Form No. 10-306 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum

AND/OR COMMON
Olympic Stadium (1932)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
3911 S. Figueroa Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Los Angeles — VICINITY OF

STATE — CODE — COUNTY — CODE
California — Los Angeles

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	AGRICULTURE	MUSEUM
BUILDING(S)	PRIVATE	UNOCCUPIED	COMMERCIAL	PARK
X STRUCTURE	BOTH	WORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONAL	PRIVATE RESIDENCE
SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	ENTERTAINMENT	RELIGIOUS
OBJECT	IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	GOVERNMENT	SCIENTIFIC
	BEING CONSIDERED	YES: UNRESTRICTED	INDUSTRIAL	TRANSPORTATION
		NO	MILITARY	X OTHER: (Sports)

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(If applicable)*
Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission

STREET & NUMBER
3911 S. Figueroa Street

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Los Angeles — VICINITY OF — California 90037

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Hall of Records, Los Angeles County

STREET & NUMBER
320 W. Temple Street

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Los Angeles — California 90012

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
State Historical Landmark Nomination

DATE
May 11, 1984 — FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
State Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Sacramento — California

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (Olympic Stadium), situated in Exposition Park, is a reinforced concrete, cast-in-place structure in the form of a giant elliptical bowl.[1] The ellipse is about 1,038 feet long by 738 feet wide at its midpoint. The structure of the Coliseum rises to a height of 106 feet from the field elevation to the top rim. Its seats are in 79 stepped tiers, grouped in three banks, two of 25 each and one of 29. The field measures 684 feet by 345 feet. (For purposes of comparison, it may be of interest to note the approximate measurements of the namesake Colosseum in Rome, 182 feet side to side, 285 feet end to end, and 157 feet high.)

The Coliseum was constructed in 1921-23, on a sloped bank of a sand and gravel pit, which had existed within the old racetrack oval on the site. The field level is thus 32 feet below grade. The lowest bank of tiered seats is cast on an excavated grade. The middle bank of stepped tiers is cast onto a compacted berm about 27 feet above the adjacent concourse grade. A raised earth bank around the excavated pit was enhanced in this part of the construction.

The top, or third, bank of 25 stepped tiers was added in the changes of 1930-31 that fitted the Coliseum for the 1932 Olympic Games; it increased the seating from 75,000 to nearly 102,000. This bank of tiers is a reinforced concrete frame system which rises above the adjacent concourse; it is supported on a continuous concrete pilaster and filler panel wall system. The top four tiers are cantilevered beyond the main pilaster wall and are directly supported by spaced concrete fin-brackets, giving an architectural cornice and bracket expression.

The main exterior feature of the Coliseum, which interrupts an otherwise continuous and rhythmic flow of pierced panels and pilasters with an earth berm base, is the Peristyle, on the east end. The original elevation, which remains, is composed of a heroic propylaeum (triumphal arch) flanked by 14 smaller arches (7 to each side) and a central "torch." The latter was added for the Xth Olympiad. The torch (107 feet above street level) was designed to fit in with the general architecture of the stadium. It was kept illuminated throughout the Games. It was constructed of concrete, although the fixture atop it is of bronze.

In 1930-31, with the enlarged seating requirements, the top tiers of original wooden seats were replaced in concrete and extended higher, requiring architectural modifications at the north and south ends of the Peristyle to conceal the added tiers of seats in a graceful way.

---

[1] In preparing this description, liberal use has been made of material appearing in Raymond Girvigian, "Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, A Nomination for Registration as a California State Historical Landmark," May 11, 1984, p. 34-36.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
_PREHISTORIC	_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	_COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	_RELIGION	
_1400-1499	_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	_CONSERVATION	_LAW	_SCIENCE	
_1500-1599	_AGRICULTURE	_ECONOMICS	_LITERATURE	_SCULPTURE	
_1600-1699	_ARCHITECTURE	_EDUCATION	_MILITARY	_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
_1700-1799	_ART	_ENGINEERING	_MUSIC	_THEATER	
_1800-1899	_COMMERCE	_EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	_PHILOSOPHY	_TRANSPORTATION	
X 1900-	_COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY	_POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	X OTHER (Specify)	
		_INVENTION		Recreation	

SPECIFIC DATES 1921-23; 1931-32 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John and Donald Parkinson

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part.... The essential thing is not conquering but fighting well.

—Pierre de Coubertin*

I came to chronicle sports' biggest disaster; I am leaving to describe its greatest triumph.

—Westbrook Pegler[1]

SUMMARY

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which will be the centerpiece of the 1984 Olympics, possesses national and international historic significance as the focal site of the Xth Olympiad of the modern era, the Los Angeles Summer Games of 1932.# Constructed in 1921-23, and enlarged for the 1932 Games, the Coliseum remains one of the premier outdoor sports facilities of the world. It is also highly important as the scene of numerous other sporting and civic events and as a key example of the architectural work of John and Donald Parkinson, two of the most prominent Los Angeles architects of the early 20th century.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The modern Olympic cycle, now poised for its 23rd games, began in Athens in 1896. Olympiads have been held every four years since then, except when they were cancelled during World Wars I and II (in 1916, 1940, and 1944).+ The early games were much less international and featured fewer sports and events than the more recent ones. For example, in the first series only 13 nations took part, competing in 42 events in 10 sports. Successive games have featured participation by increasing numbers

---

* This version of the "Olympic Creed," by the "Father of the Modern Olympics," was draped over the face of the Coliseum's Peristyle during the 1932 Olympics.

