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Cultural Landscape Report



Jacob Riis Park

Gateway National Recreation Area

Denver Service Center • National Park Service • Department of the Interior

1992

Lane, Frenchman and Associates, Inc.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service:

Denver Service Center Eastern Team:

Andrew Barton, A/E Manager

Steve Burns, Landscape Architect

North Atlantic Region Office:

W. Lewis Barlow IV, AIA, Chief Historical Architect

Robert Holzheimer, Planning and Design Coordinator

Nora Mitchell, Manager, Regional Cultural Landscape Program

Cultural Resources Center:

Stephen Spaulding, Acting Supervisor, Building Conservation Branch

Joan C. Berkowitz, Historic Preservation Conservator

Gateway National Recreation Area:

Kevin Buckley, Superintendent

Robert McIntosh, Jr., Former Superintendent

Joseph Avery, Deputy Superintendent

Administrative Staff

Interpretative Staff

Maintenance Staff

Protection Staff

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation:

Olmsted Center:

Robert Abrams, Director of Special Projects

Stephen Rizick, Document Center Archives;

Karen Sotiropoulos, Historian

New York City Department of Archives:

Kenneth Cobb, Deputy Director

Credits

Lane, Frenchman and Associates
Jonathan Lane, Architect and Planner
Richard O'Dwyer, Architect
John Strother, Architect
Beatrice Bernier, Graphics
Charles Smith, Architect and Planner
Nancy Ludwig, Architect

Laubmann-Reed Associates
Ben Reed, Landscape Architect
Chris Barton, Landscape Architect
John Geiger, Landscape Architect
Greg Atchley, Landscape Architect
Lowell Savage, Landscape Architect

McGinley Hart Associates
David Hart, Historical Architect
Paul McGinley, Historical Architect
Janice Slivko, Architect

Carol R. Johnson & Associates
John Gustavson, Landscape Architect
Laurie Webster, Landscape Architect

Jane Carolan, Historian

2.1 Historical Evolution

The site of Jacob Riis Park has evolved through five distinct operational periods:

- **Pre-development (prior to 1932)** -- prior to the opening of the Park, the area was used for a variety of recreational purposes.
- **The Initial Park (1932-34)** -- the second period started with the dedication of the Bathhouse in August of 1932, but lasted only until a sweeping reform of New York City government was instituted in 1934.
- **The Robert Moses Renovation and Expansion (1934-37)** -- the third period brought Robert Moses onto the scene to take charge of extensive redevelopment and park expansion which was completed by 1937.
- **New York City Parks Department Era (1937 - 1974)** -- the fourth period spanned the next 37 years, during which Jacob Riis Park was operated by the Parks Department of New York City which instituted few physical changes because of its decreasing resource base.
- **NPS Stewardship (1974 - present)** -- the fifth period started in 1974, when all aspects of the Park's operation were transferred to the National Park Service with the establishment of the Gateway National Recreation Area. This period continues today as plans are being developed for rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park.

A brief history of each of these five periods follows, showing the evolution of the Park. Much of the following historical data can be found, with significantly more detail, in the Historical Data Section of an Historic Structure Report prepared by National Park Service historian Harlan Unrau, in 1982.

Pre-Development Period: Prior to 1932

> *"The park stretches westward between bay and ocean beyond the summer towns of Belle Harbor and Neponsit, a country of tumbled sand-hills overgrown with beach grass and fragrant bayweed that may easily be transformed into attractive park land." (Jacob Riis, "The Story of Sea Breeze," May 1914, from Unrau 1981: 28)*

Jacob Riis Park is located on the Rockaway peninsula of Queens, New York. This narrow, sandy peninsula is a continuation of the great barrier beach running along the southern shore of Long Island. The development potential of this windswept, barren beach as a recreational area was discovered as early as 1869, spurred by the construction of the South Side Railroad, a small rail line which ran from Valley Stream to Far Rockaway. In 1880 the construction of the New York, Woodhaven, and Rockaway Railroad completed a direct rail line from New York City across Jamaica Bay and dramatically increased development potential. As the rail line was being built by private investors developed a plan for a large outdoor recreation area in the vicinity of what would later become Jacob Riis Park. In 1881 a hotel and private beach were opened to the public and by 1893 a boardwalk was completed from Holland to Seaside as Rockaway became increasingly popular as New York's newest beach resort (Unrau 1981: 6-9).

Although early development was by private investors, in 1904 the City of New York began to actively seek land for a public beach in the area. In 1905 city officials entered into an informal agreement with the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), an organization which managed three hospitals for the poor and was an advocate for thousands of impoverished immigrants, most of whom lived on New York's lower East Side. The AICP and the city would build a recreation facility on the present day site of Jacob Riis Park as well as construct a tuberculosis hospital.

> *".... the city would attempt to buy the site for the hospital and Park and the AICP would build and equip the hospital with funds to be received from a subscription drive (Unrau 1981: 15)."*

Jacob Riis (1849-1914) for whom the Park was named in 1915, was a journalist, author, and city reformer "who had long championed the cause of the New York City tenement dwellers and had taken a special interest in alleviating the plight of slumchildren (Unrau 1981: 32)." Born in Denmark, Riis immigrated to New York in 1870 and became a police reporter. His first hand encounters with New York's disenfranchised population led to his commitment to reform and in particular focused his energies on urging the construction of hundreds of playgrounds and small parks throughout the city. He also worked to pass tenement reform laws and fostered the establishment of children's hospitals. (Merit Students Encyclopedia, 1975 Volume 16, P. 52).

It was not until 1912 that the city finally purchased a 262-acre tract of land in Rockaway. In 1913 the tract was transferred to the New York City Department of Parks (Unrau 1981: 26). The same year the Parks Department sponsored a design competition opened to landscape architects and engineers. Six designs were selected and the first prize won by Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. of Brooklyn, New York. Carl F. Pilat, a landscape architect in the New York City Parks Department, prepared "a plan which included the most desirable features from the six (Unrau 1981: 29)." The 1913 Pilat plan is illustrated in Figure 4.

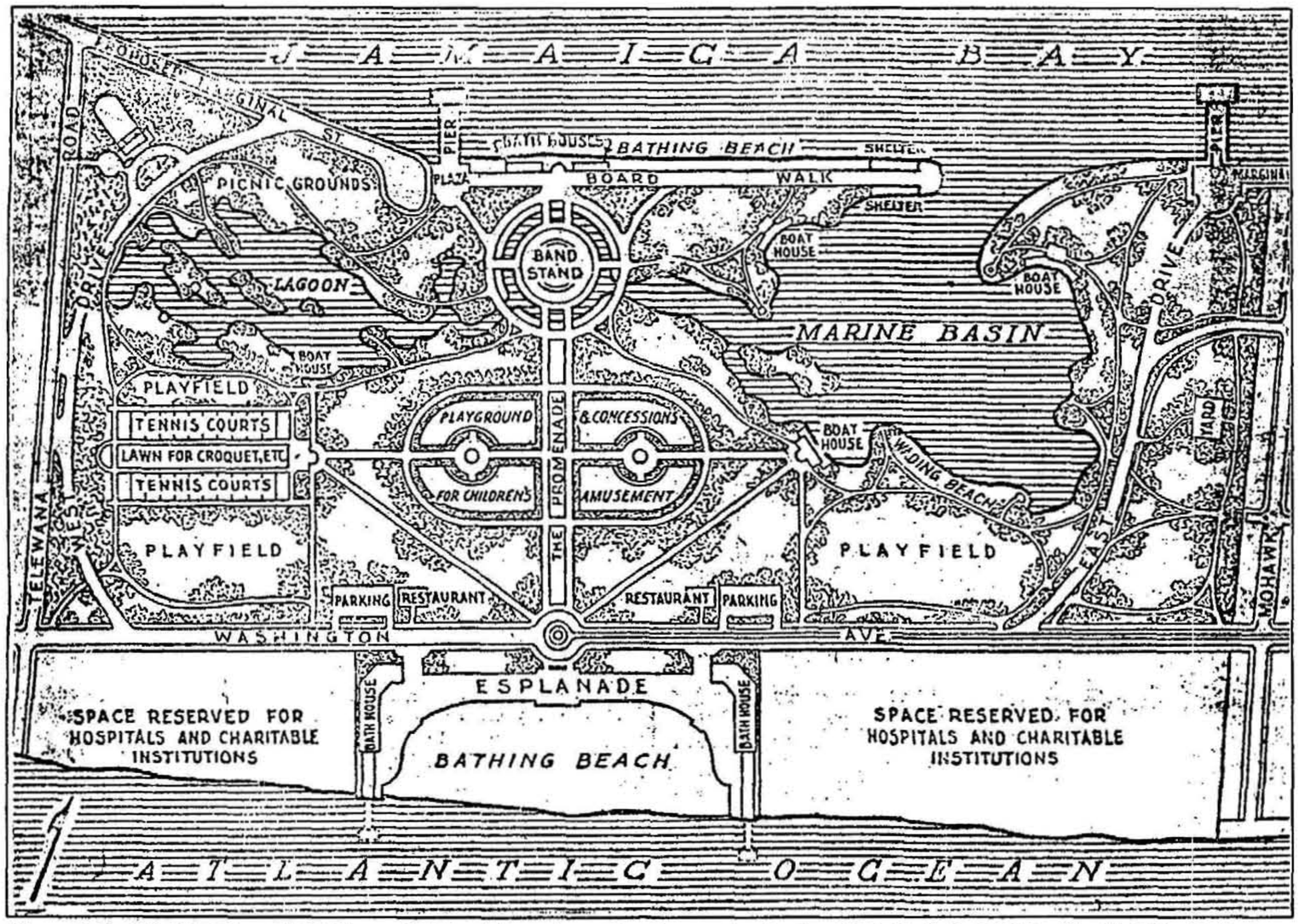


Figure 4: Carl F. Pilat Plan, 1913 (Unrau, 1981) -- This is the earliest known plan for Jacob Riis Park. In 1913 the New York City Parks Department sponsored a design competition. Design elements from the winning six designs were compiled into one plan by Pilat. The plan was never built.

"The plan provided for bathing beaches on both the ocean and bay fronts and a maritime basin jutting in from the bay for swimming and boating. The plan also called for picnic grounds, a lagoon for boating, three playfields, tennis courts, a croquet lawn, playground and concessions for children, a bandstand, four boat houses, and two restaurants and adjacent parking areas on the north side of Washington Avenue. A pier, boardwalk, two bathhouses, and two shelters were to be built on Jamaica Bay, and on the ocean front, south of Washington Avenue, provision was made for two bathhouses and an esplanade. The oceanfront development was to be flanked on either side by space reserved for the open-air children's and convalescent hospitals" (Unrau 1981: 29).

Unfortunately the six winning plans have not, at this time, been discovered but the composite design by Pilat is an early 20th-century Beaux Art design of formal symmetrical elements placed in an asymmetrical naturalistic landscape. It is unclear whether this plan was looked at when the existing design was implemented but there are similarities in features such as playgrounds, tennis courts, boardwalk and bandstand. The overall layout is similar to the existing plan its with symmetrical elements set in an asymmetrical scheme. Pilat's plan revolves around a geometric cross-axial walkway centered on the site. This is flanked by the beach and an esplanade on the south and a circular bandstand on the north. The beach area is rather small in comparison to the entire scheme and the buildings are subservient to the landscape and circulation. It is unclear whether this plan was looked at when the existing design was implemented, but there are similarities in features such as playgrounds, tennis courts, boardwalks, and bandstand.

Although the Pilat plan was approved by the Parks Department it was never implemented and there was minimal construction activity between 1913 and 1930. Instead, due to America's entry into World War I a naval air station was erected on the site of the park, although the beach area itself was still used for recreation. In 1922 the Neponsit Beach Hospital for Children, part of the original AICP concept of hospital and recreation area, was completed.

In early 1926 a small concession stand, near the western end of the park was built and in the late 1920's roads were widened and parking lot improvements completed. Although the naval air station was mostly inactive after World War I, it was not until the completion of Floyd Bennett Field in 1931 that the Navy finally vacated the property and demolished 42 buildings. Remaining were 9 structures, roads, sidewalks, concrete building foundations, seawalls, a wharf, and subsurface utilities. Most of these were demolished or buried during the 1936-7 construction phase (Unrau 1981: 57).

The Initial Park: 1932 - 1934

In the 1930's the art and architecture worlds were in a state of flux. The Modern, or Bauhaus movement in Europe, a response to the increasing industrialization of the world, had a profound impact on American design (Jellicoe, Goode and Lancaster 1986: 576). However, some designers and landscape architects were slow to respond to this trend. They felt they were closer to nature and therefore less impacted by industrialism, but the lure of new forms and the freedom of breaking out of old concepts proved to be very powerful.

> *"Before the modern movement there were two basic [landscape] plan patterns. One was formal, geometric, axial, and symmetrical. The other was informal, irregular, ungeometric, and asymmetrical"*
>
> (Jellico, Goode and Lancaster 1986: 576)

The changes sweeping through European and American design in the 1930's enabled designers to combine disparate forms, to be informal and formal in the same site plan and to come to design solutions with "limitless possibilities" (Ibid: 576). This new aesthetic was driven by a refreshing open mindedness to design solutions, a greater awareness of twentieth-century culture and the impact of external forces on society (Ibid: 576).

Early 1930's Park Schemes

During the early 1930's, three independent schemes (Figures 5, 6, & 7) were developed for Riis Park. Although none of these were built they had an influence on the final park development. The first was a 1931 design by Harold A. Caparn, a member of the private City Club's parks committee (Unrau, 1981, P.80). The second plan was developed in 1932 by the New York Regional Plan Association (RPA) and was designed by Earl Morrow, RPA's assistant engineer (Unrau, 1981, P.82). The third scheme was a 1933 plan by the New York City Park Board, designed by Julius V. Burgevin, landscape architect and Joseph Gatringer, assistant architect (Unrau, 1981, P.83). All contained similar design elements including a bathhouse, parking lots, golf courses and recreational facilities, and all schemes proposed developing the Jamaica Bay side of the property. The 1932 and 1933 plans were developed after the current Bathhouse was constructed. All designs incorporated the 1931 Bathhouse.

- **The 1931 City Club Plan** did little more than replicate the existing conditions at the park and add a golf course and many tennis courts. While not completed at this time, the City Club Plan illustrates the location of the current Bathhouse. The plan keeps Pilat's central promenade and adds a boardwalk along Jamaica Bay. Parking is severely limited. The plan is static with little overall landscape planning. It does begin, however slightly, develop a linear approach with roadways separating the beach area from the golf course (see Figure 5).
- **The 1932 Regional Plan Association (RPA) Scheme** illustrates the newly completed Bathhouse, but adds a boardwalk similar in shape to Carl Pilat's esplanade. The RPA plan is an integrated plan of landscape and structures which is a precursor to the linear approach of the final (1936) design. The bathing area of ocean, beach and Bathhouse are separated by a landscaped roadway. The "Back Beach" area of varied activities, including baseball diamonds, tennis courts, playgrounds and picnics areas, are all placed in a symmetrical arrangement of geometric shapes. The Back Beach area is extended almost to Jamaica Bay and is divided into a formal symmetrical zone in the west and a more natural zone in the east. A curving roadway, softened with plantings provides the transition between the Back Beach and the developed shore of Jamaica Bay which contained a "Canoe Beach," and a variety of boat moorings. Parking is pushed back away from the beach. There is an emphasis on public transportation and in the very center of the site is a large bus station, encouraging and enabling patrons to use public transportation and upon arrival be in the very heart of the park (see Figure 6).
- **The 1933 New York City Parks Department Plan** was a throwback to the 1931 City Club plan. The plan has many elements, although there is not a strong organizing geometry. The plan is mundane and consists of a series of geometric shapes randomly set down. However,

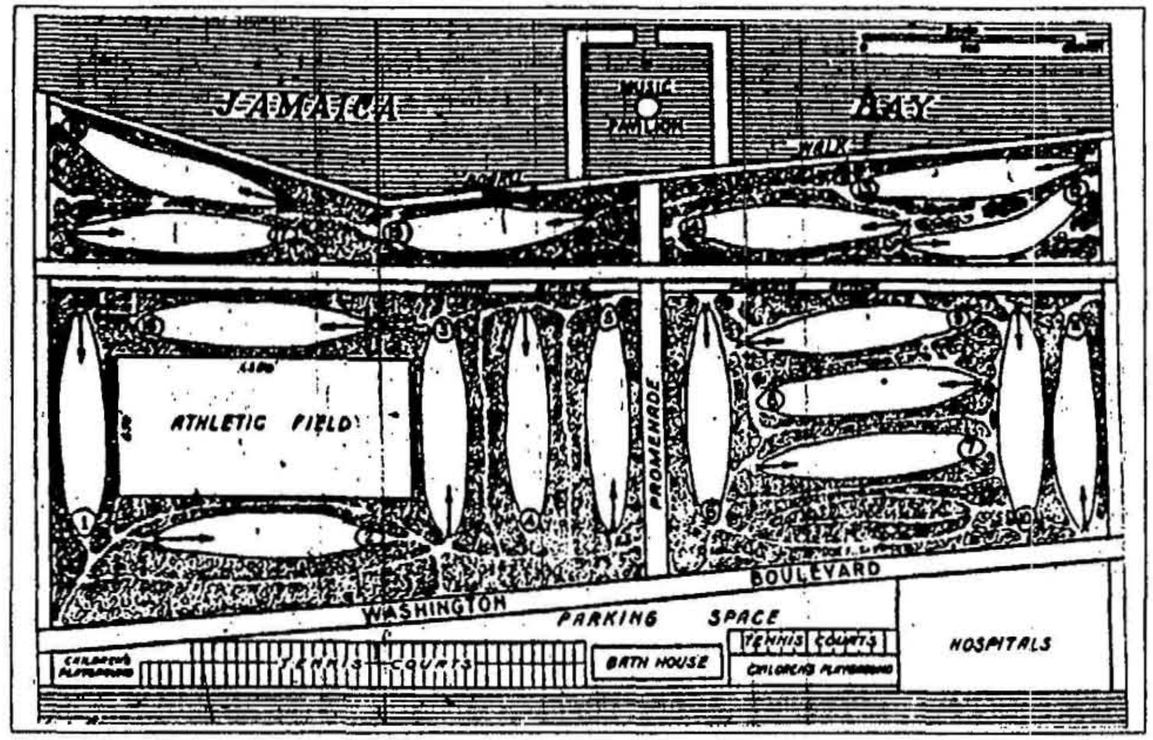


Figure 5: June, 1931 City Club Plan by H.A. Capern -- This plan, which includes the 1931 Bathhouse, does little more than replicate the then under construction 1931 plan in addition to adding a large golf course and a number of tennis courts. The plan was never constructed.

whether coincidental or not, several locational features of this plan are similar to the final (1936) plan. For example, the horizontal layering of the ocean, beach, landscaped boardwalk, and Back Beach can be seen in both schemes. The Back Beach area contains the golf course to the west, ball fields, tennis courts and playground to the east, and parking scattered throughout. The Jamaica Bay shore is developed with boating facilities (see Figure 7).

In 1931 the city finally began construction of the park with the initial building campaign centered on the construction of the Bathhouse. It was to be similar to the Bathhouse at the recently completed (1929) and very successful Jones Beach, built by Long Island State Park Commissioner Robert Moses. Jones Beach was considered to be Moses' most successful beach park and it would prove to be influential on the 1932 and the final 1936 designs of Riis Park.

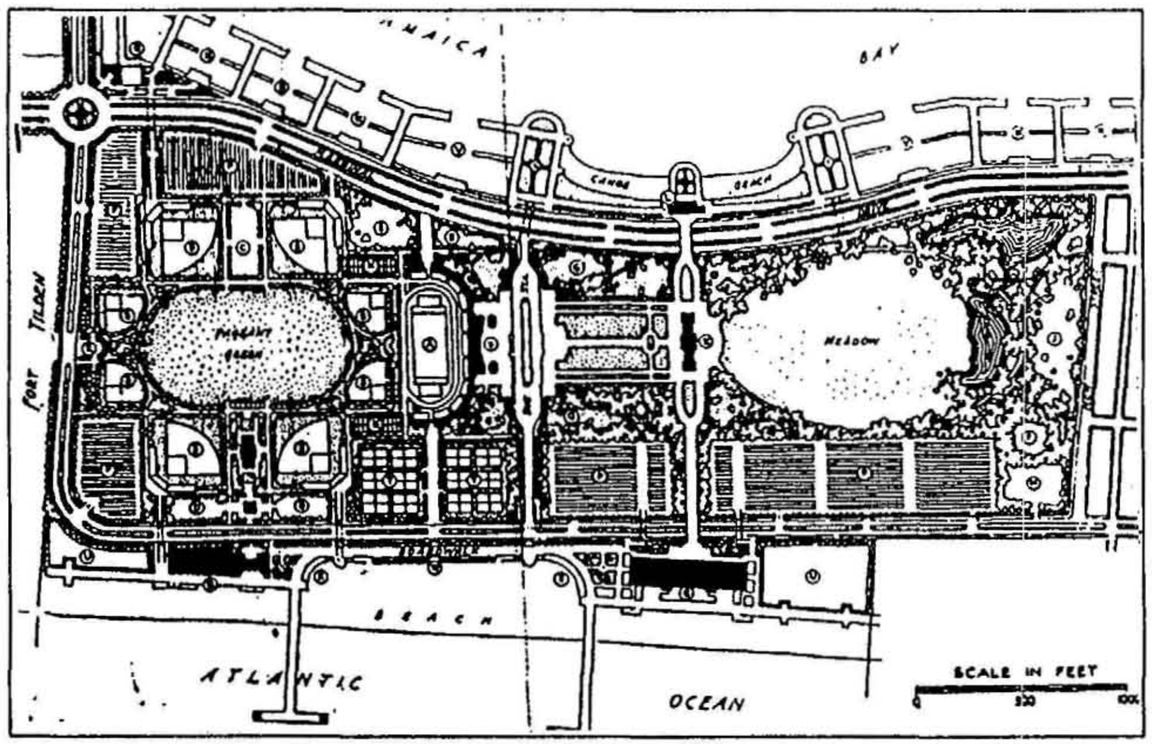


Figure 6: May 1932 Regional Plan Association, by E. Morrow -- This plan is an integrated design of landscape and structure and may well have been a precursor to the linear approach of the final (1936) design. Note that this plan was conceived after the 1931-32 plan was constructed and that this plan was never built.

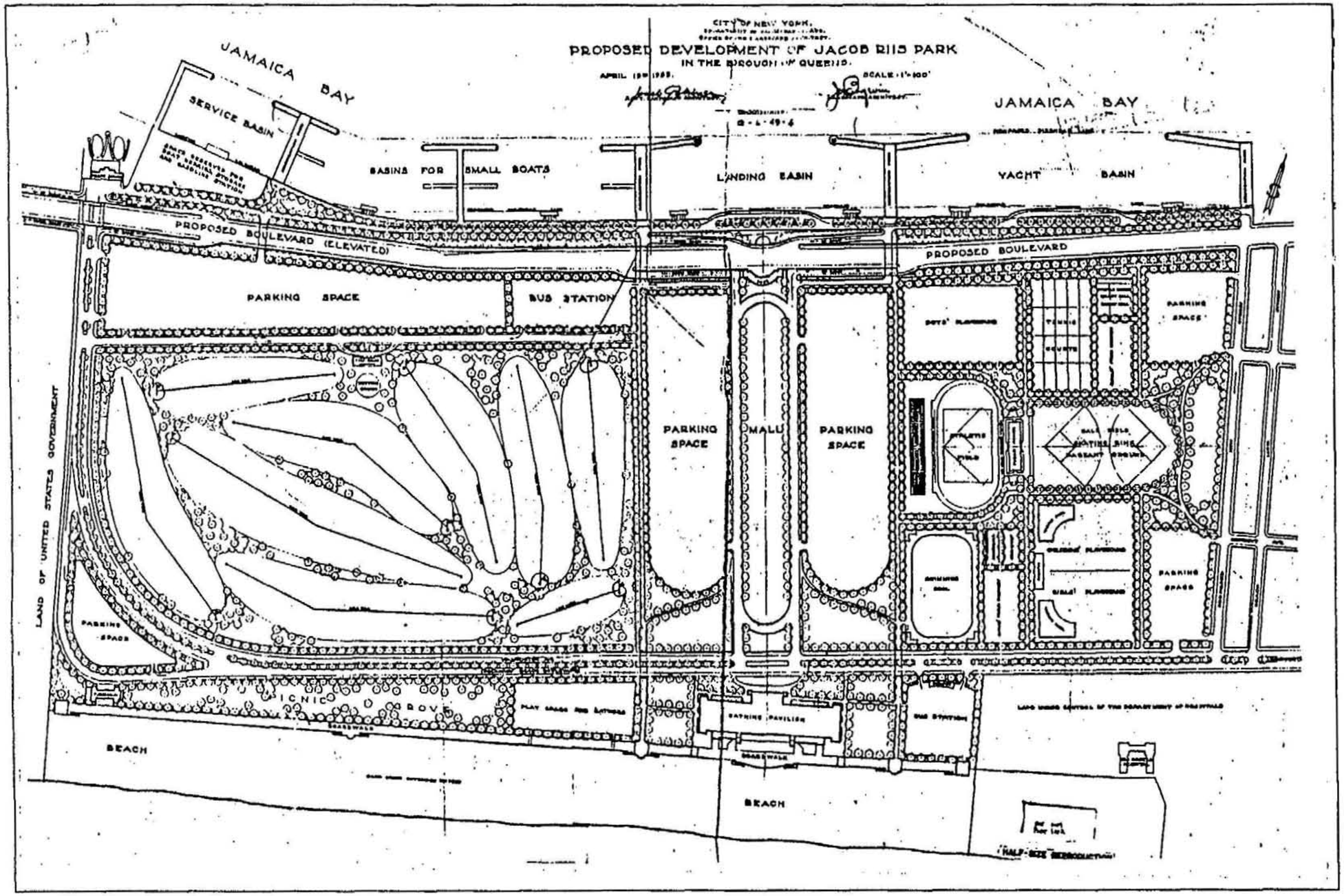


Figure 7: April, 1933 New York City Park Board Plan by J.V. Burgevin and J. Gatringer -- while this plan contains features such as the golf course, playing fields, and the horizontal layering of ocean, beach, boardwalk, and back beach found in the final 1936 plan, it as not as well conceived or organized. Note that it incorporates the 1931 Bathhouse and that Julius Burgevin, New York City Park Departmenbt Landscape Architect, worked on this design as well as the 1936 plan.

Design and Construction of The Bathhouse

The Riis Park Bathhouse was designed in 1930-31 by John L. Plock, an architect with the New York firm of Stoughton & Plock. Construction of the Moorish/Byzantine design of tapestry brick, cast stone, and tile began in 1932. It had an entrance pavilion, a central courtyard filled with lockers, a beach pavilion, sunning terraces, concession areas and two distinctive towers. As seems to be the case in many municipal projects, the Bathhouse construction was mired in controversy over its cost and contractors. Originally budgeted at $425,000, the building was finally completed at a cost of $530,000. The cost of landscaping was not included and was to be an additional charge (Unrau, 1981:60). Although the Bathhouse was not complete until 1933 and little landscaping had been finished, it was officially dedicated on August 6, 1932 (Unrau, 1981:62). When opened to the public.

> *"the brick and stone work on the administration section of the pavilion . . . [was] 75% completed and all the structural steel . . .[was] . . . set. All the brick and stone work on the two wings, which . . . contain[ed] lunch rooms and foot pools, . . . have been completed and the rough cement floors laid. More than half of the bathhouse area to be allotted to the use of women has been graded (New York Times, June 22 and August 16, 1931; Unrau 1981: 62).*

Upon final completion, the building would contain 8,100 women's and men's lockers, washrooms, a medical clinic, glass enclosed solarium, two restaurants and cafeteria, and umbrella and chair rental concessions. Figure 8 illustrates the 1934 location of the Bathhouse, squeezed between Rockaway Beach Boulevard and the Beach. Figure 9 shows the 1934 site plan in the Bathhouse vicinity, indicating planting beds, an entry drive, front lawns, and the walkway system, most of which still remain.

After the Bathhouse formally opened, work continued and by 1933 a park had been constructed with many of the facilities, if not the design, of what exists today. According to newspaper accounts the park contained, in addition to the Bathhouse, tennis courts, handball courts and playgrounds set in a landscaped environment of lawns with ornamental plants, shrubs and trees (over 3,000 were planted) all united with concrete walks. A large parking lot for 6-700 cars was constructed as well and the en-

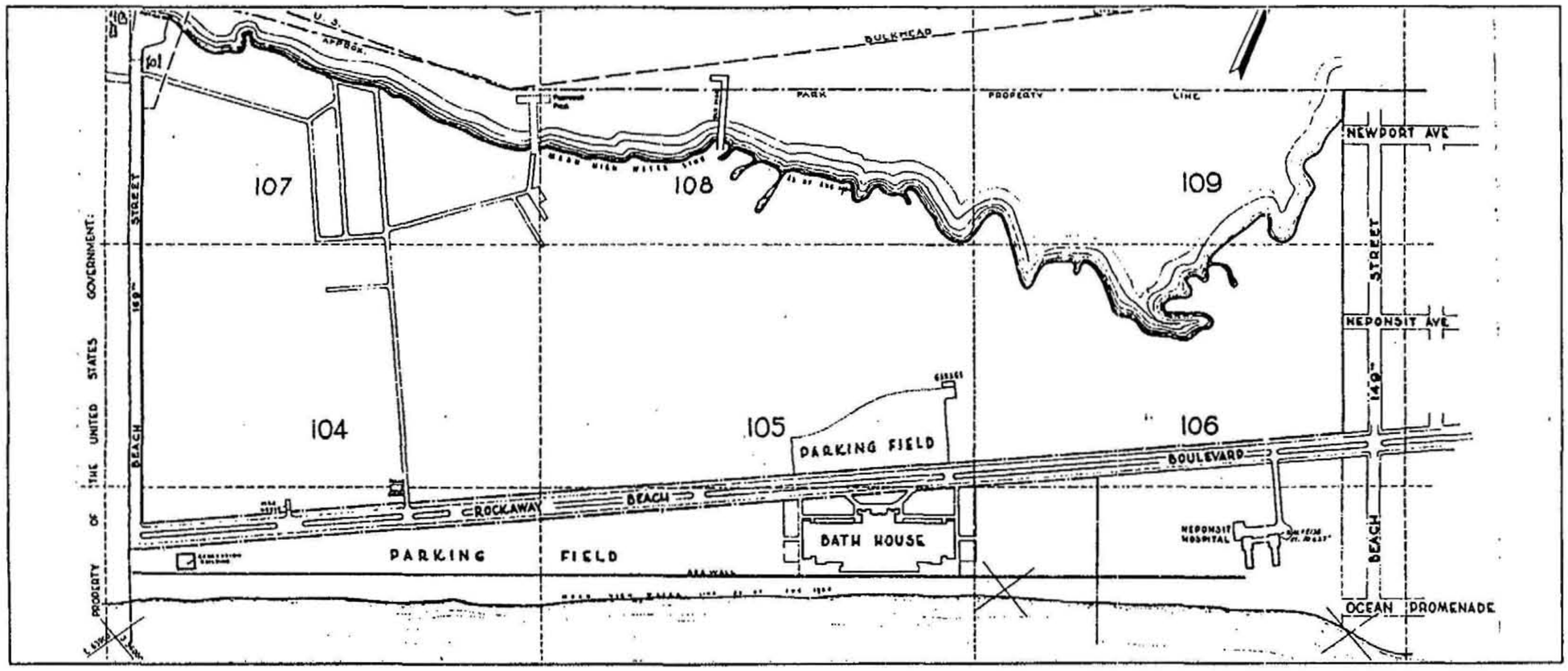


Figure 8: November, 1934 New York Department of Parks key map of Jacob Riis Park -- this is from a report by newly appointed New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses, and shows the park, as built, in 1934.

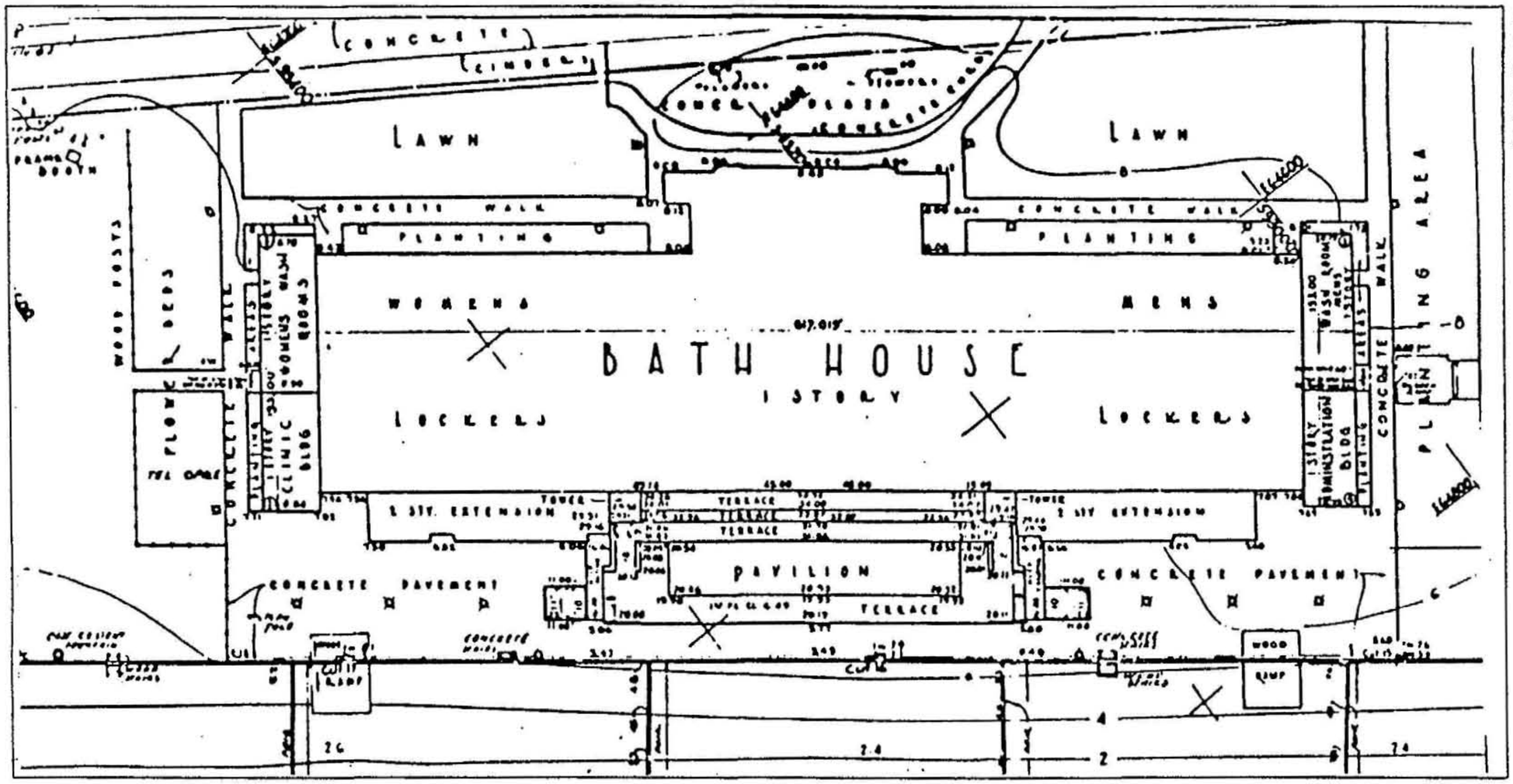


Figure 9: 1934 Site Plan of the Bathhouse -- from a 1934 study report on Jacob Riis Park by newly appointed New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses.

tire park was staffed by approximately 600 uniformed employees (Unrau 1981: 66-67).

An article in the New York Herald Tribune, 7 May 1933 described Riis Park as follows:

> *"Although the Riis Park plan has many features all its own, it resembles the highly successful Jones Beach Park.... Riis Park has been designed for the quieter enjoyment of the seashore, without any artificial devices. In atmosphere it is not unlike the English seaside resorts. The facilities provided all contribute to restfulness for the many and amusements of the out-of-door life".*

(Unrau 1981: 67).

Based on the newspaper description, funds must have been made available to landscape the park and build recreational facilities. With the exception of the Bathhouse plans, drawings from the 1931-1934 construction phase, including planting plans, have not been discovered at this time. Fortunately though, in 1934, upon assuming directorship of the New York City Parks Department, Robert Moses, commissioned a study report of Jacob Riis Park, the Works Progress Administration Park Study, and produced a drawing showing existing conditions (Unrau 1981: 73).

While newspaper articles describe a rather bucolic atmosphere, in the drawing at least, the park seems rather barren. According to the 1934 plan, all the elements described above were in place but the park seems unfocused and to consist mostly of open areas of sand with parking directly on the beach (see Figure 8 and refer also to Unrau, P.75). In a clever reuse scheme the former foundations of the Navy buildings and possibly some walkways were integrated into the park and used for circulation and handball courts. The plan seems to have been devised to fit into an existing situation rather than to shape the environment to any overall plan.

Although the newspaper article stated that 3,000 plants, shrubs and trees were planted it is hard to tell from the plan where they might have been. There did seem to be small planting beds around the bathing pavilion and grass plots just north of the structure, not unlike the existing landscaping.

Additional development plans, according to the New York Herald Tribune, May 7, 1933, called for the rehabilitation of a former naval pier in Jamaica Bay, an open air beer garden, and a boardwalk and canoeing facilities along Jamaica Bay although in actuality, these were never completed and the area developed by 1933 was quite small compared to the present day park (Unrau 1981:68).

The Robert Moses Park Expansion and Development: 1934-1937

1934 was a pivotal year for parks in New York City. In that year separate borough park departments were united into one comprehensive city department and with the help of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia, Robert Moses, then Park Commissioner of Long Island, was appointed head of the city's united parks department. Before Robert Moses was appointed Commissioner the city's parks were in shambles. Fueled by Tammany Hall, the city was a sea of corruption run by political insiders and hanger-ons with every department filled with political appointees and no-shows. The parks department was among the worst (Unrau 1981: 70).

> *"Even in an era in which every city department was staffed through patronage, the five borough park departments were something special. Recalls one observer: "You couldn't tell the difference between a park employee and the bums hanging out in the parks." Not all the lifeguards would go out [into the water]. . . . Some of them were afraid to; they didn't know how to swim" (Caro 1975: 335-336).*

Robert Moses and the Works Progress Administration

Robert Moses, urban planner and administrator, had a tremendous influence on New York City and New York State's development. He possessed enormous power and dominated public works projects in New York from the 1920's through the late 1960's. During that forty-year period, he assembled his "Moses Men," those who would carry out his massive undertakings. Through his assembled team and the different municipal and state authorities Moses headed, he was responsible for building or rebuilding most of New York City's major highways, bridges and housing projects including the Triborough Bridge, The Bear Mountain Bridge and Park, Henry Hudson Park, the Belt Parkway, the Cross Bay Parkway Bridge, Battery Park, Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town.

Of particular interest to this report are the parks Moses built, which in addition to Jacob Riis Park, include Jones Beach State Park, Orchard Beach, Bear Mountain State Park, Montauk Point, Belmont Lake State Park and Flushing Meadow Park. As seen in the list of his projects, Moses viewed parks and linking highway access projects as one concept. (Caro 1975: various pages; Merit Students Encyclopedia, 1975, Volume 12: 511).

Moses' first order after his swearing in as New York City Parks Commissioner was to fire hundreds of park employees, effective immediately, and install his own staff. At the same time, Moses was badgering the Civil Works Administration (CWA), one of the Federal New Deal programs, to fund his hiring of unemployed architects and engineers (Caro 1975: 368-369). The Works Progress Administration (WPA) had already hired over 68,000 relief workers for New York City's parks. But unsupervised, with little clear planning, men and women were literally hanging around with nothing to do. Moses "told [the WPA] that the first requirement for getting those men working on worthwhile projects was to provide them with plans. Blueprints in volume were needed, he said, and they were needed immediately (Caro 1975: 368-369)". In a somewhat unprecedented move, Moses hired out only out-of-work architects and engineers but those with jobs as well, enticing those already employed with the opportunity to design hundreds of new parks, playgrounds and swimming pools and the chance to have their project brought to completion almost immediately (Caro 1975: 368).

In 1934, Moses and his staff, supplemented by thousands of WPA workers, had completed 1700 of 1800 planned projects. Almost every park in New York City was rebuilt. New parks and playgrounds in every borough were completed as well. And plans and work continued at a frantic pace for the next seven years. In a move that would give him more control over projects Moses combined labor forces and monies with the WPA and Moses-run agencies such as the Marine Parkway Authority and the New York City Parkway Authority (Caro 1975: 373; Unrau 1981: 70). The WPA program in New York, boosted by the Moses-driven work program, was the largest in the United States.

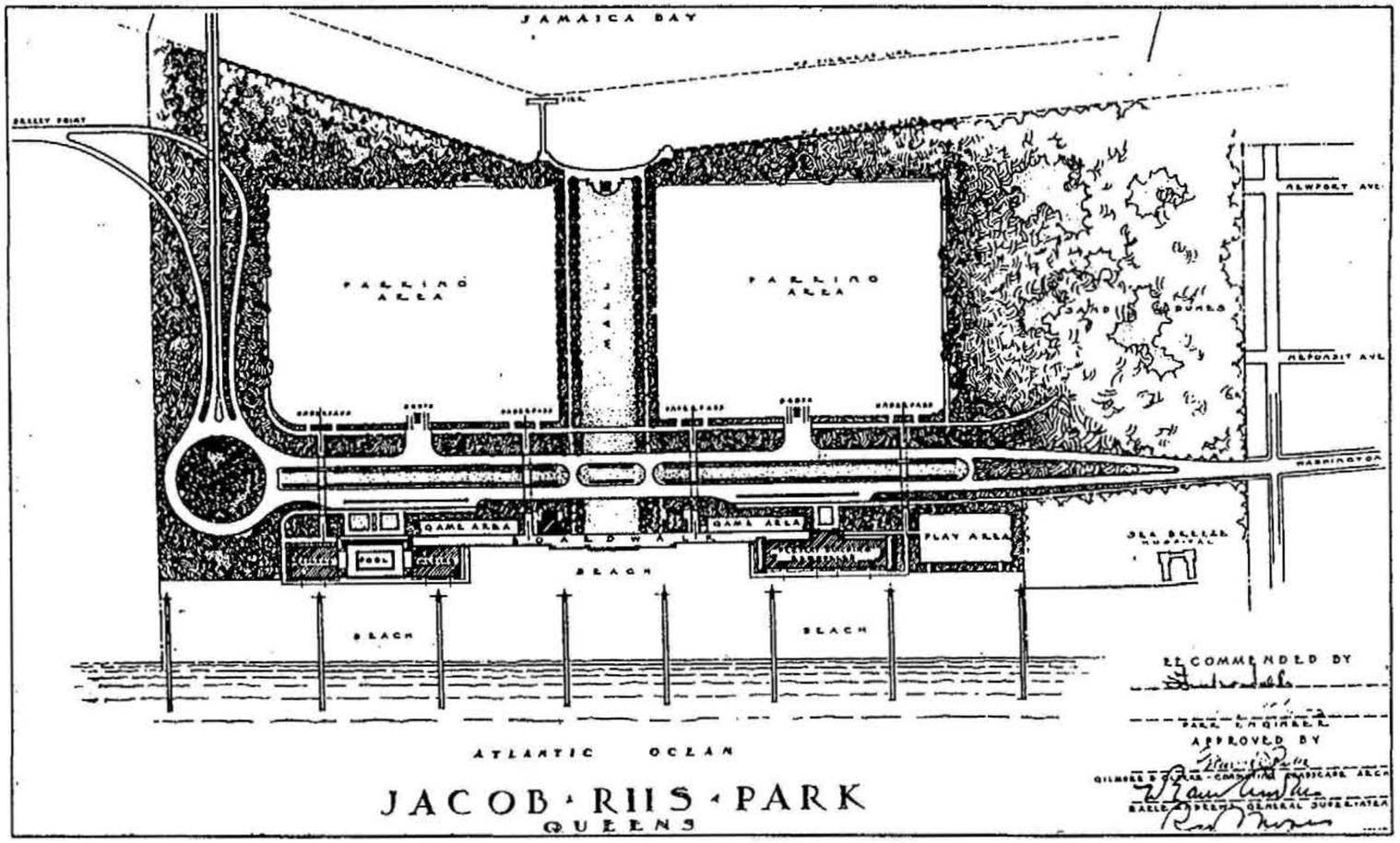


Figure 10: August, 1934 Department of Parks New York City Plan by Clarke and Andrews -- although this rigid and formal Beaux Arts plan was never executed, it is the first documented Robert Moses influenced design for Jacob Riis Park. Note the 1931-32 Bathhouse, which in the plan is labelled "Present Building Remodelled."

The 1934 assessment of Riis Park by Moses' team indicated that the existing park was in very poor condition and inefficiently run. Land was under utilized and it was felt that the park could be expanded northward to Jamaica Bay (Unrau 1981: 73). Furthermore, although under the supposed control of the New York City Parks Department, Riis Park was, in effect, run by private concessioner who was mostly concerned with the amount of money he made rather than capital improvements. A 1935 City of New York press release stated, "The only park facilities which were smoothly run were the cash registers (Unrau 1981: 77)".

The 1934 Jacob Riis Plan

Moses had substantial plans in mind for Riis Park. He wanted to create ". . . an inner-city metropolitan replica of Jones Beach State Park . . . (Unrau 1981: 81)." Jones Beach, in Wantagh, New York (east of Riis Park on the same barrier beach) was Moses' most successful park venture and one with which he is most readily identified.

When completed Jones Beach contained two bathhouses a mile apart, 10,000 lockers, two pools, a theater, restaurants and a mile and one-half long boardwalk. The bathhouses, in a vaguely Moorish/Inca design were built of large blocks of Ohio sandstone and Barbizon brick (Caro 1975: 223-4). The whole park was ringed with large, carefully landscaped roadways and parking lots. In the very cen-

ter of the complex was an elegant 231-foot high tower designed to look like a Venetian campanile but in reality, was a cleverly-disguised fresh water tower (Caro - 1975: P.223).

While the details and architectural styles may have been different, the overall planning concept was the same. Jones Beach was arranged in the same horizontal layers as Riis Park and was bounded on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and on the north by South Oyster Bay. The linear concept begins with the ocean and beach as the southern most layer. A mile and one-half long boardwalk is the dividing line between the natural (beach)and built environment (Bathhouses, playing fields, golf course, restaurants, parking lots). These structures are placed in a landscaped environment of natural dunes, lawn areas, planted areas of plants, scrubs and trees and connected by the boardwalk, concrete walkways and roadways. North of the structures is a major connecting roadway and north of this are additional parking lots, roadways and the Bay which has a picnic area and fishing facilities.

Moses' concept of translating Jones Beach into an "inner-city" facility, (i.e. Riis Park), was done by using the overall Jones Beach planning concept of linear layers and a landscape of the natural and built environment but doing it on a smaller scale, using more economical materials and employing WPA laborers.

In August 1934, Moses unveiled a plan for Riis Park; illustrated in Figure 10. It was never implemented, but the plan is interesting since it is the first documented Moses influenced design for Riis Park. The overall scheme was developed by Gilmore D. Clarke, Moses' consulting landscape architect and a partner in the engineering firm of Clarke and Rapuano, Julius Burgevin, landscape architect, W. Earle Andrews of Andrews, Clark and Buckley, consulting engineers, and Clinton Loyd, Chief of Architectural Design (Caro 1975: National Register Form, Jacob Riis Park, 1975; Unrau 1981: 81).

It is not clear if Moses and his designers saw the three previously described plans (Figures 5,6, and 7) and if they did how much they were taken into consideration. The 1934 Clarke and Andrews plan was dominated by approach roads and parking lots. The Beaux Arts symmetrical plan was composed of sharp-edged geometric shapes with a central north/south Mall which separated two parking lots each containing 7000 spaces. Patrons walked through underpasses below a boulevard to the remodeled Bathhouse or a new bathing complex to the west of the Bathhouse which contained a pool. The Bathhouse area was not unlike the existing Bathhouse. The building is surrounded by rectangular lawns on the north and rectangular plantings beds close to the building and running north/south.

As with many Moses' projects, parking lots and roadways dominated the plan. Virtually two thirds of the plan was parking lot, roadways and undeveloped space. The vertical north/south Mall concept has been kept. The Back Beach area in the 1934 Plan was smaller than that built and contained fewer facilities but did have the remodeled Bathhouse, a swimming pool, and other active recreation areas. The plan showed the beach to be enlarged.

The monies collected from Riis Park through parking and Bathhouse fees, and concession stands, should have, by rightful standards, gone to the New York City Parks Department, but instead was directed to the Marine Parkway Authority (Caro 1975: 634). So, while repairs to the Riis Park Bathhouse and the reconstruction to the park were to be completed by WPA funding and labor, projects relating to construction, such as the second bathhouse and pool were to be paid for by the Marine Parkway Authority, thus assuring Moses total control over the project (Unrau 1981: 105).

Ultimately, as noted above, the 1934 plan was never developed. The primary cause was opposition from Rockaway Park and Neponsit: white, middle-class neighborhoods, uncomfortable with the idea of inner-city minorities coming to their neighborhoods. Local citizens groups favored money-making and controlled-access tennis courts, playgrounds and a golf course (Unrau 1981: 92).

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JACOB RIIS PARK
GATEWAY NATIONAL
RECREATION AREA

Prepared for:
DENVER SERVICE CENTER
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
THE INTERIOR

By:
Lane, Frenchman & Associates, Architects

in Association with

Laubmann-Reed & Associates,
Landscape Architects

Carol R. Johnson & Associates,
Landscape Architects

TAMS Consultants, Inc.

McGinley Hart Associates

Jane Carolan, History and
Preservation Consultant

Table of Contents

List of Photographs and Illustrations
Administrative Data
Section 1. Introduction and Summary
Section 2. Site Overview
Section 3. The Bathhouse
Section 4. The Boardwalk/Promenade
Section 5. The Mall
Section 6. The Back Beach
Section 7. The Beach
Section 8. Recommendations
Appendices
A. Historic Photographs
B. Historic Plans
C. Existing Conditions Plans
D. Materials Analysis
Bibliography

List of Photographs and Illustrations

Section 1: Introduction and Summary

Fig. 1 Location Map: Gateway National Recreation Area
Fig. 2 Far Rockaway Area Map
Fig. 3 Sub-Areas at Jacob Riis Park

Section 2: Site Overview

Historical Evolution

Fig. 4 Carl F. Pilat Plan, 1913
Fig. 5 June, 1931, City Club Plan by H.A. Capern
Fig. 6 May, 1932, Regional Plan by E. Morrow
Fig. 7 April, 1933, N.Y.C. Park Board Plan by J.V. Burgevin & J. Gatringer
Fig. 8 November, 1934, Dept. of Parks, N.Y.C. Key Map of Jacob Riis Park
Fig. 9 1934 Site Plan of Bathhouse
Fig. 10 August, 1934, Department of Parks, N.Y.C. Plan by Clarke & Andrews
Fig. 11 1936 Plan by Loyd & Embury
Fig. 12 Features of the 1936-7 Plan
Fig. 13 Major Changes at Jacob Riis Park 1932 - 1991

Assessment of Landscape Features

Fig. 14 1939 Aerial Photograph
Fig. 15 View: Bathhouse Complete 1939
Fig. 16 View: Mall Buildings 1939
Fig. 17 Spatial Relationships and Views
Fig. 18 Existing Benches (4 types)
Fig. 19 Existing Trash Receptacle
Fig. 20 Ships Railing and Contemporary Picnic Table
Fig. 21 Ships Railing: Cross-secitons
Fig. 22 Chain Link Fence - Existing
Fig. 23 Playground Area
Fig. 24 Existing Lighting Types (5)
Fig. 25 Existing Signage (2)
Fig. 26 Evolution of Site Utilities

Section 3: The Bathhouse Area

Fig. 27 Entry Walkways
Fig. 28 Open Lawn and Entry Plaza to the Bathhouse
Fig. 29 East Facade and Tower of Bathhouse
Fig. 30 Bathhouse Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 31 Foundation Plantings of the Bathhouse
Fig. 32 Bench and Trash Receptacle
Fig. 33 New York Type "B" Cast Metal Light in Bathhouse Area

Section 4: The Boardwalk/Promenade Area

Fig. 34 Site Evolution: Boardwalk / Promenade
Fig. 35 Access Point Onto the Boardwalk/ Promenade
Fig. 36 View of Mall Buildings from Boardwalk
Fig. 37 Sea Views From the Boardwalk
Fig. 38 Boardwalk/Promenade - Views and Spatial Relationships
Fig. 39 Eleagnus Plantings Stabilizing a Low Dune Structure
Fig. 40 The Wise Clock
Fig. 41 Flagpole at Mall Buildings

Section 5: The Mall Area

Fig. 42 The Mall looking south toward the Ocean
Fig. 43 Pedestrian Overpass and Bus Drop Off
Fig. 44 Typical Mall Pavement Condition
Fig. 45 The Oval Seating Area of the Mall
Fig. 46 The Mall Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 47 Black Pines Along the East Side Mall
Fig. 48 Mall "Type B" Lighting

Section 6: The Back Beach Area

Fig. 49 Back Beach Uses and Areas
Fig. 50 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 51 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 52 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 53 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 54 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 55 Back Beach Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration
Fig. 56 Deteriorating Game Court Surfaces
Fig. 57 Ballfield Electrical Hut
Fig. 58 Back Beach Walkways
Fig. 59 Back Beach: Remaining Borders
Fig. 60 Back Beach Plantings
Fig. 61 1940 Ballfield With No Planting
Fig. 62 Deteriorating Benches
Fig. 63 Chain Link Fences
Fig. 64 Most Signs Serve a Prohibitory Function

Section 7: The Beach Area

Fig. 65 Existing Site Features: Beach Area
Fig. 66 Windblown Sand
Fig. 67 Old Concrete Seawall
Fig. 68 Typical Deteriorated Jetty
Fig. 69 The Crescent Beach Area

Appendix A: Historic Photographs

All photos in this section have been provided through the New York City Parks Photo Archives. Photo credits unknown unless otherwise indicated.

Fig. A-1 Administration Entry (6/18/34; Alajos Schuszler)
Fig. A-2 East Wing, Bathhouse complex with Playground beyond (8/4/34; Alajos Schuszler)
Fig. A-3 View west from south, 2nd floor terrace of Bathhouse (9/24/34 Alajos Schuszler)
Fig. A-4 Bathhouse Entry Pavilion (7/28/35)
Fig. A-5 West Wing edge of Bathhouse (7/28/35; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-6 Promenade to southwest of Bathhouse (8/10/36; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-7 Beach and Seawall to south of Bathhouse (8/10/36; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-8 Architect's bird's eye rendering of Mall Buildings (11/13/36; MacGilchrist)
Fig. A-9 Gamecourts, west of Mall, along Boardwalk (5/26/37; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-10 Entry to Mall Buildings from the Mall (7/18/37; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-11 View of East Mall Building from the Mall (7/18/37; Alajos Schuszler)
Fig. A-12 View of Mall Plaza and Flagpole (7/18/37; Alajos Schuszler)
Fig. A-13 Metal Fountain at East Mall Building (7/18/37; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-14 East Boardwalk, near Mall Building, with relationship to Back Beach and Beach (8/16/37)
Fig. A-15 Promenade and early lights, in front of Beach Pavilion (8/15/37)
Fig. A-16 Aerial view of Bathhouse and surrounding area (8/16/37)
Fig. A-17 Aerial view of Boardwalk and Crescent, including mall Buildings (9/9/37)
Fig. A-18 Aerial view of Childrens' Play Area (9/9/37)
Fig. A-19 Entrance and Bus Stop (ca. 1937)
Fig. A-20 Concessions at west end of Beach Pavilion (7/23/38; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-21 Aerial View of game areas to west of Bathhouse (9/9/38)
Fig. A-22 View from Beach Pavilion terrace to beach and Promenade (9/28/38; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-23 Aerial view of Park (ca. 1939)
Fig. A-24 Aerial view of Park (ca. 1939)
Fig. A-25 Bandstand and Flagpole at Mall Buildings (6/2/39; Max Ulrich)
Fig. A-26 Concession area along Promenade at Beach Pavilion (9/15/40)
Fig. A-27 Chairs and tables at East Mall Building (9/15/40)
Fig. A-28 View of beach and Bathhouse (ca. 1941)
Fig. A-29 Plantings and site sign at northeast side of Bathhouse complex (ca. 1941)
Fig. A-30 Promenade and Beach, with ships' railing (ca. 1941)
Fig. A-31 Aerial photo of Jacob Riis park (8/4/43?)
Fig. A-32 Bus shelter (10/4/43)
Fig. A-33 Concessions at Beach Pavilion (3/22/47)
Fig. A-34 East end of Boardwalk and Wise Clock (7/6/63)

Appendix B: Historic Plans*

Fig. B-1 1937 Overall Site Plan; Jacob Riis Park
Fig. B-2 1937 Sub-area Plan; Westernmost Back Beach parcel
Fig. B-3 1937 Sub-area Plan; Game Courts west of the Mall Buildings
Fig. B-4 1937 Planting Plan; the Mall area
Fig. B-5 1937 Sub-area Plan; Game area east of the Mall Buildings
Fig. B-6 1937 Sub-area Plan; lawn areas at east end of Boardwalk
Fig. B-7 1937 Sub-area Plan; Game court area west of the Bathhouse
Fig. B-8 1937 Sub-area Plan; Childrens' play area east of the Bathhouse

Appendix C: Existing Conditions Plans

Fig. C-1 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Bathhouse Area
Fig. C-2 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 1 of 5)
Fig. C-3 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 2 of 5)
Fig. C-4 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 3 of 5)
Fig. C-5 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 4 of 5)
Fig. C-6 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 5 of 5)
Fig. C-7 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Mall Area
Fig. C-8 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 1 of 3)
Fig. C-9 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 2 of 3)
Fig. C-10 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 3 of 3)

* Historic Plans are accessible through the Technical Information Center of the NPS Denver Service Center

Administrative Data

A. Project Identification

Jacob Riis Park is located within the Breezy Point Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area. This is in the Rockaway section of Queens, New York, near the Western end of Rockaway Peninsula (see Figure 1).

