

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For NCRS use only
received MAY 26 1982
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Seaside Park

and/or common Seaside Park

2. Location

street & number N/A Long Island Sound N/A not for publication

city, town Bridgeport, South End N/A vicinity of congressional district Fourth

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield 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"/> 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 checked="" 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 Bridgeport

street & number City Hall 45 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Hall

street & number 45 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places as this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

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

Seaside Park in Bridgeport, Connecticut, is a two-and-one-half mile, crescent-shape stretch of shoreline fronting on Long Island Sound (Figure 1). The park lies partly on a peninsula, and partly in Bridgeport's South End neighborhood. The southwest end of the parkland terminates in a small island which is linked to the peninsula by a 3,000 foot stone breakwater. Toward the northeast end, the shoreline swings abruptly into a knob-shape promontory, which forms the east section of the park. The north, or inland border of the park, fronts on both industrial and mixed commercial-residential neighborhoods, and is broken by several entrances which coordinate with north-south city streets. An irregular route along cross-streets forms the north edge of the park and eventually leads into the park's shoreline road, located just inside the park's south boundary. The park's interior varies in character; the eastern portion is curvilinear in plan and features shaded, meandering walks, open, slightly rolling greens, and an extensive grove of shade trees. Far less intimate in feeling are the park's middle and western areas; these are more rectilinear in plan, and consist of open, expansive, flat greens which are occasionally divided by vehicular roadways. A complex of early 20th-century brick buildings stands near the center of this section of the park. A mid-19th-century lighthouse remains at the tip southwest tip of the park on Fayerweather Island. There are also several monuments and statues situated at various path and roadway junctions around the park.

The nominated property consists of the entire area historically associated with Seaside Park, with the exception of the landfill area at its west end. This section, which extends to the edge of Cedar Creek, has been excluded because of the total loss of its original integrity as a historic parkland. Therefore, the north boundary of the nominated area is formed, beginning from the west, by Black Rock Harbor, the south edge of the landfill to Cedar Creek, then east to the junction of Barnum Dyke and Atlantic Avenue, then east along Atlantic Avenue to Iranistan Avenue, then south to Waldemere Avenue, following it east to its confluence with Broad Street, then east to South Main Street. The east line of the park lies along the eastern-most driveway into the park to the point at which it meets the shore.(Figure 1).

Visually and historically the park divides into three distinct sections: the eastern, or original section, developed between 1865 and 1879; the mid-section, a flatter and more open area opened in 1884; the west section, developed from reclaimed marshland from 1895 to 1918 and extending by a breakwater to Fayerweather Island. Except for a section of bathing beach at the mid-section, the entire waterfront is united by a massive, stone sea wall which was extended periodically as the park was expanded (photograph 2). Behind the bathing beach and across the shoreline drive are two of the three major buildings in the park. These are a large, two-story brick recreation hall built in 1918 (the bath house), and an architecturally related, U-shape maintenance complex (the stables) which faces the eastern half of the park (photographs 3 through 8). The third building is Black Rock Lighthouse, an octagonal, stone tower

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erected on Fayerweather Island in the mid-19th-century. Also on the island are the brick foundations of a small, mid-19th-century dwelling once used by the lighthouse keeper (Photographs 9 and 10).

The eastern section of the park features curvilinear foot paths and carriage drives which meander through shady clusters of trees and out into sunny, open greens, providing the stroller with a variation in the surroundings, and an alternative environment to the beach (photographs 1, 11, and 12). This section of the park has two entrances on city streets, one at the foot of South Main Street, the other at the foot of Park Avenue. The South Main entrance occurs in the narrow, handle-shape, northeast end of the park, and divides immediately into three, tree-lined promenades which funnel southward into the body of the park (Figure 2). The Park Avenue entrance is conspicuously marked by a monumental stone archway, through which two roadways pass. This monument serves also as the southern visual terminus for Park Avenue, a broad, divided, late-19th-century suburban street. Upon entry in the park, the street immediately diverges from the rectilinear street plan and embarks on a curvilinear route around the park's east section, leading eventually to the sea wall drive.

Salient visual elements in the eastern section of the park are the several monuments located at various points in the landscape (Photographs 13 through 18). While none of those present existed before 1875, it appears from an 1867 map that the future siting of such objects may have been considered in the original design, as in the plaza at the Main Street entrance and in the carriage concourse near the center of the park (Figure 2).

An early alteration in the eastern portion of the park is a trotting park which appears in an 1885 sketch map in the west section of the original 44 acres (Figure 3). It remains an oblong, circular running track. Also remaining from this early alteration (or addition) is a small pond at the west end of the track, dug in 1888 to drain this particularly low-lying area. The 1867 map also shows three structures, including a house at the west end of the beach, a belvedere at the carriage concourse, and a boat landing toward the west end. None of these remains, nor is their appearance known. More recent alterations in the center of the original park include a snack bar, the paving of approximately an acre surrounding the snack bar, and five tennis courts located toward the northeast end. Owing to the density of the trees and the overall scale of the park, the intrusion of these additions is minimal, and the gracious, 19th-century character of the eastern area remains well intact. Until they were paved in the mid-1960s, most of the park roads and paths were of gravel.

The flat, open quality of the mid-section of the park marks a change in character from the east section. This area, which extends west from Iranistan Avenue to Barnum Dyke (Figures 1 and 3), relates most closely to the earlier section in the area of the sea wall. Curvilinear paths once encircled the south green, (Figure 3); today the fields are used for ball-playing. As this portion of the park lies largely below sea level, the west end retains an original, small pond excavated to drain the surrounding area. Deciduous trees stand thinly along the perimeter of the two greens.

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The most recently developed section of Seaside Park covers the one-and-one-half mile area between Barnum Dyke and the tip of Fayerweather Island (Figures 1 and 4). Annexed between 1895 and 1912, this area of reclaimed marshland provides the only swimming beach of the park, and is the site of the bath house and stables, built in 1918. The landfill occupies the inland side of the peninsula, approximately 2,000 feet to the southwest. The masonry sea wall continues along the waterfront until meeting the island breakwater. The island is a nine-and-one-half acre mound of sandy soil, low scrub, with a small cluster of trees. It is undeveloped except for Black Rock Lighthouse at its southwest tip, and the brick foundation of a mid-19th-century Carpenter Gothic lighthouse keeper's dwelling, located approximately 300 feet to the north (Photographs 9 and 10).

All the historic buildings in the park stand in the west section. Following is a description of these structures:

The Bath House (Photographs 3 and 4), is a rectangular, two-story, buff brick, Renaissance Revival style building which stands at the corner of Barnum Boulevard (the sea wall drive) and Barnum Dyke. The horizontally-oriented block, which faces the water, is set back from the road on a flat, open site. The facade is distinguished by two arcades, one, a series of arches on the ground level, the other, a once-open, piered gallery on the upper story. The front and side door and ground floor window openings are classical in style, and feature pediments and ogee consoles, or brackets (Photograph 4). The building's appearance has not changed except for the addition of a small, single-story snack bar to the west side during the 1960s. Originally, rows of connected, frame cabanas, set on open-planked platforms extended behind the bath house. An underground pedestrian tunnel, which served as a connector between the bath house and the beach across the road, remains but is closed off. The tunnel opening at the beach is visible only as two concrete curbs disappearing onto the sand.