\# The proposal for National Historic andmark designation is limited, at this time, to the Coliseum itself.

\+ The Games not held are, nevertheless, counted in numbering the Olympiads.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 18 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	1 1	3 8 0 9 4 0	3 7 6 4 4 2 0
B	1 1	3 8 1 3 5 0	3 7 6 4 4 3 0
C	1 1	3 8 1 3 5 0	3 7 6 4 1 4 0
D	1 1	3 8 0 9 4 0	3 7 6 4 1 4 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
None			
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James H. Charleton, Historian — June 21, 1984

ORGANIZATION — DATE

National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER — TELEPHONE

1100 L Street, NW — (202) 343-8165

CITY OR TOWN — STATE

Washington — DC 20240

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES____ NO____ NONE____

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ____National ____State ____Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE — DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

GPO 899-214

Modifications since the Xth Olympiad

Between 1932 and the end of World War II, the Coliseum's structure remained fundamentally unchanged, except for replacement of the scoreboard in 1936. (The scoreboard has been twice changed since then.) After World War II, Bennett and Bennett, architects in Pasadena, were retained to provide the design services for changes and additions to the Coliseum and its premises. These modifications began about 1946-47 and have continued to the present.[2] Few of them are apparent to the casual observer, except for the 2-story administrative office structures, completed in 1948 at the north and south flanking towers of the east Peristyle facade, and the press box and its attendant tower and elevator, added in 1947-48, on the upper tiers of the south side of the field. The Moderne style towers adjoining the Peristyle facade have been partially obscured by the office additions. The press box, a 230-foot-long room beveled and slanted at the ends, offers an unobscured view of the field for journalists.

In addition to regular changes that have occurred to the playing field to accommodate its multiple uses over the years, other changes and additions have occurred: fieldlighting (1946); new ticket box boothes and concession facilities (at various times); a 13,000-square-foot underground dressing room complex (1949-50); ground level dressing rooms and spectator elevators (1950s); a replacement track (1960s); new folding and theater seats (1962-66 and 1970s), which have somewhat reduced the Coliseum's seating capacity; "marble veneer" at the Peristyle (1960s); and a computerized scoreboard (1972) and shade cover (1975).

In preparation for the 1984 Olympics, a new synthetic track was installed, and other refurbishing undertaken. The Coliseum overall, however, appears so much like its original self that participants and spectators in the 1932 Olympics who may return this year will find its appearance comfortably familiar.

---

[2] An official schedule of changes and improvements, with attendant dates and costs, is included in Margaret Farnum, "Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Brief History and Listing of Commissioners, 1933-69" (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, 1969, 1983) (xerox), pp. 31-33.

of nations and athletes and the introduction of new events and sports, including artistic and fine arts competitions. Innovations in Olympic tradition have also occurred.

Between 1896 and 1980, two of the Summer Olympiads were celebrated in the United States, at St. Louis in 1904 and in Los Angeles in 1932. Those at St. Louis (III Olympiad) were held on the present campus of Washington University in conjunction with the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. Only 11 countries were represented in 67 events in 15 sports. The lack of monitoring and Olympic standards, and the scarcity of foreign competitors, clouded the results.[2] (A National Historic Landmark nomination incorporating Francis Field and Francis Gymnasium, the only surviving facilities used in the 1904 Olympics, as well as the remains of the Fair, will be prepared.)

Of the Winter Olympics, initiated at Chamonix, France, in 1924, three have occurred in the United States: those at Lake Placid, N.Y., in 1932 and 1980, and at Squaw Valley, California, in 1960. (The limited remaining facilities of the 1932 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid will be nominated for National Historic Landmark designation. Those used in 1960 at Squaw Valley have been much modified or demolished. Both the Squaw Valley and the 1980 Lake Placid facilities are too recent to be prime candidates for designation.)

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LOS ANGELES (Xth) OLYMPIAD

The 1932 Summer Games were a particularly notable and influential series. They witnessed a number of innovations, including the Olympic Village, which was introduced at Los Angeles. (By reducing costs to participants, the Village concept "saved" the Games, for many athletes would otherwise have been unable to attend.) Other innovations, including the use of the victory podium, where the flags of the winning nations are unfurled behind their champions, and the accompanying playing of each athlete's national anthem, have become enshrined in the practice of the Games.[3]

The success of the Xth Olympiad must also be measured against the global economic crisis during which it occurred. At the nadir of the Depression, representatives of 40 nations participated in 124 events in 23 sports. In the competition, 16 world sports records were surpassed, two others were equalled and 32 Olympic standards (all but one) were revised.