B. Order of Significance

Historical significance of Jacob Riis Park as a designed historic landscape is established by themes identified in History and Prehistory in the National Park System and the National Historic Landmarks Program. The following themes are represented by Jacob Riis Park: Theme XVI "Architecture" subtheme "Moderne-Art Deco (1920-1945)", theme XVII "Landscape Architecture" subthemes would be WPA and Moderne-Art Deco 1920-1945, theme VII "Political and Military Affairs, 1865-1939" subtheme H "the Great Depression and the New Deal 1922-1941", theme XXXI "Social and Humanitarian Movements" subtheme J "Poverty Relief and Urban Social Reform". The site is also significant for its association with N.Y. city Parks Commissioner Robert Moses.

C. Proposed Treatment

Jacob Riis Park is a recreational public works project that was primarily constructed in two phases between 1932 and 1937. The period of 1936-1937 is the primary development period for Jacob Riis Park. Over the years, the park has remained essentially intact from its primary development period of 1936-1937. Certain elements of the park show moderate to significant signs of deterioration.

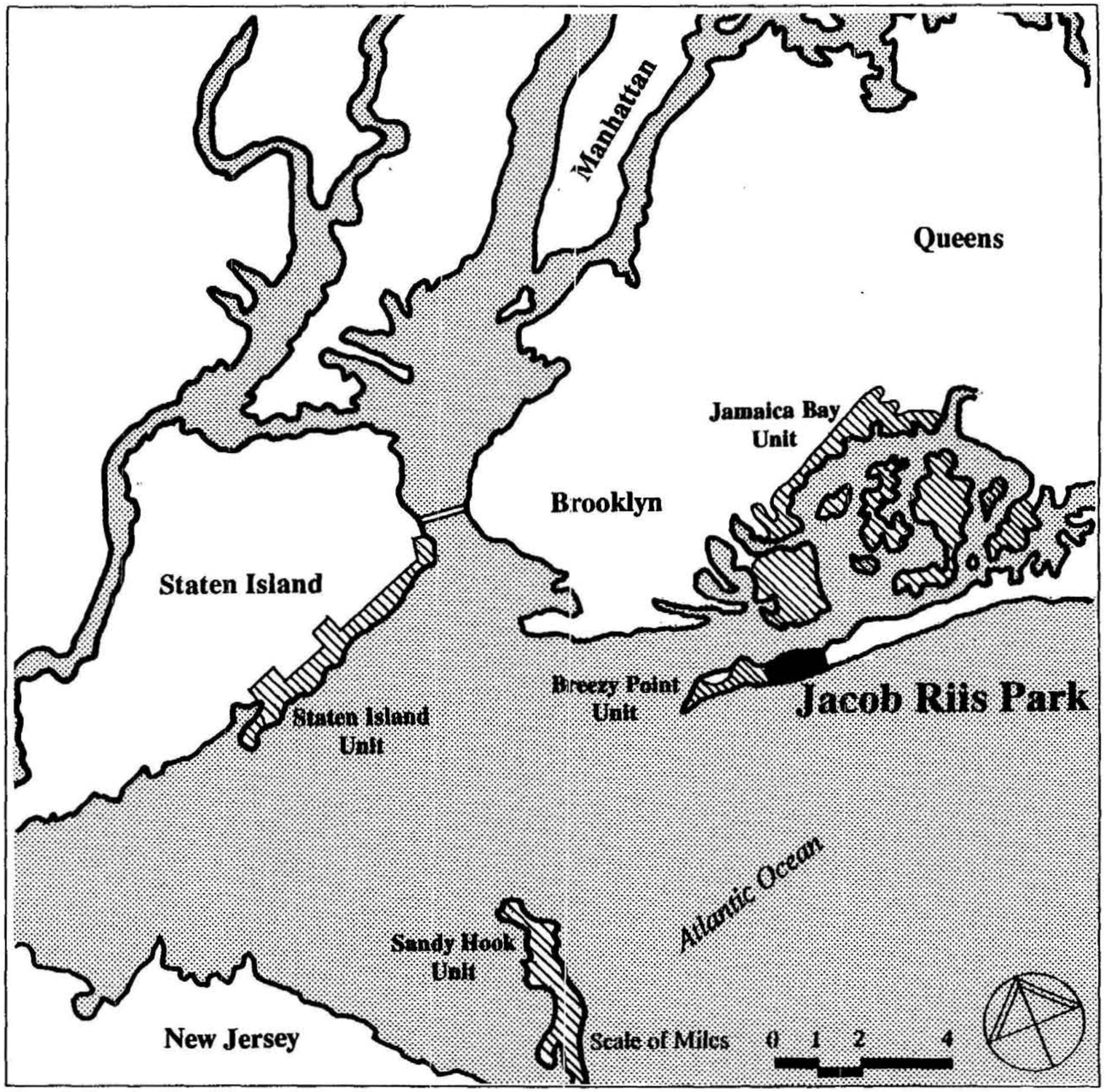


Figure 1: Location Map of Gateway National Recreation Area and Jacob Riis Park

Major park buildings, the Bathhouse and Mall buildings, have suffered substantial deterioration, as documented in separate Historic Structures Reports prepared concurrent with this Cultural Landscape Report. The overall circulation, spatial relationships, alignment, symmetry, views and vistas remain unchanged from its original layout. Some alteration has occurred in original materials and original construction in some areas of the park has deteriorated. Planting throughout the park still reflects much of the original design although specific areas have undergone some changes. Small scale elements such as the ships rail, lighting, benches, signing, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, and many of the original benches are examples of small scale elements which are essentially intact, although there is considerable deterioration in original materials.

General Management Plan and Development Concept Plan proposals approved in 1979 and 1986, respectively, did not recognize the park as being eligible for inclusion on the National Register as a designed historic landscape.

National Register nomination forms for the park were written in 1977 and amended in 1985. The 1977 National Register nomination for the park, which is written as a district, includes only the three primary buildings in the park and does not include the significant landscape resources of the site. The 1985 amendment added the parking lot and also lists several of the smaller structures, many of which are relatively recent and substantially post-date the overall park plan and the park's period of significance. It is recommended that the existing National Register nomination be further amended to address the property as a designed historic landscape and to resolve inconsistencies in prior submissions. As a result of not recognizing the park as a designed historic landscape, eligible for the National Register, some of the proposals in the GMP and DCP require re-evaluation. These documents do, however, identify the need to accommodate the contemporary recreational uses of Jacob Riis Park.

The overall treatment proposed for the park is classified as rehabilitation. Although the overall treatment may be classified as rehabilitation, specific landscape elements may require stabilization, preservation, or restoration. Any proposed treatment for the landscape will follow generally the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Some discretion may be needed for the park in following the Secretary's Standards since specific standards for cultural landscapes are currently being drafted and are not yet available.

Chapter 1:

Introduction and Summary

1.1 Purpose
1.2 Report Structure and Methodology
1.3 Jacob Riis Park Today
1.4 Planning Context
1.5 Summary

1.1 Purpose

This Cultural Landscape Report has been prepared to determine the historic significance and integrity of the landscape of Jacob Riis Park. It documents the design evolution of the Park, highlights the significant historic features which exist today, and recommends ways to rehabilitate the Park to serve contemporary needs while preserving key historic design elements. As the National Park Service (NPS) proceeds with rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park, the Cultural Landscape Report will provide the guide for preservation activities.

Historic documentation for this Report was compiled from a number of sources. One key source was the Historical Data Section of an Historic Structures Report by Harlan Unrau, NPS Historian, which was completed in 1982. In addition, many original drawings, plans, historic photographs and written accounts provided by the NPS are presented in the Report to describe the evolution of Jacob Riis Park from inception to the current period.

1.2 Report Structure and Methodology

The Cultural Landscape Report is presented in eight chapters, which are organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction and Summary** -- presents a synopsis of the report, including its methodology, structure and major findings.
- **Chapter 2: Site Overview** -- describes the historic evolution of Jacob Riis Park from its inception in 1932 to the present and assesses its historic context and significance as well as its overall historic integrity. This information provides an understanding of the overall design history of the Park, identifies what still exists from each development period, and defines the relative importance of the surviving landscape features at Jacob Riis Park to the site's historic character. In this section, each of the Landscape Elements which comprise the Park is assessed, including topography, land use, circulation, buildings and structures, spatial relationships and views, planting, site furniture and small scale elements, lighting, and signage.
- **Chapters 3 through 7: Assessment of the Sub-Areas of the Park** -- As Jacob Riis Park is quite large and diverse, a separate chapter provides detailed information on the character-defining elements of each sub-area, including documentation of physical history, existing condition, and an assessment historic integrity and significance. The five sub-areas, illustrated in Figure 3, include The Bathhouse Area, The Boardwalk/Promenade Area, The Mall Area, The Back Beach Area, and The Beach Area.
- **Chapter 8: Recommendations** -- the closing chapter presents overall recommendations for each landscape element and sub-area. These recommendations, consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, are intended to guide the rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park, insuring that historically important aspects of the landscape are preserved.

Several Appendices are provided which include important reference and analytical materials:

- **Appendix A** -- includes historic photographs, found at the Olmsted Center of the the New York Parks Department, which document conditions at the Park from its opening in 1934 through the 1960's. All photographs are numbered (A-1, A-2, etc.) and are referred to in the body of the text.
- **Appendix B** -- includes selected historic site plans and details which provide documentation of the design intent and character of the original 1933 and 1936-37 Plans. Each Plan is numbered (B-1, B-2, etc.) and is referred to in the text.
- **Appendix C** -- includes plans which indicate the location, type, and condition of existing site features at Jacob Riis Park. A master key to all plans is provided at the beginning of Appendix C which is then used for each individual plan which follows. The plans are numbered (C-1, C-2, etc.) similarly to the other Appendices.

It should be noted that this report did not consider the entirety of Jacob Riis Park, as certain areas, including the parking lot, golf course, and roadway system, were outside of the scope of work anticipated by the planned capital improvements of NPS. However, because of their contribution to the overall design of the park and their historic significance, these elements are discussed in the Historical Overview.

1.3 Jacob Riis Park Today

Jacob Riis Park is located at the western end of the Rockaway Peninsula of Queens, New York. Rockaway is a barrier peninsula separated from the borough proper by Jamaica Bay. The 220 acre Park spans the peninsula from Jamaica Bay on the north to the Atlantic Ocean on the south. To the east the Park is bounded by a residential neighborhood of single family homes, and to the west by Fort Tilden, also part of Gateway National Recreation Area. Because of this barrier island setting, the Park appears more like a summer resort community than part of urban New York City (see Figure 2).

Within the Park, many large and dramatic features remain largely unchanged since its development in the 1930's. This report deals with five sub-areas within the Park (see Figure 3). The most visually dominant feature of the Park is the Bathhouse. This large structure, most of which is currently not in use, once contained changing rooms, showers, restaurants and concession stands. The bathhouse fronts the Boardwalk/Promenade, a grandly formal, mile-long oceanfront walkway which separates the Beach from the rest of the Park. The Mall focuses on a crescent shaped extension of the Boardwalk which is bracketed by symmetrical buildings, once containing toilets and restaurants, and a long symmetrical great lawn which forms a secondary, perpendicular axis to the Boardwalk. The landside areas of the Park, the Back Beach, features walkways, playgrounds and playing fields for a number of different types of games. Throughout the park there are large areas of lawns planted with trees, shrubs and seasonal flowering plants.

The park is used primarily by New York City residents who are attracted by the bathing beach and the wide variety of other recreational facilities ranging from softball fields to quiet lawns and walkways. Visitors are drawn from throughout the City

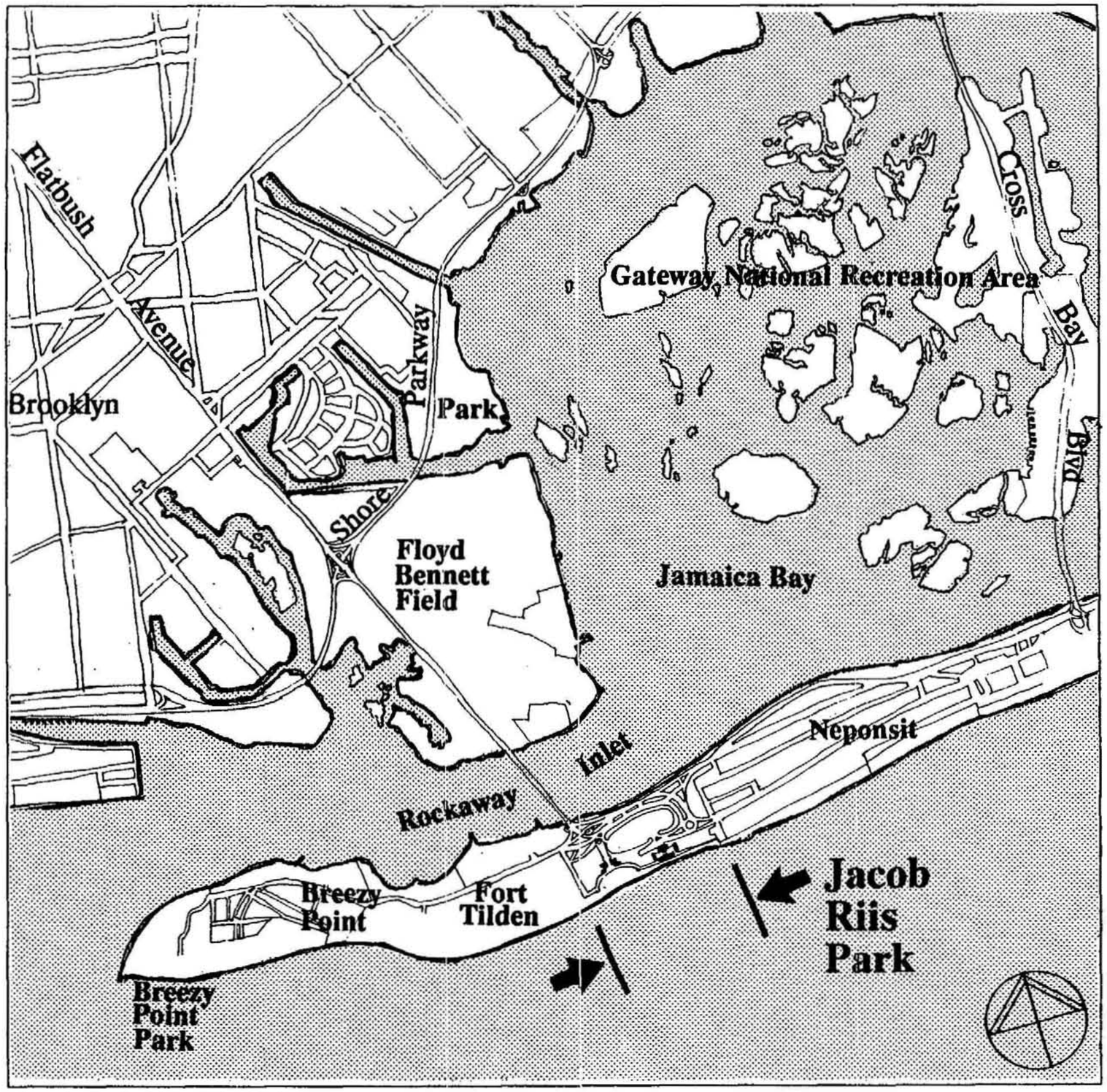


Figure 2: Jacob Riis Park Vicinity Map

and they generally travel to the Park by bus or car. The Park user groups are as diverse as the population of New York City: white, black and Hispanic; singles and families; young, middle aged and elderly. The bays on the beach, defined by jetties, have over the years been transformed into clearly defined territories for various groups. The large elderly population tends to use the benches along the Boardwalk and in the Back Beach area. The park is primarily used in the summertime and most heavily on weekends, although the golf course and ball fields are used from spring through fall.

The use of the park has changed since it was completed in 1937. As originally intended, Riis Park provided areas of passive and active recreation. For the most part this is still true today, although uses in certain areas have changed, particularly in the landscaped areas. Originally the walkways were for quiet strolling and the lawns and other green areas were for formal vistas to be observed for enjoyment. Today, open lawns are used as seating areas away from the beach and for picnicking. The handsome Black Pine settings, intended as formal ornamental landscape elements, are now heavily used as shady picnic areas by visitors with portable grills and coolers. And because the Bathhouse is closed, boardwalk drinking fountains are frequently used by visitors for washing sand off their feet.

1.4 Planning Context

Jacob Riis Park is an historic district and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. In 1974 the City of New York formally turned over Jacob Riis Park and other properties, totaling nearly 26,000 acres, to the federal government for administration by the National Park Service as a part of the Gateway National Recreation Area.

Since 1974, many documents addressing the needs of Jacob Riis Park have been produced by NPS or its consultants. These have included a General Management Plan, Development Concept Plans, and various Historic Structure Reports analyzing individual buildings within the Park. Despite these studies, a comprehensive Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) documenting the historic landscape and a completed Historic Structures Report (HSR) had not been produced until this time. This CLR and the companion HSR document synthesize existing reports and research, supplemented by additional data, such as the recent discovery of a set of 1932 drawings and numerous historic photographs from the 1930s and 1940s. Because of the volumes of existing material, no additional primary historical research was conducted for this document. While the CLR and HSR have been written as companion documents, the CLR addresses the overall historic resource as a designed historic landscape, and the HSR focuses exclusively on the buildings and structures.

1.5 Summary

Jacob Riis Park is a nearly intact example of 1930's municipal park design, making it a significant designed historic landscape. The 1937 expansion and renovation, encompassing nearly the entirety of the Park, is associated with the tenure of New York Parks Commissioner Robert Moses and is also significant for its association with the WPA and the expansion of urban recreation opportunities for a working class, urban population. Changes have occurred to the Park over time: modifications have occurred to both buildings and open spaces to accommodate changing recreation needs and significant deterioration has been experienced in the Bathhouse and Mall Buildings.

Despite these changes, the overall structure and form of the entirety of the Park have been retained to a remarkable degree. The Park still exhibits a formality, even monumentality, of design, a sophisticated layout that interweaves active and passive recreation areas, and a large-scale unity of layout relating a natural resource (the Beach), man-made linkages (the Parkway and access system), and diverse recreation areas. These large scale characteristics, as well as many smaller scale elements of the Park, retain strong integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling and association.

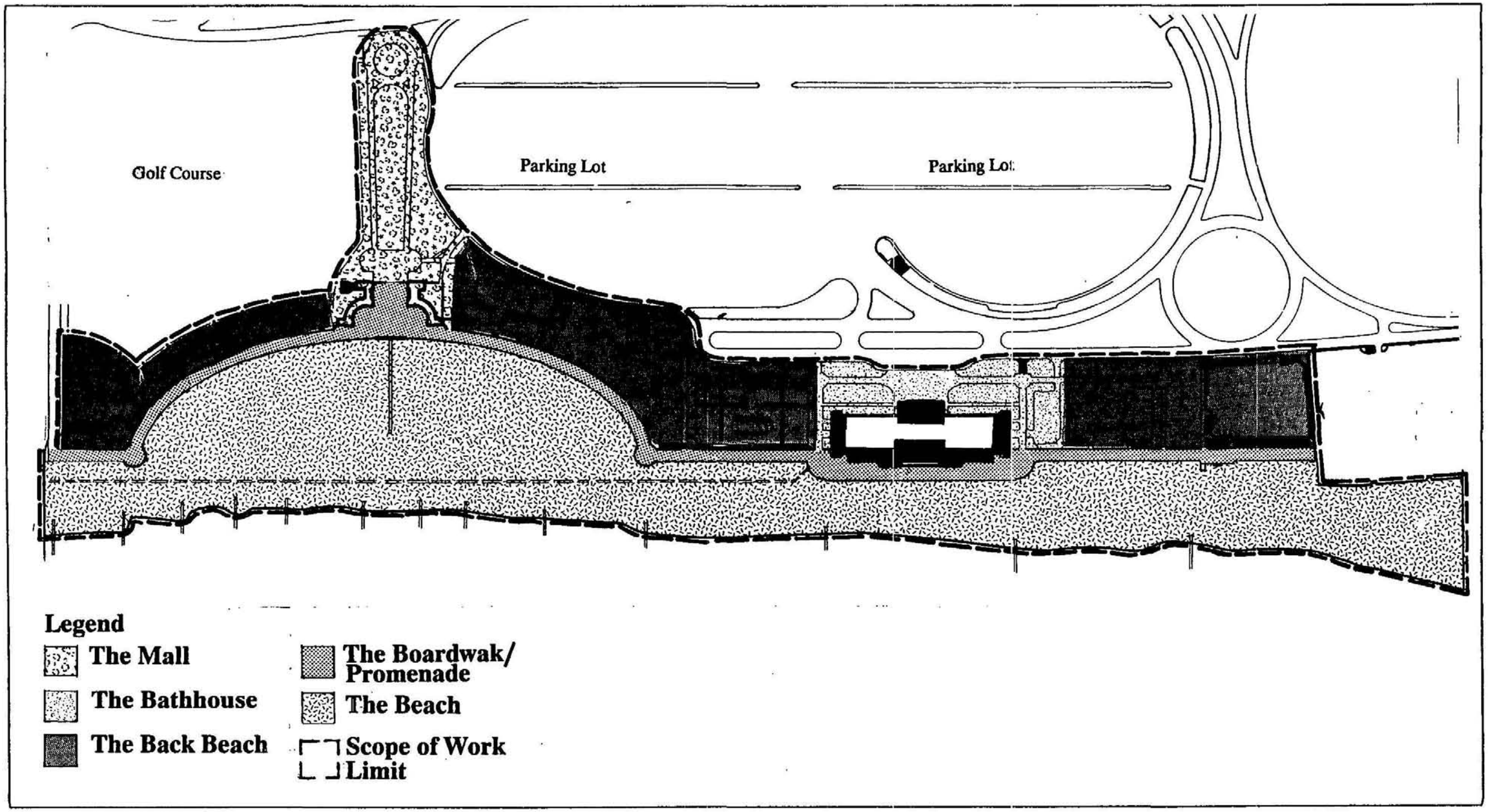
Jacob Riis Park is also a well used recreation facility that serves a major metropolitan area. The recommendations of the Cultural Landscape Report place a clear priority on preserving character-defining elements of each sub-area within Jacob Riis Park, enabling the National Park Service to accommodate the needs of present and future visitors in the rehabilitation program while preserving historic resources. Highlights of the recommendations, presented in detail in Chapter 8, include the following:

- Staged repair and restoration of the Boardwalk, including repairs to existing damaged concrete, and concluding with ultimate replacement of the wooden Boardwalk in a high density, vandal-resistant wood. This work would also include repair or replacement of the Ship's Rail along the Boardwalk and Promenade.
- Retention of historic and mature plant materials, replacement where appropriate and where adequate documentation exists, and reintroduction of planting to retain and reinforce the historic character of each sub-area of the park.
- Repair and replacement in kind of historic site lighting elements and site furniture, including addition of new supplementary site furniture and signage in areas required by contemporary uses where such installations will not

adversely impact historic resources.

- o Rehabilitation of paved court game areas where possible, compatible with typical historic layouts, to provide usable outdoor recreation while meeting contemporary needs, and
- o Rehabilitation of the Bathhouse and Mall Buildings, preserving key character-defining elements.

Figure 3: Sub-Areas at Jacob Rils Park



Chapter 2:

Overview

2.1 Historic Evolution

Predevelopment: Pre-1932

The Initial Park: 1931-1934

The Robert Moses Renovation & Expansion: 1934-1937

New York City Parks Department Management: 1937-1974

NPS Stewardship: 1974-1990

2.2 Significance

2.3 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

2.4 Integrity

2.5 Park Sub-Areas

2.1 Historical Evolution

The site of Jacob Riis Park has evolved through five distinct operational periods:

- **Pre-development (prior to 1932)** -- prior to the opening of the Park, the area was used for a variety of recreational purposes.
- **The Initial Park (1932-34)** -- the second period started with the dedication of the Bathhouse in August of 1932, but lasted only until a sweeping reform of New York City government was instituted in 1934.
- **The Robert Moses Renovation and Expansion (1934-37)** -- the third period brought Robert Moses onto the scene to take charge of extensive redevelopment and park expansion which was completed by 1937.
- **New York City Parks Department Era (1937 - 1974)** -- the fourth period spanned the next 37 years, during which Jacob Riis Park was operated by the Parks Department of New York City which instituted few physical changes because of its decreasing resource base.
- **NPS Stewardship (1974 - present)** -- the fifth period started in 1974, when all aspects of the Park's operation were transferred to the National Park Service with the establishment of the Gateway National Recreation Area. This period continues today as plans are being developed for rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park.

A brief history of each of these five periods follows, showing the evolution of the Park. Much of the following historical data can be found, with significantly more detail, in the Historical Data Section of an Historic Structure Report prepared by National Park Service historian Harlan Unrau, in 1982.

Pre-Development Period: Prior to 1932

> *"The park stretches westward between bay and ocean beyond the summer towns of Belle Harbor and Neponsit, a country of tumbled sand-hills overgrown with beach grass and fragrant bayweed that may easily be transformed into attractive park land." (Jacob Riis, "The Story of Sea Breeze," May 1914, from Unrau 1981: 28)*

Jacob Riis Park is located on the Rockaway peninsula of Queens, New York. This narrow, sandy peninsula is a continuation of the great barrier beach running along the southern shore of Long Island. The development potential of this windswept, barren beach as a recreational area was discovered as early as 1869, spurred by the construction of the South Side Railroad, a small rail line which ran from Valley Stream to Far Rockaway. In 1880 the construction of the New York, Woodhaven, and Rockaway Railroad completed a direct rail line from New York City across Jamaica Bay and dramatically increased development potential. As the rail line was being built by private investors developed a plan for a large outdoor recreation area in the vicinity of what would later become Jacob Riis Park. In 1881 a hotel and private beach were opened to the public and by 1893 a boardwalk was completed from Holland to Seaside as Rockaway became increasingly popular as New York's newest beach resort (Unrau 1981: 6-9).

Although early development was by private investors, in 1904 the City of New York began to actively seek land for a public beach in the area. In 1905 city officials entered into an informal agreement with the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), an organization which managed three hospitals for the poor and was an advocate for thousands of impoverished immigrants, most of whom lived on New York's lower East Side. The AICP and the city would build a recreation facility on the present day site of Jacob Riis Park as well as construct a tuberculosis hospital.

> *".... the city would attempt to buy the site for the hospital and Park and the AICP would build and equip the hospital with funds to be received from a subscription drive (Unrau 1981: 15)."*

Jacob Riis (1849-1914) for whom the Park was named in 1915, was a journalist, author, and city reformer "who had long championed the cause of the New York City tenement dwellers and had taken a special interest in alleviating the plight of slumchildren (Unrau 1981: 32)." Born in Denmark, Riis immigrated to New York in 1870 and became a police reporter. His first hand encounters with New York's disenfranchised population led to his commitment to reform and in particular focused his energies on urging the construction of hundreds of playgrounds and small parks throughout the city. He also worked to pass tenement reform laws and fostered the establishment of children's hospitals. (Merit Students Encyclopedia, 1975 Volume 16, P. 52).

It was not until 1912 that the city finally purchased a 262-acre tract of land in Rockaway. In 1913 the tract was transferred to the New York City Department of Parks (Unrau 1981: 26). The same year the Parks Department sponsored a design competition opened to landscape architects and engineers. Six designs were selected and the first prize won by Richard Schermerhorn, Jr. of Brooklyn, New York. Carl F. Pilat, a landscape architect in the New York City Parks Department, prepared "a plan which included the most desirable features from the six (Unrau 1981: 29)." The 1913 Pilat plan is illustrated in Figure 4.

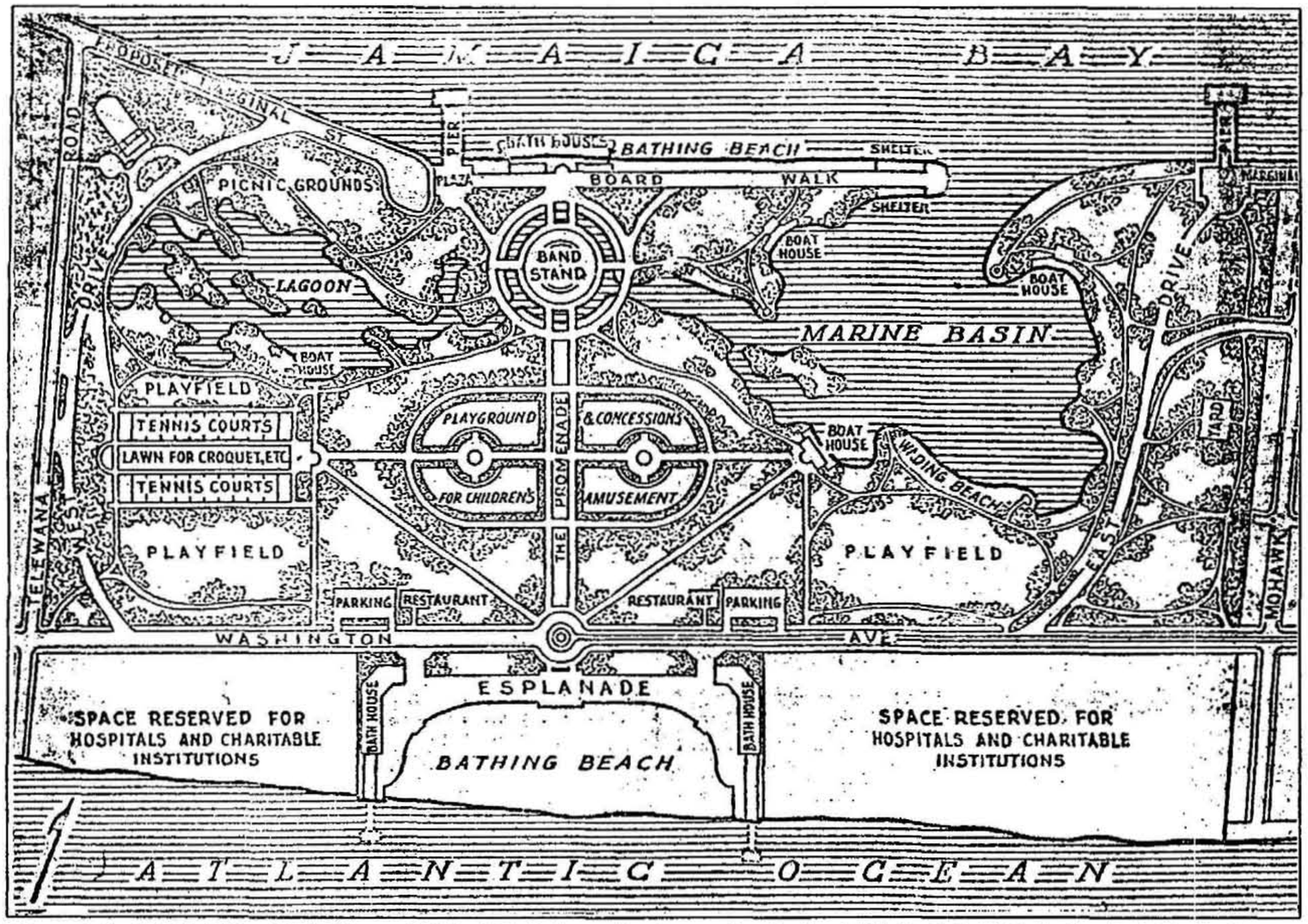


Figure 4: Carl F. Pilat Plan, 1913 (Unrau, 1981) -- This is the earliest known plan for Jacob Riis Park. In 1913 the New York City Parks Department sponsored a design competition. Design elements from the winning six designs were compiled into one plan by Pilat. The plan was never built.

"The plan provided for bathing beaches on both the ocean and bay fronts and a maritime basin jutting in from the bay for swimming and boating. The plan also called for picnic grounds, a lagoon for boating, three playfields, tennis courts, a croquet lawn, playground and concessions for children, a bandstand, four boat houses, and two restaurants and adjacent parking areas on the north side of Washington Avenue. A pier, boardwalk, two bathhouses, and two shelters were to be built on Jamaica Bay, and on the ocean front, south of Washington Avenue, provision was made for two bathhouses and an esplanade. The oceanfront development was to be flanked on either side by space reserved for the open-air children's and convalescent hospitals" (Unrau 1981: 29).

Unfortunately the six winning plans have not, at this time, been discovered but the composite design by Pilat is an early 20th-century Beaux Art design of formal symmetrical elements placed in an asymmetrical naturalistic landscape. It is unclear whether this plan was looked at when the existing design was implemented but there are similarities in features such as playgrounds, tennis courts, boardwalk and bandstand. The overall layout is similar to the existing plan its with symmetrical elements set in an asymmetrical scheme. Pilat's plan revolves around a geometric cross-axial walkway centered on the site. This is flanked by the beach and an esplanade on the south and a circular bandstand on the north. The beach area is rather small in comparison to the entire scheme and the buildings are subservient to the landscape and circulation. It is unclear whether this plan was looked at when the existing design was implemented, but there are similarities in features such as playgrounds, tennis courts, boardwalks, and bandstand.

Although the Pilat plan was approved by the Parks Department it was never implemented and there was minimal construction activity between 1913 and 1930. Instead, due to America's entry into World War I a naval air station was erected on the site of the park, although the beach area itself was still used for recreation. In 1922 the Neponsit Beach Hospital for Children, part of the original AICP concept of hospital and recreation area, was completed.

In early 1926 a small concession stand, near the western end of the park was built and in the late 1920's roads were widened and parking lot improvements completed. Although the naval air station was mostly inactive after World War I, it was not until the completion of Floyd Bennett Field in 1931 that the Navy finally vacated the property and demolished 42 buildings. Remaining were 9 structures, roads, sidewalks, concrete building foundations, seawalls, a wharf, and subsurface utilities. Most of these were demolished or buried during the 1936-7 construction phase (Unrau 1981: 57).

The Initial Park: 1932 - 1934

In the 1930's the art and architecture worlds were in a state of flux. The Modern, or Bauhaus movement in Europe, a response to the increasing industrialization of the world, had a profound impact on American design (Jellicoe, Goode and Lancaster 1986: 576). However, some designers and landscape architects were slow to respond to this trend. They felt they were closer to nature and therefore less impacted by industrialism, but the lure of new forms and the freedom of breaking out of old concepts proved to be very powerful.

> *"Before the modern movement there were two basic [landscape] plan patterns. One was formal, geometric, axial, and symmetrical. The other was informal, irregular, ungeometric, and asymmetrical"*

(Jellico, Goode and Lancaster 1986: 576)

The changes sweeping through European and American design in the 1930's enabled designers to combine disparate forms, to be informal and formal in the same site plan and to come to design solutions with "limitless possibilities" (Ibid: 576). This new aesthetic was driven by a refreshing open mindedness to design solutions, a greater awareness of twentieth-century culture and the impact of external forces on society (Ibid: 576).

Early 1930's Park Schemes

During the early 1930's, three independent schemes (Figures 5, 6, & 7) were developed for Riis Park. Although none of these were built they had an influence on the final park development. The first was a 1931 design by Harold A. Caparn, a member of the private City Club's parks committee (Unrau, 1981, P.80). The second plan was developed in 1932 by the New York Regional Plan Association (RPA) and was designed by Earl Morrow, RPA's assistant engineer (Unrau, 1981, P.82). The third scheme was a 1933 plan by the New York City Park Board, designed by Julius V. Burgevin, landscape architect and Joseph Gatringer, assistant architect (Unrau, 1981, P.83). All contained similar design elements including a bathhouse, parking lots, golf courses and recreational facilities, and all schemes proposed developing the Jamaica Bay side of the property. The 1932 and 1933 plans were developed after the current Bathhouse was constructed. All designs incorporated the 1931 Bathhouse.

- **The 1931 City Club Plan** did little more than replicate the existing conditions at the park and add a golf course and many tennis courts. While not completed at this time, the City Club Plan illustrates the location of the current Bathhouse. The plan keeps Pilat's central promenade and adds a boardwalk along Jamaica Bay. Parking is severely limited. The plan is static with little overall landscape planning. It does begin, however slightly, develop a linear approach with roadways separating the beach area from the golf course (see Figure 5).
- **The 1932 Regional Plan Association (RPA) Scheme** illustrates the newly completed Bathhouse, but adds a boardwalk similar in shape to Carl Pilat's esplanade. The RPA plan is an integrated plan of landscape and structures which is a precursor to the linear approach of the final (1936) design. The bathing area of ocean, beach and Bathhouse are separated by a landscaped roadway. The "Back Beach" area of varied activities, including baseball diamonds, tennis courts, playgrounds and picnics areas, are all placed in a symmetrical arrangement of geometric shapes. The Back Beach area is extended almost to Jamaica Bay and is divided into a formal symmetrical zone in the west and a more natural zone in the east. A curving roadway, softened with plantings provides the transition between the Back Beach and the developed shore of Jamaica Bay which contained a "Canoe Beach," and a variety of boat moorings. Parking is pushed back away from the beach. There is an emphasis on public transportation and in the very center of the site is a large bus station, encouraging and enabling patrons to use public transportation and upon arrival be in the very heart of the park (see Figure 6).
- **The 1933 New York City Parks Department Plan** was a throwback to the 1931 City Club plan. The plan has many elements, although there is not a strong organizing geometry. The plan is mundane and consists of a series of geometric shapes randomly set down. However,

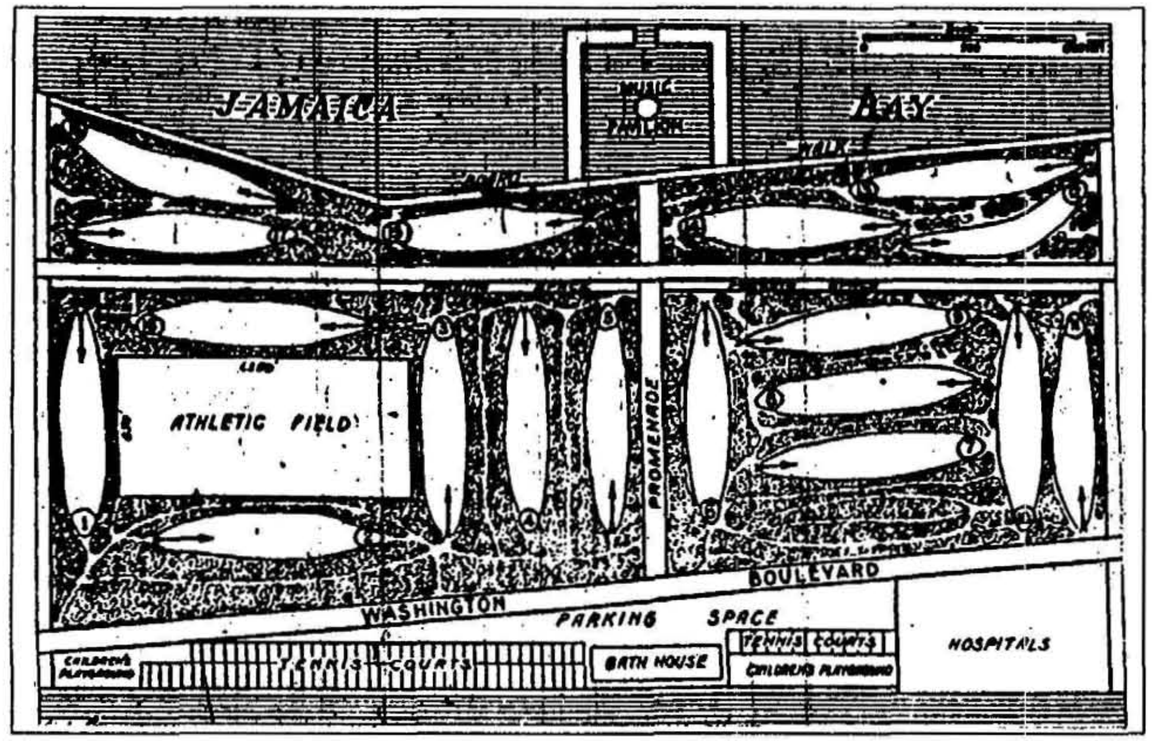


Figure 5: June, 1931 City Club Plan by H.A. Capern -- This plan, which includes the 1931 Bathhouse, does little more than replicate the then under construction 1931 plan in addition to adding a large golf course and a number of tennis courts. The plan was never constructed.

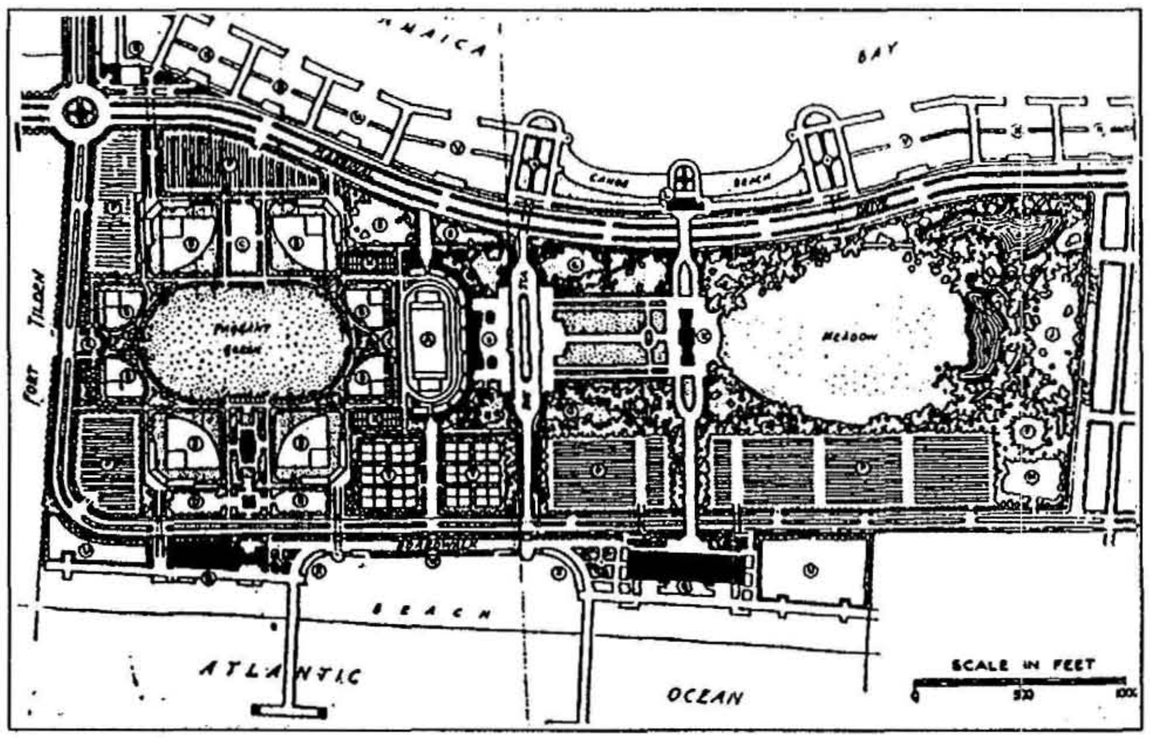


Figure 6: May 1932 Regional Plan Association, by E. Morrow -- This plan is an integrated design of landscape and structure and may well have been a precursor to the linear approach of the final (1936) design. Note that this plan was conceived after the 1931-32 plan was constructed and that this plan was never built.

whether coincidental or not, several locational features of this plan are similar to the final (1936) plan. For example, the horizontal layering of the ocean, beach, landscaped boardwalk, and Back Beach can be seen in both schemes. The Back Beach area contains the golf course to the west, ball fields, tennis courts and playground to the east, and parking scattered throughout. The Jamaica Bay shore is developed with boating facilities (see Figure 7).

In 1931 the city finally began construction of the park with the initial building campaign centered on the construction of the Bathhouse. It was to be similar to the Bathhouse at the recently completed (1929) and very successful Jones Beach, built by Long Island State Park Commissioner Robert Moses. Jones Beach was considered to be Moses' most successful beach park and it would prove to be influential on the 1932 and the final 1936 designs of Riis Park.

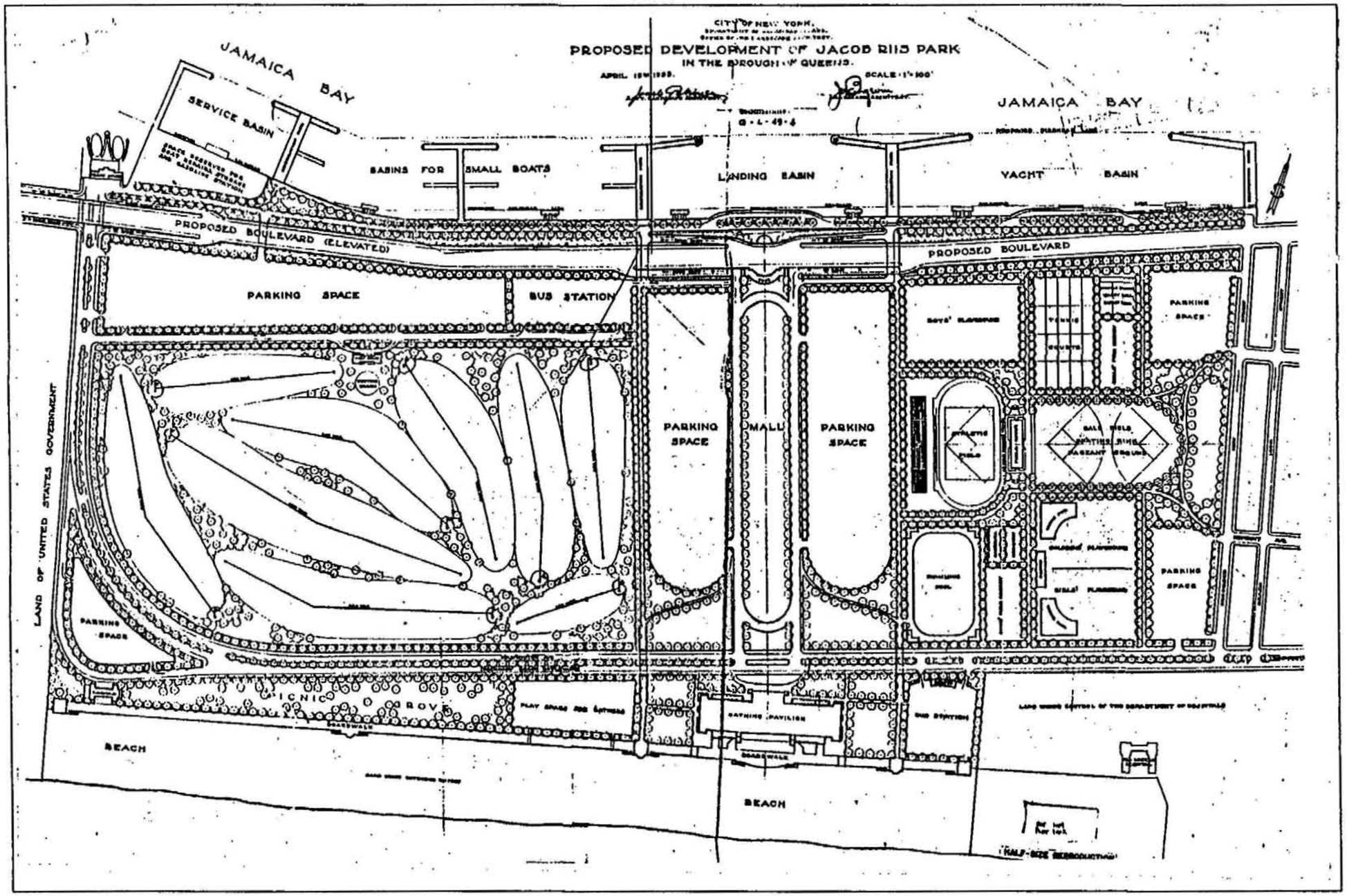


Figure 7: April, 1933 New York City Park Board Plan by J.V. Burgevin and J. Gatringer -- while this plan contains features such as the golf course, playing fields, and the horizontal layering of ocean, beach, boardwalk, and back beach found in the final 1936 plan, it as not as well conceived or organized. Note that it incorporates the 1931 Bathhouse and that Julius Burgevin, New York City Park Departmenbt Landscape Architect, worked on this design as well as the 1936 plan.

Design and Construction of The Bathhouse

The Riis Park Bathhouse was designed in 1930-31 by John L. Plock, an architect with the New York firm of Stoughton & Plock. Construction of the Moorish/Byzantine design of tapestry brick, cast stone, and tile began in 1932. It had an entrance pavilion, a central courtyard filled with lockers, a beach pavilion, sunning terraces, concession areas and two distinctive towers. As seems to be the case in many municipal projects, the Bathhouse construction was mired in controversy over its cost and contractors. Originally budgeted at $425,000, the building was finally completed at a cost of $530,000. The cost of landscaping was not included and was to be an additional charge (Unrau, 1981:60). Although the Bathhouse was not complete until 1933 and little landscaping had been finished, it was officially dedicated on August 6, 1932 (Unrau, 1981:62). When opened to the public.

> *"the brick and stone work on the administration section of the pavilion . . . [was] 75% completed and all the structural steel . . .[was] . . . set. All the brick and stone work on the two wings, which . . . contain[ed] lunch rooms and foot pools, . . . have been completed and the rough cement floors laid. More than half of the bathhouse area to be allotted to the use of women has been graded (New York Times, June 22 and August 16, 1931; Unrau 1981: 62).*

Upon final completion, the building would contain 8,100 women's and men's lockers, washrooms, a medical clinic, glass enclosed solarium, two restaurants and cafeteria, and umbrella and chair rental concessions. Figure 8 illustrates the 1934 location of the Bathhouse, squeezed between Rockaway Beach Boulevard and the Beach. Figure 9 shows the 1934 site plan in the Bathhouse vicinity, indicating planting beds, an entry drive, front lawns, and the walkway system, most of which still remain.

After the Bathhouse formally opened, work continued and by 1933 a park had been constructed with many of the facilities, if not the design, of what exists today. According to newspaper accounts the park contained, in addition to the Bathhouse, tennis courts, handball courts and playgrounds set in a landscaped environment of lawns with ornamental plants, shrubs and trees (over 3,000 were planted) all united with concrete walks. A large parking lot for 6-700 cars was constructed as well and the en-

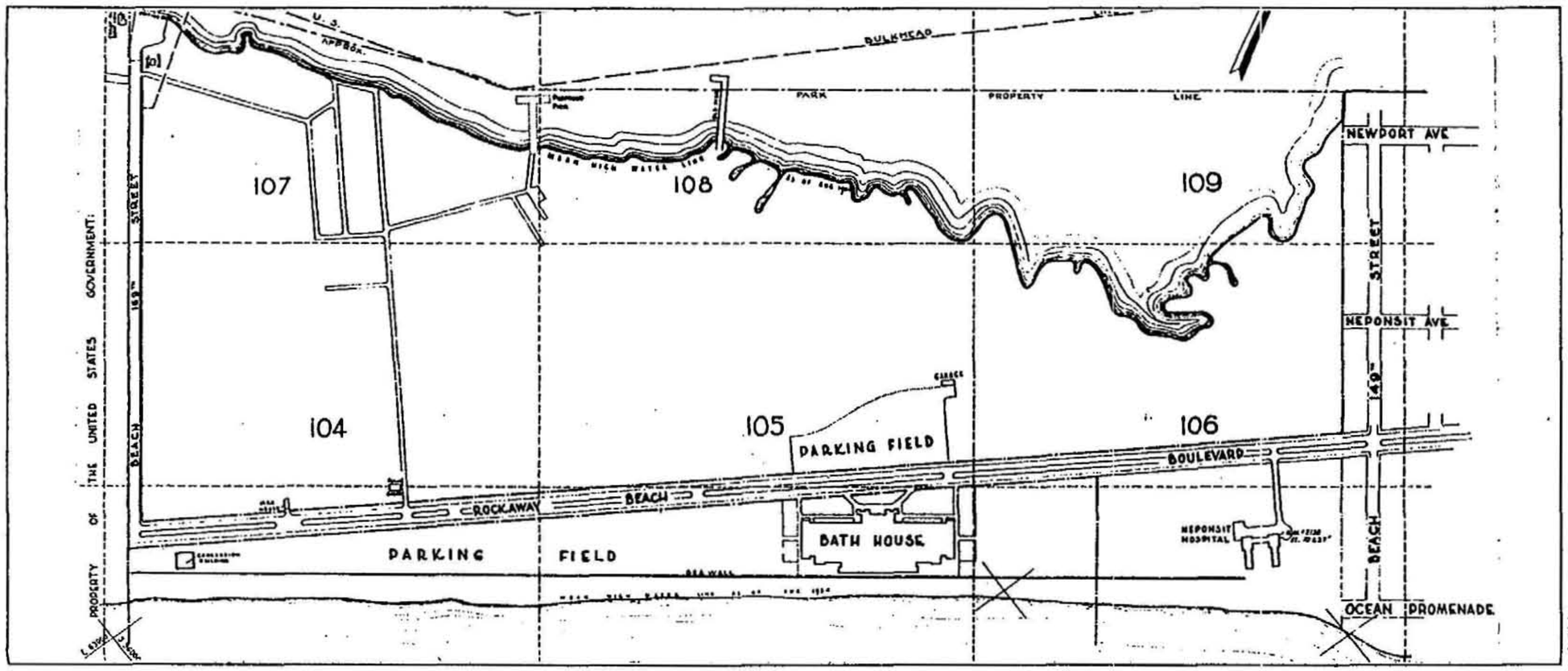


Figure 8: November, 1934 New York Department of Parks key map of Jacob Riis Park -- this is from a report by newly appointed New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses, and shows the park, as built, in 1934.

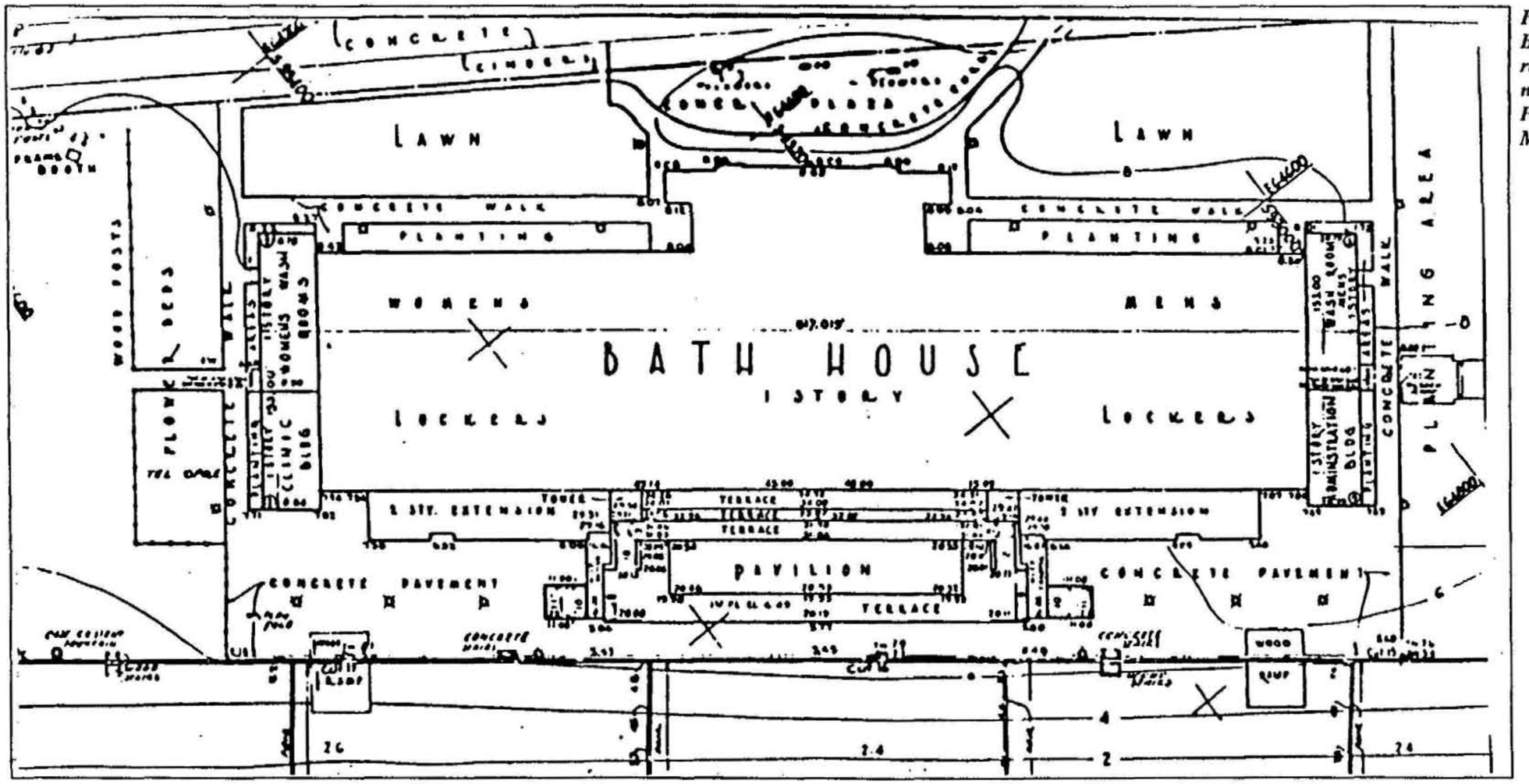


Figure 9: 1934 Site Plan of the Bathhouse -- from a 1934 study report on Jacob Riis Park by newly appointed New York City Park Commissioner Robert Moses.

tire park was staffed by approximately 600 uniformed employees (Unrau 1981: 66-67).