The symmetrical plan and the interior fabric of the bath house are almost perfectly intact. The ground floor consists of a large, rectangular public space, which is faced on the south, east, and west sides by double-case, glass-paned, French doors featuring arched transom lights (Photograph 5). A paneled ticket booth stands at the center of the north wall, and is partially visible in the far left side of the photograph. All the woodwork of the room, including the door frames, the wainscoting of the north wall, the chair rail, and the beamed ceiling, is stained a dark brown. The remainder of the ground floor contains bath rooms and small utility rooms.

Two, broad stairs lead symmetrically from the rear corners of the main space to a room known as the "ballroom" above. The stairs are of the same dark woodwork and feature thickly-turned Neo-Renaissance balusters and hand railings. The ballroom, which once occupied the entire upper floor, has been divided into two chambers. The most distinguishing element of the space is the open, concrete-pier gallery in the front wall, which overlooks the beach.

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Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Industrial and Engineering Sites,
1981 Matthew Roth

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The roof is supported by several exposed, wooden trusses (Photograph 6).

The stables (Maintenance Headquarters) is a U-shape complex of low, buff-brick buildings which stands approximately two-tenths of a mile north of the bath house, near the intersection of Barnum Dyke and Waldemere Avenue (Photographs 7 and 8). The buildings are set well back from the road and behind several large, old sycamore trees. The site is flat and overlooks the eastern half of Seaside Park.

The stables is visually related to the bath house by the use of tiled, hip roofs, and buff-brick, horizontally-massed blocks. The complex consists of three, large, nearly identical, two-story blocks which are linked by smaller, ancillary wings, forming a U-shape structure surrounding a square courtyard. The main blocks of the complex are similar, and feature large, wooden, garage-door openings on the ground floor, small casement windows on the second story, cross-gable dormers inset with double doors, and broad, overhanging hip roofs. The maintenance superintendent's house is a full, two-and-one-half-story version of the same design.

While no longer used for keeping horses, the complex retains its historic function as maintenance headquarters for the park. The exterior appears to be well intact except for the garage doors, which are known to have been changed.

Black Rock Lighthouse (Photograph 9), which stands on Fayerweather Island and marks the entrance to Black Rock Harbor, is a 60-foot high octagonal structure. The tapered shaft, which is constructed of granite rubble faced with cut brownstone, is capped by a brick cornice, and a circular, metal lantern housing. The lighthouse appears to be well intact, but has suffered considerable deterioration.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 B and C

Specific dates 1865 **Builder/Architect** probably Frederick Law Olmsted
for eastern section

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Seaside Park is significant in being an unusually well-preserved Post-Civil War park landscape. This section, the park's eastern end, epitomizes many of the esthetic and functional principles of the American parks movement as shaped by its progenitors, Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted. In its construction and layout, Seaside Park also represents an important work of 19th-century civil engineering. The park's original siting and its subsequent westward extensions along the exposed stretch of Connecticut shoreline necessitated the design and construction of several breakwaters, a massive dyke, and two miles of masonry sea wall. (Criterion C). The park is also significant for its historic associations with the famed Bridgeport circus impresario, and civic benefactor, P.T. Barnum. (Criterion B) From 1864 until his death in 1891, Barnum was a central figure in the financing, design, and supervision of Seaside Park. Barnum's influence, which served to ensure the functional and visual continuity of the landscape as it was expanded, is evident today in various sections of the park. Finally, Seaside Park is significant in being the site of several, date-19th and early-20th-century monuments important to the history of the city. Among these is probably one of the best portraits made of P.T. Barnum and of Elias Howe Jr., inventor and manufacturer of the first modern sewing machine.

The inception of Seaside Park in the fall of 1863 grew out of the increasing, general awareness of the social problems brought on by industrial and urban growth. For New York City, industrialization and its urban product had meant tree-less streets set in unending grid patterns and lined with long rows of brownstones, unsanitary and crowded slums, a significant increase in street-gang fighting, and a higher incidence of political corruption. Many 19th-century thinkers, such as Downing and Olmsted, pointed to the loss of the social and physical amenities of the rural surroundings as the partial cause for such poor urban conditions. One Bridgeport resident, advocating the establishment of a seaside park in 1864, referred to New York's recently completed Central Park as having a "civilizing tendency on the masses"¹. Contributing to this attitude was the gradual re-discovery of the American landscape and a concurrent, growing interest in the natural world and in rural life, trends which for some years had been the subject of works and writings by the Hudson River School painters, the Transcendentalists, and Downing and Olmsted.

In 1864, when Seaside Park was begun, Bridgeport was still a seaport town of approximately 15,000 people, engaged primarily in farming and small manufacturing. While congested urban conditions had not yet

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approx. 300

Quadrangle name Bridgeport

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A	18	652170	4558595
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	18	652170	4558320
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	18	649260	4558320
---	----	--------	---------

D	18	649560	4557000
---	----	--------	---------

E	18	649600	4555240
---	----	--------	---------

F	18	650728	4557640
---	----	--------	---------

G	18	652250	4558000
---	----	--------	---------

H			
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(see Figure 1)

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property runs from the foot of South Main St. southwesterly along Long Island Sound for 2½ miles to Fayerweather Island, then north, including the island, along Black Rock Harbor, then east and northeast along the south border of the dump, then east on Atlantic Ave., south on Iranistan,

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries then east on Waldemere Ave. to South Main St.

state N/A

code N/A

county N/A

code N/A

state N/A

code N/A

county N/A

code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alison Gilchrist

organization Connecticut Historical Commission date November 1981

street & number Box 838 telephone 203 263-4427

city or town Woodbury state Connecticut

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

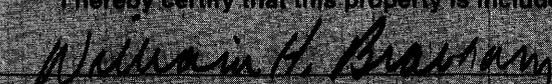
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date April 30, 1982

For HCRS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 7.1.82

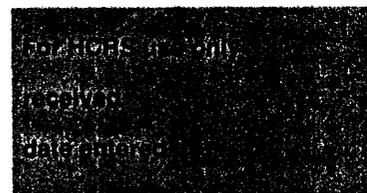
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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come to Bridgeport, there was growing a recognition of the city's imminent development as an important industrial center. Gaining partly from the experiences of nearby New York and New Haven, two cities that had grown much more rapidly and largely before the parks movement, Bridgeport was in a position to plan a major public pleasure ground in preparation for the coming boom. Particularly foresighted was the timely appreciation for the town's scenic shoreline.