Nearly all previous track and field records were broken. After embarrassing performances during the 1920s, the United States team scored well in both the men and women's Olympic track and field events around which much interest has traditionally centered, ending Finland's dominance of those events.[4]

William Carr of the United States set a new world's record in the 400-meter race. Eddie Tolan, an American black, sprinted to gold medals in both the 100-meter and 200-meter hurdles; he was the only double winner. (In the former event, he edged out Ralph Metcalfe, another black. The race was so close that it was settled by the use of a photo-finish camera that had been installed only as a test device.) Edward Gordon, also black, won the broad jump competition.

New records were set in every event in women's track and field. American women dominated the competition. Especially notable was the performance of Mildred ("Babe") Didrickson, who won two gold medals (80-meter hurdles and javelin throw) and one silver (high jump) in the track events. In the latter event, she lost to Jean Shiley, also of the United States.[5]

The American women's swim team, including Eleanor Holm, who won a gold medal in the 100-meter backstroke, nearly swept the events. In men's swimming, however, only Clarence ("Buster") Crabbe's first in the 400-meter freestyle kept the Americans from being shut out of the racing events by the Japanese.[6]

The participation of women in Olympic athletics in 1932 continued a trend set during the 1920s. For the first time in the Western Hemisphere, however, women participated in true international track and field competition under official Olympic standards. Six womens' events took place in track and field, one in fencing, and seven in swimming and diving. Eleanor Holm (later an actress) and "Babe" Didrickson, America's premier woman athlete, won national fame from their performances at the Games.[7]

Miguel de Capriles, although not the first Mexican-American to participate on a U.S. team, took the bronze medal in fencing. (Later the Vice-President of New York University, he also served as the head of the International Federation of Fencing.)[8]

The Los Angeles Games were well attended and highly publicized. About 1,250,000 individuals witnessed events in person. The stadium press box, another innovation at Los Angeles, featured a teletype system that insured instant "up-to-the-minute" transmission of the results to the wire services, radio stations,+ and officials at the widely dispersed Olympic facilities. The Games were covered by more than 700 writers, " ... the largest press corps in the history of any international happening ..." to that time.[9] A virtual "who's who" of renowned sports writers included Arthur Brisbane, Bill Cunningham, Paul Gallico, Alan Gould, Frank Menke, Westbrook

---

+ Because there were no nationwide radio networks in 1932, results were transmitted via teletype to radio stations outside Southern California. [Paul B. Zimmerman, "The Story of the Olympics-- B.C. to A.D.," in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter, 1984), p. 4.]

Pegler, Grantland Rice, Damon Runyon, and Paul Zimmerman.[10] Bill Henry, of the Los Angeles Times, took leave from his position as sports editor to serve as sports technical director of the Los Angeles Olympics. He later wrote the official history of the Olympics for the International Olympic Committee.[11]

Although the Los Angeles Games amassed a distinguished record, their prospects at the beginning of 1932 had been dismal. Some foreign nations did not relish the idea of sending athletes halfway around the world during the midst of a global Depression. Anti-Olympic sentiment raged in California, where soup kitchens, breadlines, and "Hoovervilles" had grown up only blocks from the Coliseum. Some foreign officials feared the rigors of Los Angeles' summer heat. The Japanese demanded official status at the Games for Manchukuo, where they had recently installed a puppet regime, and threatened to withdraw from the Games when the Los Angeles Olympic Committee rejected the bid.[12] In March 1932, the International Olympic Committee barred two "stars" expected in Los Angeles, Paavo Nurmi, the "Flying Finn," who had won gold medals in the three previous Olympics, and Jules Ladoumegue of France, the world record holder in the mile. (The Committee ruled that both had violated their amateur status.)

Several elements worked to counteract these evil omens. The genius of the Olympic Village concept, which had at first attracted negative criticism, was belatedly recognized. It not only fostered the Olympic spirit, but cut costs to participant teams, who had to pay only two dollars per person per day. To further reduce expenses, the organizing committee also arranged cut-rate steamship and train fares for the athletes. The Japanese reversed their stand and decided to attend. Austria, France, Italy, and several other European nations came forward. In Germany, President Paul von Hindenburg circumvented an anti-Olympic move in the Reichstag by Adolf Hitler, who was disturbed by the fraternization that would take place in the Olympic Village, and sent a 125-member German team. Other nations joined in.

Early in July, tickets for the Games started to sell well. By opening day, the Coliseum was sold out. The Olympics began with a full house, 101,022 people, by far the largest crowd in Olympic history, greeting 1,503 athletes.[13] Reporter Arthur Bern described the scene for his newspaper:

> As the gleaming trumpets pealed the national anthem, for a moment in time the crowd forgot the Depression, the rout of the Bonus Army three days ago, the terror of war in Manchuria, Hitler's gains in the German election and all such wearying cares. You remembered only that you loved your country, and that she stood for those splendid things typified by the nobility of the statuesque athletes assembled on the bright green grass under a sparkling sun.[14]

BUILDINGS AND LOCATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE Xth OLYMPIAD

As will be the case in 1984, the 1932 Olympics were held at a number of locations in the Los Angeles area. It is notable, however, that the Coliseum will be, as in 1932, the central focus of the games. This fact will add further distinction to the Coliseum, for although the Olympics have been held twice in two other cities, Paris (1900 and 1924) and London (1908 and 1948), only the Coliseum will possess the distinction of twice having been the principal stadium, for in both cities different facilities were utilized.[15]

Other facilities and sites than the Coliseum were used in the Xth Olympics. The 1932 games involved seven stadiums and sixteen special training fields, including six athletic clubs, eight high schools, and the University of Southern California and Los Angeles Junior College. These facilities were dispersed from Pasadena on the northeast to Long Beach on the south and to Santa Monica on the west.[16] In addition, city streets were utilized for long-distance events.