An article in the New York Herald Tribune, 7 May 1933 described Riis Park as follows:

> *"Although the Riis Park plan has many features all its own, it resembles the highly successful Jones Beach Park.... Riis Park has been designed for the quieter enjoyment of the seashore, without any artificial devices. In atmosphere it is not unlike the English seaside resorts. The facilities provided all contribute to restfulness for the many and amusements of the out-of-door life".*

(Unrau 1981: 67).

Based on the newspaper description, funds must have been made available to landscape the park and build recreational facilities. With the exception of the Bathhouse plans, drawings from the 1931-1934 construction phase, including planting plans, have not been discovered at this time. Fortunately though, in 1934, upon assuming directorship of the New York City Parks Department, Robert Moses, commissioned a study report of Jacob Riis Park, the Works Progress Administration Park Study, and produced a drawing showing existing conditions (Unrau 1981: 73).

While newspaper articles describe a rather bucolic atmosphere, in the drawing at least, the park seems rather barren. According to the 1934 plan, all the elements described above were in place but the park seems unfocused and to consist mostly of open areas of sand with parking directly on the beach (see Figure 8 and refer also to Unrau, P.75). In a clever reuse scheme the former foundations of the Navy buildings and possibly some walkways were integrated into the park and used for circulation and handball courts. The plan seems to have been devised to fit into an existing situation rather than to shape the environment to any overall plan.

Although the newspaper article stated that 3,000 plants, shrubs and trees were planted it is hard to tell from the plan where they might have been. There did seem to be small planting beds around the bathing pavilion and grass plots just north of the structure, not unlike the existing landscaping.

Additional development plans, according to the New York Herald Tribune, May 7, 1933, called for the rehabilitation of a former naval pier in Jamaica Bay, an open air beer garden, and a boardwalk and canoeing facilities along Jamaica Bay although in actuality, these were never completed and the area developed by 1933 was quite small compared to the present day park (Unrau 1981:68).

The Robert Moses Park Expansion and Development: 1934-1937

1934 was a pivotal year for parks in New York City. In that year separate borough park departments were united into one comprehensive city department and with the help of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia, Robert Moses, then Park Commissioner of Long Island, was appointed head of the city's united parks department. Before Robert Moses was appointed Commissioner the city's parks were in shambles. Fueled by Tammany Hall, the city was a sea of corruption run by political insiders and hanger-ons with every department filled with political appointees and no-shows. The parks department was among the worst (Unrau 1981: 70).

> *"Even in an era in which every city department was staffed through patronage, the five borough park departments were something special. Recalls one observer: "You couldn't tell the difference between a park employee and the bums hanging out in the parks." Not all the lifeguards would go out [into the water]. . . . Some of them were afraid to; they didn't know how to swim" (Caro 1975: 335-336).*

Robert Moses and the Works Progress Administration

Robert Moses, urban planner and administrator, had a tremendous influence on New York City and New York State's development. He possessed enormous power and dominated public works projects in New York from the 1920's through the late 1960's. During that forty-year period, he assembled his "Moses Men," those who would carry out his massive undertakings. Through his assembled team and the different municipal and state authorities Moses headed, he was responsible for building or rebuilding most of New York City's major highways, bridges and housing projects including the Triborough Bridge, The Bear Mountain Bridge and Park, Henry Hudson Park, the Belt Parkway, the Cross Bay Parkway Bridge, Battery Park, Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town.

Of particular interest to this report are the parks Moses built, which in addition to Jacob Riis Park, include Jones Beach State Park, Orchard Beach, Bear Mountain State Park, Montauk Point, Belmont Lake State Park and Flushing Meadow Park. As seen in the list of his projects, Moses viewed parks and linking highway access projects as one concept. (Caro 1975: various pages; Merit Students Encyclopedia, 1975, Volume 12: 511).

Moses' first order after his swearing in as New York City Parks Commissioner was to fire hundreds of park employees, effective immediately, and install his own staff. At the same time, Moses was badgering the Civil Works Administration (CWA), one of the Federal New Deal programs, to fund his hiring of unemployed architects and engineers (Caro 1975: 368-369). The Works Progress Administration (WPA) had already hired over 68,000 relief workers for New York City's parks. But unsupervised, with little clear planning, men and women were literally hanging around with nothing to do. Moses "told [the WPA] that the first requirement for getting those men working on worthwhile projects was to provide them with plans. Blueprints in volume were needed, he said, and they were needed immediately (Caro 1975: 368-369)". In a somewhat unprecedented move, Moses hired out only out-of-work architects and engineers but those with jobs as well, enticing those already employed with the opportunity to design hundreds of new parks, playgrounds and swimming pools and the chance to have their project brought to completion almost immediately (Caro 1975: 368).

In 1934, Moses and his staff, supplemented by thousands of WPA workers, had completed 1700 of 1800 planned projects. Almost every park in New York City was rebuilt. New parks and playgrounds in every borough were completed as well. And plans and work continued at a frantic pace for the next seven years. In a move that would give him more control over projects Moses combined labor forces and monies with the WPA and Moses-run agencies such as the Marine Parkway Authority and the New York City Parkway Authority (Caro 1975: 373; Unrau 1981: 70). The WPA program in New York, boosted by the Moses-driven work program, was the largest in the United States.

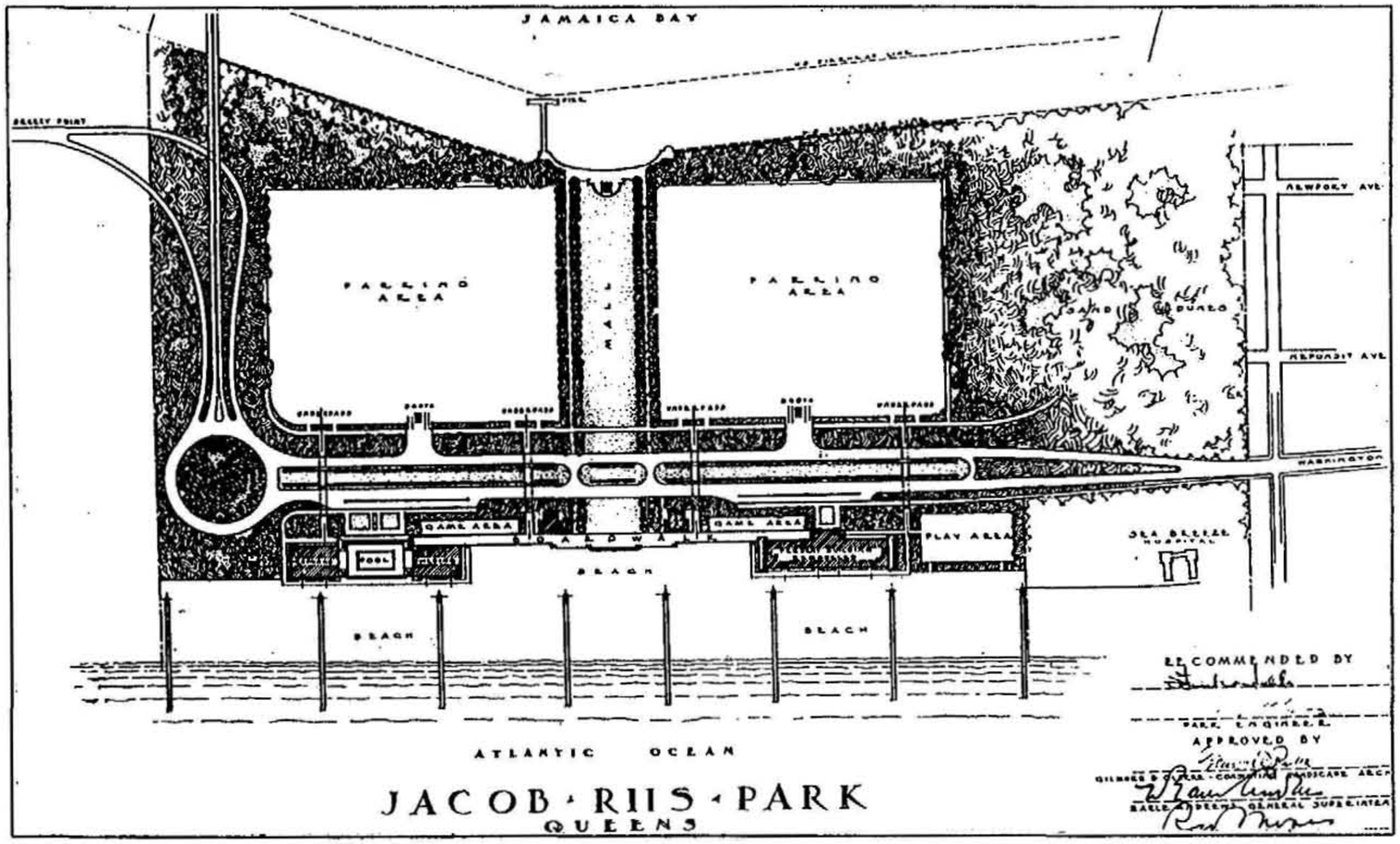


Figure 10: August, 1934 Department of Parks New York City Plan by Clarke and Andrews -- although this rigid and formal Beaux Arts plan was never executed, it is the first documented Robert Moses influenced design for Jacob Riis Park. Note the 1931-32 Bathhouse, which in the plan is labelled "Present Building Remodelled."

The 1934 assessment of Riis Park by Moses' team indicated that the existing park was in very poor condition and inefficiently run. Land was under utilized and it was felt that the park could be expanded northward to Jamaica Bay (Unrau 1981: 73). Furthermore, although under the supposed control of the New York City Parks Department, Riis Park was, in effect, run by private concessioner who was mostly concerned with the amount of money he made rather than capital improvements. A 1935 City of New York press release stated, "The only park facilities which were smoothly run were the cash registers (Unrau 1981: 77)".

The 1934 Jacob Riis Plan

Moses had substantial plans in mind for Riis Park. He wanted to create "... an inner-city metropolitan replica of Jones Beach State Park ... (Unrau 1981: 81)." Jones Beach, in Wantagh, New York (east of Riis Park on the same barrier beach) was Moses' most successful park venture and one with which he is most readily identified.

When completed Jones Beach contained two bathhouses a mile apart, 10,000 lockers, two pools, a theater, restaurants and a mile and one-half long boardwalk. The bathhouses, in a vaguely Moorish/Inca design were built of large blocks of Ohio sandstone and Barbizon brick (Caro 1975: 223-4). The whole park was ringed with large, carefully landscaped roadways and parking lots. In the very cen-

ter of the complex was an elegant 231-foot high tower designed to look like a Venetian campanile but in reality, was a cleverly-disguised fresh water tower (Caro - 1975: P.223).

While the details and architectural styles may have been different, the overall planning concept was the same. Jones Beach was arranged in the same horizontal layers as Riis Park and was bounded on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and on the north by South Oyster Bay. The linear concept begins with the ocean and beach as the southern most layer. A mile and one-half long boardwalk is the dividing line between the natural (beach)and built environment (Bathhouses, playing fields, golf course, restaurants, parking lots). These structures are placed in a landscaped environment of natural dunes, lawn areas, planted areas of plants, scrubs and trees and connected by the boardwalk, concrete walkways and roadways. North of the structures is a major connecting roadway and north of this are additional parking lots, roadways and the Bay which has a picnic area and fishing facilities.

Moses' concept of translating Jones Beach into an "inner-city" facility, (i.e. Riis Park), was done by using the overall Jones Beach planning concept of linear layers and a landscape of the natural and built environment but doing it on a smaller scale, using more economical materials and employing WPA laborers.

In August 1934, Moses unveiled a plan for Riis Park; illustrated in Figure 10. It was never implemented, but the plan is interesting since it is the first documented Moses influenced design for Riis Park. The overall scheme was developed by Gilmore D. Clarke, Moses' consulting landscape architect and a partner in the engineering firm of Clarke and Rapuano, Julius Burgevin, landscape architect, W. Earle Andrews of Andrews, Clark and Buckley, consulting engineers, and Clinton Loyd, Chief of Architectural Design (Caro 1975: National Register Form, Jacob Riis Park, 1975; Unrau 1981: 81).

It is not clear if Moses and his designers saw the three previously described plans (Figures 5,6, and 7) and if they did how much they were taken into consideration. The 1934 Clarke and Andrews plan was dominated by approach roads and parking lots. The Beaux Arts symmetrical plan was composed of sharp-edged geometric shapes with a central north/south Mall which separated two parking lots each containing 7000 spaces. Patrons walked through underpasses below a boulevard to the remodeled Bathhouse or a new bathing complex to the west of the Bathhouse which contained a pool. The Bathhouse area was not unlike the existing Bathhouse. The building is surrounded by rectangular lawns on the north and rectangular plantings beds close to the building and running north/south.

As with many Moses' projects, parking lots and roadways dominated the plan. Virtually two thirds of the plan was parking lot, roadways and undeveloped space. The vertical north/south Mall concept has been kept. The Back Beach area in the 1934 Plan was smaller than that built and contained fewer facilities but did have the remodeled Bathhouse, a swimming pool, and other active recreation areas. The plan showed the beach to be enlarged.

The monies collected from Riis Park through parking and Bathhouse fees, and concession stands, should have, by rightful standards, gone to the New York City Parks Department, but instead was directed to the Marine Parkway Authority (Caro 1975: 634). So, while repairs to the Riis Park Bathhouse and the reconstruction to the park were to be completed by WPA funding and labor, projects relating to construction, such as the second bathhouse and pool were to be paid for by the Marine Parkway Authority, thus assuring Moses total control over the project (Unrau 1981: 105).

Ultimately, as noted above, the 1934 plan was never developed. The primary cause was opposition from Rockaway Park and Neponsit: white, middle-class neighborhoods, uncomfortable with the idea of inner-city minorities coming to their neighborhoods. Local citizens groups favored money-making and controlled-access tennis courts, playgrounds and a golf course (Unrau 1981: 92).

The 1936 Jacob Riis Plan

The 1936 Plan was different from that proposed in 1934 yet apparently kept some of the design elements seen in previous plans. The plan, shown in figure 11, was by Gilmore Clarke, Consulting Landscape Architect, Clinton Loyd, Chief of Architectural Design for the Parks Department and Aymar Embury II. The overall planting plan is illustrated in Figure B-1, showing the integration of the Park with the roadway system serving it.

A major problem with Riis Park was the 1932 Bathhouse's close proximity to the beach. At high tide, there was only a twenty-foot strip of sand not covered by water. The rest of the shore front was used inefficiently for "a cinder-surfaced parking lot retained by a bulkhead that encroached on the beach as much as did the bath house (Unrau 1981: 85)." Moses was particularly annoyed by the Moorish style bathing pavilion and he "intended to trim off various 'gimcracks on it and make it into a decent looking building' (Unrau 1981: 89)." Although the interior was based on the plan for the bathhouses at Jones Beach his final criticism was one of simple economics: the Bathhouse could hold 8,000 bathers, the parking lot 5,000 cars. Work on Riis Park was to begin immediately, using WPA laborers supervised by the New York City Department of Parks.

In 1936, Moses obtained additional WPA funding which was to be used for construction projects and wages enabling construction to begin on Riis Park in earnest. Between 200 and 800 men were available daily to work on the $5,000,000 project. Additional funds were also to be made available from the Marine Parkway Authority (Unrau 1981: P.94).

The new plan eliminated the coldly elegant geometric design of 1934 and substituted symmetrical elements within an asymmetrical plan of soft curvilinear shapes. This modernist landscape design expression can be seen running through all the plans produced for Jacob Riis Park, except for Pilat's 1913 plan which was influenced by the romantic movement and the Beaux Arts. Of all the plans proposed for Riis Park the final 1936 plan is the most successful blend of the 1930's freedom of design and a blending of symmetrical and asymmetrical.

The 1936 design also displays the final resolution of the linear plan concept. Jacob Riis Park is oriented east/west and is a series of manmade and natural strips which parallel the beach. The most southerly zone is the ocean and beach which are the focal points of the park. Moving north, the mile-long Boardwalk begins the transition from natural to built environment, dividing line beach and non-beach uses. The major buildings all front on the Boardwalk, facing the Beach. Framed by the Boardwalk on the south and roads on the north is the Back Beach area, the most active area of the park which includes playgrounds, ball fields, planted areas, lawns and circulation paths.

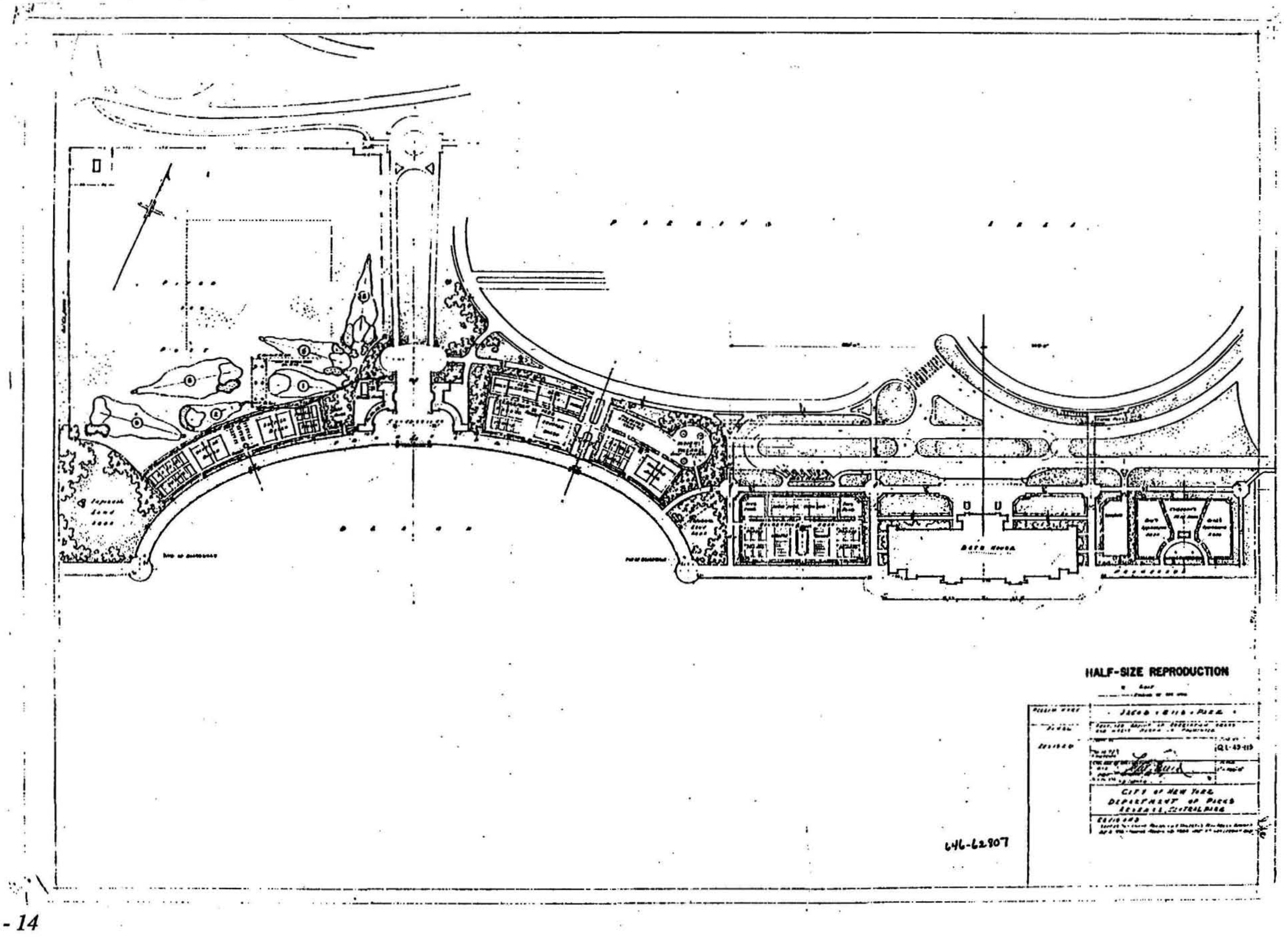
The final plan incorporated and adapted design concepts from the earlier schemes. The Mall concept was retained but moved to the undeveloped western portion of the property. The Mall lawn area ran north/south and terminated at each end with a curve: the northern end had a walk and roadway, the southern end semicircular buildings, a small power plant, a bandstand and dance floor on the Boardwalk between the two structures, and a curved Boardwalk with a distinctive ship's rail. The Boardwalk was extended a full mile, decked with Douglas Fir in a geometric design and edged with a wood and metal ship's rail on both the north and south sides. All the buildings were painted light grey, helping to unify the variety of architectural styles.

The Modern-Style Mall area bears striking similarities to Orchard Beach, a park developed by Robert Moses in the Bronx. It was completed in the same year as Jacob Riis Park and designed by the same team of architects. While the Mall and its curved Boardwalk are only part of Riis Park, Orchard Beach is one large curved beach and boardwalk. The bathhouse buildings are also curved and the twin buildings mirror each other much as they do at Riis Park (Caro 1981: 364, 365-7).

The Back Beach area, defined by the Boardwalk on the south and the circulation road on the north contains the enlarged Bathhouse, ball fields, handball and tennis courts and playgrounds. All are placed within the context of green spaces with walkways framed by shrubs, flowering plants, and Black Pines. Indeed, much of what makes the plan work is the integration of the variety of activities within the park. Every area is accessible through walkways and it is possible to stroll from one end of the park to the other on the Boardwalk or through the Back Beach. Beyond the Back Beach to the west is the golf course and north of the Bathhouse the giant parking lot. The Jamaica Bay shore was never developed. Moses' fascination with roadways prevailed and the Jamaica Bay area is nothing more than access roads for the Marine Parkway Bridge.

The original 1932 Bathhouse had its front demolished in order to "move" the building back and gain more beach area; the remaining Bathhouse was substantially enlarged with a new addition along the beach front in a streamlined Moderne design. The original towers, the building's most visible feature, had a story added. In 1936, as part of the overall expansion plan, the Army Corps of Engineers, along with the NYC Parks Department, completed Beach Erosion at Jacob Riis Park, Long Island, N.Y., a beach erosion study to determine

Figure 11: 1936 Plan by Clarke, Loyd and Embury.



the most effective means to extend the beach area (Unrau 1981: 140). The study, which was implemented between 1936 and 1938 suggested that in order to increase the "width of berm" of the beach that sand, from Jamaica Bay be dredged, deposited on the beach and the groins, jetties and seawall be rebuilt. The Corps suggested the amount of sand and money needed to build a beach averaging 500 feet wide. The new beach required the removal of the old WPA bulkhead built in 1932-1933. This was replaced with a concrete seawall (which followed the line of the Boardwalk) further back from the shore.

As part of the 1936 plan the parking lot along the waterfront was removed (the Mall was built in this area) and the northern parking lot was redesigned and enlarged. The 72-acre lot is the largest design element in the park. A parking control gate and an underpass led to the Bathhouse and the beach. The land on which the parking lot was built had been transferred by Robert Moses from the parks department to the Marine Parkway Authority. Henceforth, the Authority would collect the parking revenues which would be used for the construction of the Marine Parkway Bridge. The lot was opened in June 1936, although it was not complete. By January 1937 parking was available for 5-6,000 cars and by June 1937 the entire lot was opened. When opened it was considered the largest paved parking area in the world and contained 14,000 parking spaces (Unrau 1981: 143).

The final project which would complete Riis Park and make it accessible to the public was the construction of the Marine Parkway Bridge. This would enable New Yorkers to drive, or take public transportation, from any borough and across Jamaica Bay to Riis Park. Marine Parkway would eventually become a link, via Flatbush Avenue, with the Belt Parkway which ran from Brooklyn to Long Island. Previous to this, the only access to Rockaway was by a small municipal ferry. As in many projects by Moses, large parkways provided easy access to recreational areas and became an integral part of the design. The bridge was a three-span, four thousand foot structure with a vertical lift center span carrying a four-lane highway. Work began in 1936 and was completed in 1937. The substructure was designed and built by the Frederick Snare Corporation and the superstructure by the American Bridge Company (Unrau 1981: 144). The bridge roadway, on the Rockaway side, stopped north of the parking lot in an area that was filled in order to accommodate the bridge and roadways.

The Bathhouse was reopened to the public in June 1937, although some detail and interior work was not yet finished (Unrau 1981: 97-98). The same was true for the Mall Buildings which were not completed until late in 1937. Additional construction completed in 1936-7 included the golf course, maintenance shops and garages located in the northwest corner of the golf course, and a golf course concession stand (Unrau 1981: 128, 135-136). Major features of the 1936-7 Plan are indicated on Figure 12 and can be seen in Historic photographs in Appendix A, particularly the aerials (see Figures A-16 and A-17).

Figure 12: Features of the 1936 - 37 Plan

Legend

The Bathhouse Area

1. Bathhouse Complex
2. Entrycourt

The Boardwalk & Promenade

3. The Boardwalk
4. The Promenade

The Mall Area

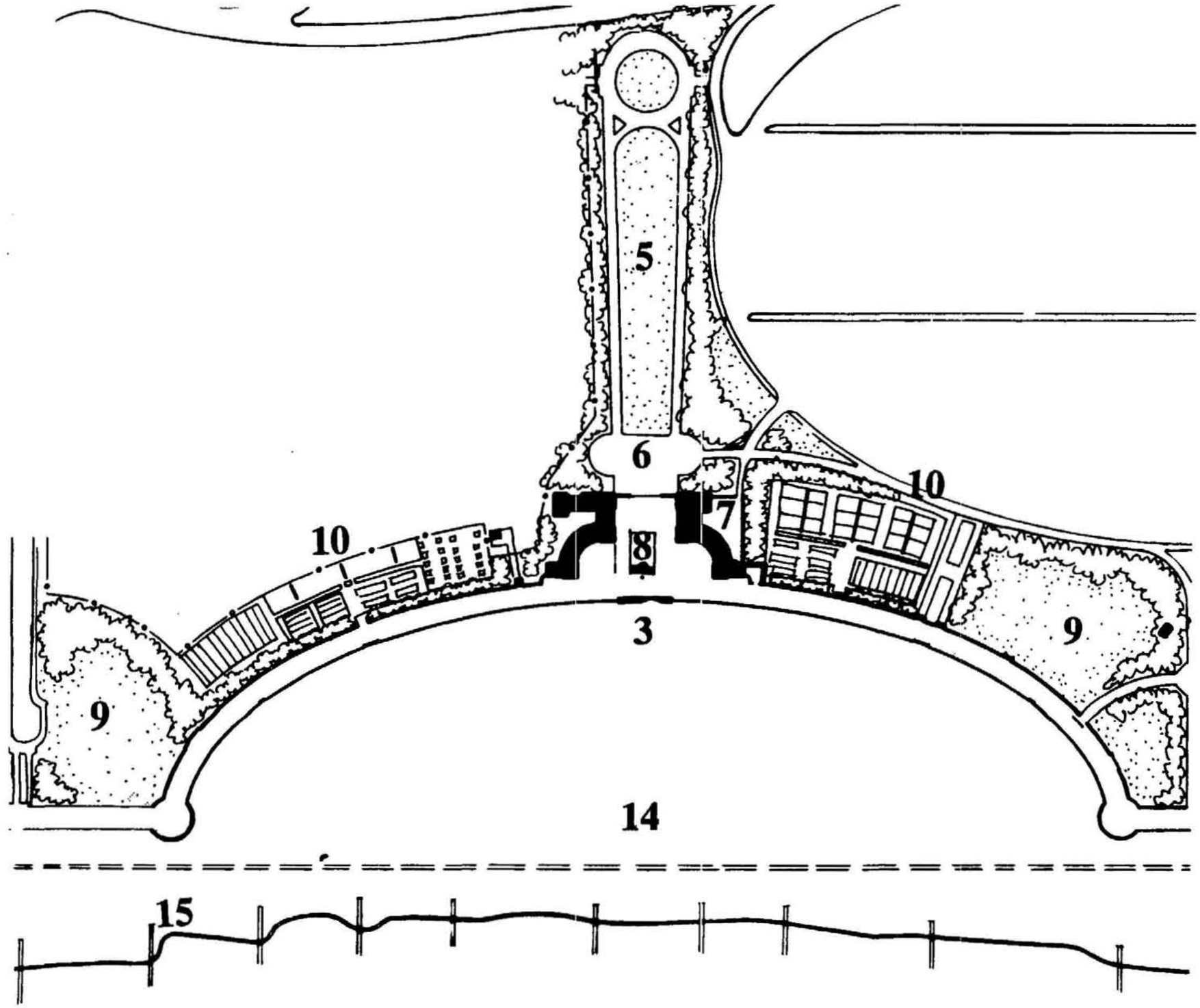
5. The Mall
6. Oval Forecourt
7. The Mall Buildings
8. The Band Stand

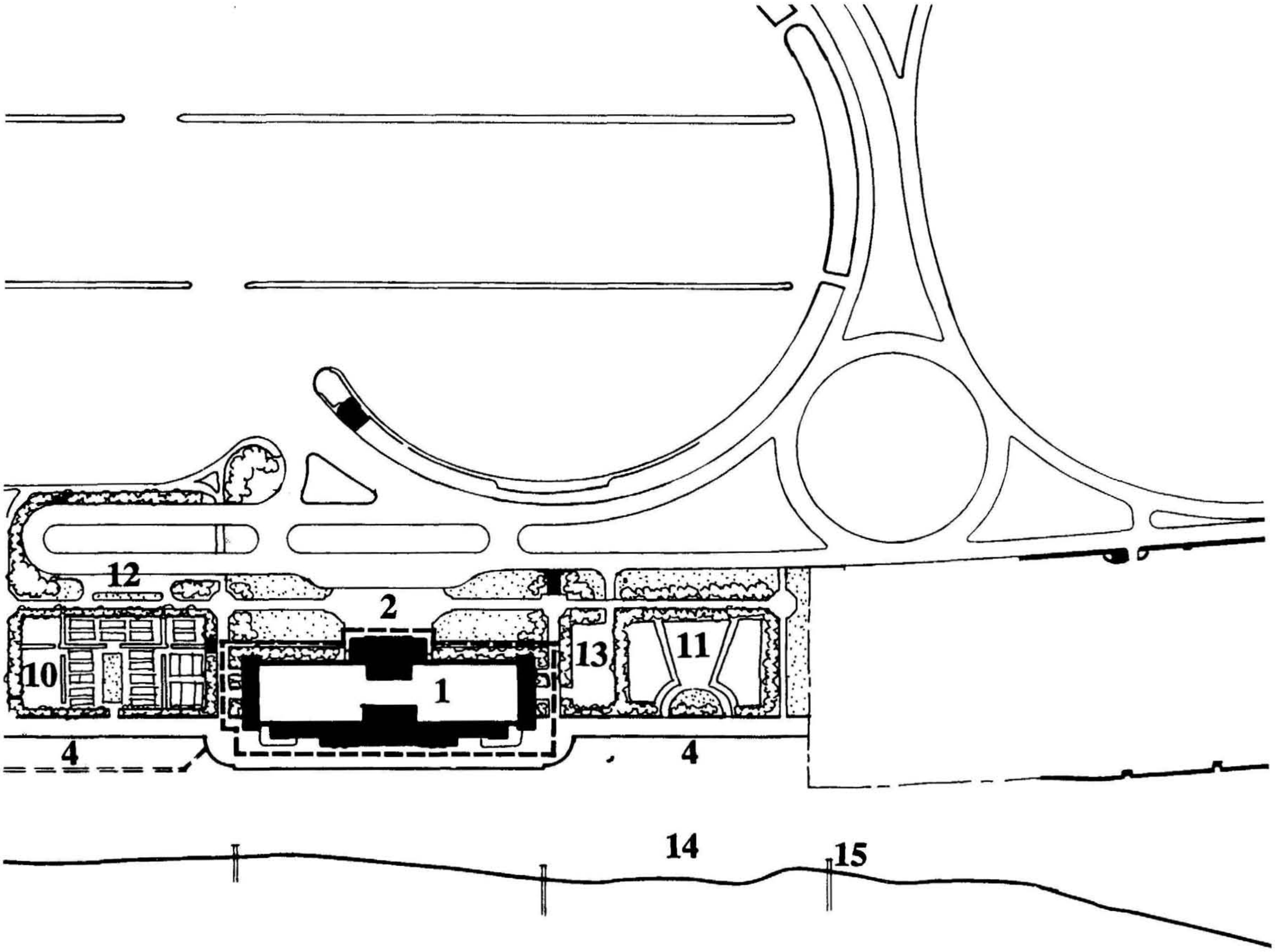
The Back Beach Area

9. Passive Lawn Area
10. Active Recreation Area
11. Children Playground
12. Bus Stop
13 Employee Parking

The Beach Area

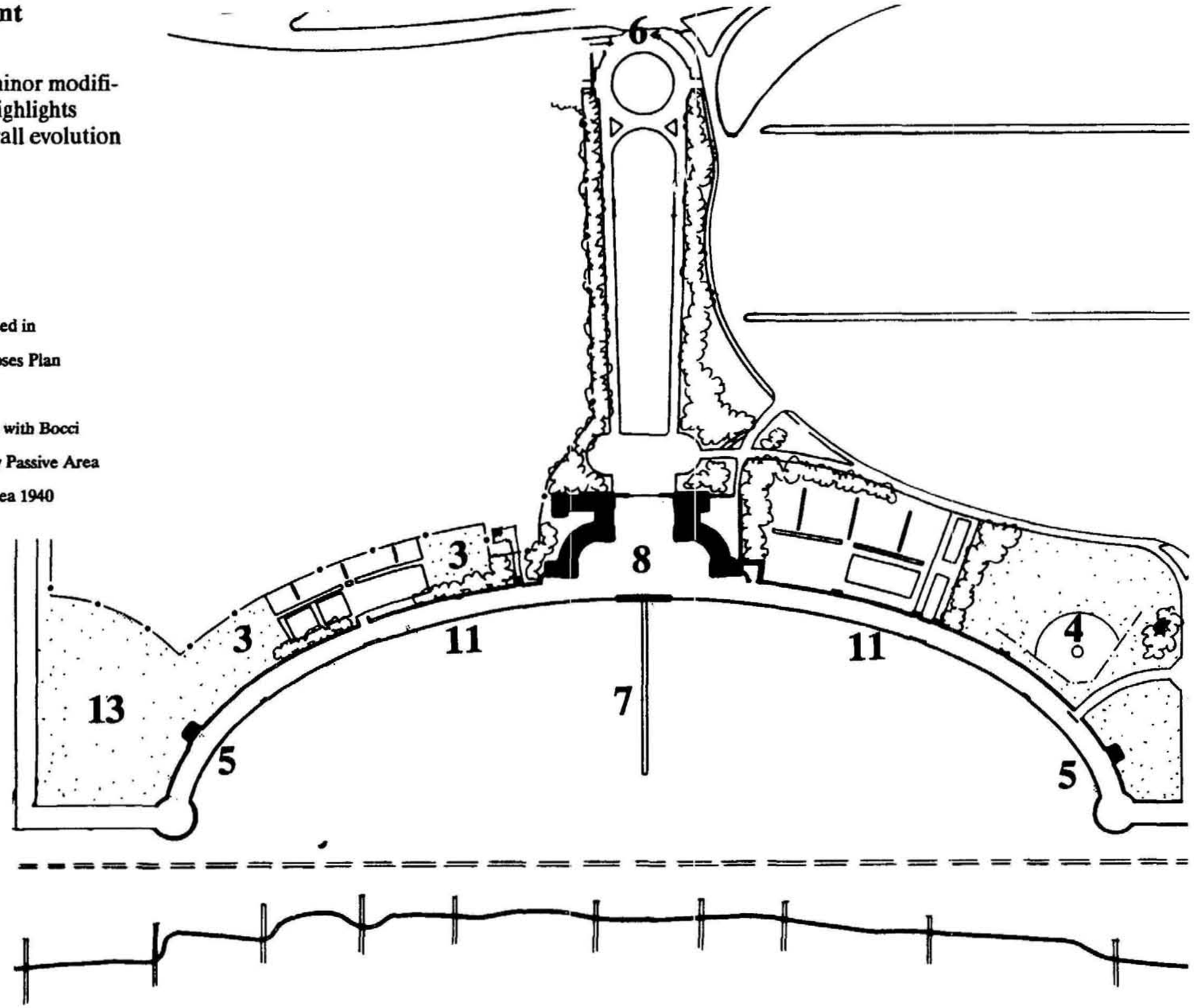
14. The Beach
15. Jetties (typ.)




12
2
10
1
13
11
4
4
14
15

New York City Parks Department Management: 1937-1974

During this period, there were some minor modifications made to the park. Figure 13 highlights these changes, also indicating the overall evolution of Jacob Riis Park from 1932-1991.



Legend

1. Bathhouse & Surrounding Walkways, completed in 1932-33 and incorporated into the 1936-37 Moses Plan
2. Modification to Beach Pavilion
3. Removal of Originally Planned Putting Green with Bocci and Horseshoe Pits; Replacement with Grassy Passive Area
4. Creation of Softball Field at Former Lawn Area 1940
5. Concession Stands 1947
6. Bus Stop 1950's; Removed 1960's
7. Central Sidewalk 1953
8. Removal of Band Stand 1954
9. Creation of Eastern Ballfields 1958, Outside boundary of 1936-37 Park
10. Concession Stand 1961
11. Wood Decking Removal and Replacement with Concrete 1969-70
12. Children's Playground Modification 1960's
13. Deterioration of Former Passive Lawn Area
14. Addition of Access Through Parking Lot (Date Unknown)

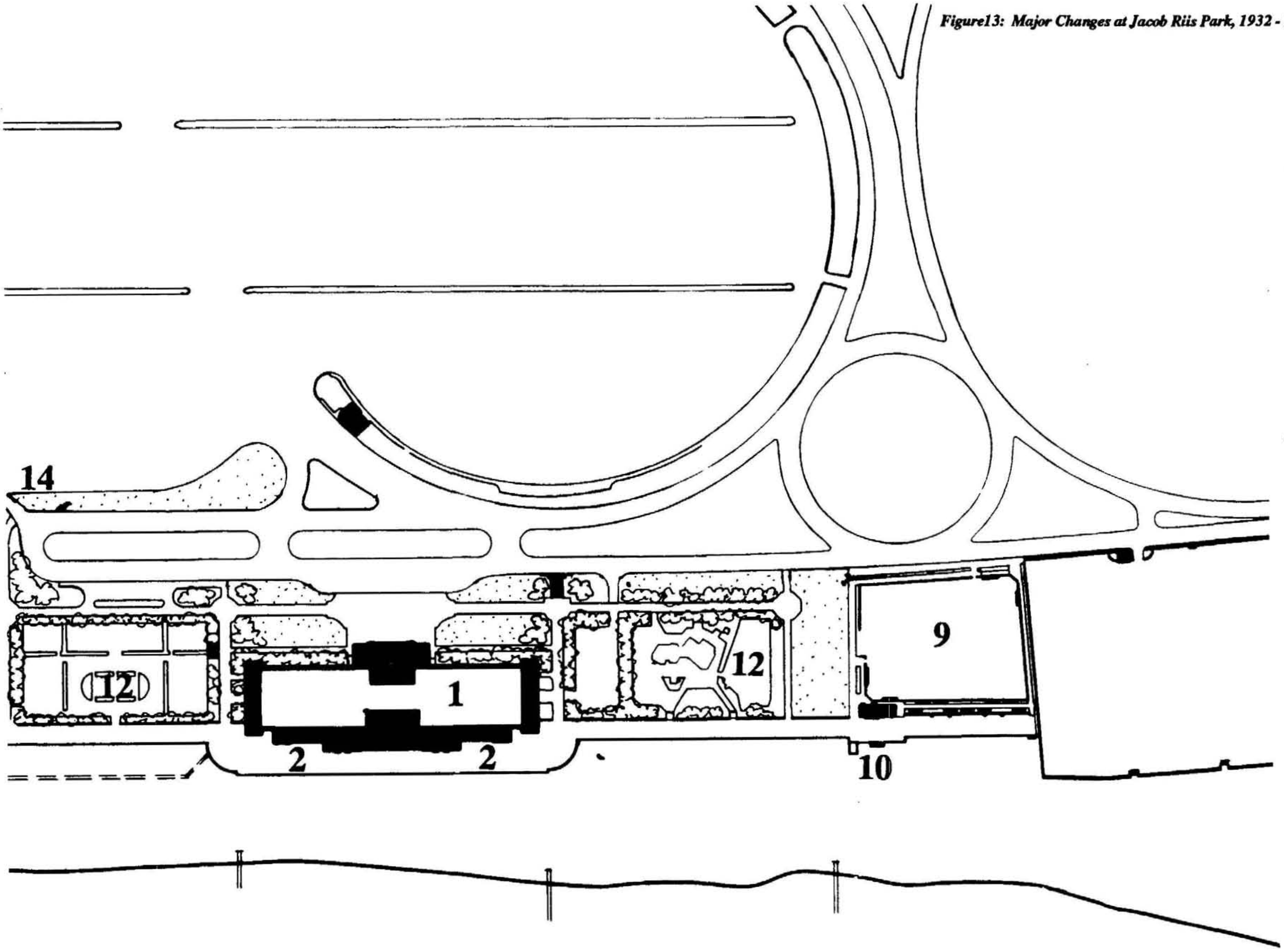


Figure13: Major Changes at Jacob Riis Park, 1932 - 1991.

In the fall of 1940 a bronze bust of Jacob A. Riis was installed between the columns of the west Mall building. The bust, inscribed with "Jacob A. Riis, a distinguished citizen of Danish Birth. Pioneer in improving city parks and playgrounds.," was given to the park by Roger William Riis, son of Jacob Riis. The bust rested on a granite pedestal erected by the Park Department and paid for by the Triborough Bridge Authority. Today only the granite base remains, the bust having been stolen (Unrau 1981: 175).

In 1941 the Wise Clock, also known as the Riis Park Memorial Clock, was installed on the Boardwalk at the east end of the eclipse. The clock was donated to the Park Department by William A. Wise and Son, a Brooklyn jeweler. The four-faced clock stood in front of the original Wise store at Flatbush and Nevins Avenue for almost thirty years. When the business moved to Fulton Street near Hoyt Street, the clock was move as well. Nine years later when the firm went out of business the Wise family gave the clock to the Parks Department and it was installed in Riis Park. This large, distinctive looking clock, originally topped by a whimsical weather vane of a sailor looking through a spy glass, is still in place (Unrau 1981: 175).

As more and more people used the beach, additional concession stands were built. In 1946-1947 two small, one-story, masonry, identical structures were built at the northern edge of the Boardwalk at the east and west ends of the eclipse (Unrau 1981: 175). In 1961 a one-story toilet building and concession stand was built along the Boardwalk just south of the most eastern ball fields.

In 1955, Moses wanted to purchase the adjacent Neponsit Hospital and add an additional fourteen acres to the park. Local residents were vigorously opposed to the expansion and in 1958, in a compromise, the hospital was spared and only nine acres were added. A new baseball diamond was built on the acquired land. In 1964, the Bathhouse was sandblasted, weakening the bricks and destroying the integrity of the overall color scheme of the park structures.

By the end of the 1960's, Robert Moses' power was waning and Riis Park went into a decline. As reported in Unrau, "major areas of Jacob Riis Park, once one of the city's most beautiful ocean playgrounds, have fallen into disrepair." (Unrau 1981: 165). The beach was filthy, the parking underpass was filled with garbage and water, and toilets were dirty and broken. The park acquired a reputation as a homosexual beach, which tended to keep families away. Much of this was reported in the press in the mid-1960's and due to the poor publicity, the Park Department made an effort to clean up the park and police the beach.

NPS Stewardship: 1974 - 1990

In 1974 Riis Park officially became part of the Gateway National Recreation Area, administrated by the National Park Service. Acquisition by the government was motivated in part, by controversy between development and preservation, spurred by Moses' desire to expand the park in the mid-1950's (Caro 1975: 1082; Unrau 1981:165).

As the character of the park's patrons has changed so has the use patterns rendering some areas obsolete and some areas being used for purposes other than their original function. The park is used primarily by New York City residents who generally travel by bus or car to the park. Most local residents, except for the elderly, tend not to use the park and visit local beaches and private beach clubs. There is a tremendous diversity in user groups. Many black and Hispanic families use the park. There is a large elderly population and an equally large youth population. The elderly people tend to use the most passive areas of the park, i.e. - seats in the Back Beach, while the teenagers tend to gather at the more isolated western end. The bays on the beach, defined by jetties, have over the years been transformed into clearly defined territories for gay users, blacks, families, teenagers, etc. with little mixing between the groups. The park is primarily used in the summer time and most heavily on weekends, although the golf course and ball fields are used from the spring through fall.

The final plan for Riis contained several open lawn areas. However, a ball field was installed in the largest and most central of these in 1940. Most of the non-active spaces (i.e. -- not game areas or playing fields) were devoted to walkways where one could get away from the beach and quietly stroll through planted and shaded walkways. Patrons use the park quite differently today and there is a tendency to merge public spaces with private uses that today is very different than the 1930's. "The discrepancy between intended use of the park, on the part of the original designer, and actual use of the park by visitors today is probably nowhere as great as in the trees, bushes and lawns (Project for Public Places, 1977: 51)." This is still true today. In the park today people are making their own spaces on open lawns, among the Black Pines, along the Mall. These areas are now serving as picnic areas and passive recreation facilities. Many of these areas used by large, extended black and Hispanic families (Project for Public Space, 1977:5).

In addition to physically rehabilitating the park, the Park Service is trying to restore the park to a family environment and maintain a safe environment, in a changing society, on the beach and in the Bathhouse. Because of deterioration and security problems the Bathhouse, with the exception of the concession stands and toilets, has been closed

to the public, but plans are being developed to rehabilitate the Bathhouse and the park and to ultimately open a refurbished Jacob Riis Park.

Since taking over Jacob Riis Park in 1974, a series of specific repair and preventative measures have been taken to stop or reverse the continued decline of the facilities. The more difficult task of refurbishing the public's perception of the Park has also been addressed, but always in a limited, piecemeal fashion. The DCP was a comprehensive plan for the physical rehabilitation, programming, or improvement of the Park's image; its recommendations were appropriate and consistent with the recommendations of this document and will serve as the bases for rehabilitation of the Park.

2.2 Significance

The National Register Nomination forms for the Jacob Riis Historic District, prepared by the National Park Service in 1977 and 1985, highlight key aspects of the district and its buildings which establish its eligibility for the National Register.

Jacob Riis Park is significant as an excellent example of New York City's municipal recreational architecture and planning of the 1930's. In contains a diverse assemblage of varying architectural styles ranging from Byzantine/Moorish (1932) to Moderne (1937). By 1938, the buildings in the complex were painted the same color, unifying the site. Finally, the Park was completed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under the guidance of Robert Moses, New York City's Park Commission.

Although a modest amount of construction took place on the site in the 1920's, the historical period of significance derives from designs executed in the 1930's. In 1932, New York City Parks Department completed the Bathhouse in a Byzantine/Moorish design along with a limited amount of landscaping and a pedestrian and adjacent vehicular circulation system.

In 1936 to 1937, the park was significantly expanded by Robert Moses using WPA architects and laborers. The final design incorporated the 1932 Bathhouse (which was substantially modified) and Robert Moses may well have been influenced by the earlier designs. Additionally, Riis Park bears similarities to Jones Beach Park and Orchard Beach, both of which were designed under the direction of Robert Moses in the 1920's and 1930's.

Work at Riis Park in the 1936-1937 period included widening and lengthening the beach. The Bathhouse complex was altered with a Moderne addition constructed on the beach side. The Moderne Mall complex, with mirror-image buildings, a crescent shaped beach and Boardwalk and symmetrically arranged and landscaped Mall, was completed. A mile-long Boardwalk was built connecting the Bathhouse with the Mall Complex and beyond. The Back Beach area consisted of geometrically shaped lawns and planted areas mixed with recreational facilities such a shuffleboard courts, baseball diamonds and handball and paddle tennis courts. The park included a massive, oval-shaped, 72-acre parking lot capable of holding 9,000 plus cars, which made it, at the time of construction, the world's largest parking lot. Finally, all the buildings in the park were painted off-white which served to visually unify the variety of architectural styles. The overall plan is a successful integration of buildings and landscape in a linear, layered design.

The design for the park reflects the trends in landscape design and planning of the 1930's. Changes sweeping through European and American design in the late 1920's and early 1930's enabled landscape designers to free themselves from earlier design conventions. Most landscape design was either locked into a rigid, formal design or into a totally natural effect of informal and unsymmetrical. During the 1930's, designers were free to combine disparate forms, to be informal and formal in the same site plan. This is readily apparent in the Riis Park plan with its linear arrangement broken by the Mall and the juxtaposition of passive and active areas, and rounded geometric shapes.

While some of the details are different in Riis Park, the overall concept of buildings in a landscape is based on the concept of Jones Beach. Orchard Beach Park in the Bronx completed the same year by the same design team as Riis Park is very similar to the Mall area. These three parks all remain intact today and are representative examples of WPA, municipal, Moses inspired designs.

Riis Park was funded by the WPA and designed and built by WPA workers. It is a good example of architecture completed under this program. WPA projects in New York City were among the most extensive in the country and helped many people survive the Depression. In addition to Riis Park, Orchard Beach was also completed under the auspices of this program.

Finally, Riis Park is associated with Robert Moses, New York City's powerful Commission of Parks. Robert Moses (1888-1976) was responsible for the growth of power, transportation and recreational facilities in New York State and New York City for over 45 years. He headed the New York City Parks Commission from 1934 to 1960 and the Marine Parkway Authority and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, among others.

Riis Park retains a high degree of integrity. While user groups have changed throughout the years and the park has been poorly maintained, the overall design is intact. Since the park was substan-

tially completed in 1937, there have been very few changes or additions. Three concession buildings were added as was the Wise Clock. Some original plant material has been lost and replaced. There has been some change in the active areas of the Back Beach and the Bathhouse is currently closed except for some food service, toilet facilities and police and first aid stations. Areas planned for walking and sitting are now used for picnicking. This is most evident in the Mall Promenade. The open lawn area, surrounded by a walkway, was originally intended as place for a quiet walk. Today, the lawn and surrounding trees are used almost exclusively by people picnicking and the quiet ambience has been somewhat diminished.

Loss of original fabric is most apparent along the Boardwalk. Wood decking has been replaced with concrete and this changes the original feeling of the Boardwalk. Repairs to original fabric have resulted in replacement with inappropriate materials and repairs have not always been made with the best materials and workmanship. In 1964, all the structures were sandblasted eradicating the unifying park wide color scheme.

Despite these changes on the overall plan, the circulation pattern and relationship of buildings to the landscape is intact. The park retains a high degree of integrity because the 1936-1937 plan is substantially intact. Later modifications have had little impact on the overall design.

Major Design Features

Aspects of Jacob Riis Park which are representative of 1930's and 1940's recreational architecture and park design, particularly in New York City, include:

- The use of ornamental masonry and brick details in the 1932 portions of the Bathhouse were typical of the New York City Parks Department and other public buildings of the period.
- The Bathhouse layout, architectural elements of its 1932 portion, and aspects of the site plan repeat elements of 1929 Jones Beach design. Although the layout is not identical (Jones Beach omits the East and West Pavilion structures at the Bathhouse), similar architectural elements include the symmetrical massing with entrance and beach pavilions, the use of towers, brick and cast stone detailing, and the use of courtyards on a central axis to serve as changing areas. Similar site elements at Jones Beach included an the use of an ellipse form for the Boardwalk, wooden decking, and a ships rail nearly identical in form to that used at Jacob Riis Park.
- The Mall Buildings are similar in siting and form to the structures at Orchard Beach, also dating from 1937, which also relate to an ellipse-shaped beach Boardwalk.

Aspects of Jacob Riis Park which exhibit the use of Art Deco and Moderne design adapted to architecture include:

- The use of Moderne style buildings to "unify" the park. Architectural and site design features which were used in the 1936-37 renovation to provide a common architectural vocabulary included: the curved, smooth walls of Mall Buildings and Art Deco elements; the introduction of the central, rounded section of the Bathhouse, and; the application of open, stylized lettering (now removed) to buildings which identified the various concession areas. These forms are reinforced by the the grand ellipse of the site layout and curved features within the site plan.
- The introduction of horizontal building elements (Mall Buildings and Central section of Beach Pavilion) to integrate them into the landscape.
- The 1937 simplification of Beach Pavilion fenestration by removal of facade articulation (windows, door openings, porches).

Aspects of the Jacob Riis Park which are characteristic of a planned NYC beachfront Park during the WPA / Robert Moses period include:

- The integrated layout and design of buildings and sitework using the grand curves of ellipse and Back Beach to echo the curved Mall elements and the curve of the Bathhouse addition.
- The provision of an integrated recreation complex include outdoor active sports, including the adjacent golf course concession, and indoor visitor services typical of the period. The Plan incorporated tiers of activities including the Beach, the Boardwalk, and the Back Beach; each tier had a different mix and intensity of activities and was accessible by walkways paralleling the shore. Within the Back Beach area, active and paved recreation spaces and court games were concentrated adjacent to the major buildings (Mall and Bathhouse), alternating with lawn spaces or grass playing fields.
- Incorporation of both typical and unique site elements of the period; examples of typical features are the Type B New York street lamps used for pedestrian portions of the Back Beach and Mall, the concrete and wood slat benches which were typical of New York City parks of the period, and the Boardwalk layout and form which was typical of other seaside parks at Jones and Orchard Beaches. Examples of unique features include the Boardwalk lights, designed soon after the Park opened, with horizontal mast arms and circular decorative elements as well as other, smaller site features such as the bandstand.
- The integration of roadway and vehicular circulation elements into the overall site plan concept, typical of the Robert Moses approach to

integration of public services. The scale of the parkway connection, the magnitude and scope of the immense parking lot, and the integration of curved forms characteristic of roadway geometries with smaller scale pedestrian and recreational activities are all characteristic of this approach.

- The use of a combination of formal and informal seaside plantings which framed active and passive recreation areas in the Back Beach and Mall areas, providing a definition for each area, and curved planting shapes which softened the relatively spartan concrete layouts of the court games which they bordered.

2.3 Assessment of Landscape Elements

The analysis in this chapter compares the general existing condition to what was constructed in the 1936-7 development period, highlighting what remains from that earlier period, and drawing conclusions as to the significance, historic context and integrity of what currently exists. This section of the Overview documents each of the elements which comprise the park landscape, including:

- Topography
- Land Use
- Circulation
- Buildings and Structures
- Spatial Relationships and Views
- Planting
- Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements
- Lighting
- Signage

Finally, a section is provided in Site Utilities.

A more detailed documentation and analysis is provided for each sub-area in Chapters 3 through 7. Figure 14 shows a 1939 aerial photograph of the Park, indicating the mix of uses, location of key buildings, and overall planting concept.

Today, the architectural design, the general topography and the pedestrian circulation system still unify all the areas of the Park, as do the natural resource of the Beach and the linear Boardwalk/ Promenade which connect all the parts of the Park. The site furnishings, plantings, and other landscape elements have all been altered, but still contribute to the perception of the various areas of Jacob Riis Park as being parts of the whole design composition. The following sections discuss each landscape element of Jacob Riis Park.

Topography

The flat terrain of Jacob Riis Park is characteristic of the seaside environment, and is an important aspect of the 1936-8 renovation. The height differential between the Boardwalk and the Beach, as well as the relationship of the Back Beach and Mall to other park sub-areas, appears to have changed little. Some accretion of blown sand at planting borders has occurred, although this has not changed the overall layout significantly.

The existing topography of the Park is for the most part flat except for some minor changes created between the Boardwalk, Back Beach and Beach. The original dune system before the Park was built is no longer existing. Minor grade changes do however exist but are limited to 4-6 feet over the entire site which generally drains toward Jamaica Bay and has not undergone purposeful alteration since 1937.

