water, creating the present fish pond. In the late 1970s the city began a restoration project, including new gravel paths, new plantings, reproduction street lights, and a new bandstand.

INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, AND OBJECTS

Contributing Buildings

Lagoon bathhouse/concession stand, 1928, 2-story flat-roofed cobblestone building with 1-story wing. Large first-floor openings separated by pilasters. Large flight of steps leading down to lagoon. Photograph 1.

Lagoon comfort station, 1929, small cobblestone gable-roofed building; no interior facilities. Photograph 3.

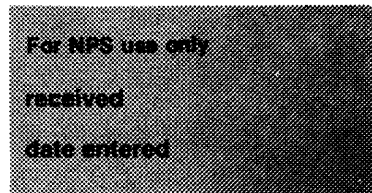
Jacobs Street comfort station, c.1914, hip-roof, cobblestone wall, louvered openings. Photograph 5.

Summerhouse Pavilion, c.1914, large open fieldstone building with arched openings; hip roof on curved braces, copper finials. Photograph 6.

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Description (continued):

Supervisor's tower (playground tower), 1917, 2-story, square-plan cobblestone tower with pinnacles, large louvered openings. Empty of interior structure or furnishings. Photograph 11.

Playground shelter, 1917, cobblestone piers, hip roof, George J. Lacourse Co., contractor; in-filled for pool facility, c.1978. Photograph 13.

Contributing Structures

Lagoon, 1914, large round pond with cobblestone retaining walls; extensive sand beach area at west end. Photograph 1.

Scenic walking paths, c.1914. Fine-gravel paths around lagoon and through wooded areas on both banks of the Pequabuck River. Restored c.1980.

Lagoon slide tower, c.1918, large circular-plan cobblestone tower, narrow openings now blocked-up. Photograph 1.

Springhouse, 1920, near lagoon; resembles small fieldstone gable-roofed house with cobblestone piers.

Dutton Avenue entrance, c.1921, cobblestone walls, piers, towers, and bridge guardrails; bridge itself rebuilt in steel. Photograph 2.

Tulip Street entrance, c.1914, cobblestone walls and gate posts, bronze plaque with name and date of park, architect, mayor, and park commissioners

Tulip Street bridge, c.1914, reinforced-concrete beam bridge with concrete parapet and inner steel-girder guardrail. George A Rowe, contractor. Photograph 7.

Brightwood Drive entrance, c.1920, cobblestone walls and piers. Photograph 8.

Pequabuck River dam, c.1930, concrete, 3' high, breached. Photograph 10.

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Description (continued):

Playground entrance, 1917. Cobblestone piers and walls, bronze dedicatory tablet.

Bell tower, 1917, small 3-stage, square-plan tower with louvered openings. Photograph 12.

Lagoon picnic area, two sets of cast-concrete tables and benches west of bathhouse, 1935.

Playground picnic area, cast-concrete tables and benches, 1935. Photograph 14.

Rockwell Drive, 1914-1940, paved scenic drive with cobblestone retaining walls. Photograph 18.

Hiking trails in woodland north of Rockwell Drive, c.1935, Photograph 17.

Valve, c.1930, cobblestone pier with operating gear on top.

System of original stone-slab benches, c.1920. Photographs 1, 11, and 12.

Contributing Objects

John C. Mack Memorial, 1929, bronze plaque on rough-hewn granite stone. Photograph 14.

Albert F. Rockwell Memorial, 1926, bronze plaque and portrait sculpture in relief, rough-hewn granite stone, bench. Photograph 15.

Noncontributing Buildings

Administration building, c.1970, fieldstone ashlar, large window areas, shingled dormers on gable roof. Photograph 23.

Garage, c.1970, gable-roofed multi-bay structure behind offices. Photograph 23.

Playground pavilion, 1978, fieldstone ashlar piers, natural siding, shallow-pitched gable roof, large glass areas. Photograph 22.

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Description (continued):

Noncontributing Structures

Music Pavilion, hexagonal-plan bandstand, 1983, cobblestone base, hip roof.
Photograph 18.