Eight principal facilities were used in the formal athletic events of the Xth Olympiad. Several of these were in Exposition (Olympic) Park or nearby:

—the Coliseum was the site of the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as all track and field events, gymnastics, field hockey finals, demonstration lacrosse and American football, and the equestrian jumping finals. It was also the start and finish point of the marathon, the course of which followed area streets.

--Los Angeles Swimming Stadium, Exposition Park, just to the south of the Coliseum, witnessed all the swimming events. This structure, erected for the 1932 Olympics, remains intact and in good condition.

-- State Armory, Exposition Park, served the fencing events and the sword competition of the modern pentathlon. The Armory remains intact.

--Olympic Auditorium (1924), at 18th Street and Grand Avenue, the scene of the weightlifting, boxing, and wrestling competitions. This structure is extant and in good condition.

Sites outside the immediate area of Exposition Park included:

--Riviera Country Club Equestrian Stadium, the location of most of the equestrian competitions.

--Long Beach Marine Stadium, where the rowing and yachting events took place.

--Rose Bowl, Pasadena, site of the cycling competition.

--Los Angeles Police Pistol Range, Elysian Park, which served shooting events.

The male athletes were housed in the Olympic Village, a complete small town of about 500 "Mexican-style" 2-room cottages with administration buildings and mess halls, built on 250 acres of loaned land in the Baldwin Hills area (south of Vernon Avenue and west of Crenshaw Boulevard). (The Olympic Village was removed not long after the Games.) Women participants stayed in the Chapman Park Hotel, just off Wilshire Boulevard. (Only fragments of this structure remain.)

Also serving functions relating to the Xth Olympiad were the following:

--Los Angeles City Hall Assembly (Tower) Room, scene of the opening meeting of the International Olympic Committee in 1932. (The City Hall is still in use.)

--Biltmore Hotel, which housed meetings of the International Olympic Committee and various international athletic congresses that met in conjunction with the Olympics. (The Biltmore is extant and has been recently restored.)

--Hollywood Bowl, where concerts and entertainments for the athletes, officials, and public were held.

--Los Angeles Museum (Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art), Exposition Park, the location of exhibitions of painting, sculpture, architectural design, medals, and musical and literary compositions, conducted under Olympic patronage.

OTHER USES OF THE COLISEUM

Before and following the Xth Olympiad, the Coliseum has served sport and civic functions taking place in Los Angeles. These events and the individuals involved with them add considerably to its historic significance. In its 60-odd years

> ... the Coliseum has hosted around 100 million people, who have come to witness a cosmic variety of events -- from a World Olympiad to a World Series to the victory celebration of a world war. In addition, the Coliseum has staged patriotic rallies, political wingdings, regular circuses, pontifical Masses and evangelical crusades, to say nothing of football games (professional and amateur), track-and-field meets (nominally amateur), boxing matches, soccer games, basketball exhibitions and other sports spectaculars.[17]

Examples of the events and persons that might be cited follow. The Coliseum's Peristyle Memorial Court of Honor contains plaques that honor many of the individuals listed.

Professional Baseball

The expansion of the major professional baseball leagues to the Pacific Coast brought the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958. They played in the Coliseum from April 18, 1958, when they first opposed the San Francisco Giants, another transplanted National League team, until April 1962, when they moved to their new Stadium in Chavez Ravine. In 1959, as the league champions, the Dodgers hosted the Chicago White Sox in the World Series. In the fifth game, in the Coliseum, a new world's record for baseball attendance (92,706) was set.[18]

Football

The Coliseum has been used for University of Southern California (USC) home football games since its opening. Thus, coaches Elmer "Gus" Henderson (1919-24), Howard "Biff" Jones (1925-40), and Newell "Jeff" Cravath (1940-50) defended it as their home turf. Among the noted coaches of other collegiate teams who have played in the Coliseum are: Knute Rockne (Notre Dame, 1918-31), Glenn Scobey ("Pop") Warner (Stanford, 1924-32), Andrew L. ("Andy") Smith (University of California, 1916-25), Henry ("Red") Sanders (UCLA, 1948-57), Amos Alonzo Stagg (College of the Pacific, 1933-46), William ("Bill") Spaulding (UCLA, 1925-38), and Francis ("Frank") Leahy (Notre Dame, 1941-53).