A low dune has formed along the north side of the Boardwalk/Promenade, possibly as a result of the

various landscape planting efforts that have occurred on this strip over the years. These plantings have acted much as a snow fence does, trapping blown sand into a drift which is then stabilized by the plants' roots. This low dune, combined with the maturing of the plant material has formed a visual as well as a physical barrier along most of the north side of the Boardwalk/Promenade.

Land Use

The location of buildings containing visitor services (the Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings) was an integral and highly significant part of the original Jacob Riis Park design concept, and these key buildings remain substantially as built in 1937. The layout of the Back Beach to contain a diverse mix of active and passive recreation, locating court games close to the major structures interspersed with more "natural" areas, was an important aspect of the original layout and is perceivable today, although some of these activity areas have been changed to other uses since 1937. Additionally, the use of planting borders to separate differing uses from one another, facilitating the mix of uses, was an important part of the original layout and still remains.

The key structures still remain at the Park and, although in disrepair and partially closed off, are still capable of providing support activities to other recreational uses. A variety of recreational land uses occur within the five areas of Jacob Riis Park. The acreage and the activities are evenly divided between passive uses such as strolling, sun bathing or picnicking and the more active uses, such as playgrounds, sports fields or game courts.

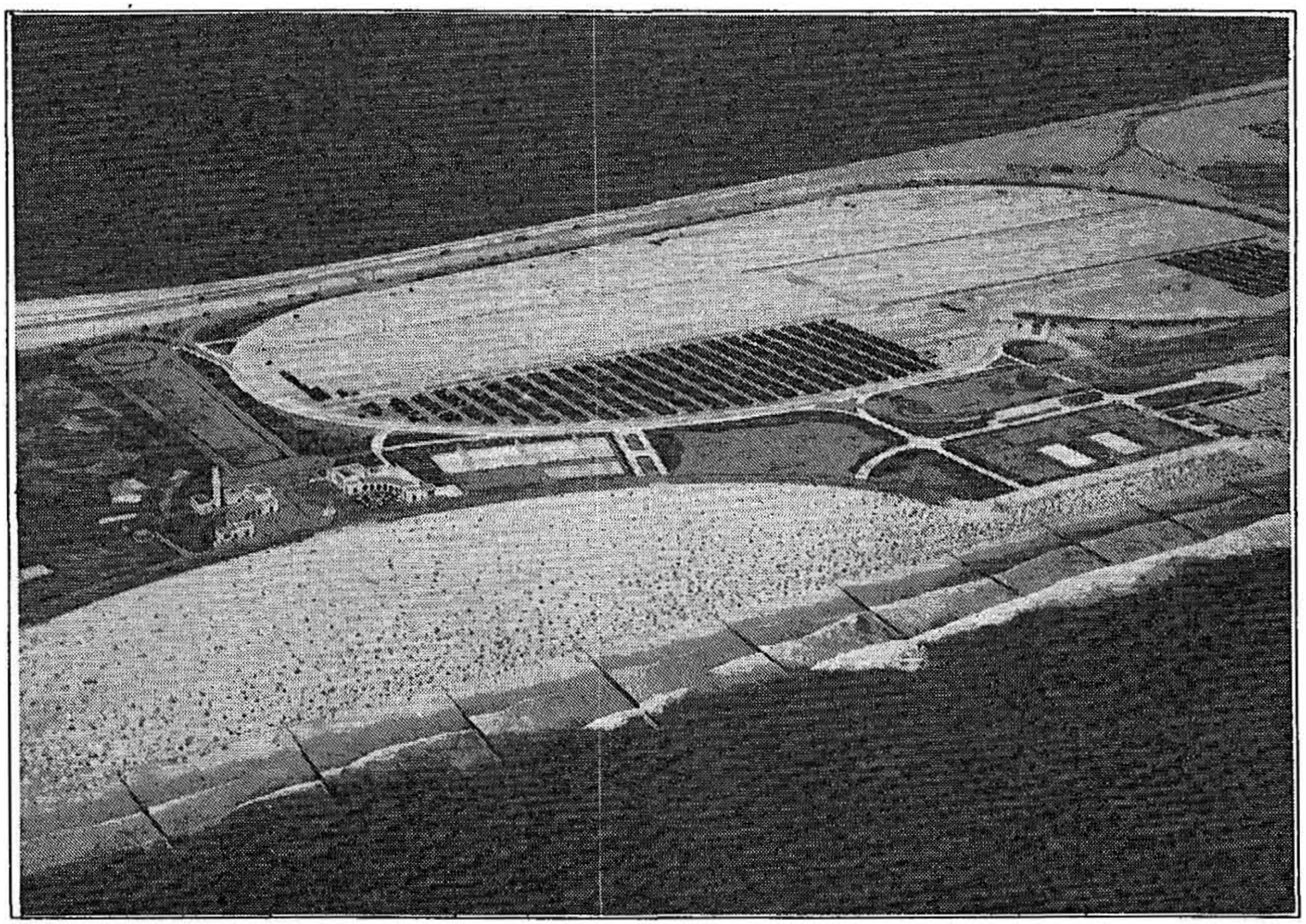


Figure 14: 1939 Aerial Photograph

Circulation

The design of the vehicular and pedestrian circulation network at Jacob Riis Park created the "frame" which defines the zones of activity in the original 1937 design. The layering of activities is directly attributable to the parallel walkways along the Boardwalk and Back Beach. The significance of the Park is strongly related to its regional linkage to the Parkway system, also constructed by Robert Moses, which

enabled public and private transportation linkages to the beach. These linkages go beyond the programmatic to include formal and design implications: the curving arrival drive which defines the rounded shape of the parking lot is complementary to the more formal ellipsoid shape of the Board-

walk and Back Beach activities and contrasts to the straight walkways of the Mall. Nearly all these pedestrian and vehicular ways remain in the same location today as when built and are of primary importance to be retained, although in some cases pavement materials have changed.

As part of the original 1937 design, vehicular access exists by way of either Beach Channel Drive to the north of the Park or by Rockaway Beach Boulevard which approaches from the east and south of the parking area. Both approaches connect to the primary Park entrance by directing all traffic into the parking lot at a point north of the Bathhouse. This monumental system of roadways along the Neponsit Hospital property form the northern and eastern boundaries of the Park. Vehicular circulation within the Park is limited to the city bus stop at the north end of the Mall, a second stop and rider queuing area near the Bathhouse, a drop off area in front of the Bathhouse, a nearby service area and a small permitted parking lot. Service and Park administration vehicles also move along the paved Boardwalk / Promenade routinely.

Pedestrian circulation occurs throughout the Park. However, the primary pedestrian systems in use today, as they were in 1937, are the Boardwalk/Promenade, the Back Beach walkways, and the Mall walkways. In some cases the original materials used in these walkways have been changed but the integrity of their original layout is intact.

The patchwork appearance of the various paving types in use at Jacob Riis Park is the result of ad hoc maintenance. Throughout the Park large areas of settled concrete can be seen along with other cracked or spalled areas of pavement. These conditions are prevalent in most areas of the Park but are especially concentrated along the Promenade and within the game court areas of the Back Beach. Asphalt has been used extensively in many of the game court areas which were previously concrete. Some areas where original concrete materials have been retained have deteriorated considerably, making many surfaces unusable for their intended use.

Buildings & Structures

There are eight structures within the five areas of Jacob Riis Park. The principal buildings are the large Bathhouse (HS 606.1-606.7 - see Figure 15) and two symmetrical Mall buildings (HS 603 & HS 604 - see Figure 16). All other structures are small, including three concession stands (HS 602, HS 605 & HS 607), a mechanical equipment building (HS 603A) behind the West Mall building, and an undesignated utility building in the central game court area.

The three major structures at Jacob Riis Park -- the Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings -- have the highest historical significance within the park and retain a high level of integrity. These structures are analyzed in depth in an Historic Structure Report prepared in parallel with this document. Retention of their character is essential, as the 1937 Park design integrated these buildings into a coordinated landscape. The Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings continue to maintain their strong linkage to the overall site, largely due to the small degree of change to the massing of these structures and due to the relatively unchanged nature of the walkways and sitework in their immediate vicinity.



Figure 15: View of Completed Bathhouse, 1939



Figure 16: View of Completed Mall Buildings, 1939

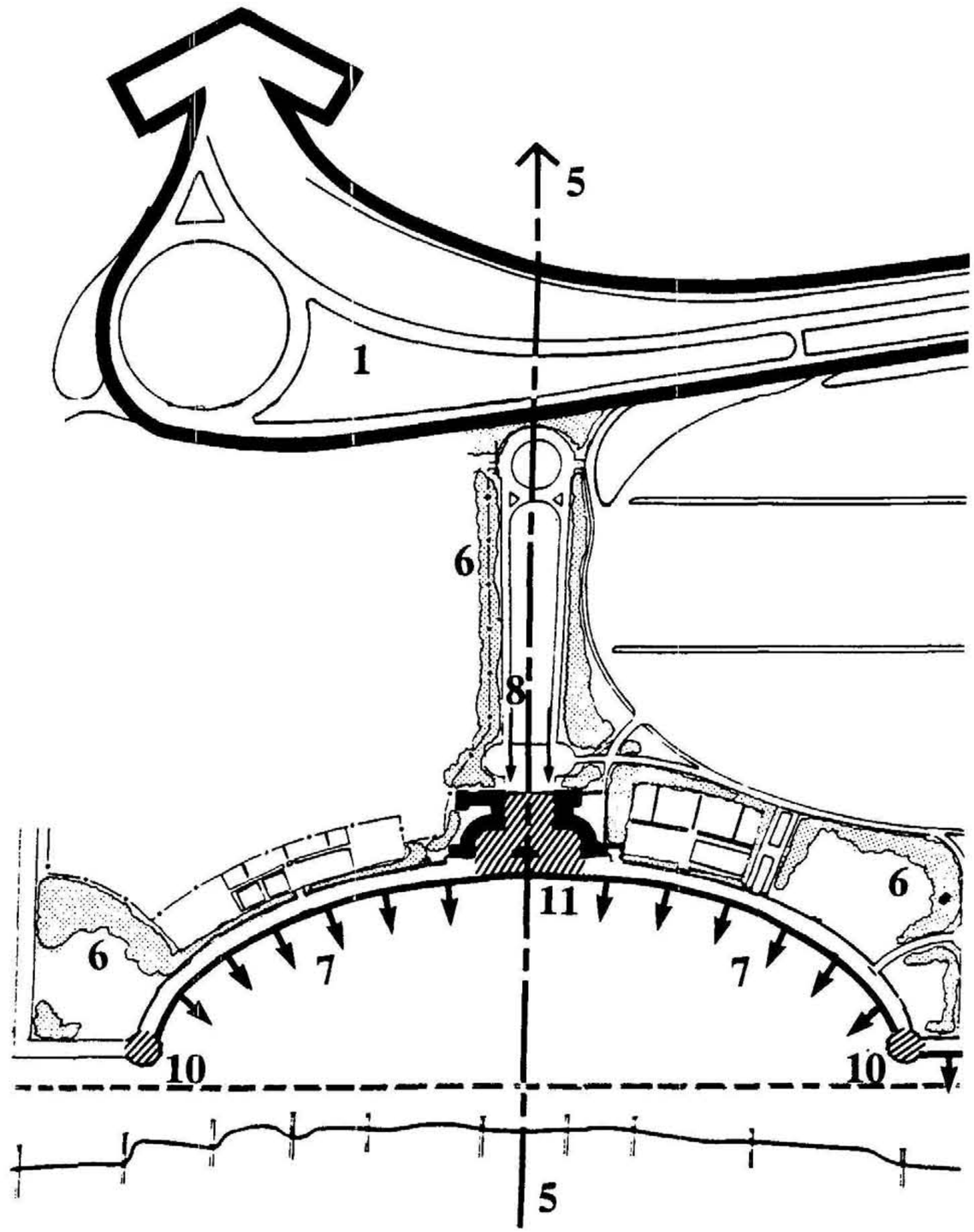
Figure 17: Spatial Relationships and Views

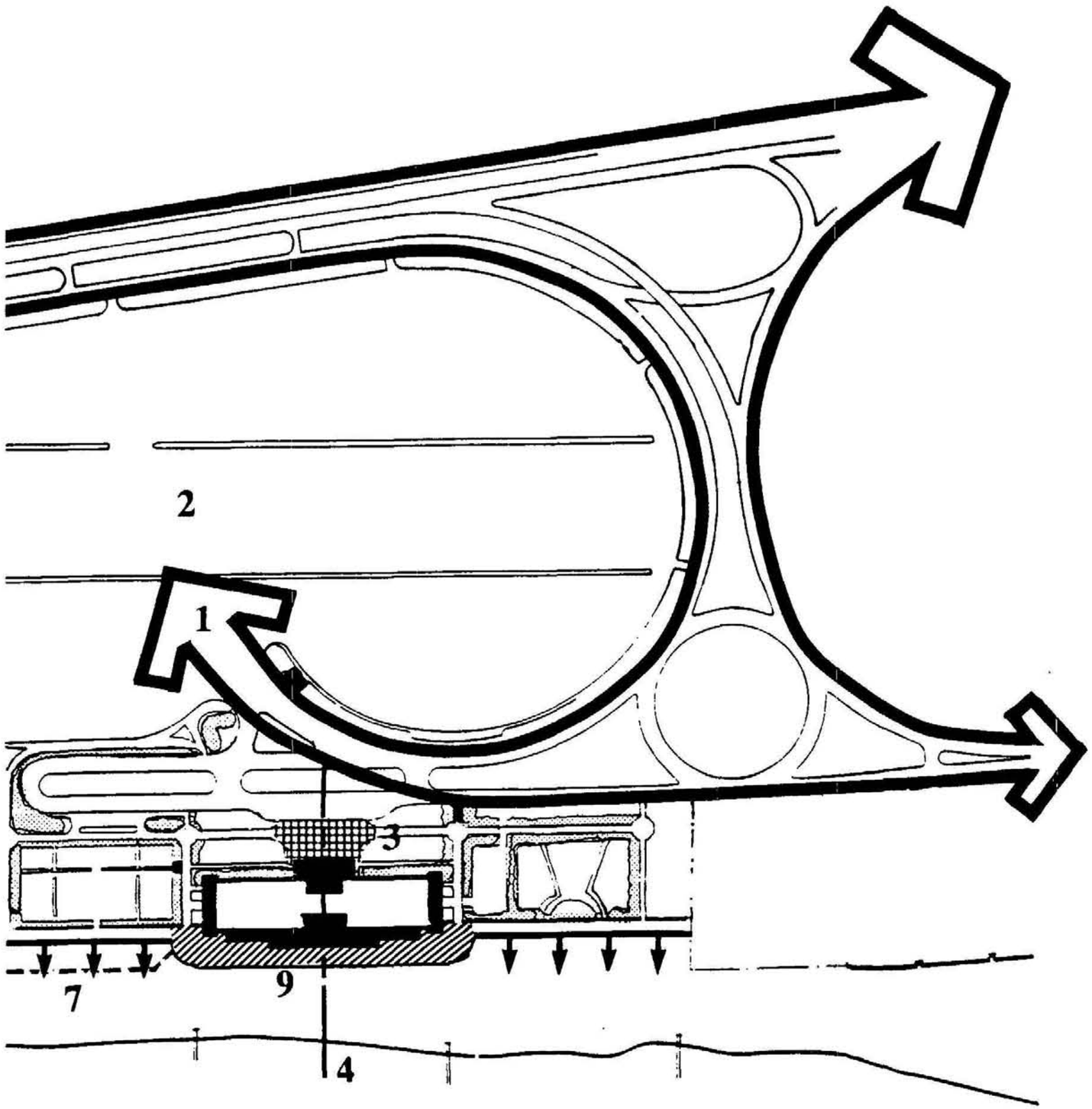
Legend

1. Landscaped Access Roadway & Geometry Define Edge
2. Large Parking Lot
3. Entry Area to Bathhouse
4. Bathhouse Axis
5. Mall Axis & Empire State Building Vista
6. Strongly Defined Space/ Planting Borders
7. Boardwalk/Promenade Ocean Panoramic View
8. Perspective View to Band Stand & Ocean Through Mall Buidings

Special Spaces with Ocean Viewpoint

9. Promenade in front of Bathouse
10. Ends of Crescent Sidewalk
11. Space Defined by Mall Buildings




2
1
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The three Concession structures, two built in the late 1940's and one in the early 1960's, postdate the 1937 park renovation and contain few noteworthy design features. These structures offer important visitor services at intermediate points along the Boardwalk between the principal buildings, but are afterthoughts to the planned overall landscape as originally conceived, presenting a blank rear face to the outdoor recreation activities they abut. The significance of the several smaller structures has not been fully resolved, as the 1975 National Register Nomination identifies the Concession Buildings as "non-contributing," while the 1985 National Register amendment list all the smaller structures as "contributing."

All structures are being used primarily for what they were originally intended, but the Bathhouse and Mall buildings are partially closed to the public for various reasons. The general appearance of the structures is fair to poor with some showing significant deterioration.

Several smaller structures were originally built within game court areas of the Back beach for personnel collecting use charges. These structures were octagonal, copper-roofed small kiosks, placed near entrances from the Boardwalk (see Figures A-9, A-14, and A-17). These structures have all been removed.

Spatial Relationships and Views

The overall design concept of the 1936-37 plan used symmetrical design layouts to define the order of spaces and activities at Jacob Riis Park (see Figure 17). This symmetry was evidenced in many aspects of the Park design and has a high significance to the character and form of the Park. There are two principal axial arrangements at Jacob Riis Park:

- Originally built to stand alone as the focal point of the entire Park, the Bathhouse building established the first order of axial symmetry. Although altered by later development periods, this can still be seen with the eastern most game courts and the playground area continuing to balance that symmetry.
- The second order of axial symmetry was established with the introduction of the Mall and Boardwalk complex which extended the Park to the west. Its development was completed as planned and few changes have altered the original design.

Additionally, border plantings created a sense of spatial definition within areas of the Back Beach and a sense of enclosure along the Mall which was a crucial part of the overall landscape character.

Two key views appear to have been part of the original conception and remain today. The first is the view to the north from the Mall plaza or oval seating area of the distant Manhattan skyline. The focus of this view is the Empire State Building which was raised in 1936, the same year the Mall was developed. A second vantage area is located in the plaza and drop off area just north of the Bathhouse. Vistas from this open space are also of the distant Manhattan skyline, but the foreground is that of Jamaica Bay. Equally, this open area insures that the Bathhouse Entrance Pavilion is highly visible from the large parking lot.

Planting

The intent of the original planting plans appears to have been to define spaces in the Mall and along the Back Beach (see Figures A-23 and A-24, Appendix A), as well as to provide a setting around the Bathhouse:

- At the Mall, the elongated central lawn remains well defined, framed by large Japanese Black Pine (Pinus thunbergi), despite the loss of understory planting. These remaining plant materials are of significance historically to the design concept of the Mall.
- Along the Back Beach, the majority of plant borders to court games areas remain and are a significant part of the original design concept, although the mix and density of plant materials have changed over time. In the more natural areas of the Back Beach at either end of the ellipse, the the original natural borders have been substantially lost and, in the case of the area to the east end of the ellipse, the lawn was replaced by a playing field early in the park's history.
- In the Bathhouse area, the Japanese Black Pines, Washington Hawthorn, Ligustrum, and Rugosa Rosa which comprise the north, east, and west borders date from 1937 and, perhaps to 1932. These materials have significant value, and have been surrounded to the north by a privet hedge which, though added later, is a defining feature in the current landscape and does not detract from the original, higher plantings. The general shape of borders and lawn areas is substantially similar to that conceived in 1932 and expanded upon in 1937. Figure A-29 shows 1941 planting in the Bathhouse vicinity.

When compared to the 1937 planting plans, the variety of existing plant material has expanded since it was originally planned. However, two va-

rieties (Baccharis halmifolia, and Prunus pumila) no longer exist in the landscape. The comparison of 1937 plantings with 1990 plantings is as follows:

1937	1990
Baccharis halmifolia	(not found)
Eleagnus umbellata	Eleagnus umbellata
Myrica carolinensis	Myrica carolinensis
Rosa rugosa	Rosa rugosa
Prunus maritima	Prunus maritima
Prunus pumila	(not found)
Pinus thunbergi	Pinus thunbergi
(not listed)	Eleagnus pungens
(not listed)	Malus sp.
(not listed)	Pyrus calleryana
(not listed)	Ligustrum vulgare
(not listed)	Euonymus kiautschovicus

Of the remaining original plants, two are particularly visible elements. The Pinus thunbergi is used extensively along many of the Back Beach and Mall walkways. This species has remained within the limits of the original design without introduction of any additional pines into new areas. These pines are the dominant plant material which now define the edges of the Mall and appear to be healthy. The Eleagnus umbellata is found primarily along the Boardwalk/Promenade and throughout the Back Beach areas. It no longer exists strictly within the 1937 configuration but has become a dominant plant throughout the Park in areas not originally planned. The balance of the remaining original plants do not adhere to the plans of 1937.

Site Furnishings and Small Scale Elements

Many of the site furnishings which were put in place in either 1932 or 1937 remain, although they are significantly deteriorated. In the original plans, site furniture was relatively simple in design, befitting the character of Jacob Riis Park and its straightforward and economical materials. The principal items which remain include sections of the wooden ship's rail on the Boardwalk, wire trash baskets, two types of concrete and wooden slat "Lundino" benches in poor repair, and a few concrete drinking fountains with the hexagonal, flared design. These items were, typically, provided throughout the park in the original design and were important elements to define the small scale character of the environment. The Wise clock on the Boardwalk, added in 1941, is a unique site element, located at a highly visible location.

Detailed location and condition assessments for each item of site furniture, as well as lighting and signage, are discussed in Chapters 2 through 7 of this report; site maps are provided in Appendix C. The section below highlights the overall repertoire of site furniture which exists at the park, its historic importance, and its predominant condition.

Benches

The four main Bench types currently in use at the Park are indicated in Figure 18. Two of these types were indicated in original plans and appear in historic photos (see Figure A-9); these are "Lundino" benches with an exposed aggregate concrete base with wooden slats used as the seat, both with and without a wooden back. In most cases, paint is peeling, some wooden slats are missing or damaged and some concrete bases are broken. The third and fourth type of benches which now exist in the park, mostly behind the Bathhouse and along the Promenade / Boardwalk, have been more recently introduced (post 1960), with galvanized metal supports and a wooden seat and back. These benches are incompatible with the style of site furniture used in the original 1936-37 park design, although these newer, post mounted benches do not show as much deterioration as the older, concrete base benches.

Figure 18: Existing Benches at Jacob Riis Park



Type A



Type B



Type C



Type D

Trash Receptacles

The Trash Receptacles currently in use at Riis Park are a basket design manufactured out of galvanized wire mesh with no additional paint or finish and are used without a liner (see Figure 19). These baskets are used throughout the Park. Historic photographs (see Figures A-2, A-10, A-28, and A-43, for example) show that these were the same type of trash receptacles which have been used throughout the park since its inception, although there is no way to determine if these items are the originals, or more contemporary replacements with the same design.



Figure 19: Existing Trash Receptacle



Figure 20: Ships railing and contemporary picnic table

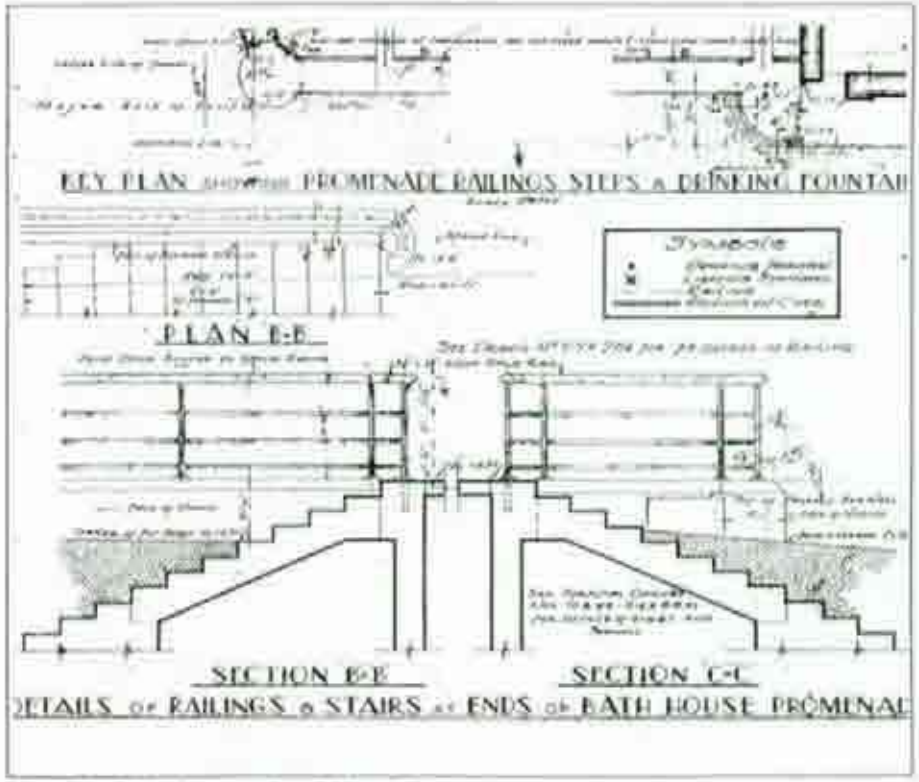


Figure 21: Original cross-section of ships railing

Picnic Tables

The Picnic Tables now used in the park, installed to meet contemporary recreational demands, are seasonally used in the Mall (see Figure 20). It is not known exactly when these items were introduced. Each table is a one piece modular design of galvanized tubular steel with a wooden top and seats. Most appeared to be in good condition. These items are not historic, as there is no documented evidence of picnic tables having been in use at Jacob Riis Park in the initial plans or site photographs.

Ships Railing

The Ships Railing used along the Boardwalk / Promenade was installed during the 1936-37 park expansion and is a prominent site element which provides continuity and scale to the park (see Figures A-14, A-25, and A-30). The Ships Railing is a design made up of round section steel pipe topped with a wooden cap made of Douglas Fir. This cap is in various states of disrepair. Some sections are thoroughly rotted, some are broken and splintered, while others are missing altogether. A few sections have been replaced and are in an adequate condition, other sections have been replaced with pieces of wood that are not similar to the original wooden railing.

There are two basic designs. A 42", four bar (including the top cap) version is found along the south or beach side of the Boardwalk/ Promenade and in the Mall Plaza area. A 36", three bar version is found along the north or land side of the Boardwalk/Promenade, where the railing is mounted on top of a 6" concrete curb. In both types, the rail height is equal from the surface of the walkway. The rhythm of the vertical elements in the rail varies, with paired supports every third opening, matching the score lines in the concrete

surface. Original details are shown in Figure 21.

The finish of the wooden caps also varies from a white painted finish, to varnish, to bare wood depending degree of exposure to sun, wind, and water. Records do not indicate how the original rail was finished. Exposure to the elements has also caused much of the pipe railings to become rusted, pitted and blistered. The worst damage has occurred on the ocean (south) side of the railing and in some places pipe sections are almost completely rusted through.

Chain Link Fencing

Chain link fencing is called for on a number of plans and drawings from the 1930's. Photographs and notes on plans indicate heights as great as sixteen feet in some of the game court areas (see Figures A-9 and A-14, which indicate that these fences separated game court activities from one another and from the Boardwalk). Some proportion of this chain link fence has been removed, as indicated in comparative plans in Chapter 6, dealing with the Back Beach. Chain link around ball fields was added later, as these uses were not part of the original design. This material has also suffered from the effects of time, weather and use as evidenced by rusted and torn sections of fencing that in many places have fallen away from their supports (see Figure 22).

Play Equipment

A construction plan dated December 17, 1936, shows one playground in the original concept, located east of the Bathhouse and divided into three areas, separated by fences and hedges, one each for boys, girls and small children. An "open shelter, Type B", was also shown in the center of the complex and was probably fitted with seating for adult supervision. No evidence of these items remains. A small grassed area with flagpole was located behind this shelter. The equipment called for was as follows;

Childrens Play Area:

Garden swings 2 sets
Kindergarten swings 2 sets
Seesaws 2 sets
Sand tables 2
Kindergarten slides 2
Play houses 2
Pipe frame exercise unit 1

Girl's Apparatus Area:

Playground swings 8 sets
Garden swings 2 sets
Seesaws 2 sets
Playslides 2
Pipe frame exercise units 2
Horizontal bar 1
Parallel bar 1
Horizontal ladder 1

Boy's Apparatus Area:

Playground swings 8 sets
Seesaws 1 sets
Horizontal bars 2
Parallel bars 2
Horizontal ladders 4

Benches were also available in each area and a single water fountain was located in the complex. Figure A-18 shows an aerial view of the Childrens' play area in 1937.

The existing Play Equipment at Riis Park includes several metal swing sets, basketball backboards, and a wooden play structure (see Figure 23). The swing sets are rusted and in a deteriorated condition with some broken or missing seats, but still function. Some of the swings may be original. The basketball backboards are also in a deteriorated condition, paint is peeling, the basketball nets are missing, the supports are rusted and some are bent. The wooden play structure, added at a later time when the playground was reconfigured, is usable but suffers from splintering and peeling varnish.

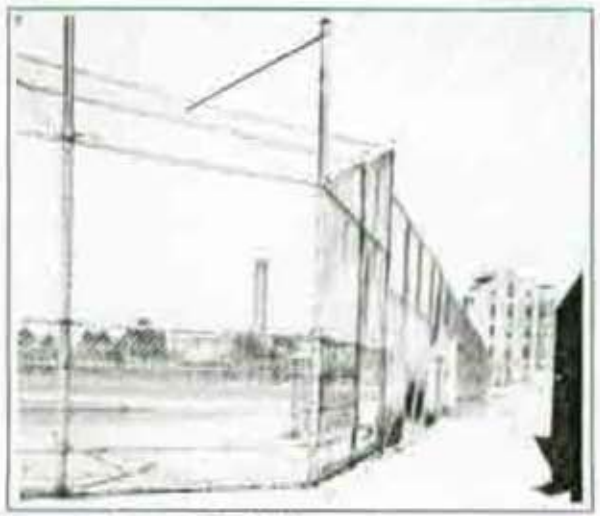


Figure 22: Existing Chain Link fence



Figure 23: Existing Playground Area

Lighting

Many lighting fixtures have been used over time at Jacob Riis Park, although those on the site today represent both historic and non-historic elements. The lights remaining which were used in the 1936-1937 period or are compatible with the historic character include the "Type A" lights with the horizontal crossarm lining the Boardwalk which appear to have been added, based on historical photographs, by 1941 (see Figure A-28) and the "Type B" New York lights which are found in the Mall and Bathhouse areas and in parts of the Back Beach (see Figure A-29 and A-11). The Type B New York lights in the Bathhouse vicinity and in the Back Beach appear to have been installed as part of the 1936-37 park project, while the Type B lights along the Mall were installed in 1948. Other lights which were used at the Park in the 1932-1939 period no longer exist including a 1932 wood bracketed fixture used near the Bathhouse (see Figures A-4 and A-6), globe lights which appear to have been used along the Boardwalk in 1939 and removed in favor of the "Type A" lights (see Figures A-10, A-14, and A-15), accent lights which were used adjacent to activity areas next to the Mall (see Figure A-25), and high mounted flood lights which were originally placed throughout the Back Beach area (see Figures A-9 and A-14).

The scale and repetitive use of the Type A and Type B lights provide a consistency and scale to the overall park environment. The Type A lights were added soon after the Park opened, perhaps to introduce an element of site furniture which may have been custom-designed to complement the Art Deco elements used in the Bathhouse and Mall. The Type B lights were typical of New York City projects of the time.

The lights which are found in the Park today are indicated in Figure 24. Locations and conditions of these elements are shown in Appendix C. The five lighting fixtures which exist at Jacob Riis Park include:

o **Type A** -- comprised of a vertical pipe post with a horizontal arm and two circular accent braces at their intersections. These lights have a painted silver finish many of which are peeling, with bare metal exposed and showing rust in many areas. This fixture is used continuously from the west end of the Boardwalk to the east end of the Promenade ending at the area of the 1960 Park expansion where a third type of light is used. These lights were installed by 1941, although they are not found on any historic drawings. However, the locations of this light correspond with lighting locations indicated on 1937 drawings.

o **Type B** -- The style of light used in the Back Beach area along the eastern ball fields and Mall areas, is a New York pedestrian scale fixture, manufactured out of cast metal and most are in working order. Most of the globes, however, appear dirty and are partially filled with debris. The

Figure 24: Existing Lighting Types (also see following page)

Type A Light



Type B Light



locations of this light are only shown on 1948 lighting expansion plans within the Mall area but their prior existence in other areas of the Park is implied in the Unrau Report and confirmed by historic photographs.

o **Type C** -- The third style of light is used only at the far east end of the Promenade. These lights were introduced in 1960 as part of the park extension to the east and are not of historic importance. These lights are standard aluminum street light all of which are in fair condition but have deteriorating finishes.

o **Type D** -- Another street light in use at Riis Park is a fourth style (D) which is alongside the Park entrance roadways. It is a modern, non-historic design manufactured out of aluminum.

o **Type E** -- The fifth type of lights used at Riis Park are the athletic field lights placed around the ball field at the east end of the crescent. These also appear to be in working order and good condition. Although the ballfield lights were not part of the original 1936-37 installation, as the lighted ball field was added in 1941, historic photographs indicate floodlights installed in the court game areas.

Signage

Historical photographs and design documents show that most signage was historically applied to buildings, indicating concession locations and rest rooms. There was at least one freestanding New York Parks Department identification and rule posting sign on the grounds. Building signs were hung on surfaces, some perpendicular to walls and others made of open, over-sized letters set off from opaque building surfaces (see Figures A-5 and A-27). The NY Parks Department sign was a timber

Type C Light



Type D Light



Type E Light



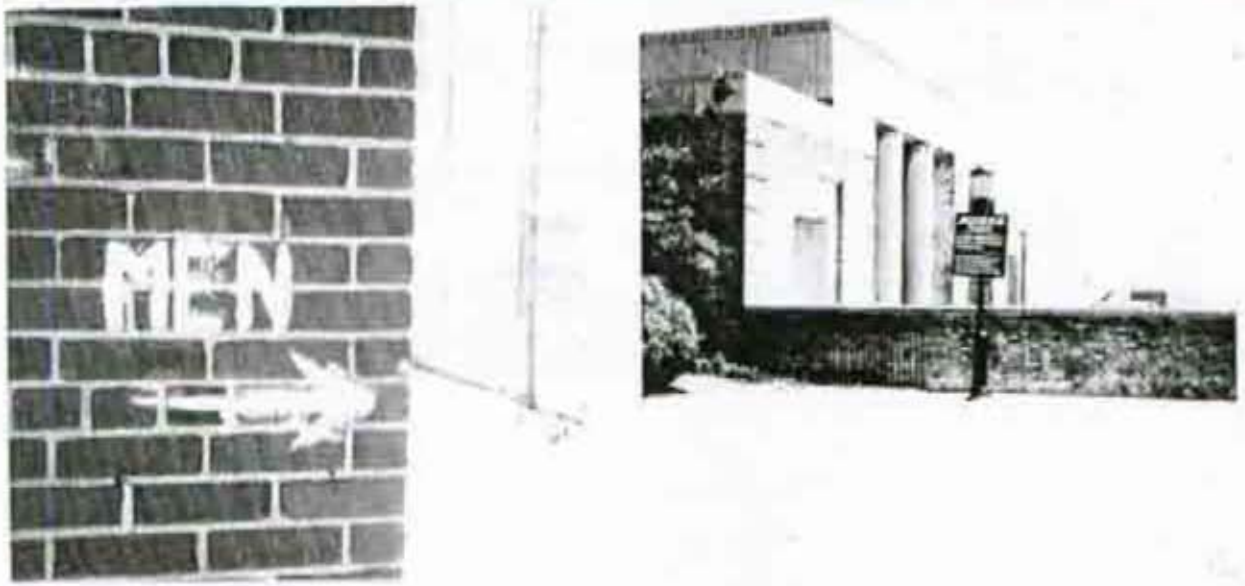


Figure 25: Two types of existing signage

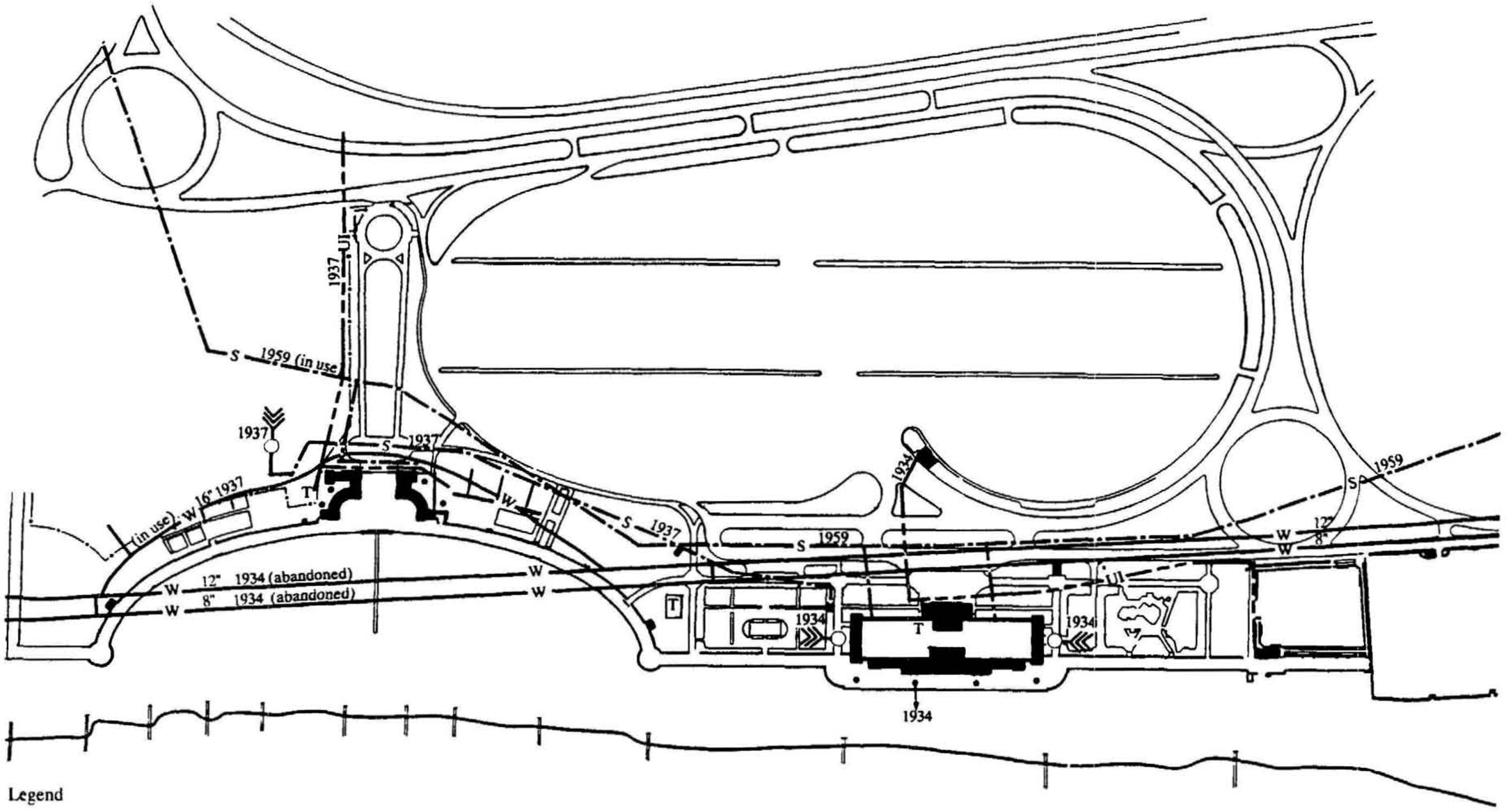
bordered, flat sign with hand-painted lettering (see Figure A-29). The open letter signing on buildings gave a certain continuity across the park because of its stylized Art Deco typeface and the large scale of the information, visible from a distance against light colored building surfaces (see Figures A-20 and A-42).

Nearly all original signs have been lost and those signs which remain are contemporary, comprising a mix of standard NPS identification signs, prohibitory signs, and handicapped access emblems. Several types of Signs are encountered in the Park (see Figure 25). The standard park identification signs used by the National Park Service are sited along heavily traveled pedestrian access points and are in a well maintained condition. The Directional/ Informational signs are also in good condition. These describe a very limited number of user rules and Park fares, and are placed on light poles at an approximate height of eight feet with the sign facing parallel to the traffic movement. In general, signage systems at the Riis Park are a series of uncoordinated signs which do not provide the identification, directional and information needs of the Park, nor are they in character with the historical period of the park. An example of this can be seen with the rest room and concession signage which has, in some cases, been hand printed on the building walls.

Site-wide Utilities

Site-wide utility installations have been sporadically upgraded since the inception of recreational use on the site in 1932. Water supply is provided by City Mains, moved in 1937. Storm water from buildings generally is directed to dry wells or directly into Jamaica Bay. Sanitary wastes are directed to a 27" main installed in 1953, with new connections provided at this time from all buildings. Electric service is provided by Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) and many of the transformers and switchgear do not comply with current codes. In general, utilities cannot at this point be considered as "historic" and the primary concern is to insure that new installations are placed so as to avoid undue impact on other aspects of historic fabric. A key plan indicating the evolution of site utilities is provided in Figure 26.

Figure 26: Evolution of site utilities



Legend

- Septic Tank - Leaching Field
- —S— Sanitary Sewer
- • Storm Sewer - Drywell
- —W— Water Line
- —UI— Electric - Underground Power

Water

Water distribution lines at the site are supplied from two existing water mains. Near the Bathhouse, a 12" and an 8' low pressure main roughly parallel the ocean and are located approximately 100' north of the Bathhouse. The 12" line follows the Boardwalk in an arc behind the Mall Buildings, is increased to a 16" size, and reconnects with the original line. Drinking fountains, irrigation outlets, and fire hydrants are shown connected to these lines. 1937 plans show that these water mains and a gas main originally crossed the sand area in front of the Mall Buildings, but were subsequently moved from this location. No significant operational problems have been reported with respect to the water supply system, except for occasional discoloration of the water. However, as with most of the utilities, portions of this distribution system have not been used to full capacity since the decline of usage at the park.

Storm Water Drainage

Several means of disposal of storm water are employed at the park, including a closed pipe system, leaching catch basins, area drains, and sheet flow off impervious surfaces into sandy or vegetated areas, taking advantage of the permeable quality of the sandy soils.

Over 100 floor drains primarily located in the east and west wings of the Bathhouse tie into collector pipes which discharge to interconnected manholes on the Promenade and flow into four leaching basins underneath the Promenade, with overflows directly to the Beach. These basins are also used for roof drain runoff, through leaders fed through the structure. A trench drain runs along the length of the central section of the Beach Pavilion of the Bathhouse, intercepting water runoff before it reaches the building.

Drainage of runoff on the access road directly north of the Bathhouse is by closed catch basin/manhole/pipe system which connects to City utilities to the northeast. Drainage for the small parking area adjacent to the east wing of the Bathhouse is accommodated by two catch basins. A common problem at the site is blockage of catch basin inlet structures with sand, requiring regular maintenance.

Most of the Boardwalk and Promenade are pitched towards the Beach so that rainfall runs off into the sands, although several areas are level or even have reverse pitch, creating ponding, a problem which should be rectified in the course of the rehabilitation effort.

Five leaching area drains are located in the plaza between the West and East Mall Buildings. Each is plugged with sand, causing water ponding.

Sanitary Wastewater

Wastewater from the Bathhouse and Mall Buildings originally discharged into one of three Septic Systems, each consisting of a septic tank and leach field. These were located off the east wing of the Bathhouse, to the west wing of the Bathhouse, and to the northwest of the West Mall Building, in the golf course area. The latter system, the largest of the three, consisted of a 336,000 gallon septic tank and a 450' square leaching field. Wastewater from the Bathhouse was pumped to this system through a 10" force main located behind the Bathhouse. A Pump House for this purpose is located just off the Western Mall Building, which is now obsolete, as these systems were abandoned in approximately 1953 in favor of direct connection to a 27" interceptor sewer installed to the northeast, behind the Bathhouse. Wastewater generated at the Mall Buildings was also disconnected from the septic system and connected to the 27" interceptor. A 6" Sanitary Sewer drains wastewater from the most easterly Concession Building into this sewer.

Electric and Gas Services

Long Island Light Company (LILCO) provides primary switches, fuses, oil transformers, and underground cables and ducts to the site. Primary service is provided below ground, directly to the Bathhouse and the East Mall Building. Transformers and in-building equipment are generally badly deteriorated and do not meet current codes, requiring replacement. The Bathhouse transformer was last upgraded in 1957 and the Mall Building transformer dates from the original 1937 installation. Gas service exists on the site, and is provided via mains parallel to the main access road, serving the Bathhouse and Mall Buildings.

2.4 Integrity

Riis Park retains substantial integrity as an overall designed landscape, intended to provide a comprehensive mix of outdoor recreation activities and indoor support services. For the park overall, a summary assessment of integrity is as follows:

- **Historic location** -- the park remains in a constant relationship with the Beach, the natural resource which motivated initial development, and with the parkway circulation system which leads to it. Although there have been modest changes within sub-areas of the park, the overall mix of activities remains diverse.
- **Design** -- the overall design is remarkably intact. The circulation pattern which defines the park and relationship of buildings to the landscape have not changed. The symmetrical organization, the major axes of orientation, the principal buildings and structures, and the overall configurations of uses and areas remains quite similar to that of 1937.
- **Setting** -- the seaside setting of the Park, on a narrow sandy area within residential neighbor-

hoods, has remained unchanged.

- **Materials** -- there has been some loss of original materials; due to conscious changes, the ravages of time and the lack of continuing maintenance. Loss of original fabric is most apparent along the Boardwalk. Wood decking has been replaced with concrete and substantially changing the character and special qualities of the elliptical Boardwalk. This is particularly seen in the site furniture, and workmanship. Some plant materials have evolved, in some cases retaining the original intent, such as around the Bathhouse, while in others cases losing essential characteristics, such as the loss of some planting borders in the Back Beach. In some areas, repairs to original fabric have resulted in replacement with inappropriate materials (such as asphalt patches over concrete). None of these latter changes are irrevocable, and could be rectified with relative ease, as none of the materials are unique to the late 1930's period.
- **Workmanship** -- the original sturdy nature of the park design had few site features which exhibited a high level of workmanship, excepting the particulars of the Bathhouse and Mall Buildings (dealt with in the companion HSR documents). The ships rail, Wise Clock, and unique lighting elements, although deteriorated, are all in salvageable condition, suitable for repair.
- **Feeling and association** -- while the complex retains its overall association and feeling of a bathing beach, changing social groups have affected the way the park is used. Areas planned for walking and sitting are now being used for picnicking. But while old activities have been replaced with new ones the intent, to relax and enjoy a day at the beach remain the same.

2.5 Park Sub-areas

Chapters 3 through 7 document the five sub-areas of the site -- the Bathhouse Area, the Boardwalk / Promenade Area, the Mall Area, the Back Beach Area, and the Beach Area -- in more detail. For each sub-area (see Figure 3), the following materials are presented:

- Documentation of the historic evolution of the sub-area and delineation of character-defining elements which are of importance to be preserved during the rehabilitation effort.
- Identification of significant landscape resources, using the Landscape Elements previously presented in Chapter 2, above.
- Documentation of existing conditions and use.
- Summary assessment of the historical integrity of the sub-area.

Chapter 3: The Bathhouse Area

3.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

3.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

3.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

3.4 Integrity

3.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

The Bathhouse was designed in 1931 and initially opened in August of 1932. The immediate grounds surrounding the structure were first completed in 1933; but this development was concentrated along the Beach and scattered across Rockaway boulevard on sites previously used by the Naval Air Station (see Figure 8). Although several alternate Plans for a larger park had been prepared, no record indicates which of these plans, if any, had been formally adopted. None of the Plans dating from that period indicate an intention to relocate Rockaway Boulevard. The original sitework in the immediate vicinity of the building relates to a highly formal and symmetrical structure which was modeled on the successful Jones Beach Bathhouse which had been completed in 1929.

The limited photographic documentation and plans (see Figure 9) of the 1932-3 site design show the building located parallel to the Beach and at a slight skew to the Boulevard, with a vehicular drop off lane immediately in front of the Entrance Pavilion of the Bathhouse. Planting beds were located immediately adjacent to the east, north, and west sides of the structure, with a perimeter walkway system on these three sides. On the north side a lawn was provided between the walkways and the Boulevard. On east and west sides, flower and planting beds were indicated on the plans beyond the perimeter walkway. To the south, or Beach side, a concrete paved apron was provided to the edge of the Beach. The perimeter walkway from this early period remain to the north sides of the structure, although changes to the north lawn and street access were made with the later relocation of Rockaway Beach Boulevard. This remaining 1932 site work is of historic interest for its relationship to the Bathhouse structure and for its characteristic formality, similar to other seashore parks of the period in the New York region.

Work on both the structure and the grounds resumed in 1936, following a major shift in New York City Administration that brought Robert Moses onto the scene. By 1937, the Bathhouse was completely renovated, made part of a larger park design which modified the structure and substantially changed the site in the Bathhouse vicinity:

- To the north, Rockaway Beach Boulevard was relocated northward, realigned to be parallel to the Bathhouse and the Beach, and converted into a formal, dead end access boulevard which served the Bathhouse and the huge, curved parking lot beyond.
- To the east and west, active recreation areas were added, comprising a Back Beach band of court games and natural areas. On the east side, a pedestrian underpass was provided under the access boulevard to connect the perimeter walkway to the parking lot. To the east of the walkway, a supplementary parking lot for employees and service vehicles was also added.
- To the south, the front of the Bathhouse was truncated, enabling construction of a Boardwalk which served as an overlook between the building and the Beach.

A second walkway was added north of the Bathhouse and adjacent to the relocated Rockaway Beach Boulevard, aligned to the northerly perimeter of the outdoor recreation spaces along the Back Beach area, to the east and west of the Bathhouse. The importance of these 1936-37 sitework alterations in the Bathhouse area derives from their relationship to the overall systems of circulation and spatial organization at Jacob Riis Park. These changes modified the Bathhouse area from an isolated recreational outpost along the Beach into the entry site for a much larger, coordinated complex of outdoor recreation, characteristic of other, similar developments of the period in the New York region.

The character-defining elements of the Bathhouse Area which represent important historic, architectural, and cultural values include:

- **Layout form and visual character** -- the symmetry of the landscape, walkways, and buildings remains strongly visible and relates strongly to the overall form of the larger park, which is representative of public seaside parks of the era. The pedestrian walkways, which remain relatively unchanged from 1936-37, incorporate the original 1932 perimeter walk to the north. Also of importance is the site relationship of the northerly pedestrian walkway to the access road and the Back Beach recreational areas, which strongly link this area to the overall layout of the park;
- **Functional use and relationships** -- the Bathhouse area still plays the same potential function which it had in the 1932 and 1936 plans: support of the Bathhouse structure and its activities within the park setting. Many of the original activities -- food service, park entry, queuing areas, concessions -- will continue to play an important part of the Jacob Riis Park experience. The northerly paved entry plaza, which remains in its 1937 configuration and served as a building forecourt, still has the potential to accommodate crowds entering the Bathhouse from the parking lot. The east and west walkways continue to serve their function of leading to the Beach and providing access to visitor services.
- **Features and materials** -- border plantings on the north, east, and west sides of the building remain, highlighting dominant original plant materials; these combined elements presumed to date from the 1932 installation with later additions, but continue to serve as a frame for the

structure. Remaining lighting elements characteristic of the late 1930's and early 1940's period also reinforce the setting. Signage and support service facilities, such as concession wagons and public seating areas, are no longer present but were part of the original site character.

3.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Based on historic photos and plans, this area was always intended to remain flat, recognizing the level quality of this beachfront site and the importance of retaining visibility of the structure from the parking lot. The Bathhouse area remains generally flat, with little perceivable topographic variation.

Land Use

The Bathhouse area, as renovated in 1936-37, was intended to serve as an important entry to the Beach at Jacob Riis Park, providing the largest group of visitor services at the site within the Bathhouse Complex. Although the Bathhouse structure has been largely "mothballed" and taken out of service, there is no reason that this role cannot continue, as the Bathhouse structure remains largely intact and the relationships between access and buildings have not changed.

Circulation

The original perimeter walkway system around the 1932 Bathhouse structure was a significant design element, as it echoed the formality and the symmetry of the building. The east and west 1932 walkways appear to have reconstructed in the 1936-37 Robert Moses renovation (see Figure A-16). The 1936-37 walkways were significant design elements of the overall park plan, as they extended the formal framework of the building to link with the different formal structure of the larger park and its access system.



Figure 27: Entry walkways

The major access drive and its median are important because they extend the automobile access system which was an integral part of the Robert Moses linkage of parks and vehicular parkways; its curves extend the highway geometry of the intersection with the Marine Parkway Bridge and integrate it with the form of the parking lot perimeter. The walkways on all sides of the Bathhouse structure strongly link it to a larger park design and layout and are also significant aspects which achieved integration of the earlier 1932 site into a much larger concept.

Both vehicular and pedestrian access systems are important landscape resources, as they remain substantially intact and in the same locations as shown on original 1936-37 plans:

- The dead end access to the site and the parking lot is the western terminus of Rockaway Beach Boulevard and was originally designed to accommodate public transportation (buses) arrivals as well as up to the 9,000 private cars that could be parked in the adjacent lot. The road system and drop off north of the Bathhouse and the access



Figure 28: Open lawn and entry plaza to Bathhouse



Figure 29: East facade and tower of Bathhouse

into the parking lot east of the Bathhouse correspond with the 1937 plan.

- The Bathhouse area was designed to be and can continue to function as a primary point of entry for pedestrians who have parked or have been dropped off (see Figure 27). Its main function is as an entry point, leading to walkways which connect to the remainder of the Park. These include the western and eastern walks leading from the parking and drop off areas to the Boardwalk/Promenade, and the walkway from the vehicular drop off area to the Entrance Pavilion of the Bathhouse. These accessways have changed little from their original design in 1936-37. The entry to the Bathhouse is now blocked by the chain link fence, but this condition is only temporary. The parking area to the east of the Bathhouse was originally used as a service/delivery area only, but now provides parking for staff and handicapped visitors.

The original paving of both walkways and parking lots was concrete, consistent with the utilitarian design of the overall park. Most of the concrete paving around the Bathhouse appears to be from the original 1937 construction, as there is no apparent evidence of replacement or large-scale modifications. The plaza and walks north of the building have some cracking and weed growth but are in good condition (see Figure 28). The walks to east and west of the building are in good condition also, although several panels have been replaced with new concrete. The concrete paving in the parking lot does not appear to have been altered since it was installed and is in fair condition, although it has experienced settlement in some areas, causing puddling when it rains.

Buildings and Structures

The Bathhouse (HSR 606.1-606.7), a collection of structures linked by enclosing walls, is the only building in this area of the park. This structure is of very high significance, as it predates the larger plan for the area and was a generating element in the ultimate landscape design configuration. The Bathhouse structure is partially closed to the general public due to deterioration and safety hazards (see Figure 28). Once restored, the Bathhouse structure is to be used for its original purposes: a point of entrance, changing and showers, Park administration support, visitor services, and concessions. Retention and rehabilitation of the Bathhouse for public uses is central to the historic values of the landscape, as clearly recognized by the National Park Service's 1979 General Management Plan for the site. Documentation of the Bathhouse is provided in an Historic Structure Report prepared in parallel to this document.

Spatial Relationships & Views

The Bathhouse and site are developed with a strong symmetry along a central, north south axis. This symmetry is reinforced by the turrets on the Entrance Pavilion and the larger towers on the Beach Pavilion, and by the planting borders on north, east, and west sides of the Bathhouse. The towers are important orientation elements from throughout the park. All these elements were part of the site design in the 1932-37 period and are important attributes of the historic landscape. Little change has occurred to these symmetrical aspects of the landscape (see Figure 29).