Aside from the purely humanitarian reasons for creating another public park, the project was also perceived as a sound business venture, which, when complete, would attract a lively and fashionable tourist trade to Bridgeport. Envisioned in editorials as being the showplace of the New England coast, the proposed park would feature a "large hotel... (serving) thousands of wealthy strangers...every season, benefitting largely every branch of Bridgeport industry. Many families from home and abroad would board in this hotel the year round, and there can be no doubts that it will pay a liberal dividend to the stockholders".² Another article, which had appeared a year earlier, envisaged the ultimate use of the park with more accuracy:

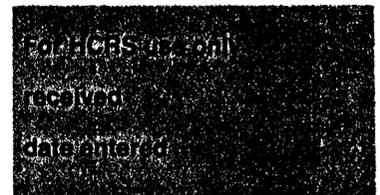
The horse railroad is to be extended to a convenient distance and all for a mere trifle can avail themselves of the privilege of the park. The intention is to make it the resort of this class of citizens, land being cheaper in this part of town, houses of cheaper rent will be put up, and those of moderate circumstances will be better provided for than they have ever been before. Rich and poor alike are interested in this movement, and let all classes as one man join in rendering every facility to ensure complete success.³

The first signs of interest in establishing a new public park appear to have been generated by a series of editorials run by the Bridgeport Standard during the fall of 1864 and the following spring. One of these, impressive in its foresight, read in part:

The citizens of Bridgeport ought to be warned by the negligence of other places, and proceed at once to locate one or more public parks, which will be an ornament to the city. The signs of a rapid increase of population here are apparent...The Housatonic Railroad terminates here. Manufactories of various kinds will center in this city, in short, the various causes which build up towns, are now clearly at work in favor of Bridgeport, and there ought to be no time lost in making those great public improvements, which not only add to the attractions of a place, but are

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essentially necessary for the comfort, enjoyment and health of the population.⁴

As foreshadowed by other major port cities of the Northeast, Bridgeport's industrial surge was to attract masses of immigrant and migrant populations seeking factory work, increasing the city's population eight-fold between 1870 and 1920, and immediately inducing a serious housing crisis. In the South End, factories appeared along the railroad, drawing with them a largely Irish, working-class population who settled in the area north of Atlantic Avenue (Figure 5). The Warner Brothers Health Corset Factory, situated along the east end of the avenue, was the South End's major employer, and hence a key force in the area's development. Another major force in the South End was P.T. Barnum, a resident of Waldemere Avenue and primary landowner in the area. In an effort

to help ease the housing problem in the area, and seeing the chance to make the park accessible to the working class, Barnum hired the prominent Bridgeport architectural firm, Palliser and Palliser, to design a suburban community of modern, attractive, duplex houses for the factory workers and their families, in a three-block area north of Atlantic Avenue.

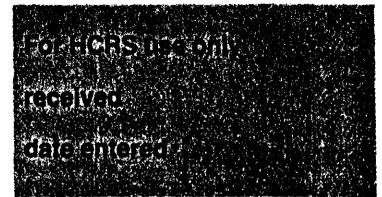
Many of these houses remain as a unified complex and comprise the Barnum-Palliser Development Historic District. Until the mid-1880s, the area lying south of Atlantic Avenue would remain largely undeveloped, except for Barnum's and a few other large estates which bordered directly on the park. By the final decade of the century, this area had been broken up into large, suburban lots and sold off to several of Bridgeport's leading industrialists, businessmen, and professionals for private homes. This area remains a largely intact collection of Colonial Revival and Shingle Style residences, and comprises the Marina Park Historic District.

P.T. Barnum, who had become interested in the idea of a shoreline park, met with some equally interested colleagues in the winter of 1865 to begin a campaign to persuade all the landowners of the South End waterfront to donate their frontage for a city park. All except one agreed; Barnum later purchased this piece and gave it to the city. Early in the summer of 1865 a parks commission was established, which, according to an August 18, 1865 newspaper, hired "a gentleman from New York who was prominent in designing Central Park, to assist in preparing a plan for the Seaside Park"⁵. The writer was probably referring to the great 19th-century landscape artist Frederick Law Olmsted, who was in the process of creating Central Park with his partner, Calvert Vaux. Both men are named directly as the authors of plans for Seaside Park in a Bridgeport Standard newspaper article dated August 15, 1867.

By August of 1865, Barnum and his associates had secured a 44-acre chunk of shoreline property located to the south and west of the foot of Main Street. Work on the park began immediately with the construction of the sea wall and the carriage road over it. In his autobiography, Struggles and Triumphs, Barnum vividly describes the evolving appearance of the park:

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At the beginning, the park on paper and the park in reality were two different things. The inaccessibility of the site was remedied by approaches which permitted the hundreds of workmen to grade the grounds, and to lay out the walks and drives. The rocks and boulders over which I had more than once attempted to make my way on foot and on horseback were devoted to the building of a substantial sea wall.

Paths were opened, shade trees were planted; and fortunately there was, in the very centre of the ground, a beautiful grove of full growth, which is one of the most attractive features of this now charming spot; and a broad and magnificent drive follows the curve of the shore and encircles the entire park.⁶

Barnum's close involvement in the development of the area continued with his decision to build his family a summer residence on property belonging to him in the area he later named "Marina Park". In his autobiography, Barnum writes of the house and its grounds:

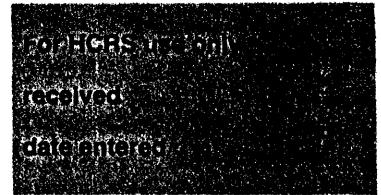
I planned a house which should combine the greatest convenience with the highest comfort, keeping in mind always that houses are made to live in as well as to look at, and to be 'homes' rather than mere residences. So the house was made to include abundant room for guests, with dressing-rooms and baths to every chamber; water from the city throughout the premises; gas, manufactured on my own ground;..The stables and gardens were located far from the mansion, on the opposite side of one of the newly opened avenues, so that in the immediate vicinity of the house, on either side and before both fronts, stretched large lawns, broken only by the grove, single-shaded trees, rock-work, walks, flower-beds and drives.⁷

In 1889 Barnum offered the two-and-one-half acre area fronting his house to the adjacent property owners, on the condition they maintain the area and forbid picnicing or the planting of trees on its grounds. In 1893, two years after Barnum's death, his neighbors granted the Marina Park land to the city for use as a public park, stipulating the same conditions as set forth previously by Barnum.

In 1885 Barnum purchased 33 acres of tidal marsh lying west of Iranistan Avenue and built a dyke across the plot's west end in order to reclaim the marsh as parkland. Stipulating, again, certain landscaping conditions, Barnum then donated the dyke and the reclaimed land to the city. Among the conditions set by Barnum were, the maintenance of the land for

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public use only; the extension of Waldemere Avenue to the dyke; the preservation of the unobstructed view of the water from Waldemere Avenue; and "the shaping and grading of the lawns, plantings, and walks on the included grounds."⁸ Also stipulated was the excavation of a special pond that would regulate the natural tidal flow into the low-lying area. All Barnum's requests were carried out, and, except for the pond, remain as visible marks of his influence on the growth of the park.