Both the first Superbowl (1967), in which the Green Bay Packers triumphed over the Kansas City Chiefs and the 1973 Superbowl, pitting the winning Miami Dolphins against the Washington Redskins, took place in the Coliseum. In addition, both the Los Angeles Raiders and the Los Angeles Rams have rented the Coliseum.

Other Athletes

Athletes and coaches who are commemorated, along with those mentioned earlier, in the Coliseum's Court of Honor include: "Kenny" Washington (UCLA, 1936-40), "an All-American for All America"; Brice Taylor (USC, 1923-26), the first USC football All-American; Jesse Mortensen (USC), the 1931 World Decathlon Champion who served as head track coach at his alma mater (1951-62); Dean Cromwell, track coach at USC (1909-48); and Charles W. Paddock (dubbed "the world's fastest human" after he won the 100-meter dash in the 1920 Olympics).

Civic Events

The Coliseum's great open space and seating capacity and Los Angeles' sunny weather have made it an ideal setting for outdoor political, religious, and patriotic gatherings and for concerts and other mass events. These have included: a Presidential campaign appearance by Franklin D. Roosevelt (September 24, 1932);[19] Roosevelt's eulogy for Will Rogers (October 1, 1935); mass rallies for Republican

Presidential candidates Wendell L. Willkie (September 19, 1940), Thomas E. Dewey (September 30, 1944), and Dwight D. Eisenhower (August 1952); the acceptance speeches of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson as Democratic candidates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency (July 15, 1960) [Kennedy and Johnson were nominated at the 1960 Democratic National Convention, held in the adjacent Los Angeles Sports Arena.]; a massive wartime bond rally featuring Generals Joseph Stilwell, Jimmy Doolittle, and George Patton, and Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey (May 16, 1943)[20]; and Billy Graham's Los Angeles Crusade for Christ (August 15-September 8, 1963).

THE COLISEUM AS A CIVIC ACHIEVEMENT

The building of the Coliseum and the successful conduct of the 1932 Olympics were major civic achievements by Los Angeles and the State of California. The voters of the State obliged by supporting an Olympic Bond issue that made it possible to organize the Games. The city's leaders spurred the movement and contributed their ambition, organizing skill, and financial acumen. Bringing the Olympics to Los Angeles was, in some respects, the capstone to their efforts in the construction of the Coliseum, for they had begun their efforts to bring the Olympics to the city as soon as the Coliseum was completed. Thus the Coliseum is one of the important civic emblems that reflect the era of astonishing growth in which Los Angeles was transformed from a small western city into a world metropolis.*

Exposition (Olympic) Park, the location of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, began as Agricultural Park. Owned by the State of California, it was used primarily for exhibits and fairs that promoted "bucolic and pastoral interests" in Southern California. Through bad management, the park was lost in a mortgage foreclosure, acquired by private interests, and converted into a gambling center.[21]

The horse racing, "rabbit coursing," and saloons that grew up on the site distressed, among others, William M. Bowen, who taught law part-time at nearby USC. Bowen, who served as president of the Los Angeles City Council and was later a municipal judge,

---

* In 1900, Los Angeles County had fewer than 171,000 people, less than the population of Providence, R.I., in the same year. Its population growth was phenomenal, as measured by the following statistics: 1910--504,000; 1920--936,000; 1930--2,208,000; 1940--2,786,000; and 1950--4,117,000.

started a decade-long crusade in 1899 to shut down the operation. He used his legal talents and public positions to achieve that goal, culminated by California Supreme Court decisions in 1908 that ruled the land to be public property. This accomplished, he sought to dedicate the site to public cultural and recreational use, an endeavor in which he was likewise successful.[22] He would become known known as the "Father of Exposition Park."[23]

In 1908, the City, County, and State joined to develop the property.[24] One of the early improvements was the core structure of the Los Angeles Natural History Museum (now part of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art), a T-shaped glass-domed building of red brick by the firm of Hudson and Munsell that opened in 1913. Bowen also prevailed on Dr. George F. Bovard, the president of USC's board of trustees, to support the concept of a recreational center in the park, and "... when thoughts were voiced for a public stadium ... Judge Bowen was able to receive a promise from Dr. Bovard that ... the USC football team would play its home games there."[25]

In 1919, Mayor Meredith P. Snyder appointed a group of prominent citizens to revive the "Old Spanish Atmosphere of Los Angeles." This group eventually became the California Fiesta Association. On its executive committee were a group of influential and civic-minded citizens, headed by William M. Garland, a real estate developer and promoter. The executive committee included, among others, Harry Chandler, publisher of the Los Angeles Times, and former U.S. Senator Frank P. Flint.[26] In November 1919, the committee agreed that a stadium was a civic necessity, suggested a plan to link a private association with the city and county governments in the enterprise, selected the name Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum as a memorial to those who had given their lives in World War I, and proposed Exposition Park as the site.[27]