The open lawn on the north, with it's landscaped beds and vehicular drop off, provides a sense of arrival for current park visitors much as it did in 1937. The quality of this forecourt was reinforced in the original plans by border plantings along the east and west walkways, defining the space in front

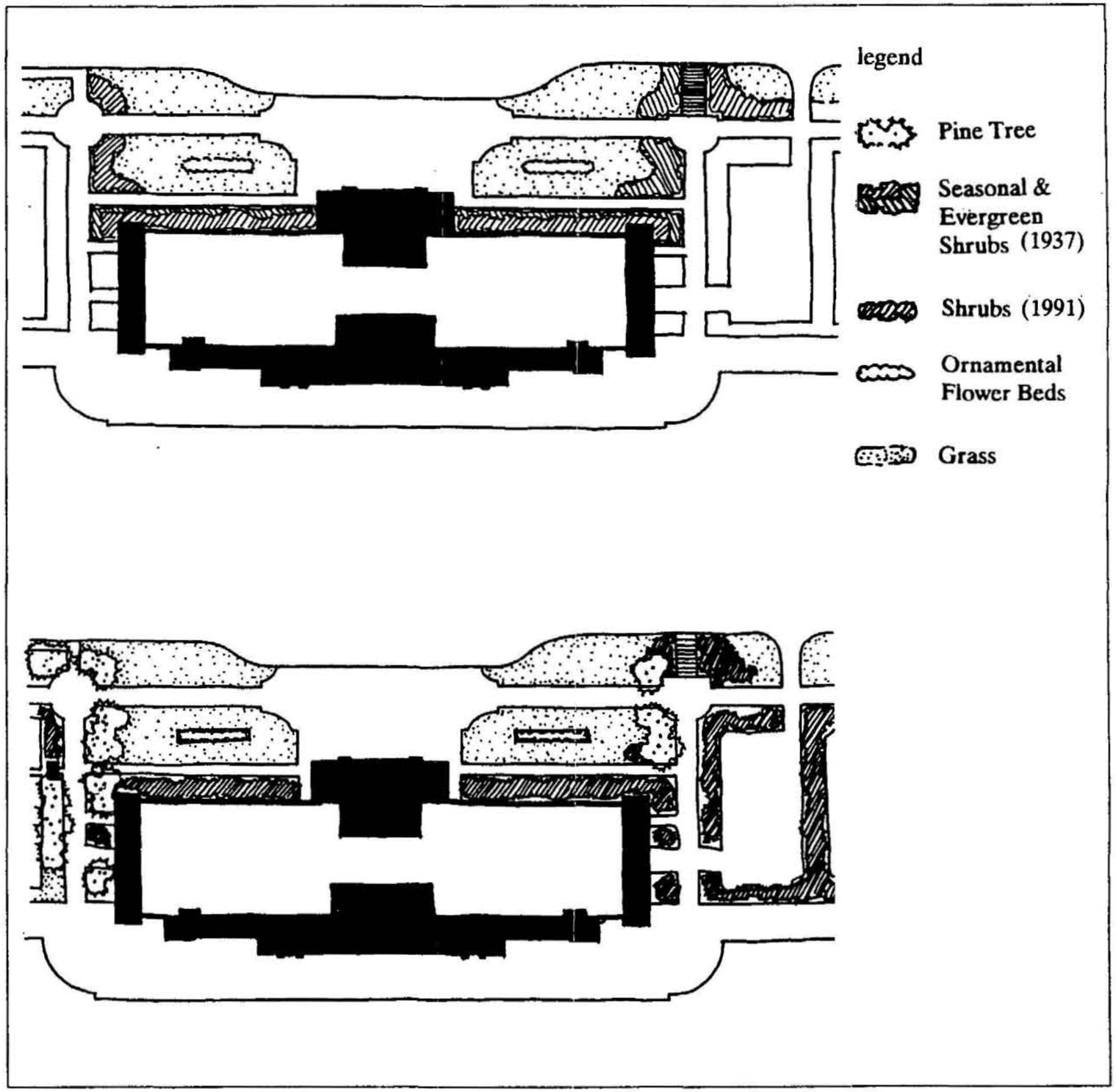


Figure 30: Bathhouse Area: Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration

of the Bathhouse. These border plantings have matured, creating a sense of spatial definition and the visual quality of a large outdoor room, which enhances the setting of the Bathhouse.

Planting

Figure 30 compares the historic and current site plan for the Bathhouse area, based on information available from historic plans and photographs. The original 1932 Bathhouse area design indicated planting beds along the north, east, and west perimeter of the structure, softening the building edges. These planting beds were probably altered during the 1937 renovation, although planting plans are not fully documented. Major planted areas in the Bathhouse area include the following:

- Planting beds along the building edges -- beds against the northern walls of the Bathhouse contain Washington Hawthorn (Crataegus phaenopyrum), Ligustrum (Ligustrum sp.) and Rugosa Rose (Rosa rugusa). They appear in a 1937 photo and because of their size, they may have been planted in 1932 when the first phase of the Bathhouse was constructed (see Figure 31). This cannot be verified since as-built plans from the 1932 construction have not been found. The Japanese Black Pines (Pinus thunbergi) bordering the east and west sidewalks are not shown on the 1937 planting plans but, based on the size of these plant materials, must have been added soon afterward. This planting is part of the original historic fabric of the park. The Eleagenus (Eleagenus umbellata) shrubs in this area were also shown on the 1937 plans but only a few of them exist compared to the planting plan. The Privet (Ligustrum sp.) that exists in this area was not part of the 1937 planting and the installation date for this work is unknown. The beds along the east and west sides of the Bathhouse also have plantings of Eleagenus and Japanese Black Pines as well as Thorny Eleagenus (Eleagnus pungens). Although there are no planting plans for the areas immediately surrounding the Bathhouse, the Thorny Eleagenus and the Japanese Black Pines were used in other areas of the site in 1937.
- Parking lot border planting -- consisting of Japanese Black Pines and remnant Eleagnus and Privet plants. Plans do not indicate that the Japanese Black Pines were part of the original installation; however, they are quite sizeable and are an important landscape feature today.
- Plant beds to lawn areas on the north side of the building -- these have remained intact except, when compared to 1937 plans, the rounded ends have been squared off.
- Lawn areas -- that exist today are more extensive than what is shown on the original plans. The formal lawn areas north of the Bathhouse have remained as constructed except for the plant bed layout change mentioned earlier. Lawn now occurs in some of the areas that were originally shrub beds. This is primarily the case in the plant beds bordering the edges of the east and west walks. The plans do not indicate what

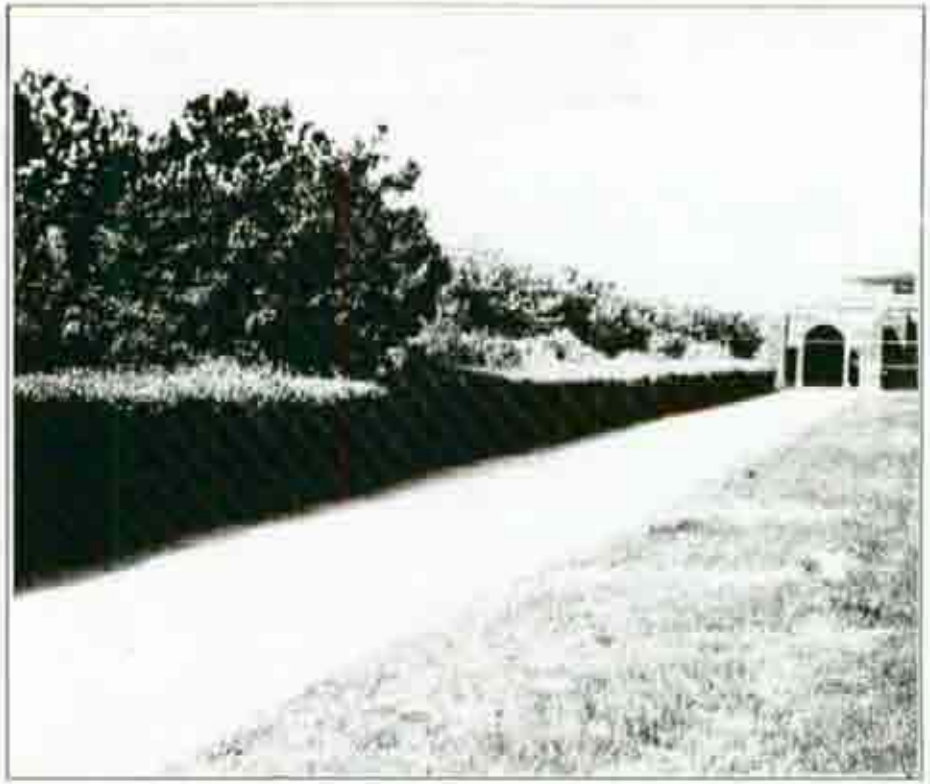


Figure 31: Foundation plantings of the Bathhouse

the original ground treatment was, but because of tub diversity in these areas, grass was probably not the specified material.

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Figure C-1 indicates the location, type, and condition of site furnishings, lighting, and signage in the Bathhouse area. The original Bathhouse area was relatively plain. No site furnishings appear in the 1937 drawings, although pictures from the late 1930's and early 1940's show the typical wire trash baskets and freestanding concrete planters (no longer existing) near the entry to the East and West Wing Buildings. There is no ships railing or permanent fencing present in the Bathhouse area and none was indicated in the early plans. Two ornate fire boxes reflective of the historic period are on the north end of the east and west sidewalks. These are on the original plans and are probably original. Although rusted, they still appear to be in good condition. Site furnishings (except lighting, dealt with in the following section) do not seem to have been an important part of the overall landscape concept for this area in the 1932 or 1937 designs.

There are not many site furnishings today in this part of the park. What is there appears to have been added since the original construction, although there are no dates of installations. A few steel support benches (Type C, dating from after the 1937 period) and wire trash receptacles are placed along the west walk (see Figure 32). Some wooden temporary showers were also placed at the end of both walks (probably when the Bathhouse was closed). The only other site furnishings are the metal bollards placed on the sidewalk between the parking lot and the east sidewalk to keep vehicles off the sidewalk (see Figure 29 above). A public telephone has recently been placed on the west side of the Bathhouse. None of these site furnishing are believed to be historical elements since they do not appear on the 1937 drawings or in historical photographs.

Lighting

The predominant lighting that is used within the Bathhouse area is the cast metal New York Type "B" (B) pedestrian scale light that is used in several other locations throughout the park. These lights were installed as part of the 1937 construction and supplemented in 1948 to serve pedestrian areas, and seem to be an important and consistent site element throughout the park, although some of them appear to require maintenance (see Figure 33). Other lights which were installed in 1932, since removed, included a square wooden pole with square cross-sarm type lights in use around the Bathhouse in the 1930's. These lights were similar to those now in use at nearby Jones Beach. One of these lights remains in the parking lot.

Finally, there are some contemporary metal street lights (D) that are placed along Rockaway Beach Boulevard in front of the Bathhouse; these are relatively recent additions and are not historic. Although they are not part of the historic landscape, these lights are sufficiently widely spaced that they do not significantly impact the overall historic character of the area. No lighting exists within the parking area although some spillage lighting occurs due to the proximity of the Promenade lighting and lights near the Bathhouse. Several of the lights are not working.

All lights and poles are in good condition except for one that is located at the entrance to the pedestrian underpass. This fixture is in a deteriorated condition.

Signage

The 1932 signage for the Bathhouse area included simple projecting signs placed on the 1932 Bathhouse to indicated Mens and Womens facilities as well as administrative areas (see Figure A-5). When the Bathhouse was renovated from 1936-37, these signs appear to have been removed in favor of large, open lettering applied to the building to indicate the location of Concessions and services (see Figure A-42, for example). The 1932 signs were wood framed and rustic in nature, while the 1936-37 signs were more stylized and in keeping with the Art Moderne Bathhouse addition. The 1937 signs complemented the character of the buildings and site, but all have been removed.

There are several site signs within the study area but none are historic in nature since they are all recent additions. There are two National Park Service, park identification signs at the north end of the east and west sidewalks. There are also several NPS directional/information signs placed along the sidewalks.

3.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

Subsequent to 1937, few changes have been made to the Bathhouse or surrounding grounds. A steady deterioration has occurred due to a variety of reasons including heavy use, the seaside climate, vandalism, and limited maintenance budgets. Large areas of the Bathhouse are not in use and recently a chain link fence was erected to prevent further building damage and to prevent park users from entering a hazardous area. Figure C-1 (Appendix C) shows major existing site features and the condition and location of site furniture and other landscape elements.

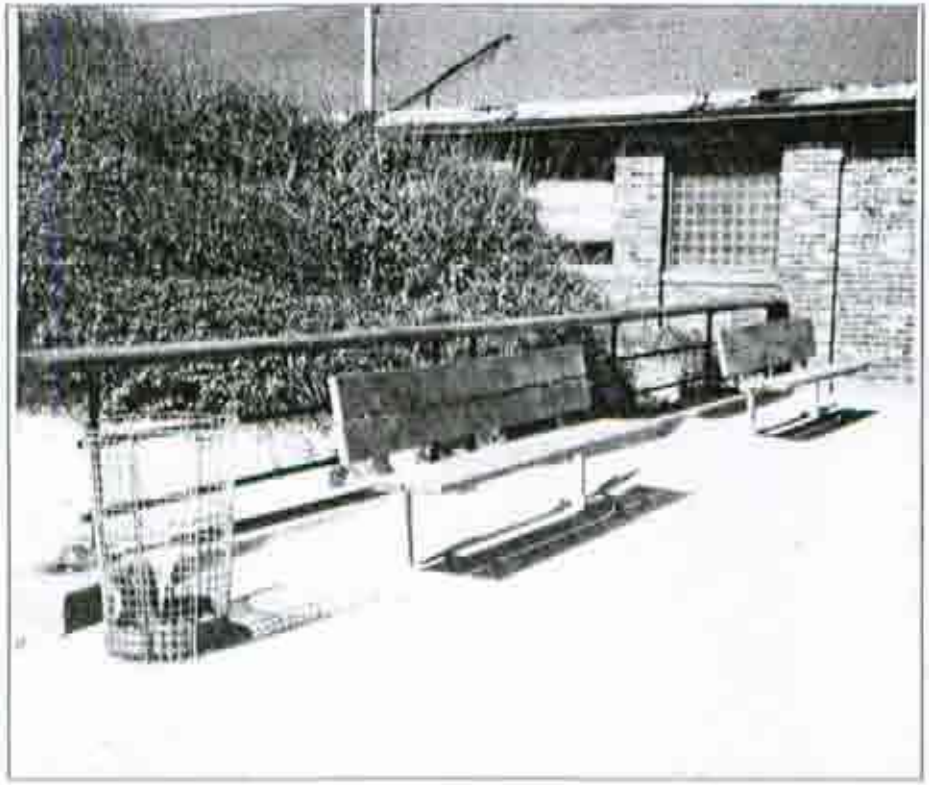


Figure 32: Bench and trash receptacle



Figure 33: New York Type "B" cast metal light in Bathhouse area

3.4 Historical Integrity

The Bathhouse retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The layout and circulation, paving, lighting, major elements of the planting and overall area functions have been retained from the original 1937 design. This area still serves as an entry point for access to the Boardwalk/Promenade and Beach areas.

The overall integrity of the materials and workmanship has been preserved although there are a few deteriorated concrete areas on the walks and parking lots. The feeling and association of the Bathhouse area has a high degree of integrity because of the small amount of change to the area, and because of the dominant presence of the Bathhouse and its related plantings and walkway system, which have changed little in 50+ years and still clearly express the symmetrical and formal intents of the original plans. This is the only area of the park which retains important features from the 1932 site plan, as the perimeter walkways on three sides of the Bathhouse are in the approximate location of the earlier 1932 installation. The retention of the Type B lights from the original design reinforces the historic qualities of this area. Although much of the understory plantings, especially along the outer edges of the space have not survived, the overall design intent has been preserved because of the mature and large scale planting borders which surround the building. The remaining Washington Hawthorns were specified in the the original planting plans. The Japanese Black Pines were not specified in the 1932 - 37 work for this area, but are characteristic of the remainder of the Park. Planted area beds are today located in almost exactly the same locations as they were originally in 1936/37.

Several contemporary site furnishings exist in this sub-area, including the Type C "cobra" street lights along Rockaway Beach Boulevard and several pipe benches added well after 1937. The street lights are sufficiently modest intrusions so as to not substantially impact the overall historic integrity of the area. The benches are intrusive to the historic character.

Chapter 6:

The Back Beach Area

6.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

6.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

6.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

6.4 Integrity

6.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

The Back Beach area provided recreational amenities such as play areas and game courts, consisting of a strip of active and passive recreation activities that paralleled the Boardwalk. The general configuration of the design included a series of areas, divided by walkways and accentuated by planted borders. The pattern of these activities placed hard surface activities -- including playgrounds and paved court game areas -- on either side of the Mall Buildings and Bathhouse complex, with less structured lawn areas at the ends of the ellipse and at the far eastern end of the Park. This configuration was an important component of the overall Park design, as it strongly related the Back Beach to both the Boardwalk and the parking lot; integrating it with the overall design concept.

An important influence on the form of the Back Beach, as originally developed, was that most of the activities were income producing, requiring a fee to be paid prior to use and involving staff supervision. This affected the design of each space, as individual activity locations were access controlled at a small kiosk at the entry to each subarea and fencing insured that activities were separated and that only paying patrons could have access. Fee-based recreation has not taken place for many years at Jacob Riis Park, rendering many aspects of the original layout dysfunctional.

The mix of activities, including handball, shuffleboard, paddle tennis, and miniature golf, insured that the Park would cater to a range of users and have a broad appeal. The creation of an intense concentration of active recreation spaces which could provide urban recreation to a city population which had few opportunities to partake of the beaches and open spaces close to Manhattan was an essential aspect of Robert Moses' notion of public works as instruments of public service.

The linkage of this major recreation complex by improved highways and public bus transportation enabled this range of activities to be accessible to large volumes of people in a dense Metropolitan area, consistent with the Robert Moses approach applied at Jones Beach and Orchard Beach, for example. The range of activities at the Back Beach are a critical aspect of the park's significance as an example of a planned beachfront park during the Robert Moses / WPA period.

The concrete walkways that frame the Back Beach have remained relatively constant since its construction in 1936-37; however, there has been a gradual evolution and shifting of the specific activities to respond to changing recreation preferences and needs. The three major court game areas -- west of the West Mall Building, east of the East Mall Building, and west of the Bathhouse -- each are configured with a central entrance from the Boardwalk leading to a variety of court games, separated by walkways, often lined with benches. The central entrances were to enable monitoring of use of the courts, designed to be revenue producing areas. Historic photographs show a series of small kiosks, wooden structures with domed copper roofs, as supervisory stations for park personnel who collected user fees. None of these small structures remain. Individual court areas were typically separated by chain link fences and lit by high floodlights for night play. Although the specific court games and play areas are not all identical to those provided in 1937, the subdivision of these areas has remained remarkably consistent. Typically these areas were bordered by planting strips which separated them from the Back Beach, parking and circulation areas, and one another.

The area to the immediate east of the Bathhouse was originally planned as a children's playground and is still used for that purpose today, although the equipment and site configuration have changed considerably.

The most westerly parcel in the Back Beach, at the west end of the ellipse, remains open. The easternmost end of the park, outside the 1937 park, was added in 1958 to to provide Little League ballfields and additional open area in the Back Beach.

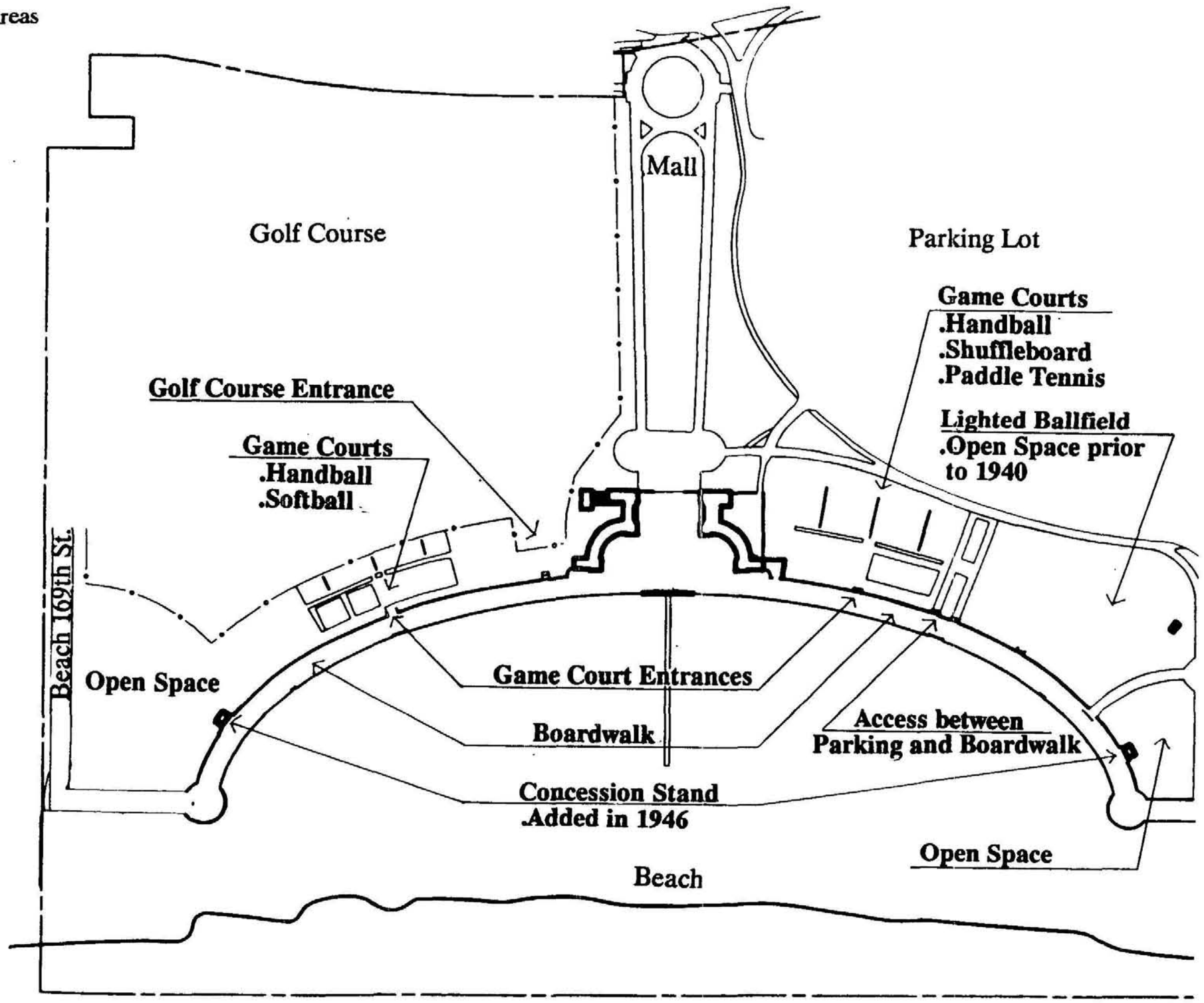
To enable provision of services along the extended length of Jacob Riis Park, freestanding concession stands were added to the Back Beach in 1947 and 1961. The 1947 stands are at either end of the Boardwalk crescent. The 1961 stand is near the easterly border of the Park, near the Little League field. All three of these stands were brick, utilitarian structures.

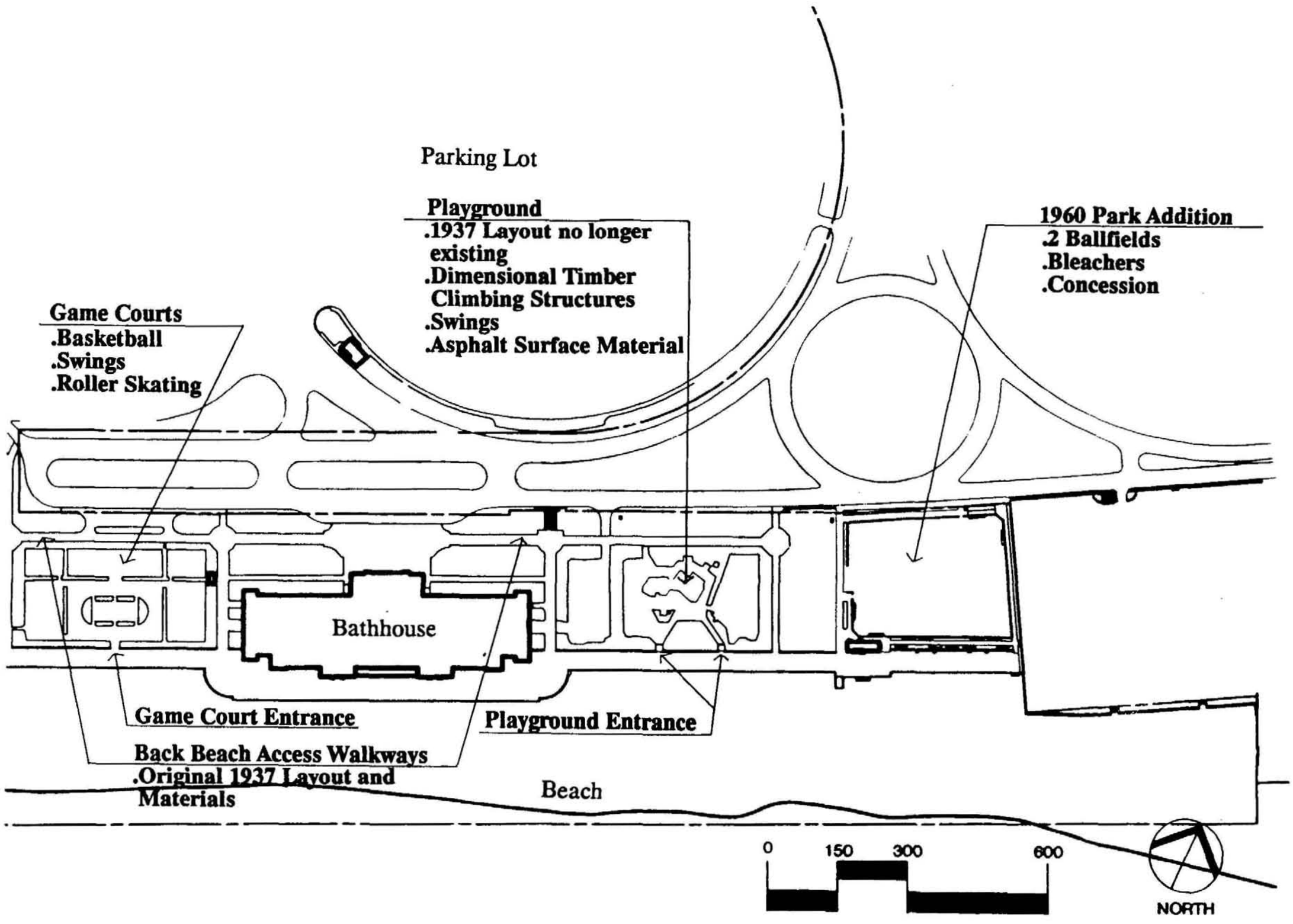
The original layout of the Back Beach included several passive lawn areas, located principally at either end of the ellipse. As opposed to the court game areas, where planting borders were placed along all four sides, these areas were bordered to the north, leaving open views of the Beach. The largest such area, near the east end of the ellipse, was converted in 1940 to a lighted softball field soon after the park opened.

The character-defining elements of the Back Beach area which represent important historic, cultural, and architectural values include:

- **Layout, form, and visual character** -- the 1937 park design is characterized by a formality of design which is typical of comparable parks of the period. The layout and form of the Back Beach used a series of devices, each of which is complementary to the layout and composition of the park, including: the defining walkways which both bounded the Back Beach and also defined the major routes to the Beach from parking; the configuration of court games and activity areas within defined rectangles, or cells;

Figure 49: Back Beach Uses and Areas




Parking Lot
Playground
.1937 Layout no longer existing
.Dimensional Timber Climbing Structures
.Swings
.Asphalt Surface Material
1960 Park Addition
.2 Ballfields
.Bleachers
.Concession
Game Courts
.Basketball
.Swings
.Roller Skating
Bathhouse
Game Court Entrance
Playground Entrance
Back Beach Access Walkways
.Original 1937 Layout and Materials
Beach
0
150
300
600
NORTH

individual cells by planting strips, to separate activities, and chain link fences, to provide spatial definition; planted borders which buffered cells from adjacent walkways and the Boardwalk; center entries from the Boardwalk to maintain control over court use, and; symmetrical layouts which were typically applied within each cell.

- **Functional and use relationships** -- Jacob Riis Park is significant for its diverse mix of urban recreation uses, developed to provide outdoor and healthy activities for an urban population. The mix of recreation types at the Back Beach, as well as the alternating of hard surface areas and grassed areas, placed these activities within an organized matrix. Many of the recreational activities, such as paddle tennis and shuffleboard, were typical of the period of significance.
- **Features and materials** -- the park was designed to the general New York area population and featured relatively utilitarian materials: concrete, chain link fences, and concrete and wood slat benches. The simplicity of this material palette, which survives today, coupled with the surviving planting borders that place these hard surface areas within a park setting are important aspects of the Back Beach area. Lighting and smaller site elements, such as drinking fountains, were part of the ensemble, but did not follow a strong pattern or design motif within the Back Beach, as compared to other sub-areas within the Park.

6.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

The Back Beach areas are generally level, as required by the paved game areas and recreation fields. The relatively small variation in topography is typical of the seaside location. Typically, Back Beach areas are several steps below the Boardwalk.

Land Use

The Back Beach is organized into a series of three types of areas that are further divided into spaces dedicated for specific games or activities (see Figure 49). In general, the paved court areas are symmetrically organized around entry points from the Boardwalk. The internal divisions between individual activity areas are achieved through the rectilinear placement of narrow planted areas or rows of park benches.

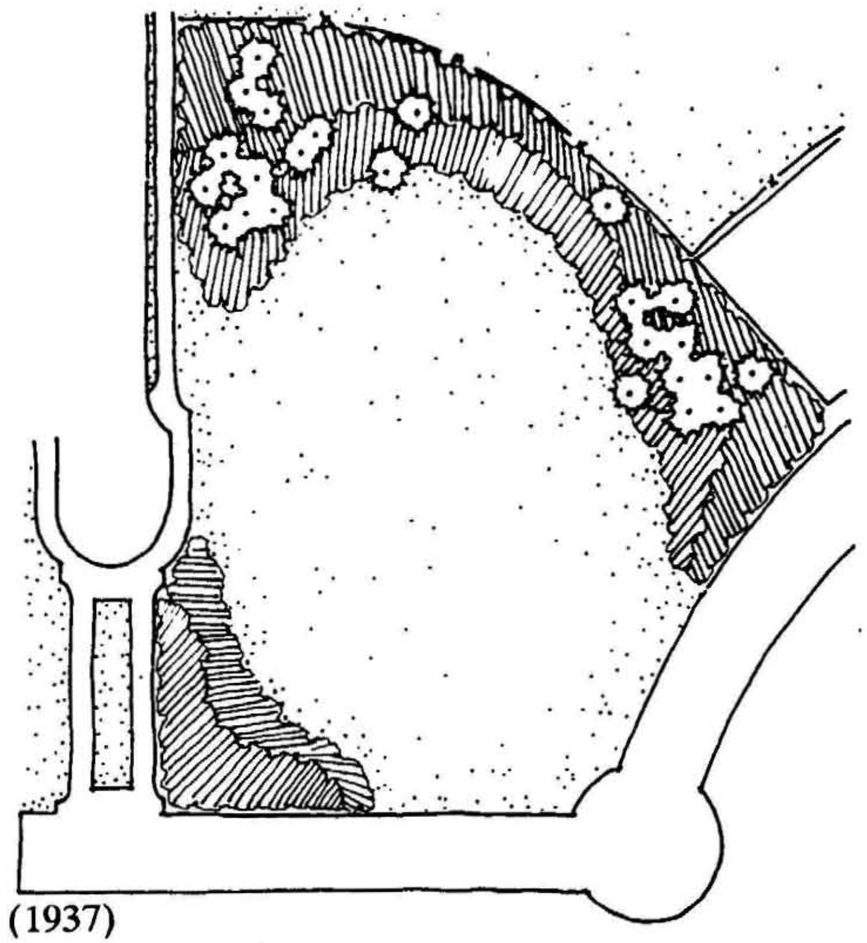
The three types of areas are:

- **Game Courts/Play Areas** -- game courts occur in two locations along the crescent Boardwalk, west of the Mall and east of the mall. The remaining game court area is located just west of the Bathhouse along the Promenade. These areas are located adjacent to major buildings, perhaps originally for ease of supervision and management of the revenue producing activities on them. The childrens' play area is located east of the Bathhouse.
- **Ballfield Areas** -- these occur at either end of the Promenade, and were additions to the original park design (the westerly ballfield in 1940 and the easterly ballfields as part of the 1961 park addition).
- **Open Lawn and Planted Areas** -- only small areas remain which are not delineated for specific recreation use; these are distributed across the Back Beach at regular intervals. The only such areas which are part of the original plan are the triangular shaped area at the west end of the Promenade and the westernmost parcel, which has lost most of its original plant matter and has reverted to a natural state.

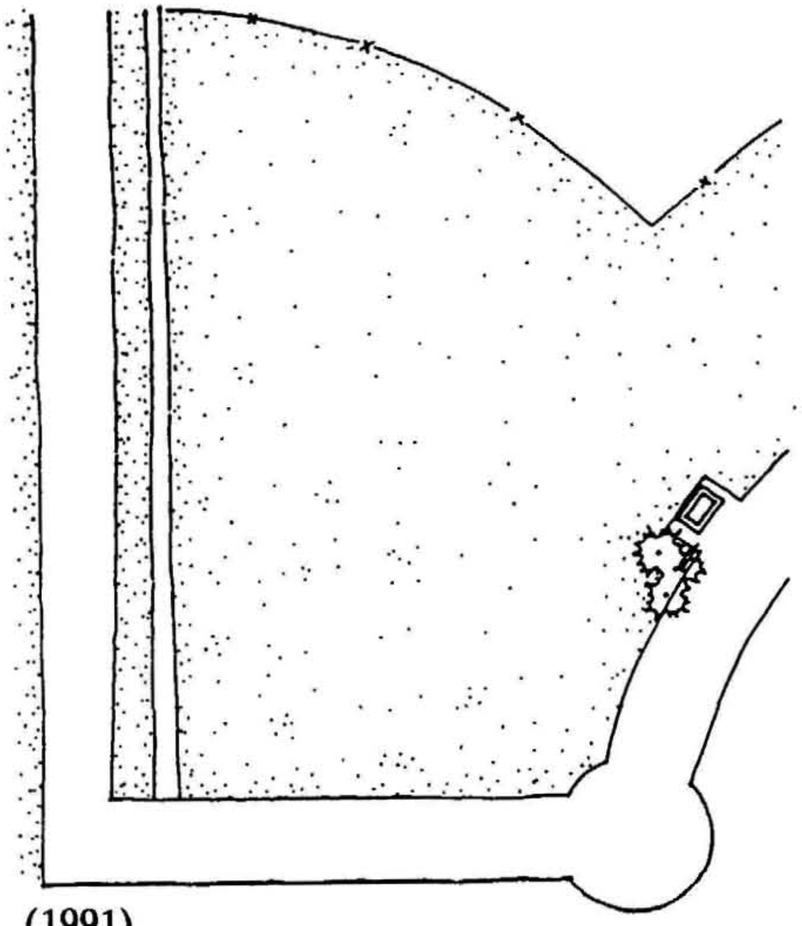
The changes in use of these areas is shown in Figures 50 through 55, which compare the original 1936-37 designs to current conditions:

- Figure 50 shows the westernmost open space area, which was shown as open, passive space in 1937 and remains undeveloped today, with the exception of the Concession Stand along the Boardwalk, added in 1947 (see Figure B - 2, Appendix B);
- Figure 51 shows the game court area to the west of the Mall Buildings. This area was originally planned to have miniature golf, shuffleboard, paddle tennis, and handball. Another use which is not defined on the drawings or immediately apparent from its shape is shown to the far east of this area (see Figure B - 3, Ap pendix B). This area originally had the typical center entrance from the Boardwalk, entry kiosk, and fenced perimeters. Separate entries and fee collection areas were shown to the extreme east and west. This area retains the basic pattern within the paved center portion, with relatively unchanged handball courts and shuffleboard layouts, although a large proportion of the fencing is missing or deteriorated. Basketball backboards have been placed in the former paddle tennis area. The east and west areas have reverted to grass, having lost the activities originally designed for them.

Figure 50: Back Beach Area comparison of 1937 and 1991 configuration



(1937)



(1991)

Legend

Pine Tree

Seasonal & Evergreen Shrubs

Grass

Scale of Feet 0 100 200

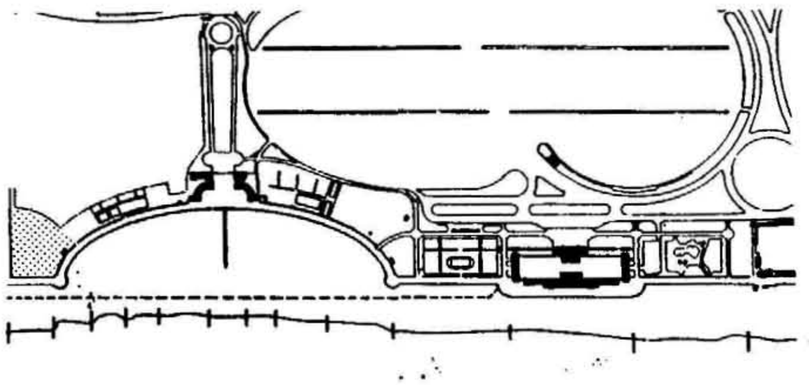


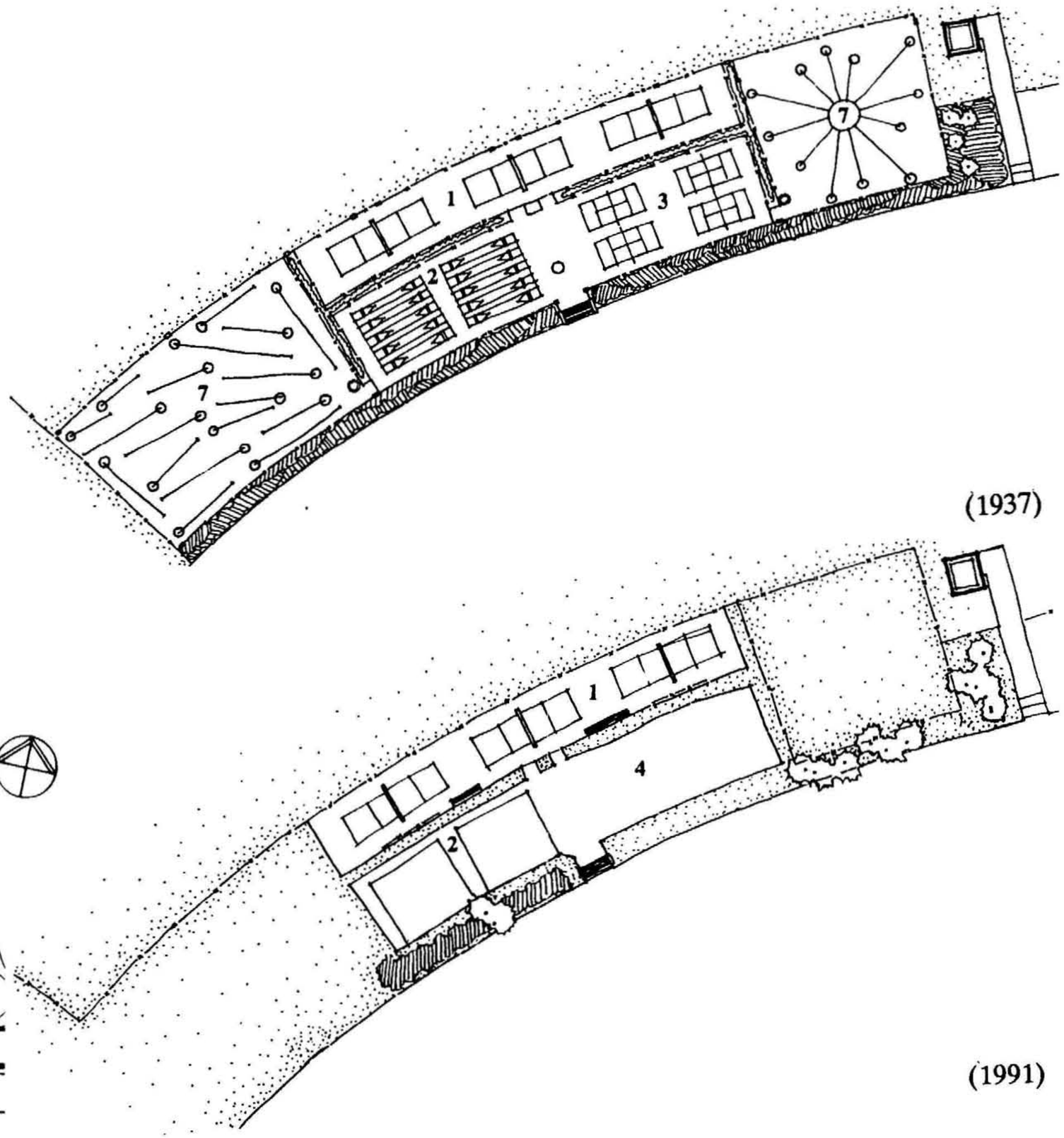
Figure 51: Back Beach Area, comparison of 1937 and 1991 configuration

Legend

1. Handball
2. Shuffleboard
3. Paddle Tennis
4. Basketball
7. Putting Green

Benches
Fences
Drinking Fountain
Pine Tree
Seasonal & Evergreen Shrubs (1937)
Shrubs (1991)
Ornamental Flower Beds
Grass (1991)

Scale of Feet 0 100 200



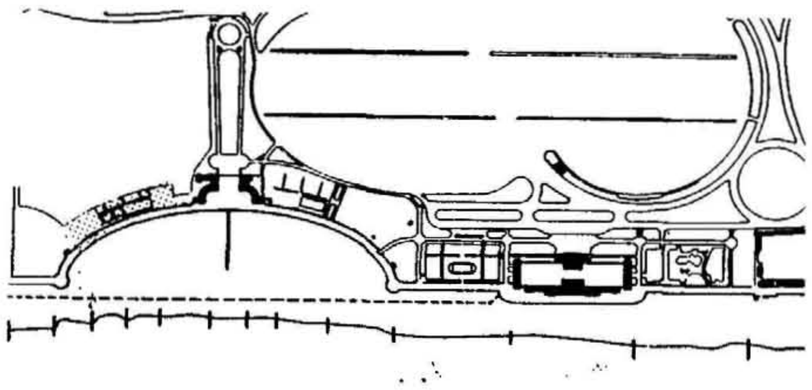
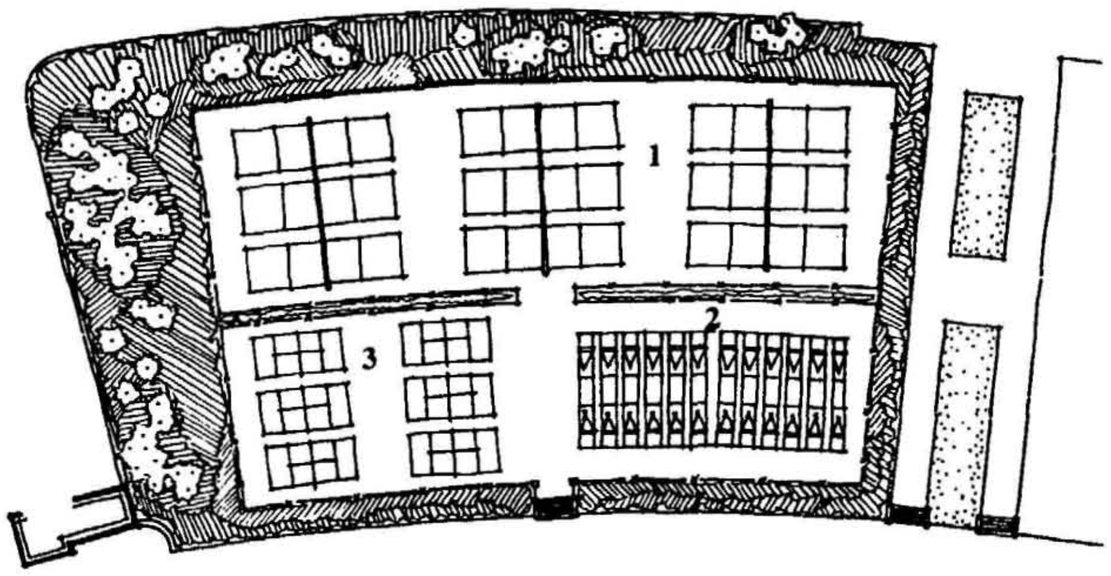
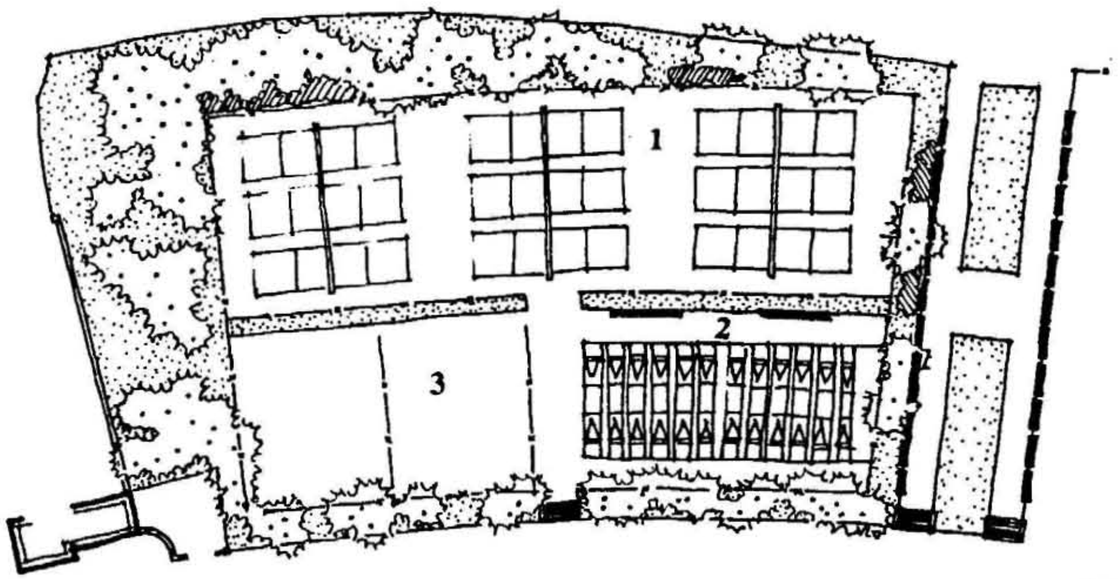


Figure 52: Back Beach Area, comparison of 1937 and 1991 configurations



(1937)



(1991)

Scale of Feet 0 100 200

Legend

- Pine Tree
- Seasonal & Evergreen Shrubs (1937)
- Shrubs (1991)
- Ornamental Flower Beds
- Grass
- Fences
- Benches

1. Handball
2. Shuffleboard
3. Paddle Tennis

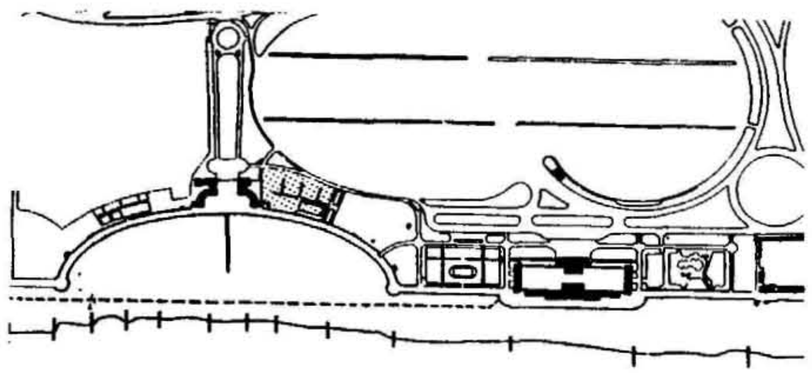
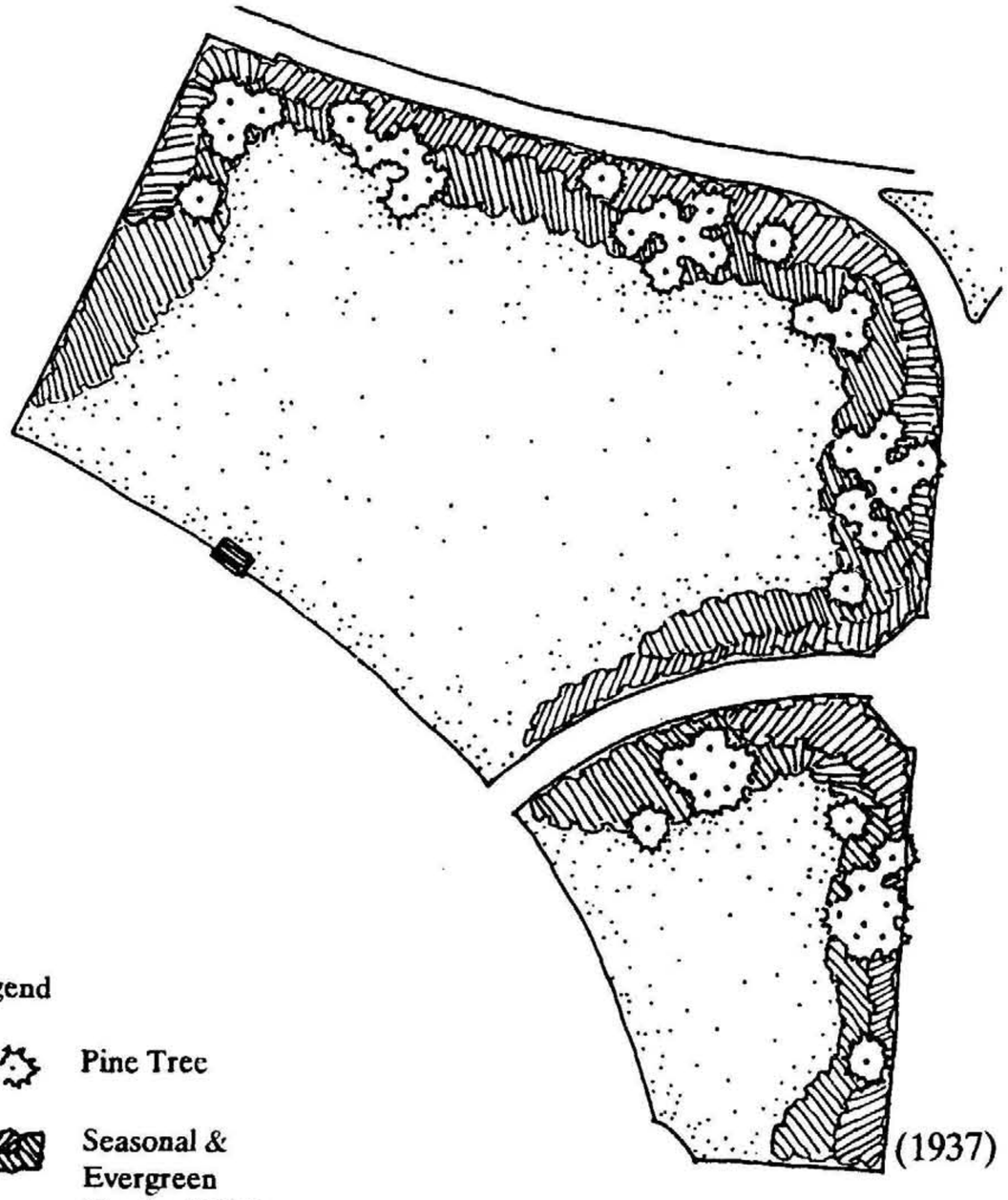
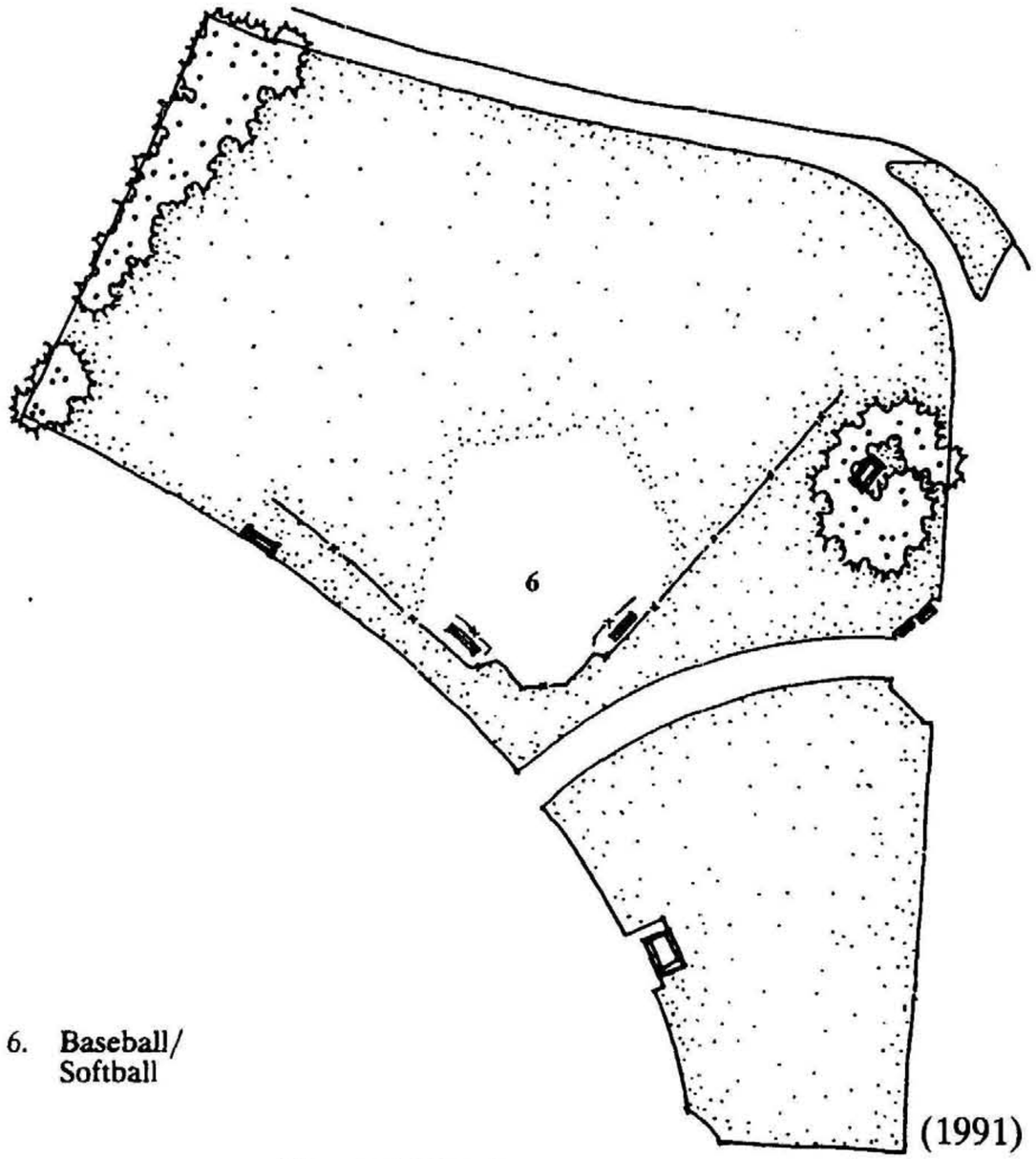


Figure 53: Back Beach Area, comparison of 1937 and 1991 configurations





Legend

- Pine Tree
- Seasonal & Evergreen Shrubs (1991)
- Grass
- Benches
- Fences

Scale of Feet 0 100 200

tures are noted as having significance as part of the overall landscape in the 1985 National Register amendment.

Three other buildings which are sited in the Back Beach have been discussed within Section 3 of this report, as they front on the Boardwalk. The two concession buildings (HS 602 & 605) located along the crescent Boardwalk are unscreened to the rear and are therefore quite visible from the two remaining open spaces of the Back Beach. The third structure is the concession building (HS 607) that was built along with the ballfields after the 1958 eastern Park extension. This structure is a utilitarian box which backs up to the easternmost ball fields. These structures are part of the overall system of activities at Jacob Riis Park, although they are not architectural distinctive.

The small kiosks within the cells of the Back Beach were part of the original park construction and were characteristic of the Back Beach setting; however, these structures have all been removed.