Playground: tennis courts, basketball courts, swing sets, 2 ballfields, and
other modern recreational items.

Playground canopy, c.1980, steel-beam pole-shelter with shallow-pitched
gable roof. Photograph 21.

Fish pond and area between lagoons, created when lagoon was partially filled
in, c.1960; new paths and lawn added, c.1980.

Wading pool, 1978, concrete.

Footbridge, welded-steel curved lattice truss, DeBourgh Mfg., c. 1980.

System of reproduction street lights, c.1980. Photographs 8 and 19.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Criteria A, B, C

Specific dates 1914 - designed **Builder/Architect** Sheffield Arnold, landscape architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Rockwell Park is significant as a well-preserved example of an important trend in landscape architecture -- the early 20th-century park movement -- embodying the movement's distinctive characteristics of natural areas, rustic structures, and visually isolated activity areas (Criterion C); as a cultural resource associated with the Rockwells, a family significant in the industrial and civic life of Bristol (Criterion B); and as an important part of Bristol's historical development as a modern industrial city: Rockwell Park was the city's first public park, built in 1914 during a period of intense growth and conflict (Criterion C). The park was designed in 1914 by Sheffield Arnold, a Providence resident with a landscape-architecture practice in Boston. Although little is known of Arnold, his concept for the park is typical of the period. The Progressive idea of a park as a natural oasis offering relief from urban congestion is evident in both the extensive undeveloped woodland north of Rockwell Drive and in the walking paths along the river. The natural, organic appearance of the picturesque cobblestone architecture complements the park's plantings. Unlike the scenic, carriage-drive parks of the 19th century, however, Rockwell Park and most early 20th-century parks included substantial recreational facilities. Rockwell Park's large swimming lagoon and playground area are important functional parts of the park, yet their visual impact on the scenic₁ areas is limited by separate entrances, roadways, or foliage screens.

Albert F. Rockwell (1862-1925) came to Bristol to manufacture his patented New Departure doorbell. Rockwell soon added the production of bicycle bells, then bicycle brakes, wheels and bearings, finally ending with a company which became the largest manufacturer of automotive bearings in the world. New Departure, now part of General Motors Corporation, is still one of Bristol's largest employers. Rockwell also was president of Bristol Brass Company, a major supplier of automotive components and brass for manufacturing. Rockwell Park was the first of several philanthropic activities by which the Rockwells transformed the physical appearance of Bristol. In 1914, Rockwell gave the city 80 acres of land for a park, on condition that the city spend \$15,000 for its construction and \$3000 annually for upkeep. In 1917 Mrs. Rockwell donated additional acreage to expand the children's playground. Before it was made into a park the area₂ had been a swampy, undeveloped part of Brightwood, the Rockwell's estate.² After World War I, the Rockwells donated land to make Bristol's Memorial Boulevard a broad, park-like entrance to the city. The same year, ³ they gave funds to build a new, elaborate, Neo-Classical-style high school. The Rockwells also continued their interest in the park, frequently making substantial donations for new structures or equipment. Mrs. Rockwell personally organized and supervised many of the special children's activities at the park, such as Doll Day.

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Arnold, Sheffield A. "Preliminary Plan for Rockwell Park," manuscript map, 1914, Bristol Park Department.

Bristol Park Commissioners. Annual Report, 1914-1940.
(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 104

Quadrangle name Bristol

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References See Continuation Sheet

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is shown on the accompanying map, adapted from City of Bristol, Department of Public Works, "Rockwell Park Jogging Paths," November, 1981, Scale 1" = 200'. This exactly reflects the park's historical extent.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette, Matthew Roth, and Robert Griffith, National Register Coordinator edited by John Herzan,

organization Historic Resource Consultants date 16 September 1986

street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268

city or town Hartford state CT

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 Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date April 13, 1987

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 5-21-87

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Significance (continued):

The park reflects Bristol's development as a mature industrial city and was part of a series of municipal improvements undertaken in the first two decades of the 20th century. The lack of public open space was a major issue in the election of 1912, as were other recreational issues such as the trolley fare to Lake Compounce amusement park. Bristol at that time had become a city of nearly 14,000 people, the majority of whom were the families of industrial workers of immigrant heritage. Crowding and lack of recreational opportunity were especially evident in the city's workingclass areas. Social divisions became more acute with the increased labor activism of the World War I period (New Departure grinders went on strike the day the park plan was approved) and with the efforts of third-party political movements to address social issues (Socialists and Progressives each received more than 10% of the vote in 1912). At the same time, Bristol was perceived as lacking beauty and a sense of order, deficiencies which would be made up in part by an attractive park. The community was ripe for the Rockwells' offer.