Beginning early in 1920, John Parkinson labored on plans for the new stadium free of charge. He promised his services at cost if and when the project were authorized.[28] In August 1921, Parkinson's plans and specifications were approved and commended by the Municipal Arts Commission and the Allied Architects Association. In November, an agreement was executed between the city and county governments, lending banks, the architect, and the contractors to construct the Coliseum. The Coliseum was completed under the aegis of the Community Development Association, a non-profit cooperative group formed for the purpose.[29] The Community Development Association secured an $800,000 loan without public financing, "Thanks particularly to the drive and financial acumen of Harry Chandler, plus the initial guarantee of ... income from Dr. Bovard's promise to Judge Bowen to have USC use the Coliseum (for its home football games)."[30]

The same month, a long-term lease was signed for 17 acres of the State's 6th Agricultural District land, within the extant former race track site where a large gravel pit existed at the south end of the park.[31] Construction began in December 1921. It was completed precisely on schedule in May 1923.[32] The inaugural football game was played on October 6, 1923, between USC and Pomona College.[33]

The Community Development Association, in conjunction with the City, County, and the 6th Agricultural District, continued to manage the facility until 1932. After Garland's request for award of an Olympic Games to Los Angeles was approved by the International Olympic Committee in 1923 (for the Xth Olympiad in 1932)*, a $1 million State bond issue to finance the Games was proposed, and passed in 1928.[34] The Olympic Organizing Committee was headed by William Garland as president with a 5-member executive committee consisting of Garland; Gwynn Wilson, graduate manager at USC; J.F. MacKenzie, former athletic director at USC; William M. ("Bill") Henry, sports editor of the Los Angeles Times; and H.O. Davis, a publisher with the Hearst interests. Zack Farmer, manager of the Coliseum, served as general secretary.[35]

To accommodate the large crowds expected for the Olympics, it was deemed necessary to enlarge the Coliseum. In February 1930, with additional financial assistance from the City and County of Los Angeles, expansion of the Coliseum began. The project was completed in May 1931. The original 75,000-seat stadium, by adding a third set of tiers, now could accommodate more than 101,000.[36]

Over time, after the Olympics, varying joint powers management and lease agreements were executed and amended. By the end of 1955, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission had been formally organized as the Coliseum's governing body, which it remains. It is a 9-member panel consisting of 3 members each from the City, the County, and the State (the latter through the 6th Agricultural District Association Board).

The Commission retains jurisdiction over the Coliseum and the adjacent companion facility, the Los Angeles Sports Arena, and continues to lease the land from the State's 6th Agricultural District. The facilities are managed exclusively from self-generated income. No taxpayers' monies are involved.[37]

---

* He had originally sought the Games for 1924. (Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 11).

THE COLISEUM AS AN ARCHITECTURAL ACHIEVEMENT

The Coliseum is significant as a major architectural work by distinguished Los Angeles architects John and Donald Parkinson, two leading figures in the physical transformation of the city during the early 20th century.

The Parkinsons are among the most significant architects Southern California has produced. Their professional practice essentially shaped the architectural fabric of central Los Angeles as it stood at the end of World War II, for they were responsible for a large proportion of the major structures built in the city between 1900 and 1940. In addition, as a key figure in the "City Beautiful" movement in Southern California, John exerted a long-term influence in civic reform movements and community planning. This activism is significant partly because "Los Angeles ... was the first city in the United States to adopt a comprehensive zoning ordinance (1909)."[38]

The elder Parkinson, English-born, immigrated to the United States in 1885.[39] Although he was never formally trained as an architect, he did study the technical aspects of engineering and drafting. He settled first in Napa, California, where he worked as a stair builder and executed his first commission, the Bank of Napa (1888). From Seattle, where he worked in 1889-94, he completed the Bank of Olympia and two hotels, among other projects.

Parkinson moved to Los Angeles in 1894. He arrived in the midst of the first of the city's major construction booms. Working alone at times and in partnership, first with G. Edwin Bergstrom (1905-15) and then with his son (after 1921), Parkinson produced an extraordinary number of the city's major buildings, generally in a Beaux-Arts manner. In 1921, the year the Parkinsons designed the Coliseum, these buildings collectively constituted: "In reality, a panorama of the skyline of the downtown business section of Los Angeles."[40]

At that time, the Parkinson commissions were concentrated on and near Spring Street, then the financial center of the city. They included: the Braly (Continental) Building (1904), the first true Beaux-Arts Building in the city[41] and, at 175 feet, long its tallest structure; the Alexandria Hotel (8 stories, 1904-06, and a 12-story addition, 1912); the Security Trust and Savings Bank Building (11 stories, 1906-07); the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (1909); the Pacific Southwest Bank (1910); the Rowan Building (11 stories, 1910); the Crocker Bank (12 stories, 1914); the Broadway Department Store (1915); and the President Trading Company (1916).

In 1921, in addition to the Coliseum, the Parkinsons designed the Bovard Administration Building at USC. After the Coliseum, the Parkinsons produced a perhaps even more impressive array of structures: the Science (1924) and Law School (1926) Buildings at USC;[42] the Title Insurance and Trust Building (10 stories, 1928), the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange (with Samuel Lunden, 1929-30), the Banks and Huntley Building (1930), and the Los Angeles Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco (1930), as well as the Hotel Heyward addition (1925), all in the Spring Street area; the Los Angeles City Hall (in consortium with John C. Austin and Albert C. Martin, 1928); Bullock's Wilshire Department Store (1928); and the Union Pacific Train Station (1939).