Figure 60: Back Beach plantings



Spatial Relationships and Views

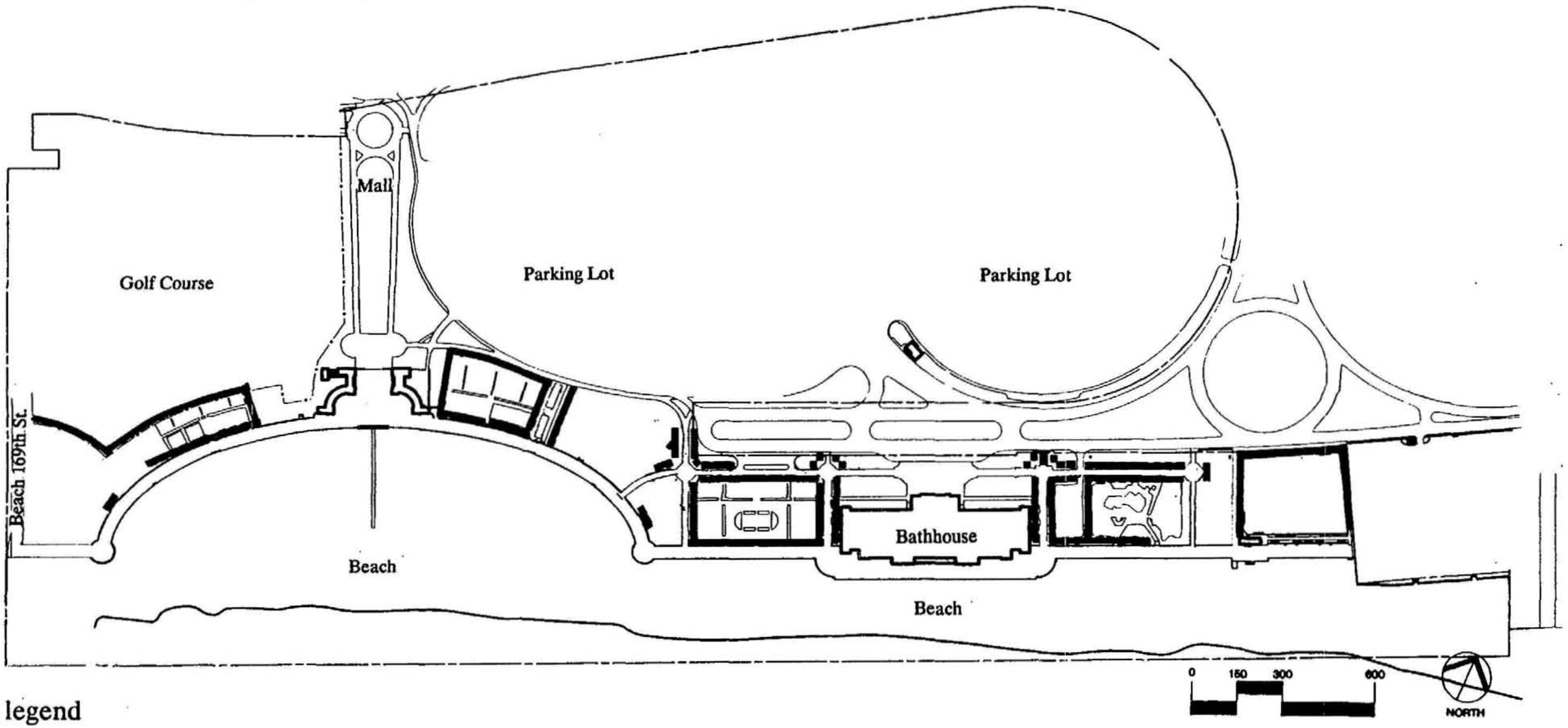
The original conception of the Back Beach was a series of recreation areas, typically bordered by border planting strips, where each recreation area was then further divided into sub-areas by court layouts, walls and backboards (in the case of handball and basketball courts), chain link fences, smaller planting strips and benches. North-south connections across the Back Beach leading to and from the Beach were defined by planting borders which tended to buffer the activity areas on either side. The cross corridors are typically still well-defined by plant borders, and are important elements of the overall design concept at Jacob Riis Park (see Figure 58). Additionally, the border between the Back Beach activity areas and the Boardwalk remains a strong spatial defining element. The original spatial qualities within the individual activity areas are somewhat diminished by the loss of smaller planting strips and the deterioration of dividing elements. Figure 59 shows the remaining planting borders in the Back Beach Area.

The larger original lawn areas were bordered to the rear and left open to views of the Beach. The back borders for these areas have been largely removed, changing from the original spatial concept.

Planting

Figures 50 through 55 compare original planting layouts for the segments of the Back Beach to what exists today. The landscape designed in 1937 consisted of only seven or eight species of plants (see Appendix B, Figures B-2, B-3, and B-5 through B-8). The placement and arrangement of these plants throughout the Back Beach areas was meant to create a naturalistic seaside environment. The 1937 planting plans of the Back Beach show curvilinear bed lines and mosaic-like groupings of assorted plants of varying sizes. These plantings were used to define and separate the various rec-

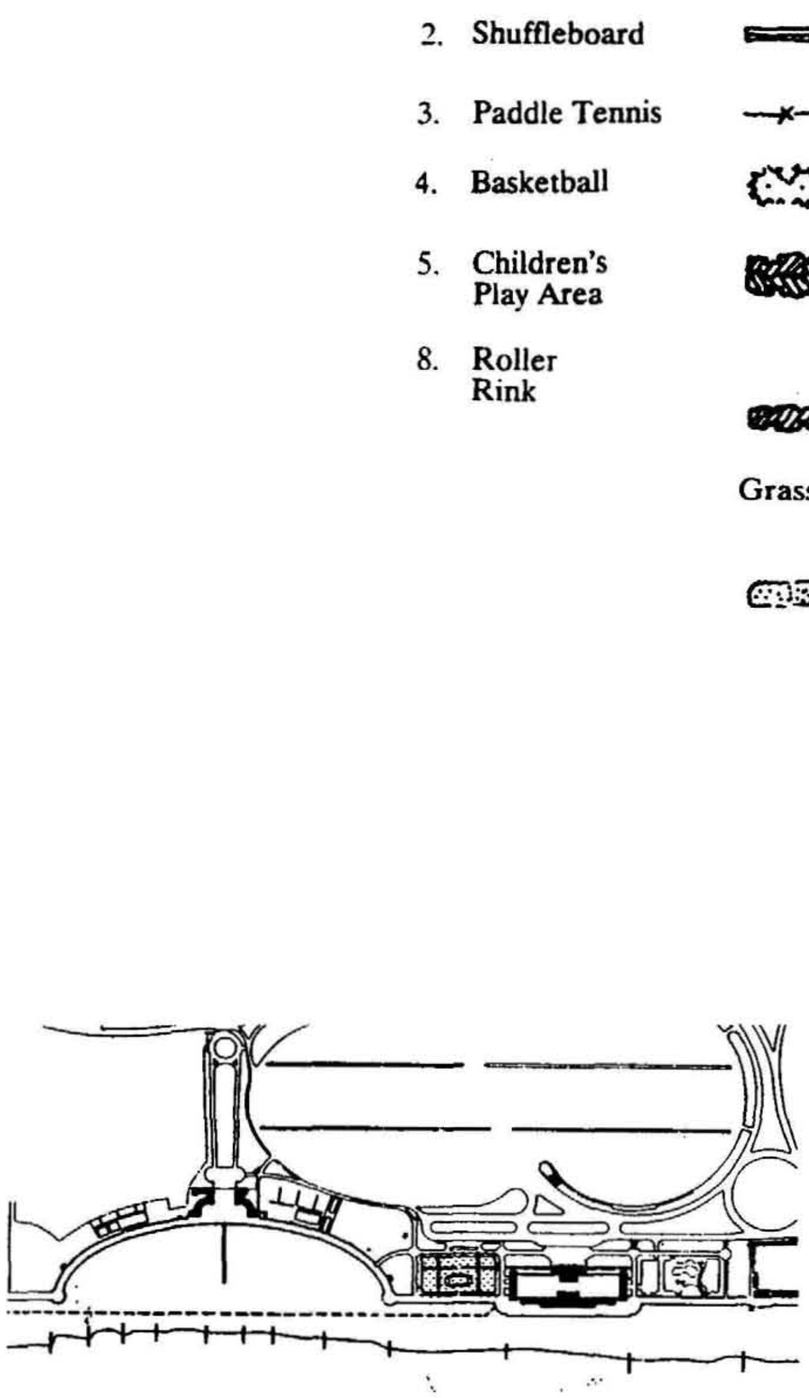
Figure 59: Back Beach, remaining border plantings



legend

Remaining Border Plantings

Figure 54: Back Beach Area, comparison of 1937 and 1991 configurations



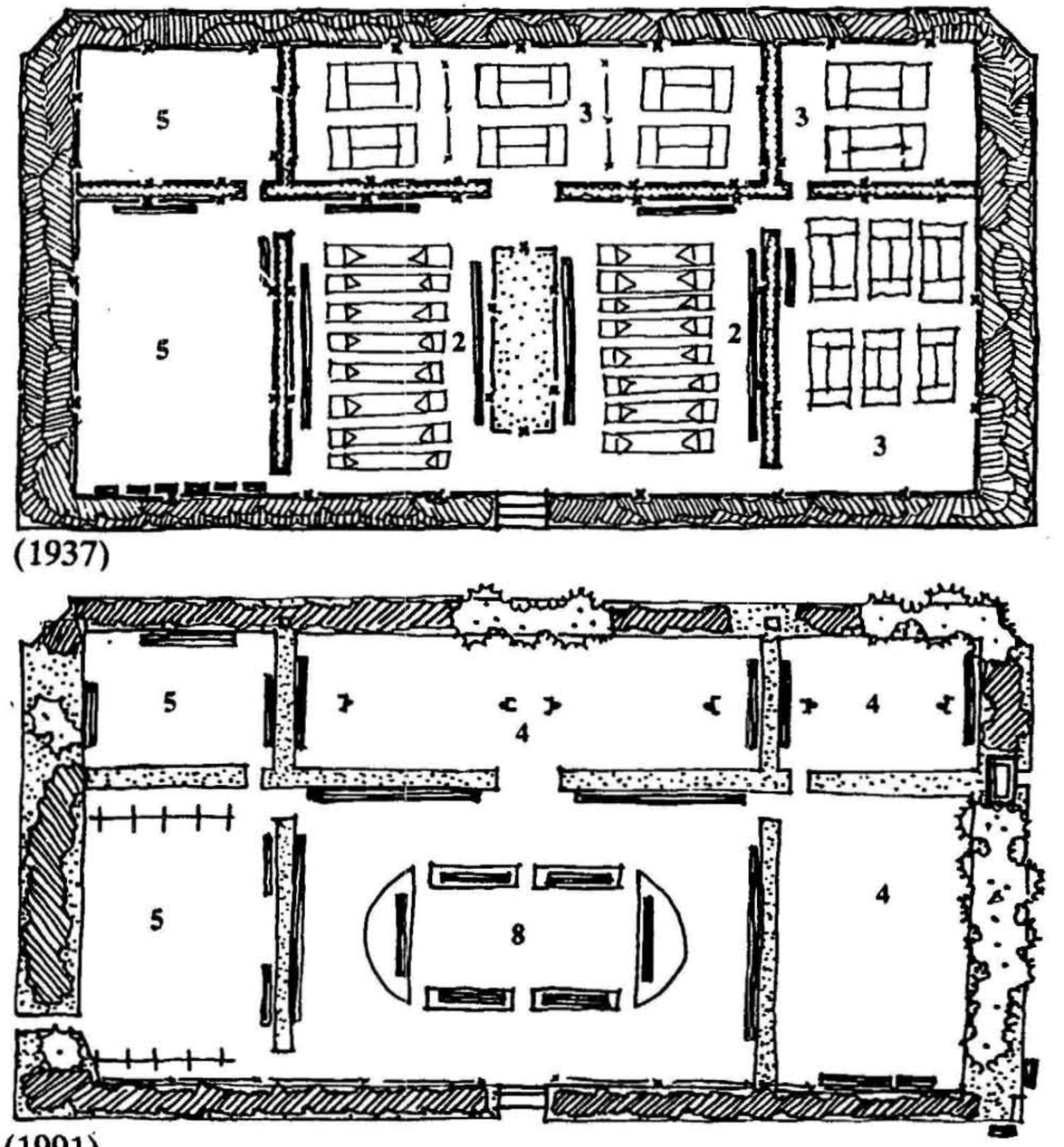
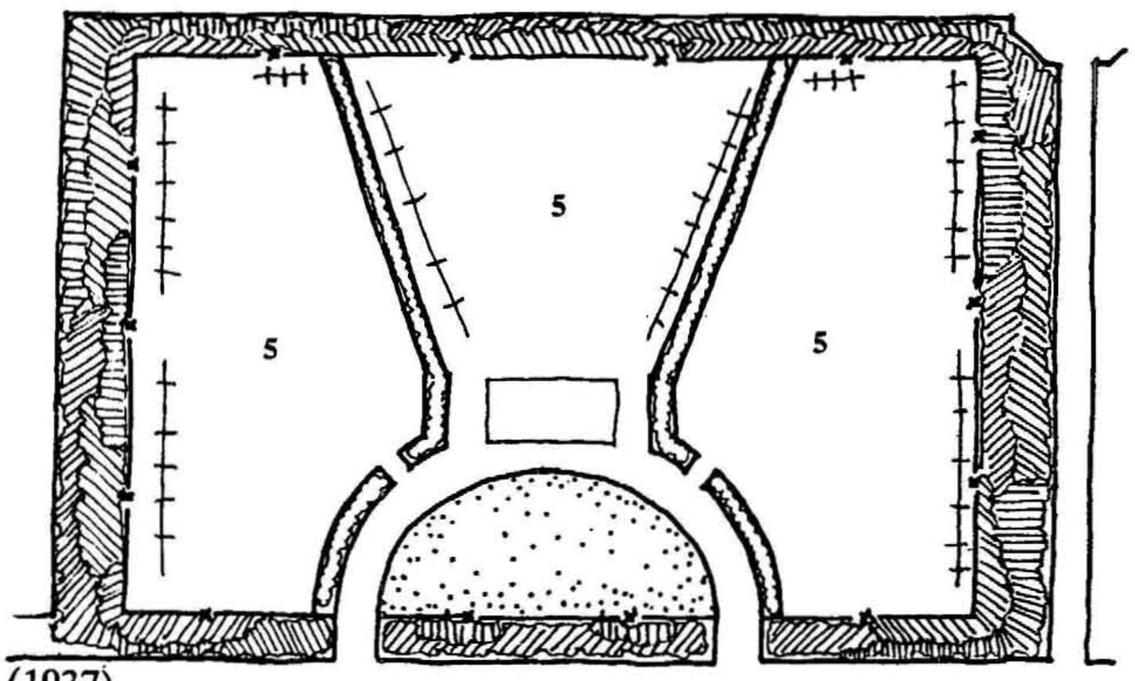
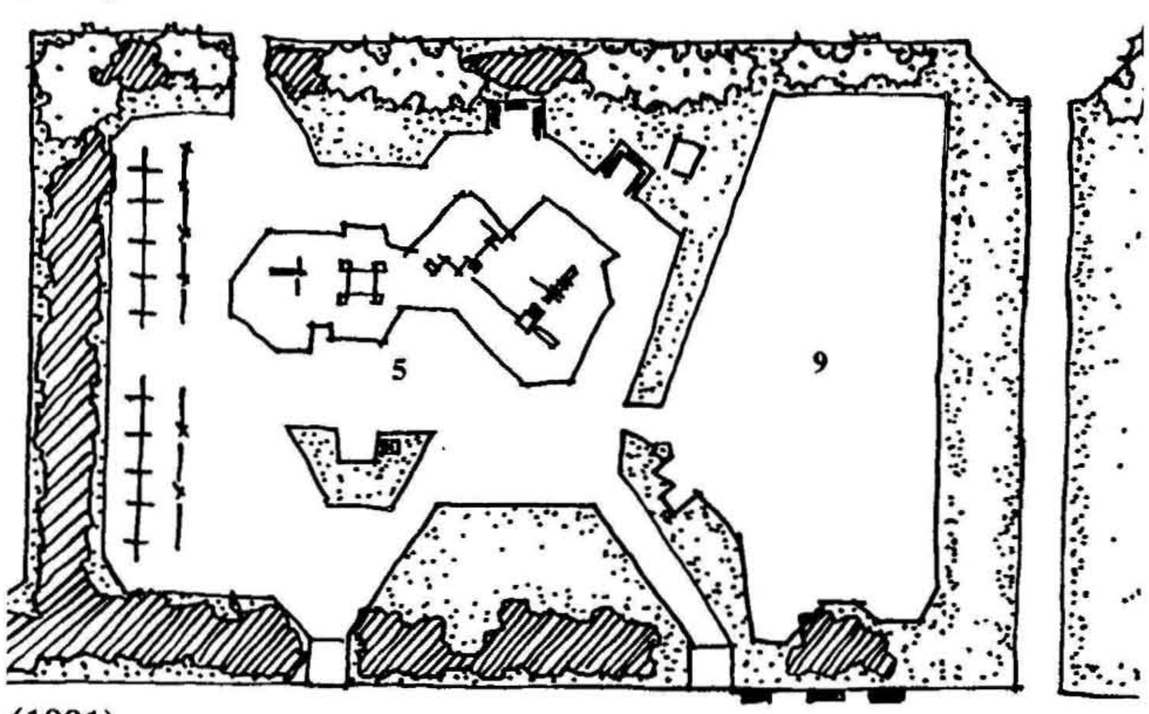


Figure 55: Back Beach Area, comparison of 1937 and 1991 configurations



(1937)



(1991)

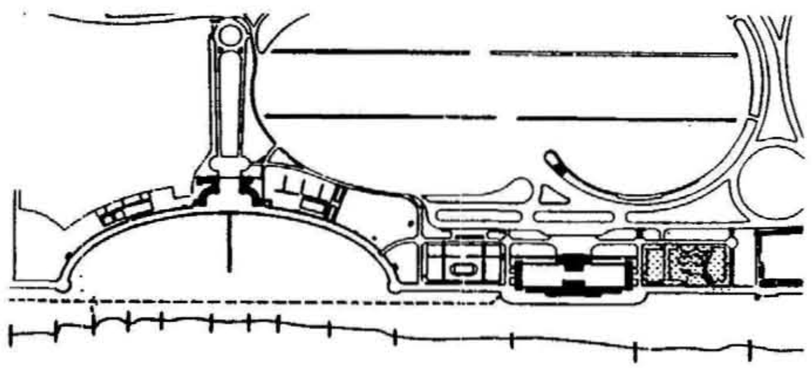
Legend

- Pine Tree
- Seasonal & Evergreen Shrubs (1937)
- Shrubs (1991)
- Ornamental Flower Beds
- Grass
- Benches
- Fences

5. Children's Play Area

9. Paved Area

Scale of Feet 0 100 200



- Figure 52 shows the game court area east of the Mall Buildings (see Figure B - 5, Appendix B). This was originally designed for paddle tennis, handball, and shuffleboard. These basic delineations remain, although the paddle tennis area has been reoriented. Portions of the fencing remain, although other fences have been added.
- Figure 53 shows the planted areas at the east end of the Boardwalk (see Figure B - 6, Appendix B). The original layout had a grassy lawn at the center of each area with perimeter plantings to the northeast. The larger of these areas changed with the addition of the lighted ball field, which required removal of plant materials and installation of light standards and an electrical transformer building. The more southerly area remains undeveloped, with the exception of the concession stand, added in 1947.
- Figure 54 shows the game and play area to the west of the Bathhouse. This area contained paddle tennis, shuffleboard, a grassed central lawn, and a childrens play area (see Figure B - 7, Appendix B). This area has retained the northerly paddle tennis layout. A roller rink was added in the center and basketball courts replaced the children's playground. Most fencing has been removed from this area.
- Figure 55 shows the childrens play area to the east of the Bathhouse. The original layout (see Figure B - 8 and Figure A - 18) had play apparatus to the perimeter, including swings, slides, seesaws, and other play equipment. Fences were placed to protect passersby from the swings. This area has changed substantially through introduction of new play equipment and climbing structures, although the westerly swings may be original.

Despite changes in each of these types of areas, the intermingling of a broad variety of types of active recreation is an important characteristic of the Back Beach area. The overall layout of the Back Beach area retains most of the attributes of the original design, although specific uses have shifted.

Figure 56: Deteriorating game court surfaces



Circulation

Pedestrian circulation within the Back Beach area has experienced very little change since 1937. The original layout of the walkways has remained intact, except minor changes since the original 1936 construction. The only substantial alteration is the addition of an entrance into the parking lot that punches through the sidewalk at a point west of the Bathhouse where Rockaway Beach Boulevard previously doubled back to the east and the eastward extension of the park which occurred in 1958.

The Back Beach is accessible from several areas but most visitors enter directly from the parking lot to the north. There are a total of seven walkways that traverse the Back Beach north to south between the parking lot and roadways and the Boardwalk and Promenade. Three of these occur within the area east of the Mall and west of the Bathhouse and are the most frequently used because of their proximity to parking.

Of the seven walkways referred to above, only five are from the original 1937 design. The remaining



Figure 57: Ballfield electrical hut



Figure 58: Back Beach walkways

two walks are recent additions associated exclusively with the 1958 Park expansion to the east.

Concrete pavement was used for all walkways and is in satisfactory condition. Some cracking has occurred, but not to the extent that structural integrity is threatened. There are many steps between the Back Beach and Boardwalk areas, posing an obstacle for handicapped accessibility between these areas.

The game court and playground areas of the 1937 plan indicate surfaces made of terrazzo and colprovia. Today most of these areas are asphalt with concrete shuffleboard and handball courts. The paved asphalt and concrete surfaces within these areas have deteriorated to the point where much of it is in a non-usable condition (see Figure 56):

- **Asphalt surfaces** -- are dried out, rotted and brittle with many low spots and cracks. In the playground, the asphalt pavement has many patches and appears to have been added to at various places.
- **Concrete surfaces** -- are cracked, with many spalled and settled areas. The painted stripes on many of the courts are hand applied and have not been recently re-done contributing to the overall visual degradation of the space.

Hexagonal asphalt pavers are used in the playground areas to connect the playground to the promenade. These appear to be later additions.

Buildings and Structures

The structures that exist inside the Back Beach area are limited to two small one story utility buildings: the first structure is located adjacent to the lighted ballfield, built in 1940 to house floodlight controls and transformer (HS605A, see Figure 57); the second structure is a pump house located just west of the Bathhouse. These struc-

Chapter 4:

The Boardwalk and Promenade Area

4.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

4.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

4.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

4.4 Integrity

4.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

A small portion of the Promenade was started in 1931, adjacent to the original Bathhouse construction,. With the initial opening of the Bathhouse in August of 1932, the broad promenade plaza in front of the Bathhouse was opened. This area was originally split into two segments by the projecting front porch of the 1932 Beach Pavilion.

The 1936-37 Robert Moses park expansion resulted in creation of a continuous walkway the length of the Beach. To the east, the Promenade was extended to the property limit, just past the playground area. In front of the Bathhouse, the reconstruction of the front of the Bathhouse, which removed the projecting south face of the building, enabled widening of the Promenade south to the edge of the seawall, which was cut down and used as a support for the walkway structure. To the west, the 1936-37 park expansion also involved construction of the great crescent boardwalk to the west, centered on the East and West Mall Buildings. The carefully shaped space between the Mall Buildings was, at the height of the Park, a major focal point for activities at Jacob Riis Park, serving concession patrons, providing outdoor seating, and a venue for a bandstand and dance floor. Most of this large sweeping walk was finished in wood decking, including the large plaza located between the East and West Mall Buildings at the end of the Mall (see Figure A-43). The rest of the structure was made of concrete. Figure 34 shows the evolution of the Boardwalk and Promenade.

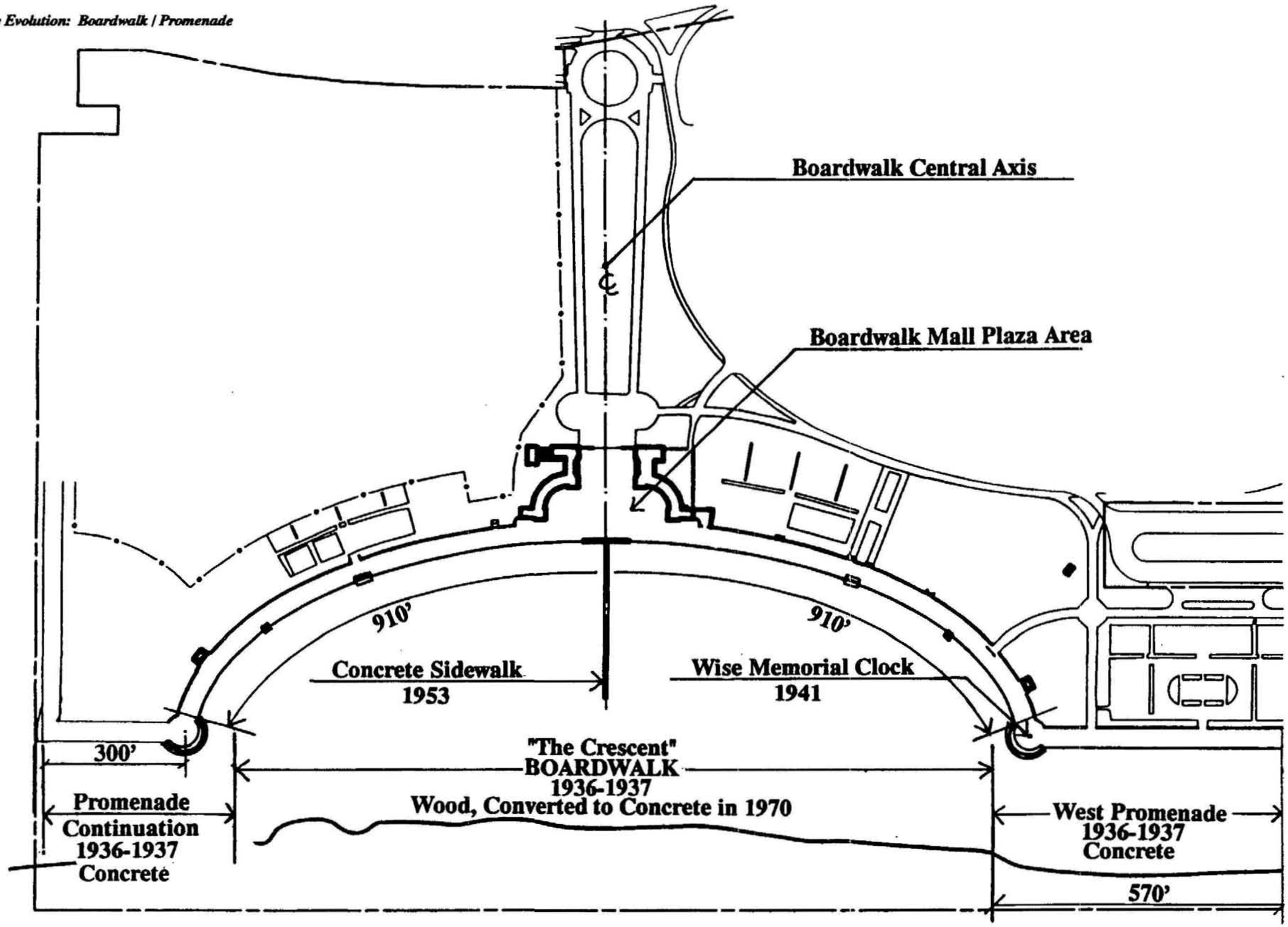
The bandstand and dance floor between the two Mall buildings were removed in 1954 when this area was redecked along with the crescent boardwalk. Between 1969 and 1970, the timber boardwalk in the Mall area was replaced with the concrete decking and the original railings removed and then reset in the concrete (Unrau 1981: 203, 205). In 1958, with the acquisition of land at the eastern end of the park, the last section of the Boardwalk/Promenade was extended to complete the structure. The Boardwalk and Promenade were unchanged until 1970, when the crescent boardwalk and Mall plaza were reconstructed, replacing the wood with concrete.

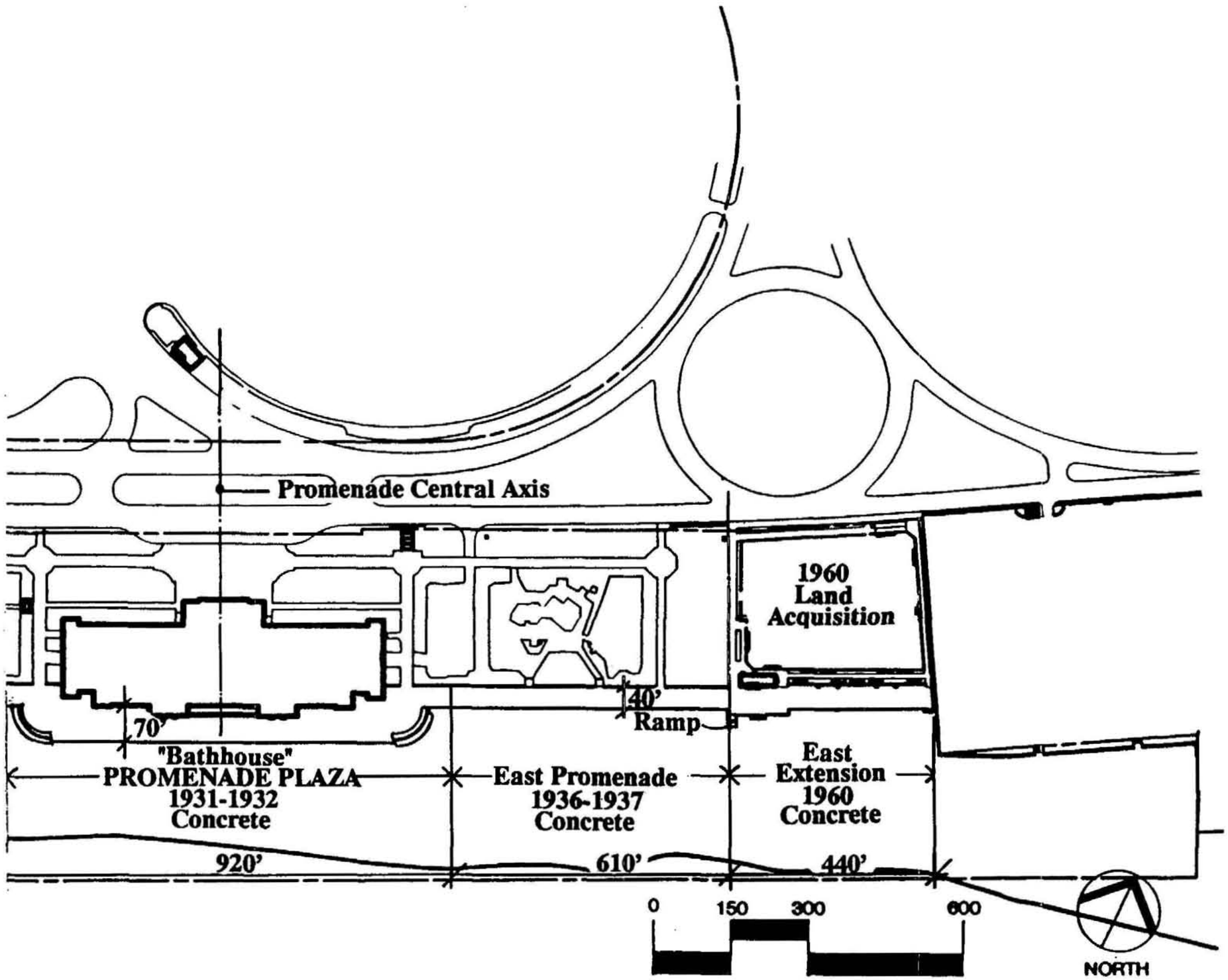
The Boardwalk and Promenade were integral and important elements of the overall park design and are pivotal to the historical significance of Jacob Riis Park. The wood Boardwalk was similar to structures done by Moses elsewhere in the New York metropolitan area. The 1937 Boardwalk defines important geometries and physical relationships which characterize the site; both by forming an ellipse which frames much of the Beach and by establishing a continuous circulation route which joins the activities on the Beach to the multiple recreation sites of the Back Beach. The use of the continuous ship's rail on both sides of the Boardwalk and Promenade, as well as repetitive lighting elements consistent with the overall form of the site and buildings, contributed an important sense of detail and continuity to this sub-area

The character-defining elements of the Boardwalk and Promenade Area which represent important historic, architectural, and cultural values include:

- **Shape and form** -- the overall layout of the Boardwalk remains substantially as originally designed. The form of the Boardwalk complements the buildings: the ellipse relates to the curved Mall Buildings and the straight section relates to the linear Bathhouse. The overall shape and form of the Boardwalk are critical elements to the creation of an integrated recreational complex at Jacob Riis Park in terms of its overall connecting function in the east-west direction and in terms of the integrated access the Boardwalk and Promenade provide through stairs to the Back Beach and formal and curved ramps and termination points along its Beach edge.
- **Functional and use relationships** -- the Boardwalk and Promenade have a strong relationship to the key buildings and uses within the Park, linking all uses and contributing strongly to the unified quality of the park as a comprehensive recreation area oriented to a beachfront resource. The pedestrian quality of the Boardwalk has been retained.
- **Features and materials** -- many aspects of the area remain as originally designed and convey a scale and feeling which characterize the original design intent of the late 1930's and early 1940's. These include: the curved areas at the ends of the ellipse and along the Promenade, which served both as overlooks and also as the location for steps to Beach; the ship's rail, though sections are missing, which frames and defines the edge of the Boardwalk and Promenade; the 1941 lighting standards, which impart a scale and rhythm to the length of the Boardwalk, while incorporating Art Deco motifs; the Wise Memorial Clock; repetitive drinking fountains, and; the concrete expanse of the Promenade. However, the loss of the wood decking on the Boardwalk results in an entirely different texture and scale in that area, one that would be desirable to replace. Additionally, the removal of the wooden decking and the bandstand between the Mall Buildings diminished distinguishing characteristics of that space.

Figure 34: Site Evolution: Boardwalk / Promenade




Promenade Central Axis
1960
Land
Acquisition
40'
Ramp
70'
"Bathhouse"
PROMENADE PLAZA
1931-1932
Concrete
East Promenade
1936-1937
Concrete
East
Extension
1960
Concrete
920'
610'
440'
0
150
300
600
NORTH

4.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

The Boardwalk and Promenade were designed to be substantially level, establishing an east-west datum across the entirety of the site. The elevation of the continuous walkway, set several steps above the Beach, provides an overlook quality which is an important aspect of the design, establishing this area as a vantage point from which the entire Park can be viewed. The structure has also acted as a stabilizing element, trapping sand along it's length and further increasing the effect that the area's topography has on visitors who walk along or who must cross over the Boardwalk/Promenade. Historically, there was a drop between the Boardwalk and the Beach; drifting sands have reduced this distance, in many cases covering up many of the concrete connecting steps.



Figure 35: Access point onto the Boardwalk / Promenade

Land Use

The Boardwalk and Promenade were clearly intended for a variety of pedestrian activities, and are used that way today. The principal difference in use stems from the demise of support concession activities such as the Bandstand which existed between the Mall Buildings and various rental concessions and cafe areas which were on the Promenade in front of the Bathhouse during the 1932-1936 period and thereafter. Nothing about the current conditions of the Boardwalk precludes these types of uses in the future.

Circulation

The Boardwalk and Promenade were important defining elements in the circulation system of Jacob Riis Park, establishing the major east/west circulation route which linked to the Mall, the Back Beach, and the Beach, tying the circulation network together. The feeling and association of the seaside location are most strongly apparent on the Boardwalk, where the relationship of the buildings to the ensemble can also be vividly seen. The Boardwalk/Promenade tie all areas of the Park together both physically and visually. There are numerous points of access along its length leading from both the Beach area on the south or from the Mall, Back Beach or Bathhouse areas on the north. Both the physical and visual connections were intended in the original plans (see Figure 35) and are still strong today.

Photographs from 1937 clearly show a concrete boardwalk in front of the Bathhouse (Photograph 13338, 1937; 10867, August 15, 1937; 12401, August 16, 1937). The section in front of the Mall buildings and continuing to the ends of the curved crescent sections, was originally decked with "salt-treated Douglas Fir from the Pacific West. From the east end of the Boardwalk (which ended just east of the



Figure 36: View of Mall Buildings from Boardwalk



Figure 37: Sea views from the Boardwalk

Bathhouse) to the east end of the park a concrete promenade, was built on top of the seawall that paralleled the beach for that distance." (Unrau 1981: 143)

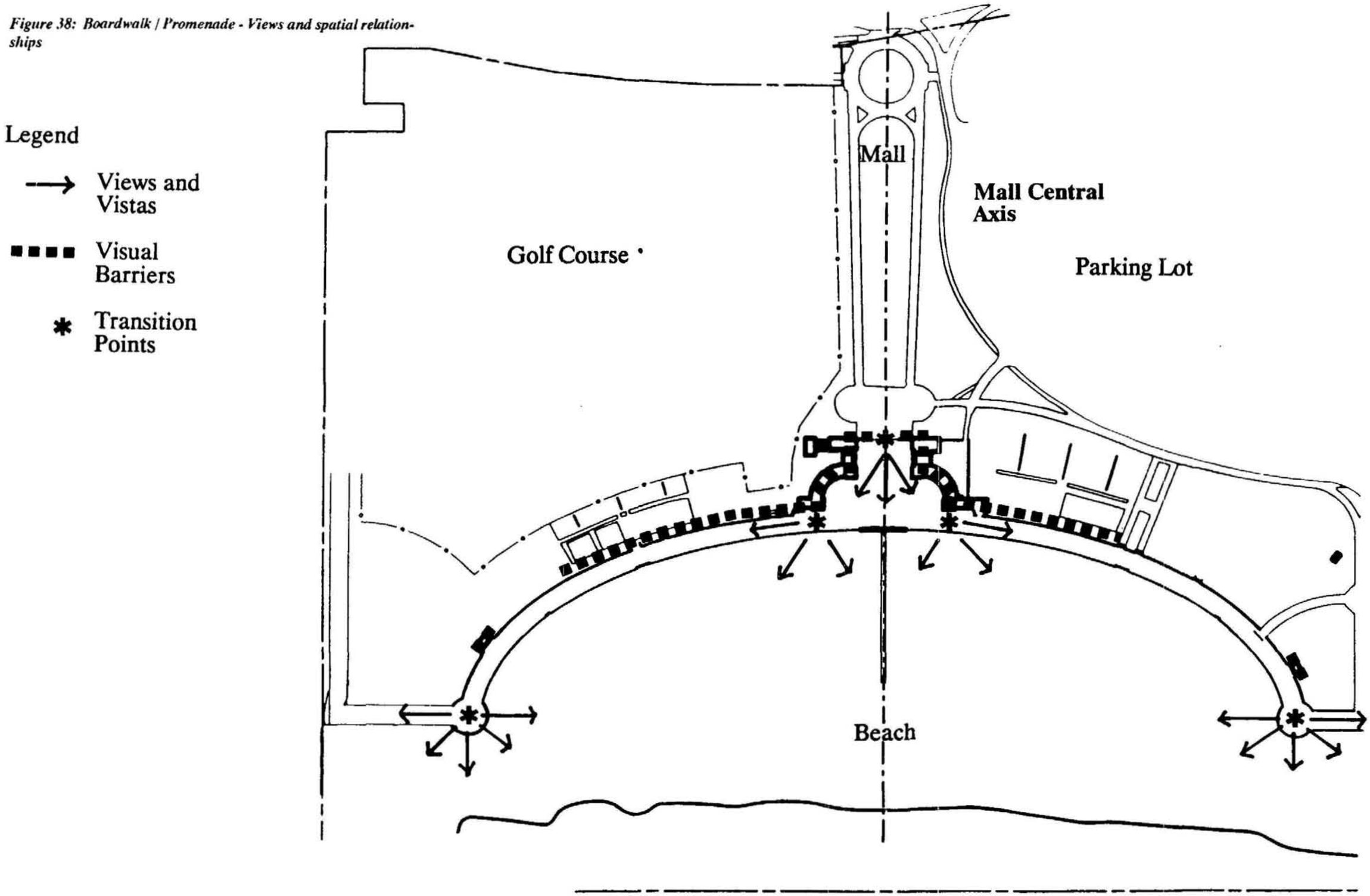
The actual walkway is a significant structure with it's seawall foundation and overall size. The straight Promenade is 2,540 feet long and has a normal width of 40 feet that widens to as much as 70 feet in front of the Bathhouse. The Boardwalk runs for a length of 2,110 feet, is 42 feet wide for most of it's width expanding to 95 feet in front of the Mall Buildings. A number of sets of steps, most located at the curved overlook and junction sections, and one concrete ramp provide access to the Beach.

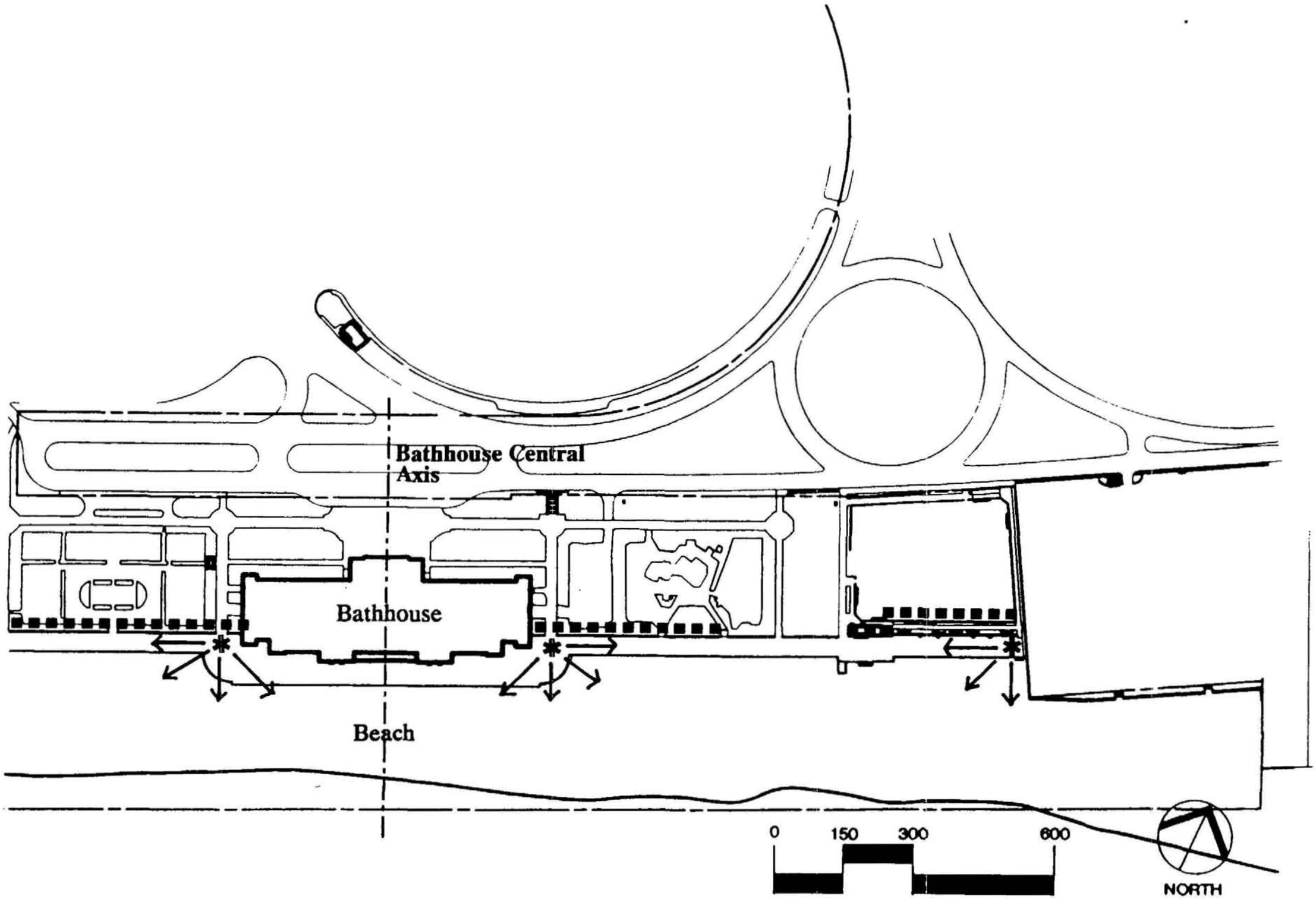
In 1941 three sets of concrete stairs were built in the ellipse section of the boardwalk. These were built closer to the ends of the ellipse than existing stairs (Unrau 1981: 202-203).

The character of the boardwalk was dramatically changed in front of the mall during 1969-70 when the wood decking at the ellipse was replaced with concrete and the wood superstructure and concrete piers were removed as well. Existing railings were reset in the concrete. (Drawing Nos. 62881.01, 02, October 12, 1969)

Although the removal of the wooden section of the Boardwalk distinctly changed the character and materials of the ellipse section, the overall sweep of the form and continuity of the Boardwalk and Promenade are among the most important attributes of Jacob Riis Park today.

Figure 38: Boardwalk / Promenade - Views and spatial relationships




Bathhouse Central Axis
Bathhouse
Beach
0
150
300
600
NORTH

Buildings and Structures

There are no extant buildings actually on the Boardwalk/Promenade but all the Park's important structures front on the great walk. These include the Bathhouse (HS 606.1-606.7), the two symmetrical Mall buildings (HS 603 & H.S. 604) and three concession stands (HS 602, HS 605 & HS 607) which are analyzed at length in the Historic Structure Reports which were prepared at the same time as this document. The relationship of these structures to the Boardwalk and Promenade is of primary historical significance, as the relationships between their uses and forms are an important aspect of the integrated recreational concept which is represented at Jacob Riis Park. Figure 36 shows the relationship between the curve of the Boardwalk and the Mall Buildings in the distance. At least one freestanding small kiosk structure was located in front of the Bathhouse for a time, but this was removed by 1961. Also the bandstand between the East and West Mall Buildings was removed in 1954.

Spatial Relationships & Views

The two distinct sections of the Boardwalk/ Promenade each are symmetrical; the Promenade is centered on the Bathhouse and the Boardwalk is oriented to the centerline of the Mall. This was clearly intended by the original 1936 plans and was an important and significant compositional element of the overall Park layout. The layout of the Back Beach areas echoes the Boardwalk form, highlighting the influence of the Boardwalk on the overall park design. The Boardwalk was intended to be a linear element which offers a constant view of the sea to the south while connecting a variety of landside activities. Changes in the width and form of the walkway were made in the 1936 plan at significant junctures in the Plan: the intersections of the ellipse with the straight sections of the Boardwalk; a wider section between the East and West mall Buildings at the junction of the Mall and the Boardwalk; a widened section in front of the Bathhouse with rounded corners, where steps to the Beach were located. The formality of these features of the plan echoed work which had been done previously in similar parks such as Orchard Beach and Jones Beach.

The overall walk serves as a viewing platform from which all other activities can be observed or reached. As one moves along it, the vistas change slowly with the open beach and ocean always dominating the view (see Figure 37).

Visual barriers only exist along the north or land side of the walk. These are made up of game court fencing, mature landscape plantings and adjacent buildings, all indicated in the original park plans and clearly part of the design intent. As one moves along the walk, adjacent views are blocked and then revealed by these dividers. They play an important part in the overall experience the Boardwalk/ Promenade offers, although in the early stages of Jacob Riis Park when plant materials were younger (and smaller), there appears to have been a stronger visual connection between the Boardwalk and the Back Beach. Figure 38 indicates the axes of symmetry along the walkway as well as the defining edges which remain.

Planting

The original plans show planted borders along much of the Back Beach adjacent to the Boardwalk (see Section 6 on the Back Beach for more detail). The result of the Plans was to create a separation between active outdoor court and playground activities and the strolling activities on the Boardwalk. These planting borders were not provided along the edges of the lawn areas at east and west edges of the Boardwalk crescent. The intent seems to have been to protect active recreation areas from the Boardwalk by a plant barrier while opening up large lawn areas to Beachfront views. The variation of activities accessible to the Boardwalk is part of the comprehensive, planned recreation complex which Jacob Riis Park exemplifies.

In the areas where borders were planned, a variety of species were indicated on the plans. The most visually predominant remaining plant material is a thick planting of Eleaegnus (Eleagnus angustifolia), bayberry, and ligustrom euonymous (see Figure 39).



Figure 39: Eleagnus plantings stabilizing a low dune structure

in fair condition.

The second type of light in use is a standard aluminum street type (C) light which has been placed along the new section (1960) of the Promenade adjacent to the eastern ball field. Although these lights adequately illuminate the Promenade they are dissonant with the remaining lights along the Boardwalk. All of these lights are in good condition.

Signage

Other than several non-historic, regulatory signs there is no sign system along the Boardwalk/ Promenade. No documentation of a freestanding sign system is known to exist in the original plans, although many signs were affixed to or placed in front of the buildings which lined the Boardwalk and Promenade. These ranged from open lettering applied to buildings to sign panels to moveable signs placed in front of seating and concession areas.

4.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

With the exception of the removal of the wood decking from the crescent portion of the Boardwalk and areas where materials have deteriorated, the configuration of the Boardwalk and Promenade remain substantially as built in 1936-37. The originally installed lights, which were teardrop shaped, were replaced by 1941 with the mast arm Type A lights which remain there today. No benches were originally provided, but many have been added over time. Segments of the concrete surface have deteriorated but, overall, it is in good condition. Portions of the ships rail have been removed and others have deteriorated. Smaller elements, such as the curved steps leading to the Beach have deteriorated but are in original locations. Drinking fountains, which have been replaced several times with progressively less attractive fixtures, are dysfunctional. A small ramp was added to the Beach during the 1958 easterly extension of the Promenade; however, the remainder of the Boardwalk and Promenade lack handicapped access provisions to the Beach, although there is a sidewalk down the center of the crescent to the beach, reputed to have been built for FDR. Figures C-2 through C-6 (Appendix C) show the location and condition of site furnishings and lighting.

The condition of the Boardwalk and Promenade varies:

- The concrete surface of the Promenade is usable, but is in various stages of deterioration. The area by the Bathhouse is in the worst condition with substantial cracking, differential settling, patching and spalling. The areas to the east and west are better, with some cracking and spalling. The Boardwalk is generally in good condition since it is newer. There is however, some minor cracking.
- The sea wall, which runs the entire length of the promenade and boardwalk, has some cracking and broken away sections at some expansion joints. It is however, in good condition.
- The sets of steps leading to the beach are often broken, cracked and spalled in many locations.

The Boardwalk/Promenade provides the only continuous east west circulation route across Jacob Riis Park, physically and visually tying this long, linear park together. The primarily use is for pedestrians, but the wide concrete path is also used by staff and service personnel vehicles. No barriers are provided to prohibit other vehicles from driving on the Boardwalk. The Boardwalk and Promenade are also used for skating, bicycling, skate boarding and other more active forms of recreation, although park signs prohibit bicycles.

The Promenade section of the Boardwalk was built atop a 4,660 foot reinforced concrete sea wall that was completed in 1936-37 and which incorporated sections of the 1932 seawall. It provides some protection to the Bathhouse from storm water, although in severe weather conditions sea water floods over the Promenade and washes into first floor areas of the Beach Pavilion.

4.4 Integrity

The Boardwalk/Promenade retains integrity of location, design, setting, feeling and association. The layout, circulation and points of access that were originally designed and completed in 1936/37 are today as they were then. Some more contemporary changes have occurred due to newly introduced elements such as ballfield fencing in the Back Beach area and additions of benches not part of the original concept. Between the Mall Buildings the bandstand and dancefloor have been removed, eliminating a focal point and unique element.

This planting, though not continuous, borders most of the length of this walkway. Through the years of maturation these plants have acquired a swept back, wind pruned form that appears to have been manually sculpted. The location and densities of the these plants provide a visual buffer and wind screen, protecting the Back Beach areas, as well as forming a northern edge for the Boardwalk. There are spotty supplemental plantings of Rugosa Rose (Rosa rugosa), also originally specified, and some weedy growth among the Eleagnus, but these do not visually compete with the dominant forms of the Eleagnus.

1937 planting plans (see Appendix B) indicate that the Eleagnus plants are original. This quick growing, hardy species may have been intended as both a visual buffer and a soil stabilizing element. Many of the plants shown on early drawings appear to have been lost, but where they still exist, they are performing their original, intended functions quite well.

In the areas where borders were not planned, such as along most of the length of the current softball field, the absence of plant materials has led to drifting of sand over the Boardwalk, to the detriment of the seeded areas. The Eleaegnus border remains on the westerly edge of the ball fields.

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

The most prominent site furniture along the Boardwalk and Promenade is the ship's rail which was located on both north and south sides of the Boardwalk and Promenade, interrupted to allow steps to both the Beach and Back Beach. The ship's railing was placed on a curb to the north side and directly on the edge of the Boardwalk surface to the Beach side. 1936-37 Plans showed eleven drinking fountains, spaced evenly and located along the north edge of the Boardwalk and Promenade. No benches were indicated to be installed along the Boardwalk, although numerous benches were added later. The Wise Clock is a unique historical element, dating from 1941, at the easterly end of the crescent (see figure 40). Lighting is discussed in the section below. Figures C-2 to C-6 (Appendix C) show existing site furnishings. Each element is discussed below.

- **The ship's railing** -- The distinctive ships railing, which runs the length of the Boardwalk and Promenade on both sides were originally grey iron posts with galvanized pipe rails with a wide flat Douglas Fir handrail. An important visual feature of the Boardwalk, this railing is placed along both sides of the Boardwalk and is a constant height of 42" (referred to in Figures 42-46 as "Type A"), although sections of the north side use a rail of 36" (referred to in Appendix C as "Type B"), set on a 6" concrete curb. The condition varies greatly from one end to the other, due to inconsistent maintenance practices. Some sections of the wood rail have been painted white, while others are simply bare wood with the original varnish remaining on some surfaces. In many places the steel pipe is severely blistered or almost completely rusted through. The worst conditions exist on the side exposed to the ocean, while the side to the north has suffered less deterioration. Along the Promenade, from the east end of the crescent Boardwalk to the east end of the Bathhouse, ships rails (B) are only used on the north or landside of the walk. Both sides are railed for the remaining length of the Promenade. All ships rails are in a deteriorated condition.
- **Drinking Fountains** -- A 1938 drawing and later photographs show eleven drinking and bottle filled fountains built along the boardwalk. The original fountains were replaced with concrete, box-shaped fountains in the 1960's.
- **Benches** -- The original 1936-37 park renovation did not provide any benches on the Boardwalk. Over time, two types of benches have been added: an old style park bench with concrete base, wood slat seat and back (A), and; a modern style bench mounted on steel posts with wood seat and back (C). The old style bench is used along the portion of the Promenade that was added in 1960, while the modern style bench is used in the oldest sections. The concrete benches (A) are generally in fair condition while the newer benches (C) are in good condition.
- **Trash receptacles** -- on the Boardwalk/ Promenade consist of the same wire mesh basket found throughout the park. Most are in good condition and are consistent with the trash barrels which have been used at the park since its inception.
- **The Wise Clock** -- was installed on the boardwalk in 1941 at the east end of the ellipse. Donated by the Wise Jewelry family of Brooklyn, New York the clock is four-faced, free-standing mechanism. The base of the clock was set in a concrete foundation. The base and stand for the clock is metal, whereas the ornamented top and clock housing is made of wood. The clock, out of service by 1968, was overhauled, in 1974, by Herb Barth. As part of the 1974 repairs, the face



Figure 40: The Wise Clock

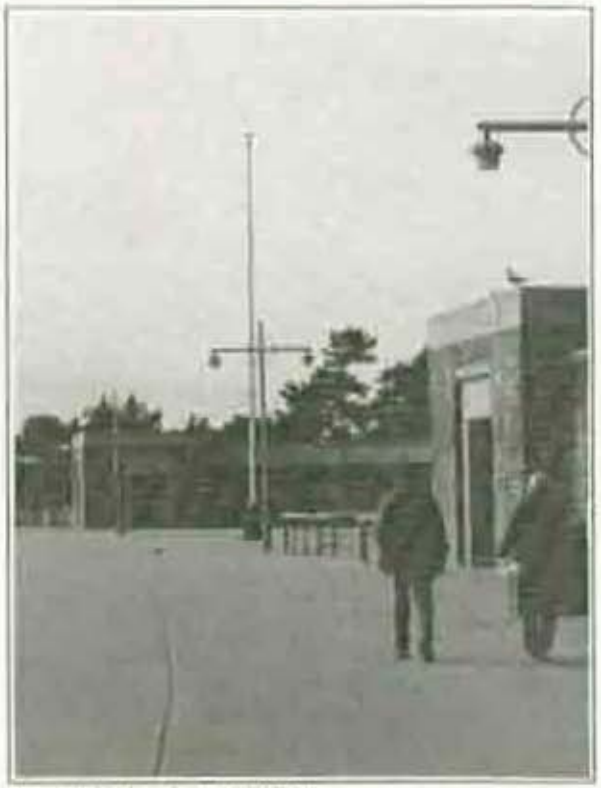


Figure 41: Flagpole at Mall Buildings

was changed, glass replaced and each face was given an individual mechanism instead of one mechanism for all four faces (Unrau 1981: 208). The clock is currently out of service. It is located at the eastern terminus of the crescent boardwalk and is visible from most locations along the walkway (see Figure 47). It is currently in poor condition with peeling paint and several of the clock faces are boarded up.

- **A flagpole** -- exists on the central axis of the crescent Boardwalk at the site of an earlier band stand and dance floor. The pole is metal and is in fair condition with peeling paint and some material deterioration. Spars and flags are missing (see Figure 41), compared to the original pole shown in historic photographs . (see Figure A-25)

In 1937, after the boardwalk was completed, a bandstand and dance floor were constructed. The dance floor was wood and "extended north from the edge of the boardwalk and was set off from the rest of the mall by a railing (Unrau 1981: 127)." On the oceanside of the dance floor was the roofed bandstand on a platform (Unrau 1981: 127).

In 1954, the ellipse section of the boardwalk was refurbished. It was redecked with wood and the old railing along the Boardwalk was replaced. The dance floor had new lighting installed. In the same year the bandstand was removed as was the ship's rail around the dance floor (Drawing Nos. 62622.01;02;03. March 5, 1954). The dance floor was removed in 1970 when the Boardwalk was rebuilt with concrete. The flagpole was reset at that time.