Extension of Seaside Park continued after Barnum's death. In 1894 through 1895 the sea wall was extended 5,045 feet westward of the dyke, and the marsh-land filled in behind it. Fayerweather Island was purchased in 1912, but not incorporated as parkland until after 1917, when the breakwater was built to re-connect the island to the mainland.⁹ The bath house was built in 1918 as part of a beach improvement program, in which 200 feet of the sea wall were removed to deepen the beach area, and a tunnel constructed under Barnum Boulevard for pedestrian passage between the beach and bath-house.

The Landscape

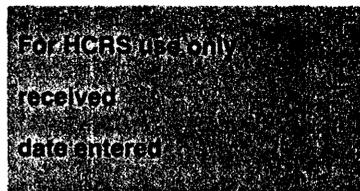
While the Bridgeport Standard article of 1867 attributes the park's original plans to the firm of Olmsted and Vaux, the absence of drawings or related correspondence makes a definite attribution impossible. However, the failure as yet to find any documentation to the contrary leaves the Olmsted-Vaux authorship a strong possibility. A description of Olmsted's plan and of the ongoing construction in the same 1867 article corresponds closely to elements present in the eastern section of the park. Features of Olmsted's plan, such as "a wall constructed along the shore and a broad drive and walk," the unification of "the approaches from Main and Broad Streets...in one central entrance," and the preservation of the existing "grove...to form a nucleus for the general scheme,"¹⁰ directly correlate with the present scheme. In addition, the careful separation of pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares in Seaside Park is a feature used extensively by Olmsted in Central Park.¹¹

Barnum's assertion that he "aided and advised in all important matters in the laying out and progress of the new park",¹² coupled with the showman's flair for the spectacular, would make his choice of Central Park's celebrated architects a distinct likelihood.

In its design integrity and its high degree of preservation, Seaside Park is an outstanding example of the "Beautiful" manner in post-Civil War landscape gardening as championed by Andrew Jackson Downing. Characterized by gracefully curving paths, softly rolling lawns, and regularly-shaped trees and plantings, the "Beautiful" attitude to landscapes sought, above all, the pleasing, visual harmony of these various elements. Whereas sections of Olmsted's Central Park in New York and Beardsley Park (also in Bridgeport) exemplify the opposite, contemporaneous view (the "Picturesque"), which is

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characterized by the use of rugged, dramatic scenic forms, and more irregular, naturalistic plantings, Seaside Park's design deliberately capitalizes on the pleasing, harmonious qualities of its site: the view of Long Island Sound and the accompanying, fresh sea breezes. The clusters of carefully-spaced shade trees, interspersed with open, flowing greens overlooking the water, combine to produce a setting that is orderly yet pleasing to the senses and, above all, serene. Such an ambience, central to the "Beautiful" mode of expression in the 19th-century landscape, remains extremely well-preserved in the eastern section of Seaside Park (Photographs 1 and 12).

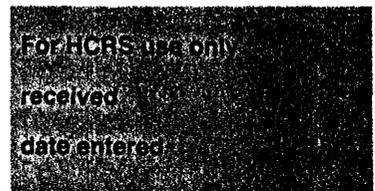
Other natural features existing at the time of the park's original construction in 1865 were used to advantage in the park's "Beautiful" manner of design. The laying of the sea wall, following the natural contours of the shoreline, and the wall's function as an open promenade from which the visitor could fully survey the spectacular, panoramic views of the crescent beach and the water, reflects planning in the "Beautiful" manner. (Photograph 2). Inland, the "grove" provided a sheltered, shaded area away from the sun and wind, and acted as a visual focus for the park's layout. In his autobiography, Barnum praises the incorporation of the shoreline and the grove, which suggests his responsibility for their inclusion as dominant features.

Certain planned features of the park are also notable. As stated, pedestrian and vehicular paths were designed to be separate, giving safety and privacy to those on foot and providing a variety of routes through the park. The narrow, Main Street entrance drive retains its denser planting, featuring a double promenade of Linden Trees (Photograph 1). The skillful division of entrance routes at this end of the park accommodates heavier traffic while retaining a gracious ambience. The more open areas, graded into gently rolling greens, provide space for passive recreational activities and open the view of the water to the inner areas of the park.

One especially outstanding feature of Seaside Park is the extraordinary collection of several non-native and a few rare species of trees which occupies the central part of the park's east section. Some of these trees may remain from the 19th-century, however, it appears that most of the trees were planted during the middle of the present century. While the presence of unusual plant material is appropriate in a restored Victorian landscape as Seaside Park, the lack of any reference in historic descriptions to exotic plantings suggests that non-native trees were not originally used in the park. However, the diverse assortment and number of tree types present, including deciduous, fir, and pine, visually animates the wooded areas in varying ways throughout the seasons. Among the non-native trees represented are: Silverbell (*Halesia carolina*), a native tree of the southern states, which produces white, bell-shape flowers in spring and brilliant yellow foliage in fall; Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), native to the Allegheny Range, which bears white, tassel-like flowers and leaves

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that turn crimson in the fall; Linden (*Tilia glabra*), bearing fragrant, yellow blossoms in July. Also growing in the park is a single fern-wood tree, allegedly the only one of its species in Bridgeport. Other than several hundred common hardwood trees, there are few plantings of any other kind, which fortuitously accords with the original park policy, advising the "little or no use of shrubbery, thus avoiding the harborage for mosquitoes".¹³

Finally, in its layout and topography, the eastern Seaside Park landscape clearly reflects the passive recreational habits of the Victorians, as opposed to the far more active recreational uses of parks today. For the Victorians, tennis and baseball-playing were simply not associated with park use. Rather, late 19th-century visitors to Seaside Park came to walk, cycle, ride horseback, or drive through the park while enjoying its pleasant surroundings. The park was used also for regularly-scheduled band concerts, and served as a gathering place for holiday parades.

Engineering

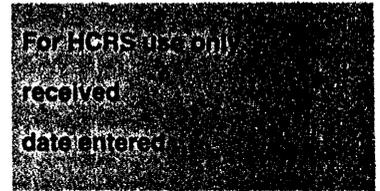
Seaside Park is also significant as a remarkable feat of 19th-century civil engineering. Until the availability of motorized vehicles, all the work was carried out using carts, horses, and large teams of workmen. The first task, that of building the sea wall along the completely exposed eastern end of the park shoreline, was facilitated by the plentiful supply of boulders already on the property. The purpose of the sea wall was to act as a retaining structure for the raised park grounds, and as a buffer against wind and water. The original sea wall has been considerably rebuilt over the years, owing to damage from storms and general erosion. In later years, the sea wall permitted the expansions of the park by retaining vast amounts of soil and rubble infill used to reclaim the marsh-lands of the west section.