Several of the later Parkinson designs have been highly praised individually, e.g., Bullock's Wilshire as a premier example of Art Deco[43] and the Union Pacific Station as a rare marriage of Spanish Revival and "Deco-Moderne."[44] They reflect the more modish styles in which the Parkinsons worked after Donald became his father's partner. (The architectural contributions of both Parkinsons will be considered during the National Historic Landmark theme study of American architecture, now in progress.)

The Los Angeles Coliseum is an eclectic and transitional structure that falls into a stripped-down Moderne mode, with touches of Egyptian ornament and Spanish or Mediterranean styles. These features are particularly evident on the working drawings for the structure, which exhibit ornament that was never put in place, apparently because of cost factors.

The Parkinson partners, especially John, also played a major part in bringing the emerging concepts of city planning to Los Angeles. This field of study was inspired and energized by Daniel Burnham's "White City" plan for the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, and has often been called the "City Beautiful" movement. In 1903, John began service as a charter member of the first Los Angeles Municipal Art Commission.[45] One of the enduring results of his term of service was the city's height limit, imposed in 1905 and sustained until 1957, on the "... basis of the development of our great city along broad and harmonious lines of beauty and symmetry."[46] This ordinance played a significant role in shaping and maintaining the low scale of the city.

While on the Commission, in 1907, John Parkinson assisted the noted planner Charles Mulford Robinson in revising plans for Los Angeles' beautification and improvement.[47] Later, in 1920, with the elder Parkinson's assistance, the city established a planning commission, and in 1923 a regional (county-wide) commission.[48]

Although many of the Parkinsons' city planning proposals, including a scheme for a civic center complex, did not materialize, they were more successful in persuading powerful leaders in business and politics to accept their designs. Their firm thus was able to produce a remarkable group of worthy individual structures. Most of them remain, lasting contributions to the rich architectural heritage of Los Angeles.

The Coliseum, Los Angeles' premier sports facility, and the Los Angeles City Hall, its civic heart, regardless of how they may be judged architecturally, are perhaps the Parkinsons' most enduring legacies to their home city. Symbolically, they were integral to the Parkinsons' involvement in civic activities.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cited in Sam Balter, "The Big Sportscast, in " Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984), p. 39.

2. Bill Henry, An Approved History of the Olympic Games (Los Angeles: Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games, 1981), p. 59.

3. Al J. Stump, "The Olympics That Almost Wasn't," American Heritage, 33,5 (August/September 1982), p. 68,70.

4. Paul B. Zimmerman, "The Story of the Olympics — B.C. to A.D.," in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984), p. 21; "Olympic Games," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1967, p. 945-953.

5. Henry, op. cit., p. 156-158; Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 12-21.

6. Henry, op. cit., p. 157-158; Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 21.

7. Henry, op. cit., p. 164-170.

8. Virginia Escalante, "Exhibit to Commemorate Contributions of Latino Athletes on U.S. Olympic Teams," Los Angeles Times, June 6, 1984, p. V-1, V-5.

9. Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 12.

10. Ibid.

11. Balter, op. cit., p. 39.

12. Henry, op. cit., p. 160.

13. Stump, op. cit., p. 65-70.

14. Cited in Ed Cray, "Burning the Wires Press Rate," in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984), p. 44.

15. The article "Stadium," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1967, p. 72-73, discusses locations of Olympic Games.

16. Xth Olympiade Committee of the Games of Los Angeles, U.S.A., 1932, Ltd. The Games of the Xth Olympiade — Los Angeles 1932 — Official Report (Los Angeles: Xth Olympiade Committee, 1933), p. 189. Notes on the sites that follow are derived from the Official Report, passim, and on-site inspection.

17. Robert Bobrow, "The Coliseum ... Candidate for Immortality," Westways (October 1969), p. 28.

18. Text of plaque in the Coliseum's Peristyle Memorial Court of Honor.

19. Two films by Bud Greenspan for Cappy Productions: "Time Capsule: The Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932," in The Olympiad Series, and "Arena of Excellence/The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum," contain film clips of almost all the sports and civic events listed in this nomination. Other information for this section is partially derived from the texts of the plaques in the Memorial Court of Honor.

20. George Hjelte, Footprints in the Park (Los Angeles: Public Service Publications, 1977), p. 57.

21. Margaret Gilbert Mackey, Los Angeles Proper and Improper (Los Angeles: Goodwin Press, 1938), p. 38.

22. Hjelte, op. cit., p. 54.

23. Margaret Farnum, "Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Brief History and Listing of Commissioners, 1933-69," (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, 1969, 1983) (xerox), p. 1.

24. Mackey, op. cit., p. 39.

25. Farnum, op. cit., p. 1.

26. Ibid., p. 1-2.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 3.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p. 5.

33. Bobrow, op. cit., p. 29.

34. Farnum, op. cit., p. 6.

35. Ibid., p. 7.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., p. 12-13.

38. David Gebhard et al., Guide to Los Angeles and Southern California (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1977), p. 21.