Lighting

There were three types of lights used on the Boardwalk and Promenade between 1934-1940, none of which remain today. A 1935 photograph of the Bathhouse and a 1936 photograph of the Bathhouse and Boardwalk show wood heavy timber light poles with a cross brace piece, with globes hung to either side, similar to lights used at Jones Beach. These were erected during the 1932 period and were replaced during the 1936-7 expansion with metal poles with an inverted U-shaped top with a hung globe, a type of light which was installed along the length of the Boardwalk and Promenade. Finally, there was a down-light with a saucer-shaped reflector installed in front of the East and West Mall Buildings. All of these types of lights have been removed.

The Boardwalk lights were replaced by 1941 with the current fixtures (referred to as "Type A" in Chapter 2 and on Figures 43-47), which have a horizontal arm and a double circle accent. These fixtures have an Art Deco style which complemented the architecture of the new and renovated buildings. The finish on many of these is peeling with some rust showing. Most lights work, although all are capable of working provided minor electrical problems are resolved. All lights of this type are

Chapter 5:

The Mall Area

5.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

5.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

5.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

5.4 Integrity

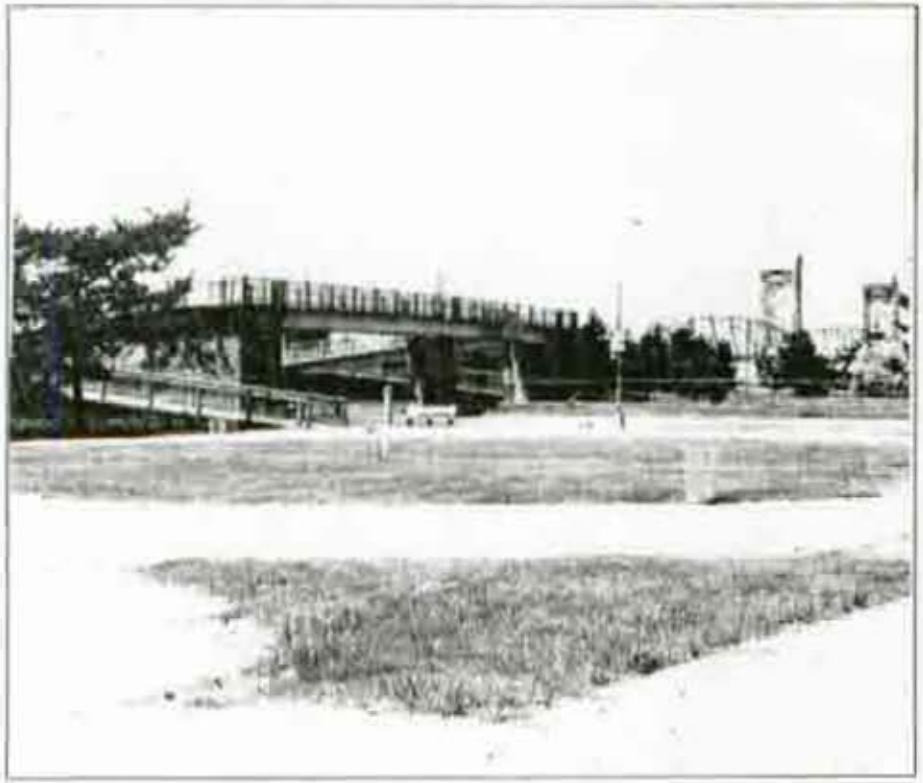


Figure 43: Pedestrian overpass and bus drop off



Figure 44: Typical Mall pavement condition

thus framing and enhancing the north-south views. The central axis ends on the north with a tree framed view of the bay area with a distant view of the Empire State Building. The southern view centers on the flagpole between the Mall Buildings and vistas of the beach and Atlantic ocean, although historically the bandstand formed a southerly terminus.

Plantings

The plans and early photographs indicate that the planting had an important role in defining the space of the Mall; by 1939 there was a strong planted edge at the perimeter of the Mall. However, the maturation of the trees has probably changed its visual character; early plantings had a dense understory which contained eye level views to east and west; current planting have either lost or strongly pruned the understory, allowing views through the pine trees. In the oval area north of the Mall Buildings, planting definitions are particularly strong (see Figure 45).

Figure 46 compares the original 1936-37 design for the Mall with the current condition. The original planting plans (see Figure B-4, Appendix C) for the Mall indicated predominant Japanese Black Pine (Pinus thunbergi) of several sizes to define the outer east and west boundaries of the Mall, with a varied understory, including materials used elsewhere in the park, such as Eleagnus umbellata and Rosa ruposa (see Figure 47). Aerial photographs indicate that by 1939 the planting cover was dense and continuous (see Figure A-23, from 1939). The planting reinforced the spatial and formal qualities of the Mall and created continuity of

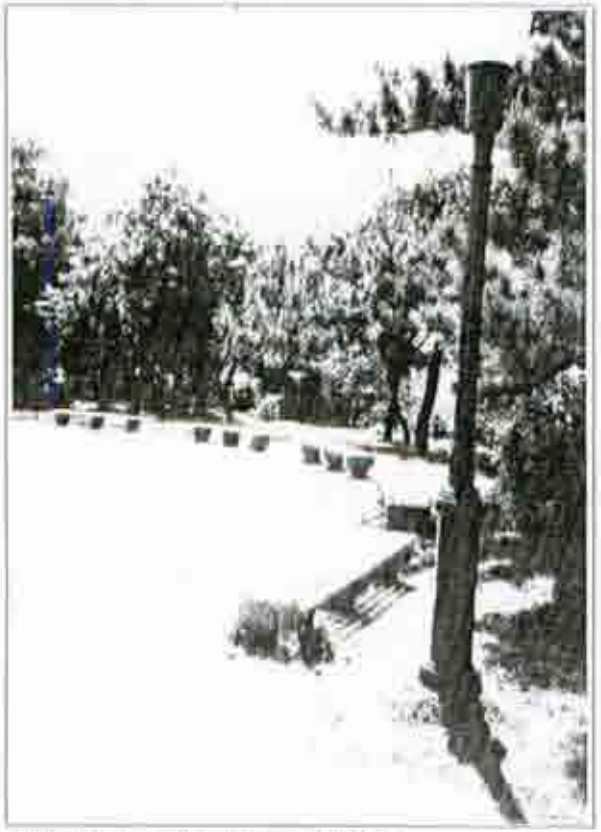


Figure 45: The oval seating area of the Mall

materials throughout the overall plan. Over time, the understory plantings have grown to be substantial; some of these species have the character of small trees rather than understory plants.

There is evidence that the understory planting was supplemented several times. According to an article in the New York Times, "Christmas Holly, Inkberry, and small-leaved native hollies", were planted on both sides of the Mall just above the oval plaza. In 1953, about 339 hollies (Ilex species of unknown type) and other plants were added to existing plantings along the Mall.

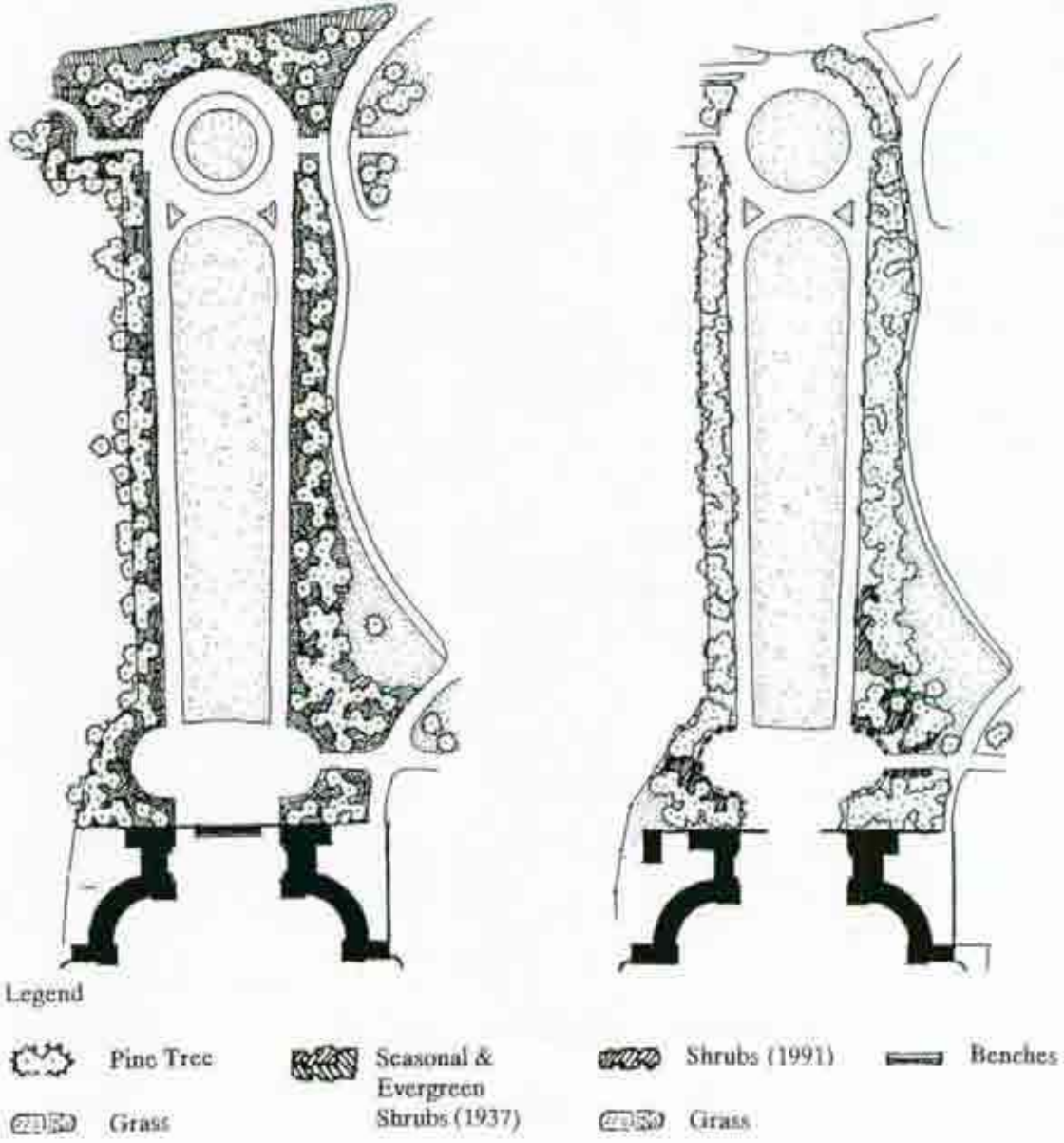


Figure 46: The Mall Area - Comparison of 1937 Plan and 1991 configuration

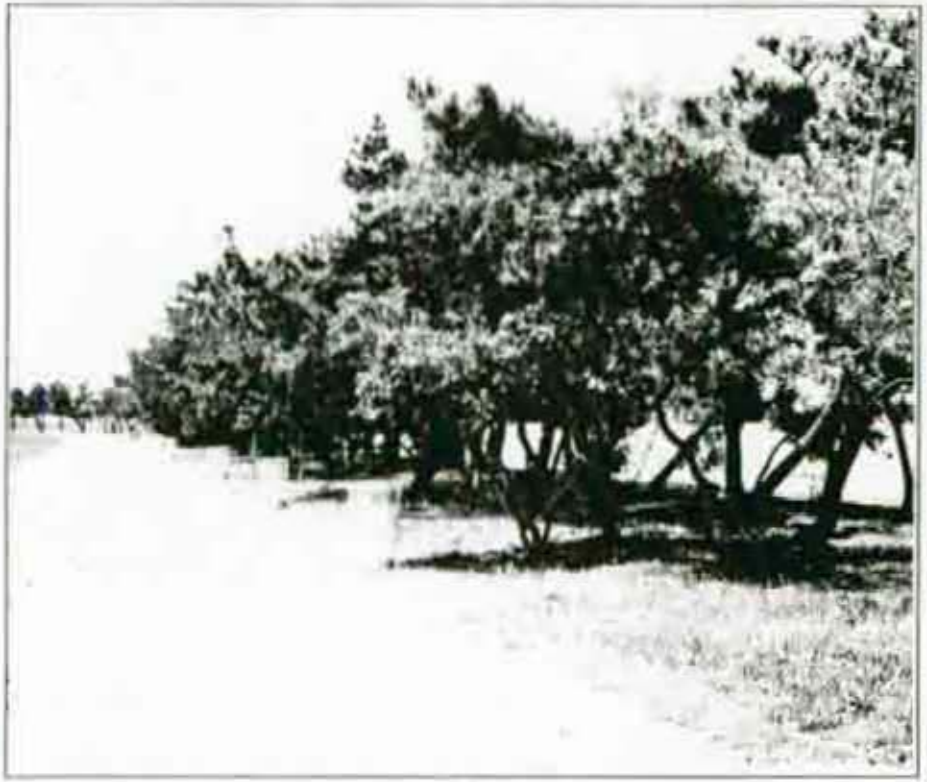


Figure 47: Black pines along the East side of the Mall

The Black Pines appear to be in good condition and in the general location indicated by the original plans (see Figure 46). The secondary shrub and small tree plantings in front of the pines appear healthy, but show evidence of pest and/or insect problems. Many of the shrubs have been severely pruned into a shape which is very uncharacteristic of their natural forms. In support of the stand of Black Pine are secondary plantings of Euonymus sp., Ligustrum (Ligustrum sp.), Flowering Cherries (Prunus sp.), American Holly (Ilex opaca), and Eleaegnus (Eleagnus angustafolia). Most of these plantings have been pruned up to a height of approximately 6 ft. This has enabled the area to be utilized by picnickers. However, because of the pruning, views have been opened up to the parking lot, and to a lesser extent, to the golf course, probably contrary to the original design intent.

The arrangement of the Mall planting allows unobstructed views in both directions along the main axis. The south end of the Mall, adjacent to the oval plaza, is heavily planted with Yew (Taxus), American Holly (Ilex opaca), Euonymus (Euonymus sp.), Eleaegnus (Eleagnus angustifolia), and Japanese Black Pine (Pinus thunbergi). These plants also are relatively healthy and have also been improperly pruned.

The central lawn area is in reasonably good condition with a variety of weeds growing throughout; it is a typical park-grade lawn. The tree and shrub beds have also filled in with a mixture of weed/sand grass. This area would benefit from a higher quality of maintenance.

Site Furnishings and Small Scale Elements

1936 Plans and aerial photographs provide no detailed information about historical site furniture in the Mall area.

Existing site furniture and conditions are shown in Figure C-7(Appendix C) and include the following:

- **Benches** -- arranged in semi-circles paralleling the east and west ends of the paved oval provide the only general seating located in the Mall area. These are the backless "Lundino" benches with wooden slat seats and exposed aggregate concrete bases which were installed as part of the 1936-37 plan. Most of these benches are deteriorating, with peeling paint, splintered wood and chipped or leaning bases. Grass and weeds are growing at most bases. Two similar benches with backs similar to others used throughout the Park are located near the bus stop at the end of the Mall; their condition is also poor. These benches are typical of New York City parks.
- **Picnic tables** -- although not historic, these are currently placed seasonally among the trees on both sides of the Mall; a few picnic tables are also provided in the concession area adjacent to the east Mall building. The units are moveable

the east Mall building. The units are moveable and are not anchored or secured to the ground. The condition of most of the tables in the concession area is similar to the benches; the wood is often splintered and/or vandalized, and with peeling paint. These are not historic in nature.

- **Trash receptacles** -- are placed close together throughout the Mall. The type of receptacle used is the galvanized wire mesh basket with no liner, similar to those seen in historic photographs in other sections of the park.
- **A contemporary bicycle rack** -- is located along the south side of the oval plaza in front of the east Mall building. Its condition is good, although sand and weed growth have accumulated around the base. Another bike rack is located on the other side of the Mall plaza wall, it is also in good condition.

Some of the site furnishings in use – the benches and trash baskets -- are similar to those that were in use in 1936/37 in other sections of the park. There is no documentary evidence, however, that these specific items were installed in 1936-1937.

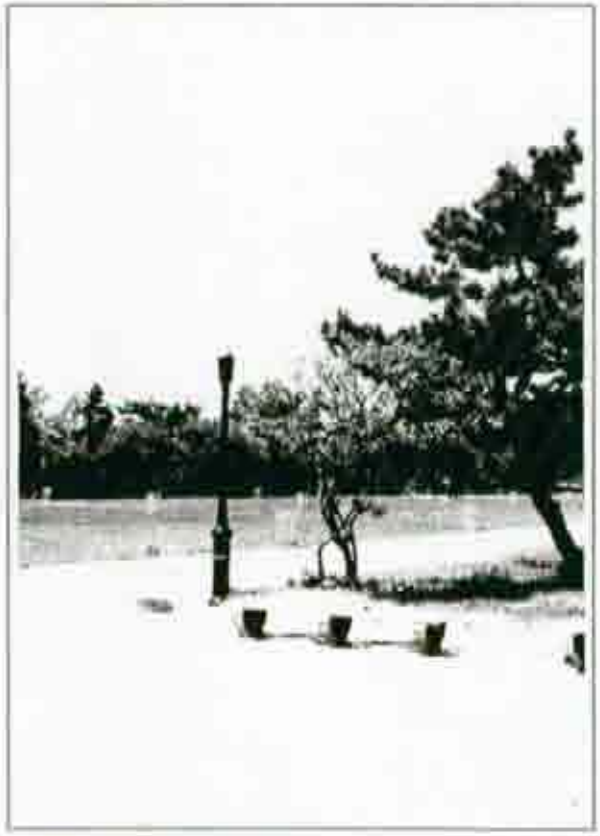


Figure 48: Mall "Type B" Lighting

Lighting

The lights that are used in the main part of the Mall are New York City Type B Lamps and were used in most pedestrian areas of Jacob Riis Park (except for the Boardwalk) as part of the 1936-7 park expansion, although records indicate that lighting in the Mall was not installed until 1948. These light fixtures are typical for the period and the region. The lamps are cast iron with a black painted finish. They are generally in good condition. The lights are located along the outside of the west sidewalk and at several locations along the eastern end of the oval (see Figure 48). No lights are located along the eastern side of the Mall.

A couple of the silver painted metal lights used along most of the Boardwalk are used in the plaza between the Mall Buildings. These fixtures have double arms, and are shown in 1941 photographs, having replaced an earlier fixture in this location. It is possible that the two arm fixture was designed particularly for the central spaces at Riis, as most other fixtures along the linear Boardwalk only have a single arm and luminaire. The condition generally appears satisfactory but some paint is peeling.

All lights in the Mall are working, but most of the globes contain debris and need to be cleaned.

Signage

The only signs documented in the Mall through historic photographs or drawings were those affixed to the East and West Mall Buildings. These included large open letter signs to identify concessions, similar to those at the Bathhouse, as well as smaller signs identifying public telephones and other services. The open letter signs were in an Art Deco style, and were affixed over doorways, and reinforced the architecture and style of the Art Moderne Mall Buildings and Bathhouse addition. A smaller sign for public telephones was suspended under one of the mall partitions.

Current signs in the area include two minor standard service information signs fastened on light poles along the south side of the oval plaza and a no parking sign fastened to a street light pole at the north end of the Mall. The signs are in good condition except that one has been vandalized with spray paint. The 'No Parking' sign is in

satisfactory condition but has been turned so that it is not readable from the parking lot.

5.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

The major physical elements of the Mall remain consistent with the original plans and construction, including the walkways, the predominant planting, definition of spaces, and relationship to buildings, with some deterioration of most elements and other minor changes. Figure C-7 (see Appendix C) indicates existing conditions.

The use of the Mall has probably changed more than other areas at Jacob Riis Park. Today, the lawn area is used for a number of active recreational activities and picnicking has become very common in the shade of the mature pines, a tremendous contrast from its early days, when walking on the grass was prohibited. Consequently, there is more activity in the lawn area than there was earlier in the park's history.

5.4 Integrity

The Mall area retains integrity of location, design, and setting as well as feeling and association. The original layout, circulation patterns and symmetry have been retained from the original design of 1936/37. This area still serves as a circulation route, as a buffer between the use areas of the Park and the main parking lot, and it is still a visually important part of the Jacob Riis Park composition, although the intensity of its use has increased.

The maturing and gradual change of plant materials may have resulted in subtle changes in the views from and to the Mall, but the overall feeling and association of this long, axial space retains integrity and significance in relationship to the overall park plan. Changes at the periphery of the Mall to the pedestrian overpass and bus stop on Beach Channel Boulevard were minor in nature, with little impact on the character defining elements of this area.

Overall, the overall scale, circulation, spatial relationships, and symmetry of the Mall have been retained.

5.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

The Mall area was completed in 1936-7 as part of the Robert Moses expansion program for Jacob Riis Park. The complex consists of mirror image, Moderne-style buildings placed in a formal symmetrical landscape of walks and plantings. The Mall area is one of the distinctive architectural and spatial elements of the expansion of of Jacob Riis Park, establishing an axis to which the elliptical Boardwalk crescent and the East and West Mall Buildings relate. The Mall Buildings, shaping the space at the southerly end of the Mall, are quite similar in siting and form to the structures at Orchard Beach, also designed under the supervision of Robert Moses and completed in 1937.

When first opened in 1937, the Mall area was substantially different from the Bathhouse area, which was the original structure at Jacob Riis Park. The overall concept for the Mall and its buildings was governed by a strict symmetrical plan. The Mall consisted of three main spaces: an elongated rectangular lawn running north/south with a circular walkway at the northern end, a small oval plaza running east/west just south of this area and then the Mall buildings themselves framing a semi-circular plaza. The whole was a linear space of rectilinear and semi-circular shapes echoed in both the buildings and landscape. North-south concrete pathways surrounded the central lawn area and terminated in a circular lawn at the most northern end of the Mall. These principal walks were slightly skewed from parallel, perhaps to compensate for perspective foreshortening. Japanese Black Pines (Pinus thunbergi) and understory plantings lined both sides of the entire Mall. The form of the East and West Mall buildings defined a semi-circular space in front and between the two structures, serving as an extension of the Boardwalk, oriented to the sea. This space, which echoed the circular walkway details used throughout the Mall area, complemented the original Moderne design. A feature of the linear Mall was the framed view of the Empire State Building, looking north.

Figure 42: The Mall, looking south towards the Ocean



Over the years, the Mall complex has undergone remarkably little alteration (see Historic Structures Report for changes to buildings). The original layout is intact although one detail, transitional steps between the rear of the Mall buildings and the Mall itself, appears not to have been constructed (Drawing QL-49 1300, December 29, 1936, Planting Plan). In June 1948 "an anonymous bather donated $1,000 to the Parks Department for use in beautifying the park (Unrau 1981: 203)." A bronze plaque on the west side of the Mall was dedicated to the donor (although it does not exist today). Park lighting was also extended into the Mall in 1948.The character-defining elements of the Mall area which represent important historic, architectural, and cultural values include:

- **Layout, form, and visual character** -- the strong axial symmetry defined by the Mall, centered on the crescent Boardwalk, is a central organizing feature and point of orientation for the overall Plan of Jacob Riis Park. This type of plan was also used at Orchard Beach by Robert Moses. The space has a highly ornamental and formal character. Within the Mall, a sequence of defined spaces -- the open, long lawn, bounded by trees; the small oval, edged by benches and plantings, just north of the Mall Buildings and; the paved semi-circular space between the East and West Mall Buildings -- are integral parts of the symmetrical composition. Visual elements at either end -- the view of the Empire State Building to the north and the flag pole and bandstand to the south -- pro-

vided orientation and a terminus to the space. All these spaces are substantially unchanged in layout and form (see Figure 42).

- **Functional and use relationships** -- The Mall area was originally intended to be a formal, manicured landscape, serving as a visual and ornamental relief to the active beach uses and the circulation and parking systems which serve the site. The Mall space relates strongly to the parking lot and to the circulation system to the north of the Back Beach area. Thus, it plays an important linking function in the overall park design. The Mall still acts as a buffer between the large parking lot and other recreational activities of the park, although the loss and pruning of understory planting has diminished this effect. The Mall also serves as a major pedestrian collector for visitors entering and leaving the parking area. Many visitors who encounter the Mall pass through it on their way to and from the Beach, Boardwalk or westernmost game court areas, although picnickers use the Mall as a destination. (see Section 5.2, below).
- **Features and materials** -- the Japanese Black Pines which line both sides of the Mall define the edges of the lawn date from the 1936-8 park, and were used throughout Jacob Riis Park. The lawn and benches, although deteriorated, are substantially as installed in 1937. The Type B lights located throughout the Mall were installed in 1948, although they match lights present in other portions of the Park earlier. The benches and lights are typical of public works of the 1930's and 1940's. Major changes include gradual loss of understory planting below the Black Pines and deterioration of the manicured quality of the landscape.

5.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

The Mall is relatively flat, as are most of the areas at Riis Park. As grades have not changed, it can be assumed that the original intent was to retain a relatively flat design.

Circulation

The walkways in the Mall area are in the identical location shown in the 1936-1937 plans, excepting a small area to the far northerly end, and play an important role in defining the axiality and symmetry of this space, reinforcing the overall spatial concept for Jacob Riis Park. Similar to the style of other places in the Park, such as the ends of the Boardwalk crescent, the special places in the Mall are defined by variations in layout and geometry: the circle at the northern end; the oval at the southern end marking the intersection with the walkway to the north edge of the Back Beach.

One of the principal functions of the Mall is as a formal landscape which collects visitors from the parking area and directs them towards the Boardwalk/Promenade. This is still the case today and many users of the Mall area see it only as they pass through. The chain link fence that bounds the lot has several openings, but they don's always correspond to park paths. There are no crosswalks, no curb cuts, and no way for pedestrians coming from the lot to know there are park entrances unless he/she has discovered them on previous visits. From the north, there is a bus drop-off and pedestrian overpass over Beach Channel Drive (see Figure 43). To the west of the Mall, separated by the mature Mall plantings, is the Pitch and Putt golf course. It has no visual impact on the Mall, however it does draw a fair number of visitors through the south end and contributes to the amount of activity that occurs here.

The walkways within the Mall which define the main lawn area and the paved oval at the south end were originally paved with an asphalt-based, bituminous surfaceand have become deteriorated, cracked, and uneven due to a lack of maintenance and frequent unauthorized vehicular traffic (see Figure 44). These surfaces may have been resealed or patched, but retain their original materials and base. The sidewalk edges are undefined and overgrown with grass. Weeds and grass are growing in some of the cracks. Sand blown from the beach also accumulates on the walk areas.

Spatial Relationships and Views

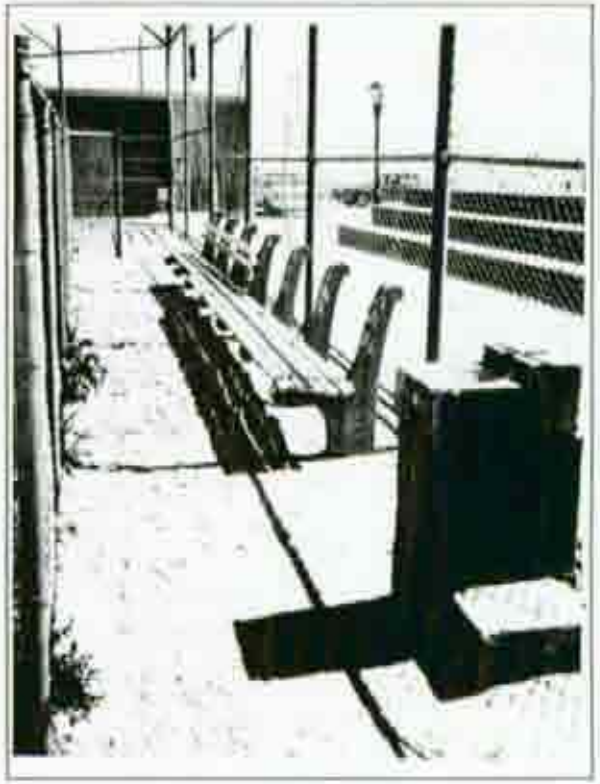
The 1936 plans for Jacob Riis Park indicate the Mall to be defined by three main elements: the rectangular lawn, the oval plaza and the Mall plaza. The axial layout of the Mall and its symmetry were evident in the plans and remain today. The Mall is the largest contained space in the Jacob Riis Park composition, oriented perpendicular to the Beach, beginning at the center of the crescent Boardwalk and extending approximately 500 feet northwest to its terminus at Beach Channel Drive. This layout and form survives substantially intact.

The plaza that occurs between the two Mall buildings adjacent to the boardwalk just south of the oval forms the southern terminus of the Mall. From this point are excellent views of the Atlantic Ocean to the south or of the Mall to the north with the Manhattan skyline in the background. The main axis of the Mall continues through this plaza and is emphasized by the placement of the flagpole. The symmetrical arrangement of the buildings encloses this space on the east and west sides

Figure 61: 1940 Ballfield with no remaining planting

Figure 62: Deteriorating Benches





reational spaces, walks, and open lawn areas.

Today, most planted areas of the Back Beach are in the same location as built in 1937, but plants found in these areas have evolved. Of the plants shown on 1937 plans, two of these are particularly visible elements within the Park today. Most notable is the Pinus thunbergi, or Black Pine, that is used throughout the Back Beach primarily along walkways and adjacent to many of the game courts. Having matured over the years, these pines have also multiplied in numbers becoming a critical contemporary element in providing spatial definition and separation from adjacent areas.

The second plant that is used extensively is Eleagnus umbellata. This plant can frequently be seen separating the game courts and other Back Beach activities from the Boardwalk/ Promenade and is also used throughout other areas of the Park. This plant is currently growing in areas outside of those indicated on the 1937 plans. It has either spread over the years or has been placed around the Park as other species died out. Aside from differences in predominant plant material, the original design in terms of layout is mostly intact. However, there are two areas that have lost substantial plantings since 1937. These areas are located at each end of the crescent Boardwalk and were both originally designed as open lawn areas with associated landscaped borders to the rear and sides.

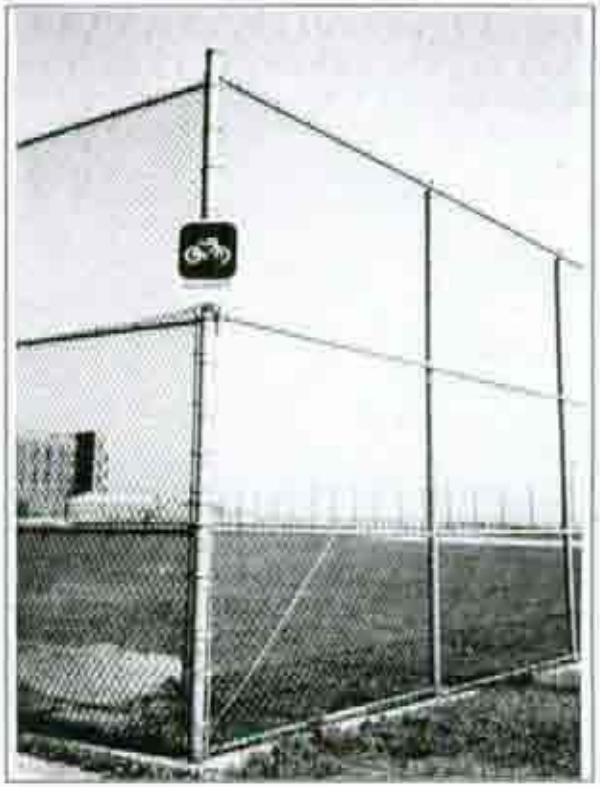
In the case of the area to the extreme west of the Back Beach, no plantings remain today that were included in the 1937 design. This is simply an under-utilized open space that is beginning a successional process which, if not changed, eventually will return itself to a natural beach/dune environment. (see Figure 50)

The area on the east end of the Boardwalk lost most of its plantings in 1940 with the construction

Figure 63: Typical chain link fences in poor repair

Figure 64: Most signs serve a prohibitory function





of the lighted ballfield (see Figure 61). Some plantings, mostly Pinus thunbergi, still remain which separate the field from an access walkway on its western side. Another group of Pinus thunbergi also exists on the eastern edge of the Ballfield and which serve to screen the electrical hut located there. But for the most part only fragments of the original planting design exist today.

All of the plantings that are shown in 1937 plans of the interior spaces of the game courts and play areas have disappeared. In their place are grass panels which, although they show where internal divisions once existed. In the case of the playground east of the Bathhouse, the entire organization of the space has been altered. (see Figures 51, 52, 54, and 55)

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Figures C-8 through C-10 (Appendix C) show site furniture and existing conditions for the Back Beach Area. The 1937 plans of the Back Beach areas indicate only the locations of a few benches but do not include information on the types used. There exist today four bench types within the Jacob Riis Park. Two of these could potentially be either original benches or simply the original style of bench used. These two benches have concrete bases with wood slat seats and one possesses a back also of wood slats. Many benches are in advanced states of deterioration (see Figure 62).

Other site furnishings found today in the Back Beach areas include two additional bench types both of modern design, assorted swings, basketball backboards, play equipment, chain link fences, and wire mesh trash receptacles. Site furnishings in the Back Beach areas are uniformly deteriorated. Chain link fences are often torn or bent (see Figure 63). Of the site furnishings that exist today in

the Back Beach area, only the wire mesh trash receptacles, fences, and benches are consistent with the original plans, along with two of the concrete hexagonal drinking fountains.

Lighting

The original plans only show lighting locations but do not indicate the style that was used. Photographs indicate that high mast floodlights were extensively used in the game courts and playground areas but have since been removed, except for the softball fields.

Pedestrian lighting in the Back Beach area is supplied by black, pedestrian scale lights (Type B) that are also found in the Mall. These lights were used in pedestrian areas throughout the park and appear original.

The only other lights supplied in the Back Beach area are more contemporary athletic field lights used around the ballfield at the east end of the crescent Boardwalk.

Signage

The 1937 plans do not include information on signage. Where it exists today, it is usually prohibitory (see Figure 64). No system of identification or directional signage is currently in place.

6.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

The elements which frame the Back Beach, the pedestrian walkway system and planting borders, are still generally well defined and function as intended, despite areas of pavement deterioration, loss of site furniture, and selective loss of plant materials. **Areas where planting borders have been lost along the Boardwalk have become vulnerable to drifting sand, as they have lost the planting beds which trap the sand and accumulate small dunes at the Boardwalk edges of court areas.**

In general, the Back Beach is used less intensively than at any time in its history, due to declining visitation to Jacob Riis Park, brought on by its progressive deterioration. The most intensively used facilities are the several ball fields, particularly the lighted softball field which is in high demand and is the only facility where night use is encouraged. No other facilities are lit for night use. The handball courts and basketball courts are also in demand, although deteriorating concrete paving has made some of them dangerous to use. Playground areas are used, but at nowhere near the density that characterized the park in its prime.

An expanded area of demand and use is picnicking, which is desired by a large percentage of park visitors typically family groups. The Back Beach, with its emphasis on active recreation, is generally ill-suited to meet this demand, although several of the smaller parcels which remain in open lawn are used for this purpose.

6.4 Integrity

The Back Beach area retains integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. The original layout, circulation systems and general land use have been retained from the original design of 1936-37. There have, however, been significant changes in the specific uses within the various game court areas, although most of these areas retain their feeling and association. The introduction of the easterly ballfield was an extension of the park, and is compatible with adjacent uses. The ballfield at the easterly edge of the crescent Boardwalk changed the nature of its space from a lawn to a sports field, detracting from the original design concept; however, it has been in that location for nearly fifty years and has acquired its contributing significance as one of the more important and continuous activities of the park. Integrity of materials has been lost in site furniture and benches, although these are easily replaceable in kind.

The most notable aspects of the Park that remain from the 1936-37 design are the pedestrian walkways and paths, the planted borders, some of the open lawn and landscaped areas, and the series of compartmentalized recreation spaces adjacent to the Boardwalk/Promenade. When considering overall appearance, modest change has occurred within the Back Beach. The majority of the areas are still used as originally intended. The only major change in use is the additional demand for picnicking, which has spread to available landscaped areas.

Chapter 7:

The Beach Area

7.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

7.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Topography

Land Use

Circulation

Buildings and Structures

Spatial Relationships and Views

Planting

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

Lighting

Signage

7.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

7.4 Integrity

7.1 Historical Evolution and Significance

The shoreline adjacent to Jacob Riis Park was stabilized in 1932 as part of the City's plans to develop a public recreation beach area. The Beach itself was protected with a concrete bulkhead and a number of jetties used to stabilize the shifting sand.

The overall 1932 Park design presented a number of difficulties for the Beach area. Perhaps the most contentious was the Bathhouse's proximity to the beach. At high tide there was only a twenty-foot strip of sand not covered with water. The remaining Beach had problems as well. "The balance of the valuable shorefront area had been developed as a cinder-surfaced parking lot retained by bulkhead that encroached on the Beach as much as did the bathing house (Unrau 1981:88)."

Between 1936 and 1938 the U.S. Army Corps completed a beach erosion study at Riis Park to determine the most effective means of extending the beach area to the west in order to accommodate Moses' expanded park and to make the beach wider at high tide. As a result of this study a number of measures were taken. In 1936 the Atlantic Gulf and Pacific Dredging Company dredged 2,000,000 cubic yards of fine white sand from the Rockaway Inlet in Jamaica Bay east of the present Marine Parkway Bridge. This sand was placed and carefully graded to increased the Beach in area from 8 to 24 acres along a length of one mile. It became a smooth, firm, sloping beach, almost 500 feet wide (Unrau 1981:140). (For a detailed description of the fill operations the reader is referred to the Historic Structures Report by Harlan Unrau, 1981.)

Thirteen existing groins which were found by the 1936-38 study to be in poor condition were reconstructedand each third groin was extended to hold back the newly deposited sand. The extensions were made of creosoted round wood piling and creosoted wood wales (Unrau 1981:138-139;142).

Portions of the original seawall were removed in front of the mall in order to accommodate the newly designed crescent shaped beach front of the mall. A new seawall in front of the reconstructed Bathhouse was completed as well.

In 1939 concrete caps and steel sheeting were added to existing jetties to make them longer; several jetties were relocated to the center of the mall's crescent beach. In the same year, between the hospital at the east end of the park and the play areas east of the Bathhouse, 22,000 cubic yards of fill was added and hydraulic fill was pumped in along the entire beach (Unrau 1981: 199).

Additional work on the jetties was completed in 1940 when five new jetties were constructed in front of the Bathhouse. Each extended approximately 500 feet from the seawall and 250,000 cubic yards of fill were deposited to extend the beach. Older jetties were repaired with concrete caps and steel sheeting (Unrau 1981: 199-200).

In 1957 and 1958 beach stabilization structures were removed along the oceanfront at the east end of the park and in front of the Neponsit Hospital. This may have been due to a land transfer.

A severe storm in 1962 damaged most beach areas throughout New York City. Particularly hard hit were the Rockaways and Riis Park. Emergency contracts were let and the following repairs made:

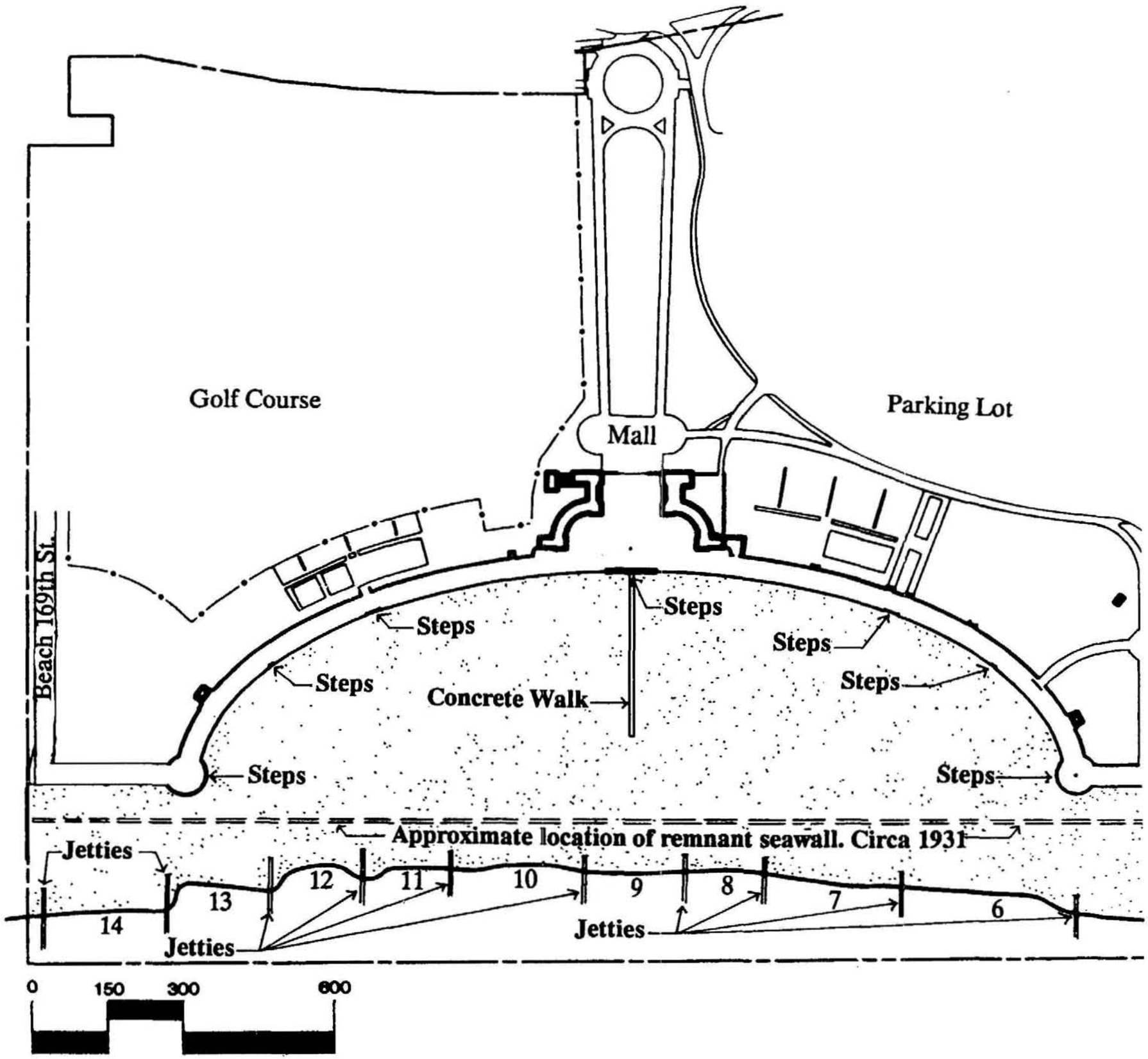
- *"removal of existing pipe rail and bulkhead cap*
- *excavation of fill outshore of bulkhead*
- *replacement of creosoted timber sheet piling and wales*
- *replacement of bulkheads' concrete seal and securing of tops of timber sheet piles to prevent excessive lateral deflection*
- *excavation of inshore side of bulkheads*
- *installation of 3-foot aluminum bulkheads*
- *installation of 3-foot aluminum bulkhead fence*
- *placement and compaction of sand fill inshore of bulkhead and replacement of rip rap blanket*
- *replacement of bulkheads' concrete for structures*
- *replacement of reinforcing bars*
- *installation of end pieces of outfall sewer*
- *replacement of all deteriorated steel sheet piling* (Unrau 1981: 200-201)."

Since 1960 there have been few repairs made to the Beach area.

The character-defining elements of the Beach area which represent important historic, architectural, and cultural values include:

- **Layout, form, and visual character** -- the repetitive quality and location of the jetties, which divide the beach into activity areas which, over time, have been claimed by different user groups, as well as the defined and formal edge which is created by the seawall perimeter of the Boardwalk and Promenade;
- **Functional and use relationships** -- the large scale of the beach space, which lends itself to a variety of activities;
- **Features and materials** -- the natural qualities of the sand and the ocean, which are the primary resource which draw many visitors to Jacob Riis Park.

Figure 65: Existing Site Features, Beach Area



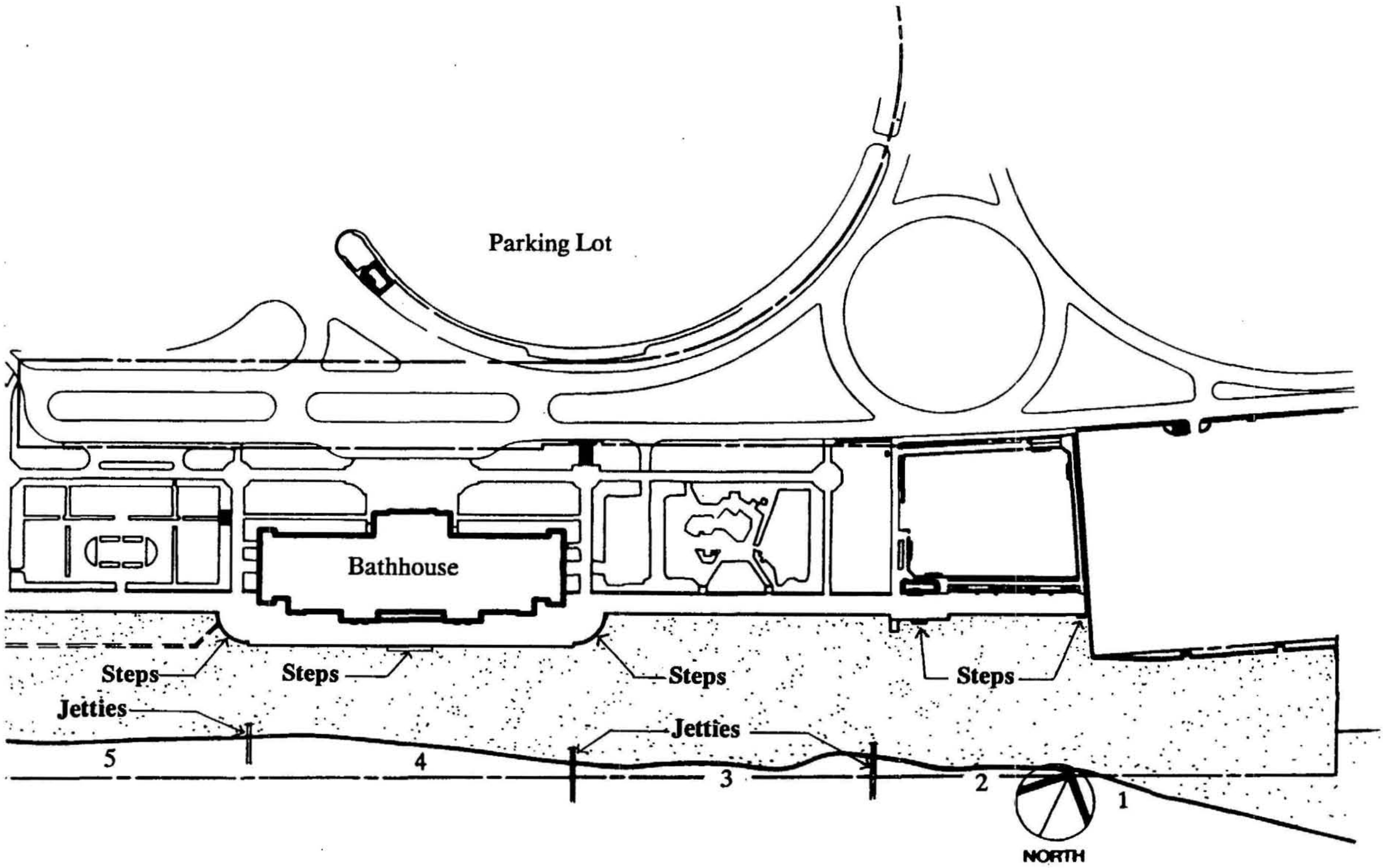

Parking Lot
Bathhouse
Steps
Steps
Steps
Steps
Jetties
Jetties
5
4
3
2
1
NORTH



Figure 66: Windblown sand



Figure 67: Old concrete seawall

7.2 Assessment of Landscape Elements

Existing features of the Beach sub-area are shown in Figure 65.

Topography

The topography of the Beach is a flat expanse of sand slightly sloped toward the ocean. The flat, open nature help define the character of the Beach and is characteristic of this type of resource. Windblown sand drifts on the Beach and beyond and is regraded each spring (see Figure 66).

Land Use

The Beach was intended for and is still used for unstructured recreational use.

Circulation

Pedestrian circulation onto the Beach is gained from several sets of steps placed along the Boardwalk/Promenade. Once off the steps, each user is free to choose his desired path in the sand. An exposed aggregate walkway ramp extends from the center of the mall plaza steps, bisecting the north half of the crescent Beach. This large expanse of sand is not used much except on extremely heavy use days.

The only paving that occurs on the Beach is the exposed aggregate concrete walk in the center of the crescent Beach and portions of the old sea wall. The walk is in good condition with few minor cracks. This was not part of the 1937 plans but was installed in 1953. Broken and deteriorating sections of the concrete sea wall still exist in the crescent Beach, dating from the 1931 plans (see Figure 67).



Figure 68: Typical deteriorated jetty



Figure 69: The crescent beach area

Buildings and Structures

The shoreline of Jacob Riis Park is stabilized by thirteen jetties and groins located along the Beach. Most of these structures are wooden and appear to function but portions of the bulkheads have rotted away (see Figure 68). A couple of the groins are reinforced concrete and although the concrete is badly spalled exposing the reinforcement, they still appear to function. The jetties at the western end of the park crescent Beach appear to exist from the 1934, 1936 and 1939 jetty extension plans while the jetties along the eastern half of the park appear to be from the 1936 and 1939 extension plans. Several of the jetties at the extreme eastern end of the park were removed in 1957. There is no evidence currently to suggest when the jetties from the 1934 plans were removed from the eastern half of the Beach. No evidence has been found to indicate when the concrete jetties were constructed.

Spatial Relationships and Views

The Beach is an open space, exposed to the elements. Spaces or "rooms" on the Beach are partially defined by the jetties and groins; these elements tend to define territorial limits for the various users.

The crescent Beach is visually defined by the Boardwalk and its plantings along with the Mall buildings (see Figure 68). This space is larger and feels more open and unprotected than the other hall of the Beach.

The crescent Beach is symmetrical around the extension of the Mall plaza centerline; as it was originally constructed in 1937. The eastern half of the Beach is no longer symmetrical about the Bathhouse as it originally was in 1937; the 1958 addition extended the Beach farther to the east.

The major views are obviously directed toward the ocean and its wave action. The Promenade and it's

planting along with the Bathhouse act as a backdrop for the eastern portion of the Beach. The Mall Buildings and the crescent Boardwalk act as a backdrop for the western half of the Beach (see Figure 69). The ends of the Beach are not visually defined, so views extend off site, farther down the Beach, although several off-site landmarks do define the property edges.

Site Furniture and Small Scale Elements

No permanent site furnishings exist on Beach. Temporary life guard stands and trash receptacles are seasonally placed by the maintenance staff. Umbrellas, chairs and other Beach furniture can also be seen here when the Beach is being used; these temporary site furnishings are brought by the user although the Park has in the past, rented chairs and umbrellas. The park service staff installs snow fencing parallel to the Boardwalk/Promenade in the off season months to catch and deposit wind blown sand. The 1937 plans do not show any permanent site furnishings.

Signage

The only signage that exists on the Beach are some temporary signs placed by the Park service to seasonally close the Beach and to denote a bird nesting area. The 1937 plans do not have any information regarding signage on the Beach.

7.3 Overview of Existing Conditions and Use

The Beach is just south of the Boardwalk/ Promenade and can be divided into two parts. The east half parallels the Promenade. The western half, the crescent Beach, widens to correspond with the elliptical Boardwalk. The sand width fluctuates with the daily tidal action and is generally peppered with all sorts of debris and jetsam. The Beach is divided into "social rooms" by the 13 irregularly spaced jetties and groins. Many of these "rooms" have traditionally been used by various ethnic and other groups, by informal arrangements.

The layout of the Beach has been enlarged since the 1937 plans were implemented, but with the exception of the natural movement of the sand and several modifications to the jetties the overall layout of the Beach is substantially unchanged since the 1939 improvements.

7.4 Integrity

The Beach at Jacob Riis Park retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling and association.

The overall layout integrity has been retained even through the eastern portion was added to the original Robert Moses 1937 Park layout. The overall visual integrity has been retained although the material and workmanship of the jetties and groins has been weakened by the deteriorating action of the ocean on these elements. Although several of the jetties and groins have been extended they still retain their original purpose. The old sea wall which runs through the crescent Beach is highly deteriorated. With the exception of the natural movement of sand, the Beach has not been substantially changed since the 1939 project.

Chapter 8:

Recommendations

8.1 Context of the Recommendations

8.2 Summary of Site Landscape Elements

8.3 Bathhouse Area

8.4 Boardwalk / Promenade Area

8.5 Mall Area

8.6 Back Beach Area

8.7 Beach Area

8.1 Context of the Recommendations

The National Park Service's 1979 General Management Plan defines a general policy of "rehabilitation" for Jacob Riis Park, proposing that "... the location and configuration of existing facilities at Riis will be retained, but significant modernizing improvements will be made ... " The policy of "rehabilitation" is defined, by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation, as "the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use, while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values." Therefore, the rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park will include retaining, preserving, repairing, and replacing significant features of the landscape. The foregoing report has defined the significant remaining features of the landscape as well as important features which have been lost for the park overall and its sub-areas. This summary section provides recommendations based on that analysis.

Significance

The key historically significant aspects of the Jacob Riis Historic District, as defined in the National Register application referred to previously and as a designed historic landscape, are described in further detail in Section 2.3 of this report include:

1. *Jacob Riis Park is representative of 1920's and 1930's recreational landscape architecture, architecture, and park design, particularly in New York City*
2. *Jacob Riis Park exhibits the use of Art Deco and Moderne design adapted to architecture*
3. *Jacob Riis Park is an excellent example of a planned NYC beachfront Park during the WPA and Robert Moses period*

Despite small scale changes and progressive deterioration over time, Jacob Riis Park retains its overall character as a designed historic landscape which contains significant historic landscape resources, many of which have a high level of physical integrity. Jacob Riis Park as a whole represents a remarkably well preserved and intact example of mid-twentieth century municipal park and recreation design.

At Jacob Riis Park, the 1932 park design, focusing on a single building, was expanded in 1936-37 into an overall site development concept and redeveloped into a successful, popular facility. The park incorporates a small number of 1932 site features, principally in the Bathhouse Area, into a comprehensive design, formal in scale and intent. The original Bathhouse and surrounding grounds were an early effort to emulate the nearby, and very successful Jones Beach State Park. The designers of the 1936-38 Park expansion, featuring the Crescent Boardwalk and Mall area, adapted the 1932 design by widening the Beach and creating the strong geometrical forms of the Mall and Boardwalk as well as the Back Beach recreation area.

The site design exhibits a combination of formalism and strong geometric layout characteristic of the modern movement and public works of the period, combined with a planting strategy which attempted to create elements of a naturalistic seaside landscape. The overall walkway and circulation system and the basic zoning of the site into the five sub-areas previously discussed -- the Bathhouse, Boardwalk/Promenade, Mall, the Back Beach, and Beach -- are immediately perceivable and understandable, much as conceived in the 1936-37 design. Each of these sub-areas retains essential landscape resources which contribute to the overall ensemble, despite changes which have evolved over time:

- **The Bathhouse Area** -- retains the symmetrical walkways from the 1932 layout and 1937 renovation, as well as planted areas which complement the imposing and symmetrical Bathhouse structure. Although some plant materials have been lost over time, many of the remaining plant materials in this area date from both the 1932 construction and the 1937 renovation;
- **The Boardwalk/Promenade Area** -- retains its important unifying quality as a linear walkway parallel to the Beach linking all park elements. Its relationship to the buildings and Back Beach areas remains constant, as access points to Back Beach activity areas and key original structures remain. Areas of which have changed include the loss of wood materials on the surface of the Boardwalk, deterioration of the ship's rail, and the introduction of contemporary, incompatible modern benches;
- **The Mall** -- in overall shape, delineation, and symmetry, the Mall remains substantially as designed, including the location of nearly all walkways and circulation and the perimeter planting approach. Modest changes to some walkways, removal of the wooden Boardwalk and related site features between the East and West Mall Buildings, and maturation of some plant materials represent a loss of historic character,but have not jeopardized the overall integrity of the landscape concept in this area. Many of these changes are reversible.
- **The Back Beach** -- has changed more substantially than other sub-areas, as many original court, playground, and playing field layouts have been modified over time to meet changing recreation needs. However, the general system

of walkways and connections to the Boardwalk remain in this area, defining the perimeter of the active recreation uses and maintaining the layering of activity which characterized the original layout. Several sections of the Back Beach, particularly near the East and West Mall Buildings, retain activity layouts which are quite similar to the 1936-37 installations.

- **The Beach** -- remains the recreational and visual resource which motivated the entire site design, providing a rationale for the linearity of the Boardwalk and attracting activities which demand services along its length.

The proposed rehabilitation of Jacob Riis Park will inevitably involve the introduction of new activities and design elements within this historic landscape. Jacob Riis Park is a dynamic, functioning recreation resource in a major metropolitan region which should legitimately serve the changing needs of its service population. This report recommends that those elements of the landscape which retain high historic integrity be retained, permitting minor adjustments for contemporary user needs. On the other hand, those portions of the site where historic integrity has already been compromised by prior modifications could be considered for the introduction of new open space uses to meet contemporary recreation needs if such uses are designed to be compatible with the character-defining elements of the landscape.