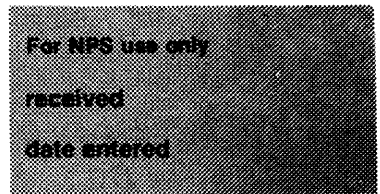
Rockwell Park remained the only public park in Bristol until 1933, when Rockwell's brother-in-law and corporate rival DeWitt Page established Page Park. As such, Rockwell Park became a focus of community activities. Children from all over the city, including Forestville three miles away, came to swim, play, and take part in the special programs and activities. The city's principal celebrations of holidays such as May Day and Fourth of July also took place at Rockwell Park.

Rockwell Park was one of Bristol's chief subjects for public-relief efforts in the 1930s. New picnic areas, the completion of Rockwell Drive, general refurbishment of paths and facilities, and a better water supply for the swimming lagoon were some of the projects undertaken during the Depression.

The historical significance of the park is heightened by the retention of much of its historical integrity. The only substantial losses are the fountains, water slides, stone-arch bridge, and original bandstand once part of the lagoon. These amenities disappeared in the 1960s as the city had trouble maintaining the water level. All the original landscape ideas are evident (even though the lagoon has been reduced in size), most of the historic buildings are still standing, modern construction is minimal and unobtrusive, and the park continues to function as both a scenic retreat and a popular recreational facility.

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Significance (continued):

Notes:

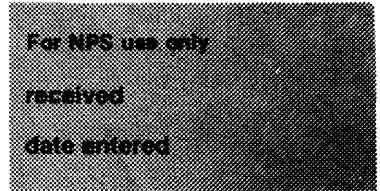
1. Riverside Park in Hartford was originally similar in concept and appearance to Rockwell Park. It was designed by Olmsted Brothers in 1899. See John Alexopoulos, The Nineteenth Century Parks of Hartford (Hartford, 1983).

2. Brightwood Hall itself, an elaborate Medieval-Revival stone mansion, was demolished in the 1930s and the land sold for a housing development. Today only two discontinuous buildings remain from the estate.

3. Like the park, Rockwell's other gifts contained conditions which required serious public commitment to the projects. His unconventional offers reflected a maverick quality in Rockwell's personality, a trait which offended the more staid members of Bristol's financial and industrial elite. His example, however, probably inspired the contemporary gift of land by the Muzzy family for an athletic field next to the park (not included in the nomination).

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Bibliography (continued):

Bristol Press, February 23, 1914; March 9, 1914; June 25, 1918.

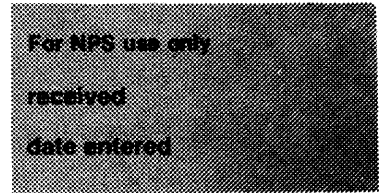
Clouette, Bruce and Matthew Roth. Bristol: A Bicentennial History, 1785-1985.
Canaan, N.H., 1985.

Carol R. Johnson & Associates. Rockwell Park Restoration Master Plan. Bristol:
Office of Community Development, 1979.

Rivard, Kathy. "Albert Rockwell's Park Gift to City Has Endured Through the
Years," Bristol/Valley Press, September 24, 1980, p. 12; continued
October 1, 1980, p. 10.

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Geographical Data (continued):

UTM References:

- A: 18/668950/4615280
- B: 18/669260/4615440
- C: 18/669600/4615775
- D: 18/669940/4615840
- E: 18/670180/4615860
- F: 18/670200/4615700
- G: 18/670130/4615740
- H: 18/670050/4615680
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