P.T. Barnum's gift of 33 salt-marsh acres in 1869 required the construction of a massive dyke to enclose the added area. The structure, which measured 1,000 feet long, 120 feet wide at the base, and 45 feet wide at the top, worked in conjunction with a newly-excavated pond in an ingenious system of tidal flood control. The pond was connected to the Sound by an underground pipe containing a valve which would open with the rise of the tide to fill the pond, and close to retain the collected water as the tide fell. By this system, the marsh surrounding the pond was drained, filled with soil, and thus rendered useful as a trotting park.

The next major engineering project was the extension of the park westward in 1894 through 1895, in which the sea wall was extended 5,045 feet across more marsh-land. This area was later filled and made into solid ground. The contractor for this project was C.W. Blakesley and Sons, a New Haven firm, who hired J.W. Southey and Sons of Bridgeport to supply the stone. Under stipulation by the city, only Bridgeport laborers were hired.

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The final extension of the park included the reclamation of further marsh land, which forms the present western end of the park. The city purchased Fayerweather Island in 1912, and six years later hired the T.A. Scott Company to re-connect the island to the shore. This was done by building a massive, 1,600 foot breakwater between the island and the mainland.

Each of the construction phases listed took at least two years to complete. Much of the labor was provided by volunteers, and involved the additional difficulties and safety hazards of building along a fully exposed shoreline.

The Buildings

The bath house and the stables (Photographs 3 through 8) are significant as public building types which represent the academic current in American architecture during the first two decades of the 20th-century.

The bath house, designed by Bridgeport architect Ernest G. Southey in 1917 through 1918, replaced a row of dilapidated, frame bath houses which had stood on the beach. The building was designed to serve a variety of uses and to accommodate large numbers of people moving through it. A main function was to control the use of the public showers and cabanas and to provide a public gathering place. Bathers wishing to use the facilities would enter the front of the building, proceed directly to the ticket booth to buy tickets and secure valuables, then pass through turnstiles outside to the separate, mens' and womens' cabanas. Access to the beach was then gained via the tunnel, entered just behind the building.

The most notable feature of the building is its use of Renaissance-derived arcade to relate the structure to its beach-front setting. A variation of the arcade appears also in the second story, in the ballroom's open gallery, (now boarded up) (Photographs 3 and 4). Both forms act as intermediate spaces, which provide varying degrees of shelter from and exposure to the natural elements, sights, and sounds of the beach. The ground-story arcade is echoed on the interior in the use of French doors with arched overlights, which form an interior wall around three sides of the main space. (Photograph 5).

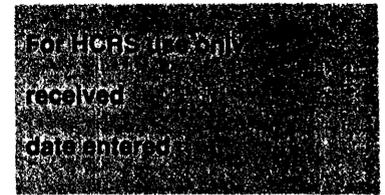
In contrast to the building's formal, imposing exterior, the comparatively simple, utilitarian interior reflects the structure's function as a public, recreational facility. A specific example is in the exposed truss-work in the ballroom (Photograph 6).

As a public building, the bath house is characteristic of its time in its use of academic, Neo-Italianate Renaissance architecture as an expression of civic pride.

The architect, Ernest G. Southey, practiced in Bridgeport from 1901 to 1943. Another of his works is the William N. Beardsley House in the Marina Park Historic District (135 Park Avenue), a shingle style and Colonial Revival residence built in 1902.

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The architecture of the stables generally recalls that of outbuilding architecture in European country estates, as expressed in the three-sided layout with a central courtyard, the use of brick and red tile, and casement windows. (Photographs 7 and 8).

Neither the architect nor the date of the building is known, although it seems likely that it is also the work of Southey, and that it was built at the same time as the bath house. Despite their outward formality, both structures were designed to visually harmonize with their expansive, parkland surroundings. The choice of buff brick and the horizontal emphasis of the buildings reflect the architect's sensitivity to the designing of large buildings in a parkland setting.

The bath house and stables are significant as visual reminders of Bridgeport's civic pride and the importance of Seaside Park as a major public resource during the first decades of the present century.

Black Rock Lighthouse was built by the town of Fairfield. (which at one time owned Fayerweather Island) before 1840, making the structure one of the oldest remaining lighthouses in New England. Rising to a height of only 60 feet, the structure is unusually small for its building type.

Monuments

Several of the park's monuments, which commemorate certain of Bridgeport's outstanding citizens, are important as historic and artistic additions to the landscape. These range in size and style and are situated at prominent locations throughout the the park. A list of those monuments 50 years of age or older follows:

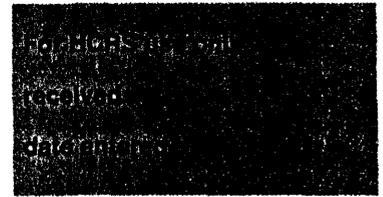
The Soldiers and Sailors Monument was raised in 1876 in honor of the Centennial. (Photograph 13). The monument was built by M.H. Moseman of Chicopee, Massachusetts and is of Quincy granite, marble, and bronze. A rusticated granite base supports a three-tiered Renaissance Revival shaft with arched, tabernacle openings. The life-size, bronze figures of a sailor and soldier stand on opposite sides of the base. Bronze castings of the symbols of war ornament the upper sides of the base. The monument is surmounted by a twelve-foot bronze figure of the Genius of America, presenting the Wreath of Laurel to the war dead. The monument stands near the center of the park's east section, and faces the Sound.

(Photograph 15)

The Bergh Fountain, was erected in 1897 in honor of Henry Bergh, (1811-1888), founder and president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Made of cast iron and designed using generally Renaissance Revival architectural forms, the fountain features a lion's head spout overhanging a thickly gadrooned, cast iron basin. The top was originally surmounted by the statue of a prancing horse. The east and west sides of the base have stone, symbolic reliefs, depicting an angel appealing to a man who is whipping a horse. Bergh promoted the anti-cruelty movement through

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his public criticism of the treatment of horses on the streets of New York City. The fountain is located at the South Main Street plaza entrance.

The statue of Elias Howe, Jr., inventor and manufacturer of the sewing machine, was erected in 1885 (Photograph 14). An 1885 Bridgeport Standard description attributes the monument's design to an "S. Ellis".¹⁶ The statue features a standing bronze figure on a smooth granite base. "HOWE" is spelled in raised letters on the south side of the base. The monument is prominently situated at the junction of the Park Avenue entrance drive and the sea wall boulevard, and overlooks the Sound. The statue was presented by the Howe Machine Company of Bridgeport in honor of the company's founder. The sewing machine industry became a major Bridgeport manufacturer during the 1880s.