39. Robert H. Tracy, John Parkinson and the Beaux-Arts City Beautiful Movement in Downtown Los Angeles, 1894-1935. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1982, pp. 224-225.

40. Ibid., p. 224.

41. Ibid., p. 228.

42. Ibid., p. 238.

43. Ibid., p. 258.

44. Ibid., p. 370-372.

45. Ibid., p. 194.

46. Parkinson's role in explained in Paul Gleye, The Architecture of Los Angeles (Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981), pp. 97-99, along with the citation of the city ordinance, which is taken from the "Minute Books" of the City, vol. 66, p. 225.

47. Tracy, op. cit., p. 204.

48. Ibid., p. 283.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Articles:

Attias, Elaine, "A Show of Culture," pp. 77-79, in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984).

Balter, Sam. "The Big Sportscast," pp. 38-45, in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984).

Bobrow, Robert. "The Coliseum ... Candidate for Immortality," Westways (October 1970), pp. 28-30.

Cray, Ed. "Burning the Wires Press Rate," pp. 40-45, in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984).

Escalante, Virginia. "Exhibit to Commemorate Contributions of Latino Athletes on U.S. Olympic Teams," Los Angeles Times, June 6, 1984, pp. V-1, V-5.

Farnum, Margaret. "Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Brief History and Listing of Commissioners." Los Angeles: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, 1969, 1983. (Xerox)

Gebhard, David, et al. Guide to Los Angeles and Southern California. Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1977.

Girvigian, Raymond. "Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, A Nomination for Registration as a California State Historical Landmark." May 11, 1984. (Xerox) (This document has been used as a basic source for the National Historic Landmark nomination, and also contains valuable references and materials not used herein.)

Gleye, Paul. The Architecture of Los Angeles. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981.

Henry, Bill. An Approved History of the Olympic Games. Los Angeles: Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games, 1981. (Latest edition)

Hjelte, George. Footprints in the Park. Los Angeles: Public Service Publications, 1977.

Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission. "The Story Behind the Largest and Finest Stadium in America." Los Angeles: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, [1952].

Mackey, Margaret G. Los Angeles Proper and Improper. Los Angeles: Goodwin Press, 1938.

Revista del Centro de Arquitectos Constructores de Obras y Anexos, VI, 67 (Diciembre 1932), pp. 180-182. [Buenos Aires]

Smith, Jack. "Running with a Dream," pp. 22-25, in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984).

Stump, Al. "The Olympics That Almost Wasn't," pp. 64-71, American Heritage, 33, 5(August/September 1982).

Xth Olympiade Committee of the Games of Los Angeles, USA, 1932, Ltd. The Games of the Xth Olympiade—Los Angeles 1932—Official Report. Los Angeles: Xth Olympiade Committee, 1933.

Tracy, Robert H. John Parkinson and the Beaux-Arts City Beautiful Movement in Downtown Los Angeles, 1894-1935. Ph. D. dissertation. University of California, Los Angeles, 1982.

_____. "Palaces of Finance: A Walking Tour of the Spring Street Historical District." Los Angeles: Design Center, Spring Street, 1983. (Leaflet)

Zimmerman, Paul B. "The Story of the Olympics -- B.C. to A.D.," in "Champions in the Sun," California History (Special Issue), LXIII, 1 (Winter 1984), pp. 8-21.

Drawings:

See Michali under Interviews just below.

Interviews:

Farnum, Margaret. Administrative Assistant, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, May 1, 1984.

Girvigian, Raymond. State Preservation Coordinator, American Institute of Architects, May 4, 1984.

Hardy, Jim. General Manager, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, May 1, 1984.

Michali, Thomas. Preservation Architect, Woodford and Bernard, Architects (successor to the firm of John and Donald Parkinson). May 2, 1984. (Woodford and Bernard made available for inspection from their private vaults the original Parkinson drawings of the Coliseum and its renovation for the 1932 Olympics. Several of these drawings are reproduced with this nomination.)

Mon, Glenn. Manager, Los Angeles Sports Arena, May 1, 1984.

Films:

Greenspan, Bud. "Time Capsule: The Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932," in the Olympiad Series. Santa Monica, Calif.: Cappy Productions.

_____. "Arena of Excellence, The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum," Santa Monica, Calif.: Cappy Productions, 1984.

Other Acknowledgements:

Research assistance and courtesies rendered by Ms. Kim Stedman, of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, and Mr. Thomas Lim, of Woodford and Bernard, Architects, are gratefully acknowledged.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Verbal Boundary Description

This nomination includes only the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and its immediate surroundings, as defined on the attached U.S. Geological Survey map. For this purpose, its boundary is defined as the centerlines of the roadways that encircle the Coliseum, running east on 39th Street from its junction with Menlo Avenue, then southeast and southwest, curving around the Peristyle (east end of the Coliseum), then between the Coliseum and the Los Angeles Swimming Stadium to Menlo Avenue, and north along Menlo Avenue to its junction with 39th Street, i.e., the point of beginning. (Neither the Los Angeles Swimming Stadium nor the Los Angeles Sports Arena is included in the nomination.)