The P.T. Barnum Statue (Photograph 16) was commissioned by James A. Bailey and J.L. Hutchinson, business associates and friends of the showman. The artist was Thomas Ball, who had made a bust of Barnum for the Barnum Museum of Natural History at Tufts College in 1884. Ball completed the plaster statue in Florence, Italy, and sent it to the Royal Bronze Foundry in Munich, Germany for casting. The work depicts Barnum seated in a fancy armchair, holding a book in one hand and a pencil in the other. The granite pedestal is set on a stepped, circular base designed by the firm of Longstaff and Hurd, leading Bridgeport architects and the favorite firm of Barnum, whose other works include the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, and an 1893 addition to the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford. Before leaving Germany, the statue was awarded first prize in a prestigious Munich art exhibition. The statue occupies a prominent position at the junction of Iranistan Avenue and the sea wall drive, and faces Long Island Sound.

Sited on the sea wall, on a slight promontory near the east end of the park, is the Spanish Cannon, captured at the Battle of Santiago and erected in 1900 as a memorial to the Spanish-American War. The cannon was assigned to the city of Bridgeport by the U.S. government. Cast in Seville, Spain in 1794, the bronze gun metal cannon is mounted on a cast-iron ornamental carriage made in Bridgeport. (Photograph 17)

The Perry Memorial Arch (Photograph 18), erected in 1918, stands as a gateway for the Park Avenue entrance to Seaside Park. The arch was built in memory of William Hunt Perry (1820-1899), a leading Bridgeport manufacturer, benefactor, and commissioner of Seaside Park. The arch was designed by Henry S. Bacon, a New York architect, and built by the Sperry and Treat Company of New London, Connecticut. The granite monument's design is based on the ancient Roman triumphal arch scheme, but is highly unusual in its double-arch composition. The north side of the central pier features a Neo-Classical, bronze relief portrait of Perry.

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In its scale, setting, and value as an unusually well-preserved historic landscape, Seaside Park is unmatched in the state of Connecticut. The physical integrity of the oldest section of the park is particularly noteworthy, and is probably the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Since its construction beginning in 1865, Seaside Park has preserved a two-and-one-half-mile stretch of Connecticut shoreline which is located within blocks of the center of the state's largest city. The site of one of the oldest lighthouses in New England, and the rich repository of several monuments of strong historical and artistic merit, Seaside Park is a diversified and unique public resource which maintains its historic function while remaining a vital part of Bridgeport's modern life.

FOOTNOTES

1. "A Seaside Park for Bridgeport," The Bridgeport Standard, 2 Sept. 1864.
2. "Bridgeport Looking Up," The Bridgeport Standard, 28 Aug. 1866.
3. Article, The Bridgeport Standard, 7 Oct. 1865.
4. "Public Parks," The Bridgeport Standard, 1 Oct. 1863.
5. Article, The Bridgeport Standard, 18 Aug. 1865.
6. P.T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), p. 158.
7. *ibid.* p. 159.
8. "The Howe Statue," The Bridgeport Standard, 30 Mar. 1885.
9. Matthew Roth, Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Industrial and Engineering Sites (Washington D.C.: Society for Industrial Archaeology, 1981).
10. "The Seaside Park," unidentified newspaper, 15 Jan. 1867.
11. From 1884 to 1890 the superintendent of Seaside Park was the prominent landscape gardener, Oliver C. Bullard, who is described in his obituary as "the right hand man of Frederick Law Olmsted". The same article credits Bullard with "the laying out and constructing and ordering the whole arrangement of Prospect Park in Brooklyn", and the planning of "the National Grounds at Washington". (The Bridgeport Standard, 27 Oct. 1890.) That Bullard, who was intimately familiar with Olmsted's work, was given responsibility for Seaside Park, advances the possibility of Olmsted's responsibility for its design.
12. Barnum, *op cit*, p. 158.

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Footnotes, continued

13. "The Seaside Park," op cit.

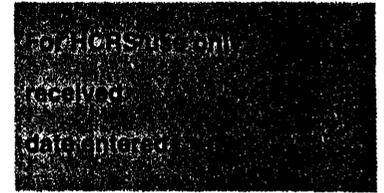
14. M. Roth, op cit.

15. Chris Nevins, conversation, 17 Nov. 1981.

16. "The Howe Statue," op cit.

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Charles Brilvitch, Neighborhood Housing Services, Bridgeport. Interviews, July 15 and November 16, 1981.

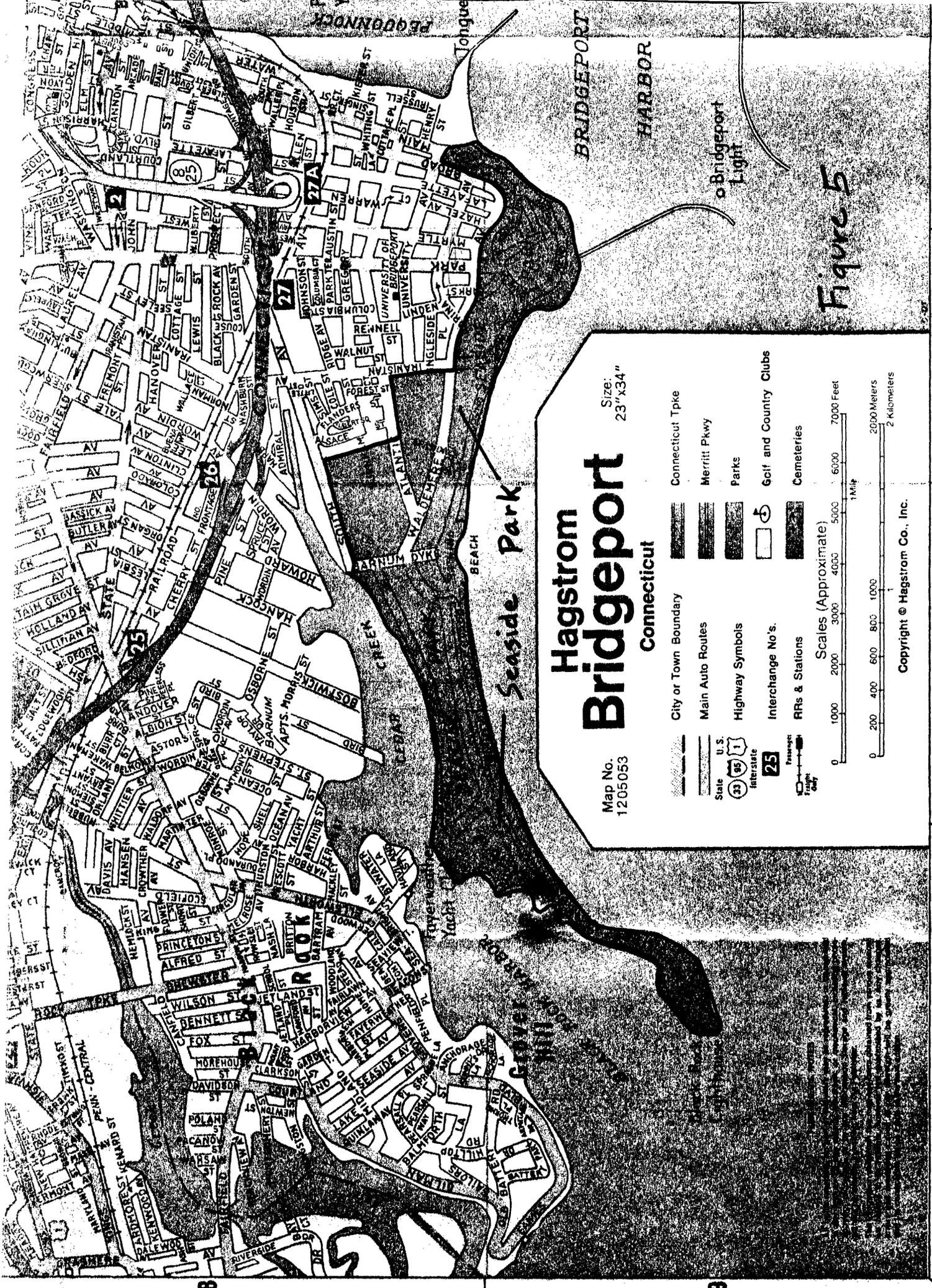
Chris Nevins, Curator, Fairfield Historical Society, Fairfield CT, interview, November 17, 1981.

also consulted:

The Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline MA.

The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Department of History, The American University, Washington D.C.

The National Association of Olmsted Parks, New York, NY.



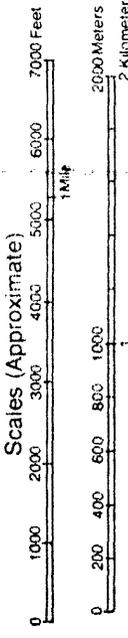
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Size:
23" x 34"

Hagstrom Bridgeport

Connecticut

- City or Town Boundary
- Main Auto Routes
- Highway Symbols
- Interchange No.'s
- RRs & Stations
- Connecticut Tpke
- Merritt Pkwy
- Parks
- Golf and Country Clubs
- Cemeteries



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Figure 5

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BRIDGEPORT DAILY STANDARD, TUESDAY MARCH 3, 1885.

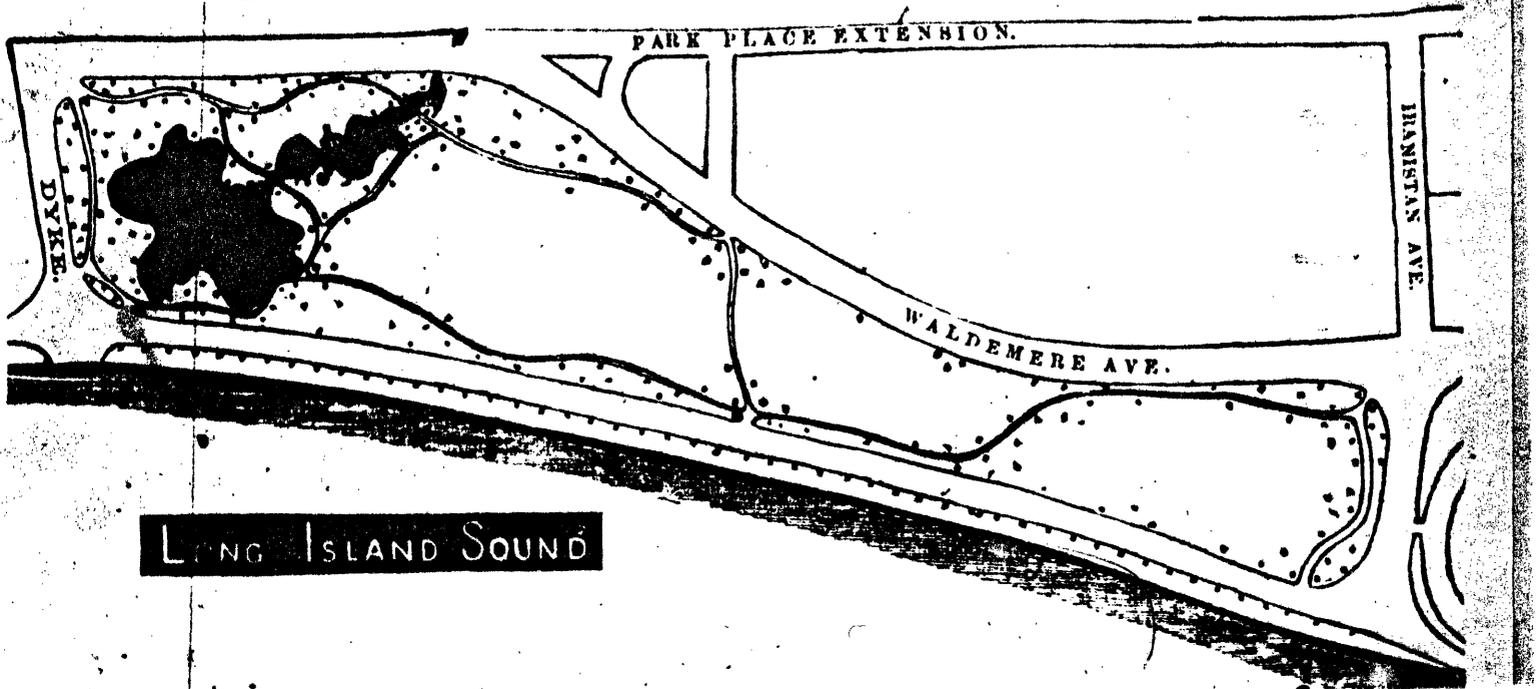


FIGURE 3 SEASIDE PARK, 1885 (mid-section)
BRIDGEPORT CT

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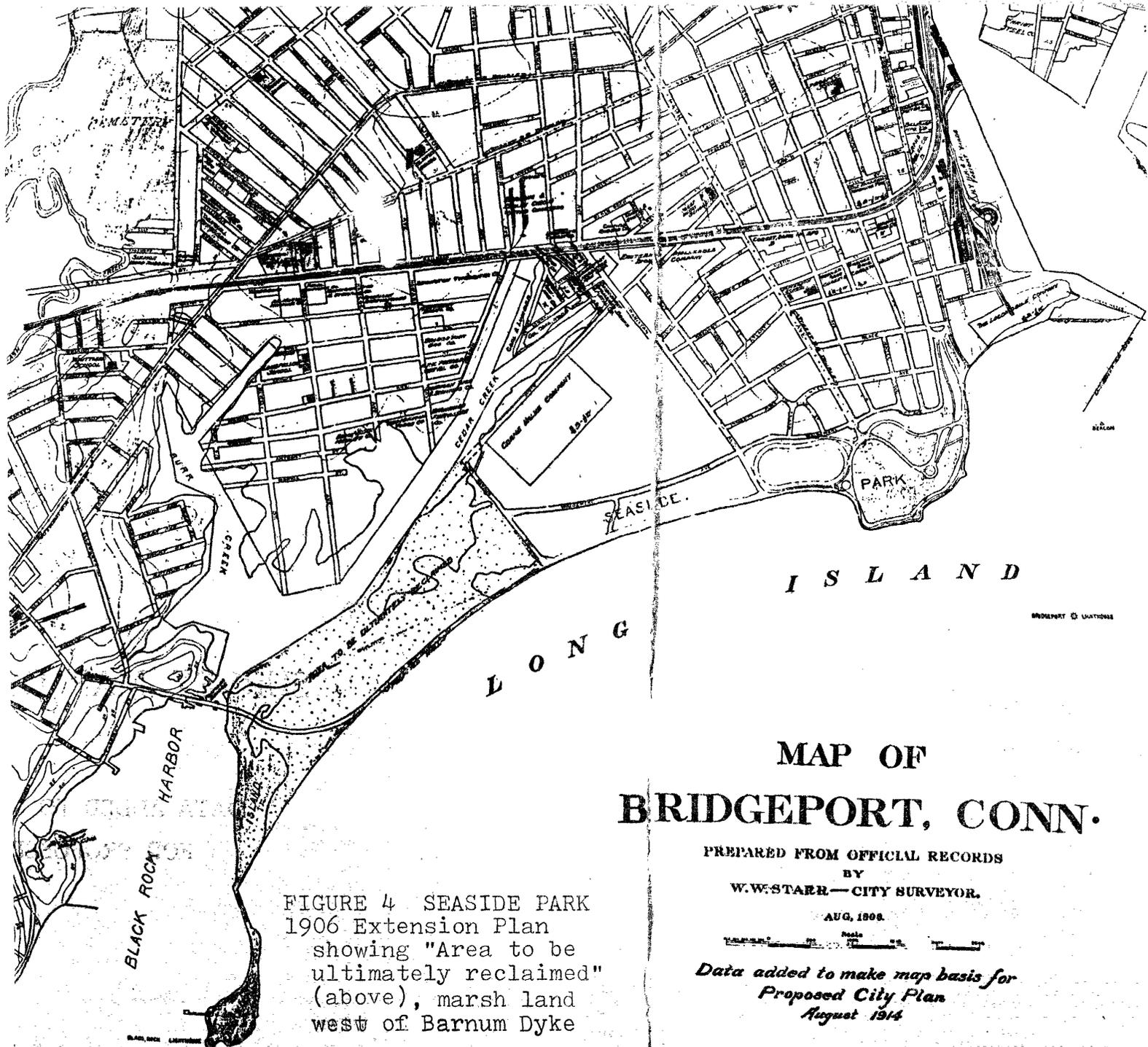


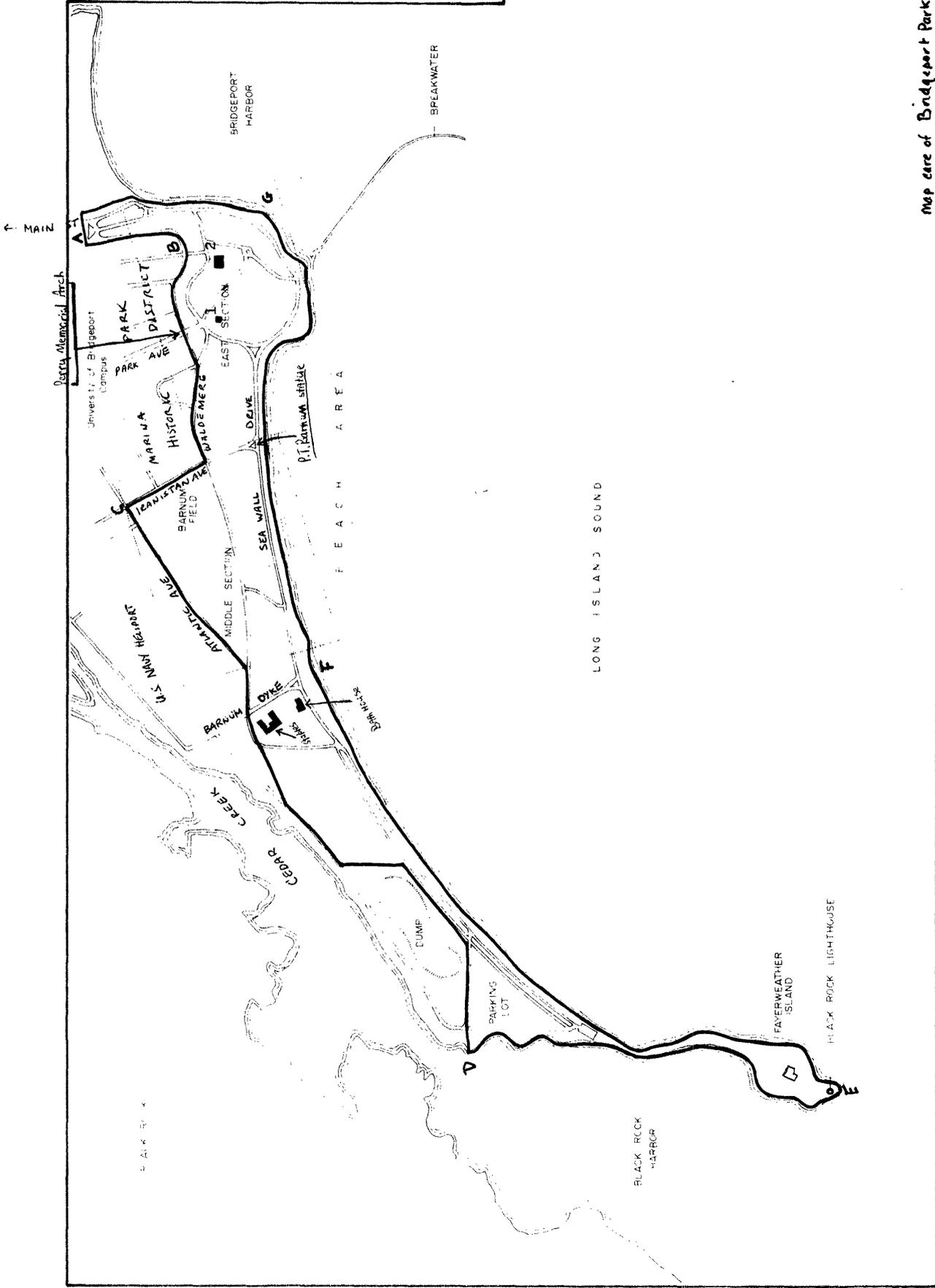
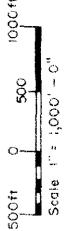


Figure 1 - Boundary Description and Key to PARK UTM reference

CITY OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

2.5 BC mph

1:snack bar
2:tennis courts



Map care of Bridgeport Parks Commission

Appendix

11.10