8.2 Recommendations: Site Landscape Elements

In this section, overview recommendations are offered for each of the landscape elements previously presented in the Report, highlighting the aspects of each element which are of significance to the historical, architectural, or cultural values of the landscape. In subsequent sections, more detailed proposals are made for each of the defined sub-areas at Jacob Riis Park.

Topography

The flat terrain of Jacob Riis Park is characteristic of the seaside environment, and is an important aspect of the 1937 renovation. The height differential between the Boardwalk and the Beach, as well as the relationship of the Back Beach and Mall to other park sub-areas, appears to have changed little. Some accretion of blown sand at planting borders has occurred, although this has not changed the overall layout significantly.

In general, the topographic relationships of the sub-areas and activities at Jacob Riis should be maintained. New development at the Park should avoid introduction of changes in historic elevations, creation of new major earthforms, or disturbance of established dunes.

Land Use

The location of buildings containing visitor services (the Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings) was an integral and highly significant part of the original Jacob Riis Park design concept, and these key buildings remain substantially as built in 1937. The layout of the Back Beach to contain a diverse mix of active and passive recreation, locating court games close to the major structures interspersed with more "natural" areas, was an important aspect of the original layout and is perceivable today, although some of these activity areas have been changed to other uses since 1937. Additionally, the use of planting borders to separate differing uses from one another, facilitating the mix of uses, was an important part of the original layout and still remains.

Areas of the site which retain historic fabric and integrity and contain uses which are substantially consistent with the original 1936-37 designs should be preserved. If changes to uses in such areas are deemed essential to meet contemporary recreation needs, such changes should retain the scale, character, and typical materials of those sections of the site. Where changes to incorporate new outdoor activities are proposed, these should be oriented to those sections of the site which have lost historic integrity and where replacement of missing features is not essential to the historic character. Such changes, in the Back Beach area, for example, should be designed to adhere to the symmetrical and formal qualities which characterized the 1936-1937 plan. Addition of new elements to the existing historic landscape should be done with great care to avoid damaging the essential features of these areas.

Circulation and Paving

The design of the vehicular and pedestrian circulation network at Jacob Riis Park created the "frame" which defines the zones of activity in the original 1937 design. The layering of activities is directly attributable to the parallel walkways along the Boardwalk and Back Beach. Additionally, the curving arrival drive which defines the rounded shape of the parking lot is complementary to the more formal ellipsoid shape of the Boardwalk and Back Beach activities and contrasts to the straight walkways of the Mall. Nearly all these pedestrian and vehicular ways remain in the same location today and are of primary importance to be retained, although in some cases pavement materials have changed.

Vehicular circulation at Jacob Riis Park should remain limited to the arrival / departure experience, as originally intended. Use of the Boardwalk/

Promenade and other Park walkways as service drives should be restricted only to emergency and authorized maintenance vehicles. No new roadways should be developed.

All walks, whether original or introduced after 1937, should be kept to widths consistent with the design used in 1936-1937. New walks should be minimized, except within areas of the Back Beach which have lost their historic integrity and where their location is non-intrusive and does not detract from the historic character. Any changes which are required to enable access for the disabled should be designed to be compatible with original layouts and to reflect the formality and strong geometries which characterized the 1936-37 design.

Repair of existing pavements which retain their original materials should be done with care to match color and textures. Where walkways need rebuilding, they should be replaced with in kind materials. Over time, programs should be developed to systematically repair or replace with in kind materials paved surfaces which deteriorate. Compatible substitute materials may be considered where repair or replacement in kind is not technically or economically feasible . Where historic materials have been removed, replacement should be systematically made to return historic or historically comptible materials.

Buildings and Structures

The three major structures at Jacob Riis Park -- the Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings -- are historically significant within the park and retain a high level of integrity. Retention of their character is essential, as a feature of the 1937 Park design was to integrate these buildings into a coordinated landscape. The Bathhouse and the two Mall Buildings continue to maintain their strong linkage to the overall site, largely due to the small degree of change to the massing of these structures and due to the relatively unchanged nature of the walkways and sitework in their immediate vicinity. The three Concession structures, built in the late 1940's and early 1960's, postdate the 1937 park renovation and contain few noteworthy design features.

The Bathhouse and Mall Buildings should be preserved and rehabilitated, in conformance with recommendations of the Historic Structures Report.

The two 1940's structures symmetrically placed at east and west ends of the Boardwalk ellipse should be treated similarly, in terms of sitework and overall access to maintain the symmetry of their relationship. Modifications to these structures could be considered if required to meet contemporary service needs of park users, so long as the design maintains a symmetrical quality and small scale, subordinate to the other buildings and the boardwalk. The most easterly Concession structure is adjacent to a segment of the Back Beach which was developed in the 1960's and is not part of the historic landscape. Modifications to the site surrounding this structure could be made to accommodate new functions, respecting the character of the adjacent Boardwalk.

Additional structures, such as grilles to accommodate picnic use, may be considered to be added to the landscape if they are sited and scaled so as not to distract from character-defining landscape qualities.

Spatial Relationships and Views

The overall design concept of the 1936-37 plan relied on symmetry to define the order of spaces and activities at Jacob Riis Park. This symmetry was evidenced in many aspects of the Park design and has a high significance to the character and form of the Park in areas such as: the layout of walkways near the Bathhouse, the Boardwalk and Back Beach areas along the ellipse on either side of the Mall Buildings; the Mall, and; the area between the Mall Buildings. Additionally, border planting created a sense of spatial definition within areas of the Back Beach and a sense of enclosure along the Mall which was a crucial part of the overall landscape character.

The overall spatial character of the Mall, the Boardwalk, and the Bathhouse areas should be retained. Future improvements should be designed to retain and reestablish original spatial relationships and symmetries that have been altered or have deteriorated. Court games and paved play areas in the Back Beach should be designed to reflect the formal and symmetrical layouts which characterized original designs. Playfields and passive recreation areas within the Back Beach should be designed to preserve existing historic plant materials and restore missing plantings to emphasize the seaside setting. The Mall and Bathhouse areas should retain the symmetry which characterized the original designs.

The views and vistas of certain areas of Jacob Riis Park are important features of the site, although these views are not necessarily the same as in 1937-1939, as plant materials have matured. Two areas which have important views which should be retained, based on original layouts, include the axis of the lawn in the Mall area and the clear field of vision which remains in front of the Entrance Pavilion, which enables this structure to have high visibility from the vast parking lot. The open quality of the Boardwalk south edge should be maintained, avoiding obstruction of the ocean view. Planting borders around court areas and between the Beach and Back Beach have, over time, created a sense of separation between disparate activities which appears to have been an important design intent of the 1937 Plan and should be retained.

Planting

The intent of the original planting plans appears to have been to create informal, open landscaped areas, to define spaces in the Mall and along the Back Beach, as well as to provide a setting around the Bathhouse:

- At the Mall, the elongated central lawn remains well defined, framed by large Japanese Black Pine (Pinus thunbergi), despite the loss of the mixed species which provided understory planting as well as other small trees. These remaining plant materials are of significance historically to the design concept of the Mall. The mix of species in this area was a character-defining element of the original plan and should be pursued in the rehabilitation through addition of plant materials and through a systematic replacement program as current plant materials reach the end of their life cycles.
- Along the Back Beach, the majority of plant borders to court games areas remain and are a significant part of the original design concept, although the mix and density of plant materials have changed over time. In the more natural areas of the Back Beach at either end of the ellipse, the original natural borders have been substantially lost and, in the case of the area to the east end of the ellipse, a playing field was added in 1940, early in the park's history.
- In the Bathhouse area the Washington Hawthorn and Ligustrum which comprise the north, east, and west borders date from 1937 and, perhaps to 1932. These materials have significant value. The general shape of borders and lawn areas is substantially similar to that conceived in 1932 and expanded upon in 1937.

Original plant materials should be retained, excepting plant materials which are in decline which should be replaced in kind as they reach the end of their life cycles. Typical life spans for the plants on the original plant list at Jacob Riis Park include:

Botanical Name	Common Name	Life Span
Baccharis halmifolia	Groundsel bush	under 5 years
Elaegnus umbellata	Autumn elaegnus	50 - 100 years
Myrica carolinensis	Wax-myrtle	(1)
Rosa rugosa	Rugosa rose	50 - 100 years
Prunus maritima	Beach plan	25 - 50 years
Prunus pumila	Sand cherry	25 - 40 years (2)
Pinus thunbergi	Japanese Black Pine	100 + years (3)

Notes:

(1) not hardy enough for cold weather

(2) difficult to cultivate

(3) jeopardized by "blue cancre stain"

Pinus thunbergi, a particularly prevalent tree species on site, is at risk due to a lethal disease, "blue cancre stain," carried by beetles that is decimating all Japanese Black Pine on the East Coast, similar to the damage wrought by Dutch Elm disease. Although a preventive cure may be found, it is possible that the black pines may be lost over the next 10-15 years. Possible replacements for Pinus thunbergi which have a similar visual character and the potential of survival at the site may include:

- Pinus rigida (Pitch Pine)
- Juniperus chinensis (Chinese juniper)
- Chamaecyparis pisifera (Sawara False Cypress)
- Cryptomeria japonica (Cryptomeria)

However, all of the above, with the possible exception of the first two species, need shelter from wind and salt spray and may have difficulty surviving at the beach edge. Other individual healthy trees should be retained, even if not part of the original planting list, if they can be pruned to a form characteristic of the species in the environment. Where shade is desired for new picnic areas, preference should be given to using original species or small trees which can be shaped for shade, located to be consistent with historic planting planting patterns and the overall landscape design character.

Where possible, existing shrub beds should be rehabilitated with infill plantings, to restore missing materials. The intent of the original shrub beds in the park appears to include:

- Foundation planting adjacent to building edges (such as at the Bathhouse)
- Natural edge "understory" defining a formal space (such as at the Mall)
- Natural edge "understory" defining an informal space (such as at passive recreation spaces along the Back Beach)
- Natural seaside hedges (such as around the game courts at the Back Beach)
- Clipped hedges (such as the planters in the east playground)
- Accent beds (such as at the Bathhouse entrance).

In all of these areas, priority should be given to protection of original plant materials, where feasible. A careful procedure should be used to identify and mark plant materials which are likely to be original and/or are listed on the original planting plans. Other plant materials which appear to be non-original but which are flourishing and are in a location and form which is characteristic of original beds should also be identified and protected.

Where healthy shrub beds and individual plant materials are not consistent with the original intent of the design (such as trees at edges of game court areas), materials which are healthy may be retained if they are compatible with current or planned uses. When such materials are in direct conflict with programmatic needs, then consideration should be given to their removal or transplant in favor of materials that will both support the planned activities and be consistent with the historic character.

When placing new infill planting within historical shrub beds, plant materials should either be among those listed on the original plant list or should be compatible in color, texture, form and scale with original species. Care should be taken in choosing materials to select materials which will survive in the seaside environment and to install them in configurations which will maximize survivability. One approach which holds promise is a simplification of mixed species plant beds, clustering species. Separation should be maintained beween beds of Eleagnus umbellata, Rosa rugosa, and Prunus sp., and Myrica sp.

Evaluations should be done in areas where original planting did not survive to determine whether non-surviving plant materials were inappropriately sited. Irrigation systems should be considered for areas of new planting where materials are subject to high stress or in high profile and formal areas, such as planting beds in the Bathhouse vicinity.

Site Furnishings and Small Scale Elements

Relatively few of the site furnishings which were put in place in either 1932 or 1937 remain. Site furniture was relatively simple in design, befitting the character of Jacob Riis Park and its straightforward and economical materials. The principal items which remain include sections of the wooden ship's rail on the Boardwalk, wire trash baskets, two types of concrete and wooden slat "Lundino" benches in poor repair, and a few concrete drinking fountains with the hexagonal, flared design. The concrete fountains replaced the original cast iron pedestal units which were provided as part of the 1937 Plan. The other items were, typically, provided throughout the park in the original design and were important elements to define the small scale character of the environment. The Wise clock on the Boardwalk is a unique site element, located at a highly visible location, installed in the early 1940's. Other small site furniture items which were part of the original design and have been largely removed included kiosks in the Back Beach area, telephone booths, and fire boxes.

Site furnishings and other small scale elements can have a unifying effect on the entire Park and should be coordinated to be compatible with the original design. Where significant resources which are compatible remain (such as the Lundino benches), these should be repaired, where possible, or replaced in kind. The wooden ships rail restoration (where practical) and replacement with similar materials where necessary is a crucial site element to restore continuity along the Boardwalk. Where replacement materials are required, a case-by-case assessment should be done. If using the same kind of materials is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered. Those elements which do exist should be evaluated and restored if their condition warrants. Even though most of the benches along the Boardwalk were added after the original 1937-39 design, they provide an important amenity and should be restored and/or replaced, except that the later, modern pipe benches should be replaced by concrete and wood slat Lundino type benches. In future design, consideration should be given to replacement of historic site furniture items which have been removed if, economically feasible and responsive to contemporary needs of park users. Additional site furnishings, such as picnic tables and grilles, should be considered on a case-by-case basis if their inclusion can be accommodated without detrimental effect on the park's historic character.

Lighting

Many lighting fixtures have been used over time at Jacob Riis Park. Those remaining which are characteristic of the park's early development include the 1948 "Type B" New York lights which are found in the Mall and Bathhouse areas and in parts of the Back Beach and the "Type A" lights with the horizontal crossarm lining the Boardwalk which appear to have been added, based on historical photographs, by 1941. Other lights which were used at the Park in the 1932-1939 period included a 1932 wood bracketed fixture used near the Bathhouse, globe lights which appear to have been used along the Boardwalk in 1939 and removed in favor of the "Type A" lights, and high mounted flood lights which were originally placed throughout the Back Beach area. None of these lights remain, except one of the 1932 wood-bracketed fixtures in the large parking lot. The scale and consistency of the several types of lights at Jacob Riis Park are important character defining elements to the overall park environment.

Type A and Type B lights should be retained and restored for the pedestrian portions of the Boardwalk (Type A) and Mall/Back Beach/Bathhouse (Type B). Investigation of luminaire replacement should be undertaken to ascertain whether higher levels of maintainability can be achieved while maintaining the scale of fixture and appropriate character of illumination. Lighting levels at the Park are generally low and should be increased, particularly at high impact/use areas such as entries, recreation and event sites. Substantial use of flood lights throughout the Park is evident from historic photographs. Additional flood light installation would be appropriate if nighttime recreation is to be encouraged in the Back Beach. Transitional areas and contemporary new functions will each require further study to insure compatibility of lighting with the historic landscape and the intended functions.

Signage

Historical photographs and design documents show that most signage was historically applied to buildings, indicating concession locations and rest rooms. There were also small, freestanding signs on the grounds. Building signs were hung on surfaces, some to walls, or perpendicular made of open, over-sized letters set off from opaque building surfaces. The NY Parks Department sign was a timber bordered, flat sign with hand-painted lettering. These signs have allbeen removed. The open letter signing on buildings gave a continuity across the park because of its stylized Art Deco typeface and the large scale of the information, visible from a distance against light colored building surfaces. Nearly all original signs have been lost and those signs which remain are contemporary, comprising a mix of standard NPS identification signs, prohibitory signs, and handicapped access emblems.

An effective sign system should be designed to serve as a unifying element for identification, directional and interpretive information at Jacob Riis Park. The design of this system should evoke the design and feel of the signs typical of public park spaces of the 1930s. It will be important to design signs which can be durable and replaceable to withstand potential vandalism.

Materials should be selected for durability and heavy use associated with a major public recreational environment, a similar context to the original 1937-39 design. Principles which should apply to design of new signage at Jacob Riis Park, include the following:

- Signage should use a stylized Art Deco or Moderne typeface characteristic of the park's period of significance.
- Building signs should be of two types: (a) open letter signs, mounted set-off from opaque building surfaces, could be used for generic visitor service and concession information, similar to signs used historically. Such signs should be confined to the south faces of the Beach Pavilion and the Mall Buildings; (b) other small building signs panels could be placed within or subordinate to building facade elements (e.g. - hung under a portico).
- Signage should be kept to a minimum to be consistent with the site's historic tradition of limited site signage. For example, rules and regulations should be posted at a few key points, as opposed to identifying and repeating prohibited activities throughout the park.
- Site signs should be installed so as not to detract from the area where they are installed, to avoid impact on character-defining elements. For example; (a) on the Boardwalk, signs should be, typically, placed to the north side so not to block views of the ocean. Any sign which must, for reasons of public safety, appear to the south edge of the Boardwalk, should be mounted to avoid obstructing views and at a location which reinforces the rhythm of Boardwalk rails and passing; (b) on the Back Beach, where possible, necessary signs should be mounted on fences and dividing walls; similar to historic practice; (c) on the Mall, signs should be placed to the periphery and not in the central lawn.

8.3 Recommendations: Bathhouse Area

Historic Resource Context

The area immediately surrounding the Bathhouse retains a high degree of historic integrity. Circulation systems, paving, lighting, and major planting beds from the 1937 design remain, are in relatively good condition, and should be retained and replanted. Although much of the mixed species planting has not survived, the remaining Washington Hawthorns are the most predominant and substantial species of the original design and therefore much of the historic character is retained, despite the addition of a later privet hedge. Mature Japanese Black Pines, while not part of the original layout, were probably put in by the New York City Parks Department in the late 1940's or early 1950's, based on the size and maturity of the trees. These trees have evolved into important and long-lived landscape elements. These important elements should be retained. The major qualities of the Bathhouse area which should be maintained include:

- o Strong symmetrical layout of both landscape and building, with original walkway layouts.
- o Dominant architectural style of the Entrance Pavilion; with focal tower and portico elements and its visibility from the parking lot.
- o High integrity of the original site layout and walkway system.
- o Mature plantings which enhance and highlight the building's architecture while de-emphasizing the mass of the structure.
- o Strong relationship to entry roadways and parking lots.

Recommendations

Several problems should be addressed in this subarea. These include deteriorating concrete paving, lawn areas with uneven grades that have overgrown adjacent walks and paved areas, and planted areas overgrown with weeds. Additionally, the area has poor signage that is not readily visible to vehicles approaching from the east.

As the primary point of arrival for most Park visitors, the Bathhouse area should serve two functions. First, it should be returned to its traditional function as the "front door" into the Park and should project a positive visual image. Second, it must incorporate the components necessary to orient visitors to the Park, inform them of the amenities offered, and provide a logical entry sequence for arriving visitors. The following recommendations would help achieve the above goals, while responding to the historic elements of the landscape:

1. Retain and strengthen historic character defining elements and introduce needed improvements to maintain and restore the historic fabric.

   A. Retain Washington Hawthorne and Ligustrum planting along front of Bathhouse; prune/trim as necessary to retain natural shape of plants and to keep branches away from building.

   B. Replace damaged or missing plants to retain historic character of planting borders.

   C. Retain Japanese Black Pines; prune as necessary to retain natural character of tree.

   D. Retain and restore the walkway system, patching and replacing concrete paving to match existing color and texture.

   E. Retain "Type B" pedestrian lights in this area, restoring or replacing elements as necessary.

   F. Retain seasonal planting beds on either side of the main entrance.

   G. Prohibit grills or picnic benches at the main entrance, as new areas for these uses will be established as part of the overall plans.

   H. Restore, where possible and consistent with intended park use, missing character-defining elements which have been removed.

2. Develop a sense of arrival through the combined rehabilitation of historic features such as the Bathhouse structure, plaza paving and landscaping, and through the introduction of new design elements which respond to current visitor needs. These might include:

   A. The introduction of historically consistent site furnishings, removing intrusive contemporary elements, such as the aluminum benches.

   B. The return of historically documented features such as flagpoles and building signage.

   C. The introduction of appropriate identification, directional and interpretive signage.

   D. Increased lighting in all entry areas.

   E. Establish a logical entry sequence for Park visitors that will directly and indirectly move them through this entry area to the recreation areas of Jacob Riis Park.

   F. Establish locations for emergency vehicles near the Bathhouse First Aid area and the Boardwalk to minimize their visual presence on the character-defining aspects of the landscape.

   G. Provide handicapped access curb cuts at all sidewalks.

   H. Consider design of building features and appurtenant structures, such as building signage, drinking fountains, telephone booths, and concession carts, to be in character with original elements which have been removed.

8.4 Recommendations: Boardwalk / Promenade Area

Historic Resource Context

The Boardwalk/Promenade extends the entire length of Jacob Riis Park from east to west. It links together all areas of the Park and serves as a major pedestrian circulation route serving the Beach on its south side and the Back Beach, Mall and Bathhouse on its north side. Its visibility to and from the Beach links the Boardwalk / Promenade strongly with the natural resource which prompted the original development of Jacob Riis Park. The major character-defining elements of the Boardwalk include its layout, shape and form, materials, its functional and visual relationship to the key buildings within the Park, the ships rail, and the "Type A" lights which, though not part of the original Moses work, were installed shortly thereafter and date to approximately 1941. Major qualities of the Boardwalk which should be retained include the following:

- o Integrity of the original layout, including access points to and from the Back Beach and Beach areas.
- o The form of the Boardwalk, which complements the buildings: the ellipse relates to the curved Mall Buildings and the straight section relates to the linear Bathhouse.
- o Concrete pavement is 50 years old in most areas and in fair condition.
- o Most of the 1941 lighting standards remain, imparting a scale and rhythm to the length of the Boardwalk
- o The ship's rail which, though sections are missing, frames and defines the edge of the Boardwalk.

The principal changes in the Boardwalk which have occurred since the 1936-38 development include the replacement of the wooden deck in the elliptical section with concrete, removal of the bandstand, deterioration of materials, and addition of some modern incompatible benches which were not part of the original design. The Boardwalk is more separate today from the Back Beach than when originally installed, due to the growth of planting borders to mature size.

Recommendations

Problems which must be addressed in this area include elements in need of maintenance and restoration, including the ships rails, concrete paving and steps, and damaged benches and lights.

The Boardwalk at Jacob Riis Park is a place to see and be seen, providing continuity across the site and continuous visual access to the Beach. The Boardwalk and Promenade should retain their linear character, should provide easy access to and from the Beach, and should retain those elements which define its historic character. The following recommendations are made to realize these potentials:

1. Enhance the historic character of design and function through the repair and/or replacement of important elements, including:

   A. Repair, where feasible the Ship's Rail and supporting frame; replacing those segments which are deteriorated beyond repair or missing with in-kind materials.

   B. Repair and replace the "Type A" Boardwalk/ Promenade lights, replacing missing elements and replacing luminaires with compatible fixtures.

   C. Repair the Wise Memorial Clock to original condition.

   D. Repair concrete pavement, seawall, and steps to improve access to Beach.

   E. Replace existing modern benches along the Boardwalk. Even though these were not part of the 1937-39 installation, benches are an important adjunct to the Boardwalk and do not detract from the materials and design approach of the park. Metal benches should be removed and replaced with the concrete and wooden slat "Lundino" benches used in court and game areas and dating from the 1937-39 period.

   F. Replace the wooden Boardwalk, as part of a phased upgrading. Phase 1 would include patching of spalling concrete; Phase 2 would be construction of the wooden Boardwalk on top of the concrete. If using the same type of wood is not technologically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials, such as vandal-resistant tropical hardwoods or other substitutes, may be considered.

   G. Strong consideration should be given to replacing the bandstand which was a character-defining element at this location and might serve as an interpretive and information shelter. If demand would support other uses in the location, they should be designed to be compatible with the size, scale, materials, and color of this historic feature.

2. Add elements required for contemporary visitor needs which would not adversely affect the historic charcter of the landscape of this area and which would assure the preservation of character-defining features. These may include:

   A. Appropriate minimal signage, designed to be part of an overall system of orientation and information at the park. Signs should be small scale and should not intrude on views of the Beach or Back Beach.

B. Shower heads at the edge of the Beach for wash-off which are visually compatible with the historic character in terms of size, scale, materials, color and texture.

C. Provision of access for the disabled from the Boardwalk / Promenade to the Beach, to include the addition of handrails at existing stairs, designed to be compatible with the existing rail system and overall historic character.

D. Existing drinking fountains must be replaced, as they are typically not accessible to the disabled and not visually in character with the park. New fountains should be located in historic locations, to the north side of the boardwalk and promenade, using materials and designs which fulfill contemporary usage requirements while in character with the materials and scale of the historic landscape.

8.5 Recommendations: Mall Area

Historic Resource Context

The Mall retains substantial historic integrity, as the location, setting, and overall design have been little changed since 1937. The space is still partitioned into the unornamented and formal lawn, on axis with the Mall Buildings, surrounded by mature trees and the paved forecourt north of the Mall Buildings. Walkways are in original locations and have retained original materials. The Type B lights were added in the Mall area in 1948, although at least two of these types of fixtures were used adjacent to the Mall Buildings in 1937. The strong geometry and form of the central lawn accentuates the opposing curves of the Mall Buildings and the ellipse Boardwalk. These attributes must be preserved. The key qualities of the Mall Area which should be preserved include:

- o Strong axiality and symmetry of original design.
- o Mature plantings that define the edges of the central lawn space.
- o Views across the open and uncluttered central lawn.

Originally designed as a formal, ornamental open space for passive uses, the Mall retains its visual and formal qualities. However, the space is probably used much more intensively now than in 1937. The Mall is now heavily used for picnicking and other passive uses. In order to satisfy the heavy use demands placed on it, consideration should be given to adding amenities which support these uses, while protecting the important historic qualities of the landscape. Recommendations for the Mall area include:

Recommendations

The problems of this area relate principally to the deterioration or replacement of materials. Walkway surfaces are cracked and deteriorating. Lawn areas are uneven and have overgrown the pavement edges. Some of the New York Type "B" lamps are broken. Additionally, a bus stop has been added at the north end of the Mall on Beach Channel Drive resulting in the loss of some original plantings.

1. Enhance the historic character of design and function through the repair and/or replacement of important character-defining elements, including:

   A. Rehabilitate the two Mall buildings.

   B. Retain and repair the "Type B" lights in the Mall area.

   C. Repair and/or replace in kind existing benches in the plaza north of the Mall Buildings. These are backless "Lundino" benches similar to others used during the Moses park era, although they may have been added later.

   D. Avoid adding new site furniture or other vertical elements to the lawn area, as they would detract from its simplicity and character.

   E. Maintain tree and shrub beds to define their limits and perpetuate with new plantings.

   F. Additionally, pruning, maintenance, and replacement policies should be defined for important plant materials to maintain the character of the Mall area.

2. Add contemporary elements and amenities, if required for visitor use, where such additions can be accommodated without adversely affecting the integrity of the landscape of this area. These may include:

   A. Support facilities for picnic use. These may include grills and/or charcoal collection bins, but should not include picnic tables or other site furniture. Grills should not be placed in the central lawn or under trees, but might be sited in areas to the east and west periphery of the Mall in places where there is no overhead tree. Grills should be low to the ground, of the smallest practical height and dimension, and located far from the sidewalk to avoid encroachment on views along the Mall. Charcoal bins should also be considered, to avoid the hazard of dumping live ashes on the ground. Such facilities should be sited to avoid adverse affect on historically significant plant materials or the overall character of the landscape.

   B. If required by activity demand, supplementary elements could be considered between the two Mall Buildings.

C. Introduction of signage required as part of a Park-wide system.

8.6 Recommendations: Back Beach Area

Historic Resource Context

The Back Beach was originally conceived to provide a mix of active and passive recreation. These areas provided a transition zone between the arrival areas and the Boardwalk and Beach areas of the Park. The design concept included controlled access, income and non-income producing hard surfaced court, game, and play areas adjacent to the principal buildings, punctuated with more natural areas at the two ends of the ellipse.

The Back Beach was defined by a linear and cross circulation system of walkways which defined these activity areas and were reinforced by border plantings. The system of defining walkways is remarkably intact, as are many of the court game area internal layouts and many of the border plantings. Some of these areas have changed to varying degree, due to modifications over the years or due to the loss of plant materials.

The Back Beach should remain an area serving a broad variety of recreation uses. In general, it is proposed that parts of the Back Beach which retain their original form and function be retained and rehabilitated in place, that court areas whose uses have changed be retained as hard surface areas, but with possible shifts in recreation type, and that areas which have been altered substantially be considered as candidates for redesign, consistent with program needs. Consideration should also be given to restoration of missing features which were inportant character-defining elements.

Major qualities of the Back Beach area which should be retained include the following:

- o Comprehensive system of walkways, as originally designed, provides pedestrian access and circulation to all amenities.
- o Mature border plantings that, in most locations, provide excellent separation of spaces, consistent with apparent original design intent.
- o Wide variety of active recreation uses alternating areas for hard court games with planted natural areas and fields.

Several changes in use have resulted in loss of integrity to sub-areas within the Back Beach:

- o West of the Mall -- the configuration of court games has been changed, although the general layout is intact.
- o Between the Mall and the Bathhouse -- substantial changes have occurred to the sub-parts of the Back Beach. The ballfield at the end of the ellipse was added to an area which appeared originally intended as open field, bordered with natural plantings which have substantially disappeared. This area was an important counterpoint to the hard surface court areas in the original design. Other court areas and parts of planted borders have also been changed.
- o East of the Bathhouse -- most areas beyond the immediate area of the Bathhouse have been modified. The childrens' play area was changed from a formal layout to an informal layout, although small portions of the original layout are intact. The ballfield to the far east is an addition to the original plan.

Recommendations

Major problems of the Back Beach area that should be addressed include planted areas overgrown with weeds, pavement edges overgrown by adjacent lawns, and site furnishings that are broken and deteriorated. Additionally, many paved court game areas are cracked and in poor repair. There is an overall lack of signage, and lighting in the area. Recommendations for the area include:

1. Restore the historic character of design and function through the repair and/or replacement of important character-defining elements, including:

   A. Retain mature plantings of historic species. Supplement the historic plantings that exist to fill in border areas and to replace those areas which have been removed or where original plantings are missing, using historic species.

   B. Retain and restore all defining walkways to the north of the active recreation parts of the Back Beach, as well as cross walks which separate and define the individual activity areas.

   C. Restore and/or replace in kind the concrete and wood slat "Lundino" benches adjacent to activity areas. In the original design, most benches at Jacob Riis Park were in the Back Beach area. Remove the modern metal benches, which date from later periods and are inappropriate.

   D. Repair and/or replace in kind damaged court surfaces and separating fences, where appropriate to proposed uses.

   E. Retain "Type B" pedestrian lighting within Back Beach walkway areas, and consider overhead flood lights for those areas where night outdoor recreation is to be permitted.

   F. Replace planting borders which have been removed or have deteriorated with species typical of the original design to reinforce the separation and definition of Back Beach sub-areas.

   G. If future uses warrant, consider reintroduction of the small kiosks which were originally built along the income-producing portions of the Boardwalk.

2. Limit the introduction of new uses to areas where historic integrity has been compromised and where such changes would have limited adverse affect on the historic character. In these areas, provide designs which:

   A. In design of hard surface areas, use geometrically precise and generally symmetrical layouts, consistent with the original philosophy of the 1937-39 design.

   B. In design of larger play areas, design planting borders to recreate the informal seascape feel which characterized the original design. These borders should hold the edge of walkways but should be informally shaped to their interior.

   C. Complete missing border plantings on the south edges of all ballfield and lawn areas to trap blown sand and stabilize these areas.

   D. New plant materials should be added only in areas where consistent with original plant massings and the overall historic landscape concept. For example, new deciduous trees might be added to provide shade for picnickers, but should be limited to the interior edges of northerly planting borders in lawn and active playfield areas of the Back Beach, where mixed species of varying size were originally introduced. These areas might include the lawn area near the Wise clock, and the most westerly parcel on the Back Beach.

3. Develop, and maintain throughout the Back Beach, a continuation of the entry sequence established by the Bathhouse:

   A. Introduce signage that is visually in keeping with the historic theme of the Park.

4. Provide access for the disabled from the Boardwalk and Promenade areas to the Back Beach, designing new elements to insure compatibility with scale and form of the historic landscape.

8.7 Recommendations: Beach Area

Historic Resource Context

The Beach is the main resource and attraction at Jacob Riis Park. All other areas and/or activities exist to supplement the Beach. As such, the Beach needs to remain the main feature of the Park. All activities or actions need to be directed so this natural resource is preserved and enjoyed. The repetitive jetties and original sea walls are an important part of this area, which, though created by natural forces, was shaped by man-made improvements. Design of the Beach area should avoid further encroachment on or alteration of the natural environment and should be oriented to providing needed services which will support typical beach activities. Major qualities of this area that should be retained include:

- The repetitive quality of the beach and jetties, which has remained relatively constant since 1937 design.
- The scale of the beach space which supports a variety of uses and activities.
- The natural quality of the sand and the ocean, which is the only natural resource which draws people to Riis Park.

Recommendations

Problems which should be addressed in the Beach area, include deteriorating jetties, groins, and original sea wall. Additionally, the beach and ocean are not handicap accessible. Recommendations for this area include:

1. Repair jetties and groins.
2. Develop maintenance program to regularly remove debris and rocks from sand.
3. Provide handicapped access to Beach and ocean.
4. Provide amenity in area adjacent to crescent/ boardwalk to draw heavier use.
5. Provide shower wash-off areas near junction with the Boardwalk.

Any new additions should be unobtrusive, should not adversely affect the historic character of existing resources, and should use compatible materials, forms, textures, and colors to existing character-defining features.

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Appendix A:
Historic Photographs



Fig. A-1 Administration Entry (6/18/34; Ahjos Schuszler)



Fig. A-2 *East Wing, Bathhouse complex with Playground beyond (8/4/34; Alajos Schuszler)*



Fig. A-3 *View west from south, 2nd floor terrace of Bathhouse (9/24/34 Alajos Schuszler)*

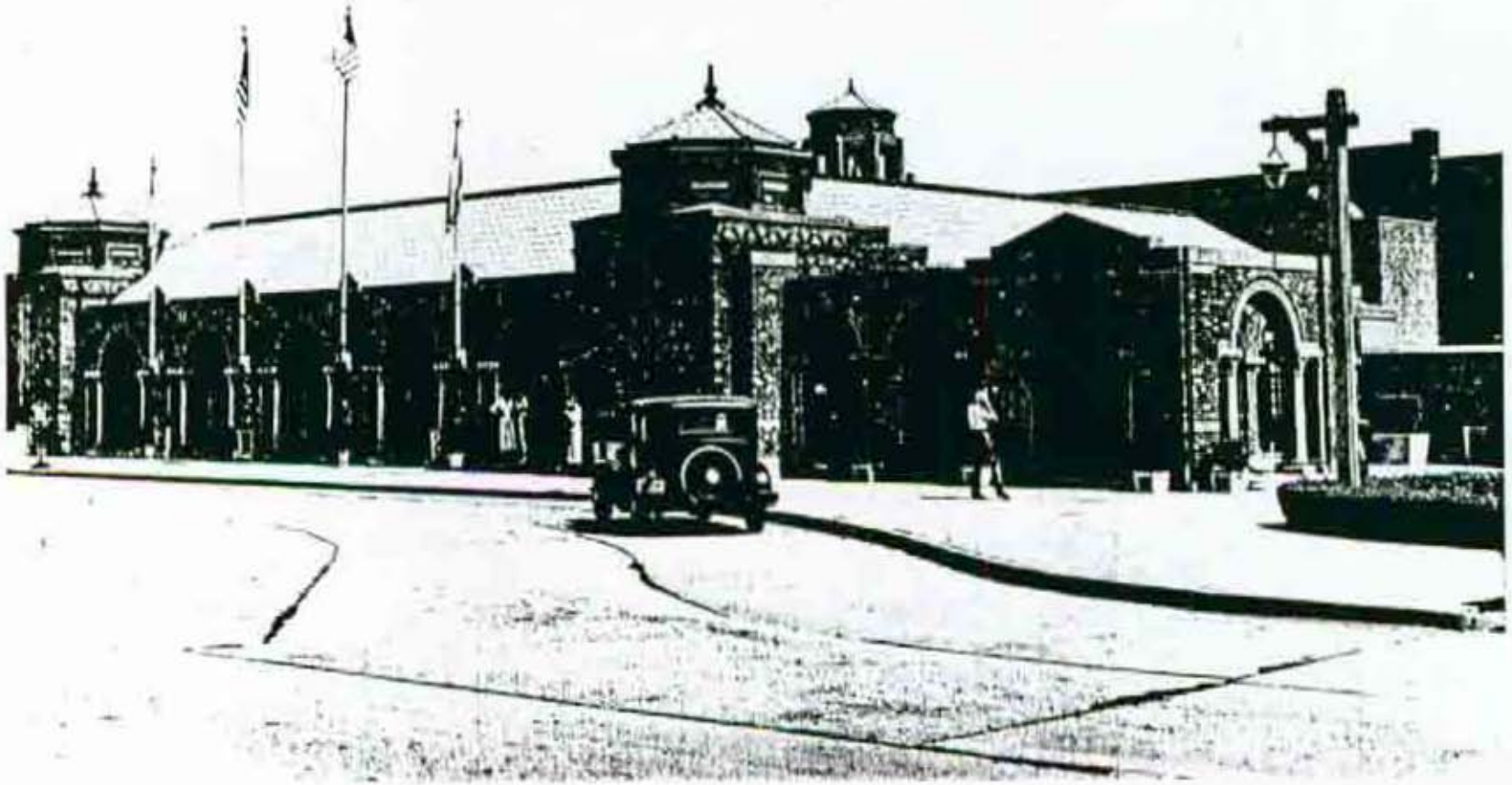


Fig. A-4 Bathhouse Entry Pavilion (7/28/35)



Fig. A-5 *West Wing edge of Bathhouse (7/28/35; Max Ubich)*



Fig. A-6 Promenade to southwest of Bathhouse (8/10/36; Max Ulrich)

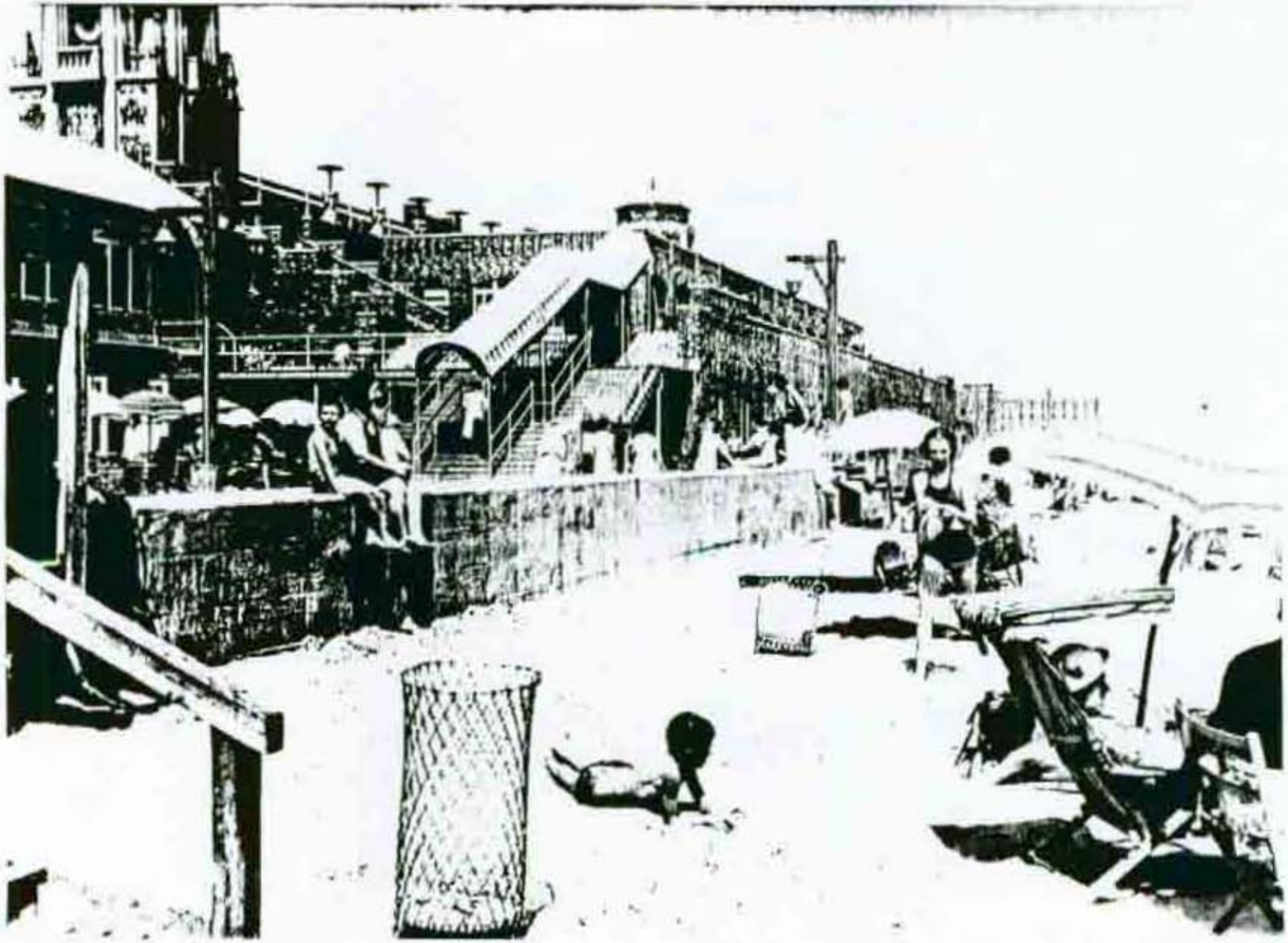


Fig. A-7 *Beach and Seawall to south of Bathhouse (8/10/36; Max Ulrich)*

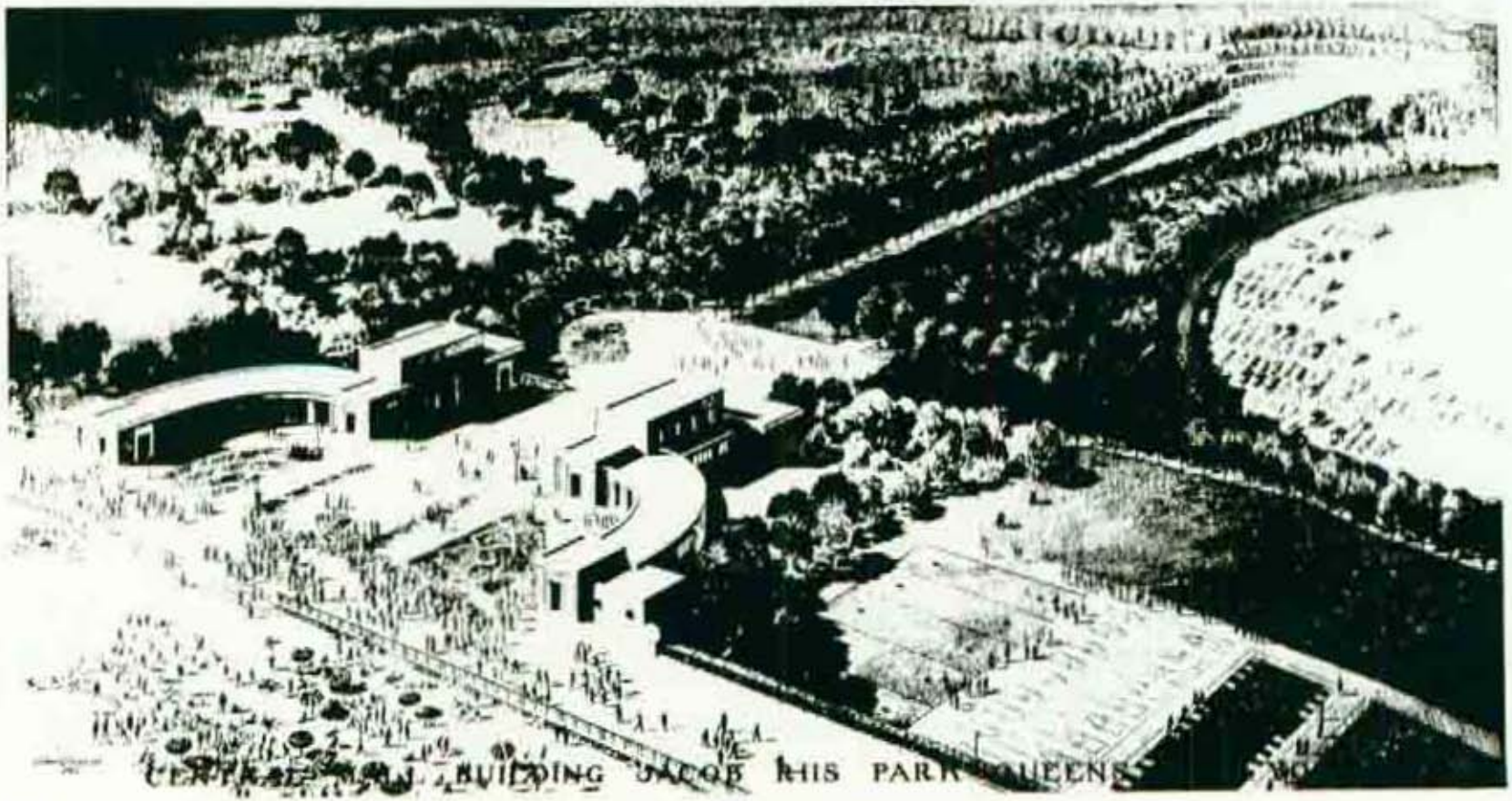


Fig. A-8 *Architect's bird's eye rendering of Mall Buildings (11/13/36, MacGilchrist)*

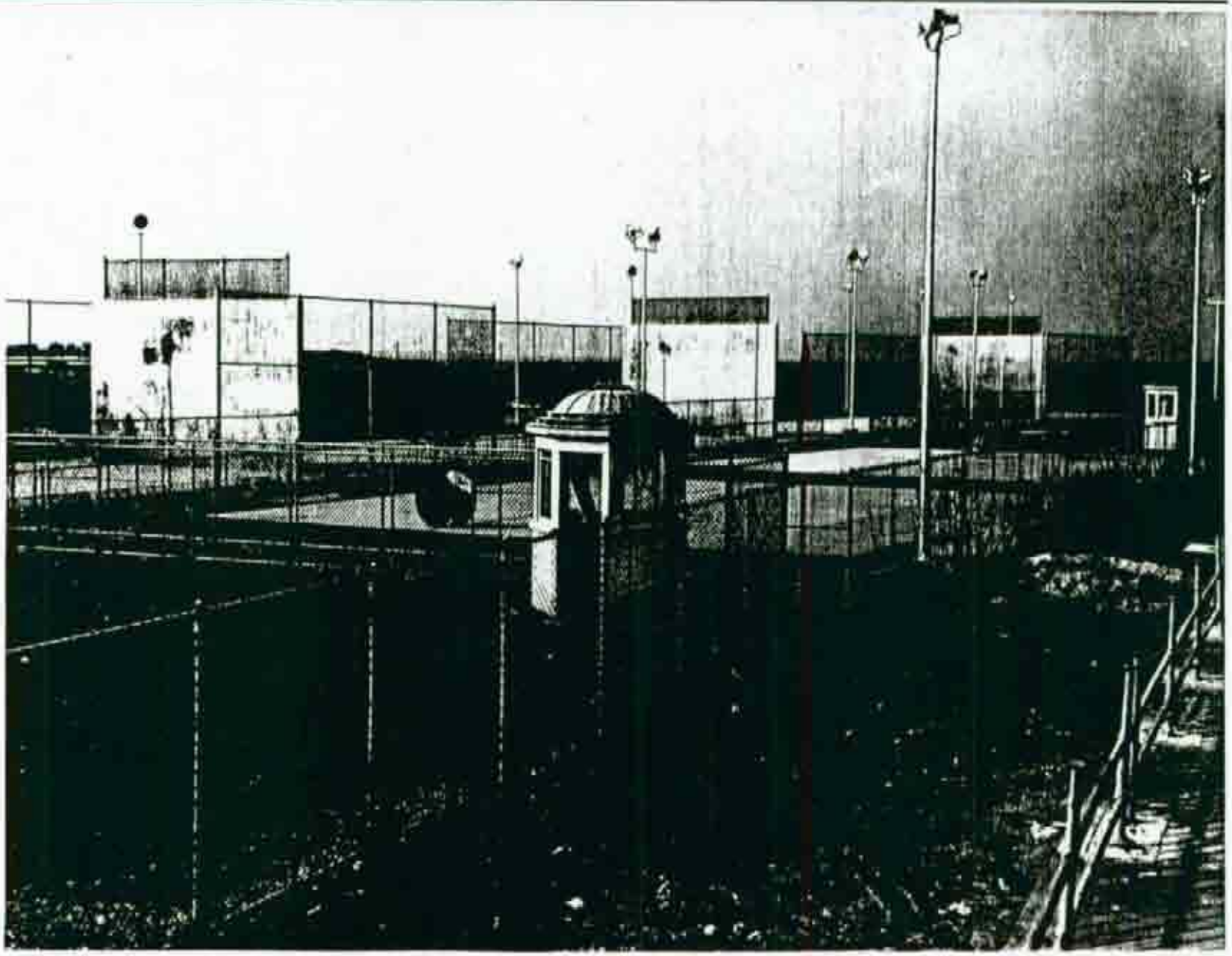


Fig. A-9 Gamecourts, west of Mall, along Boardwalk (5/26/37; Max Ulrich)

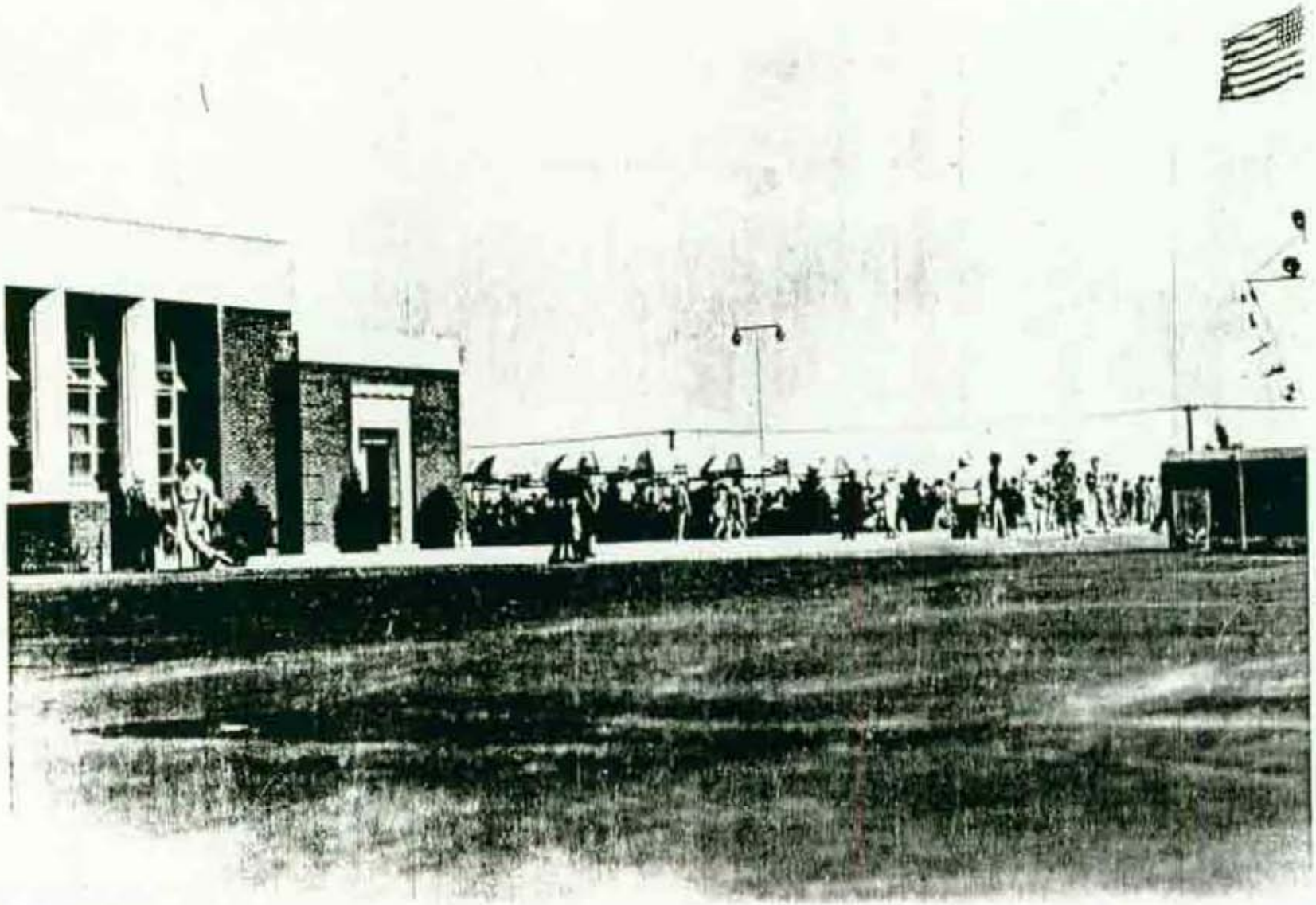


Fig. A-10 Entry to Mall Buildings from the Mall (7/18/37; Max Ulrich)

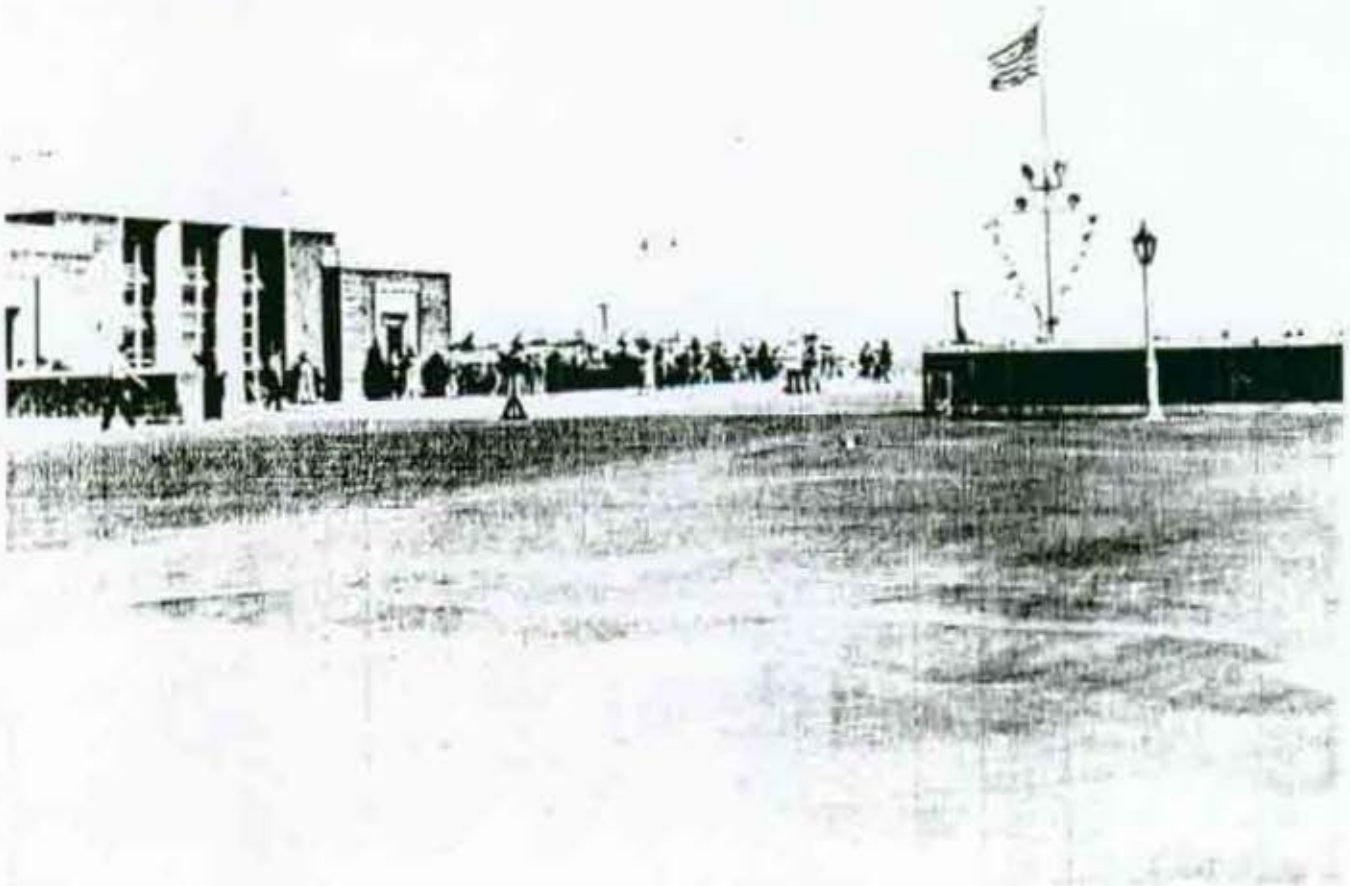


Fig. A-11 View of East Mall Building from the Mall (7/18/37; Major Schuyler)



Fig. A-12 View of Mall Plaza and Flagpole (7/18/37; Alajos Schwizler)

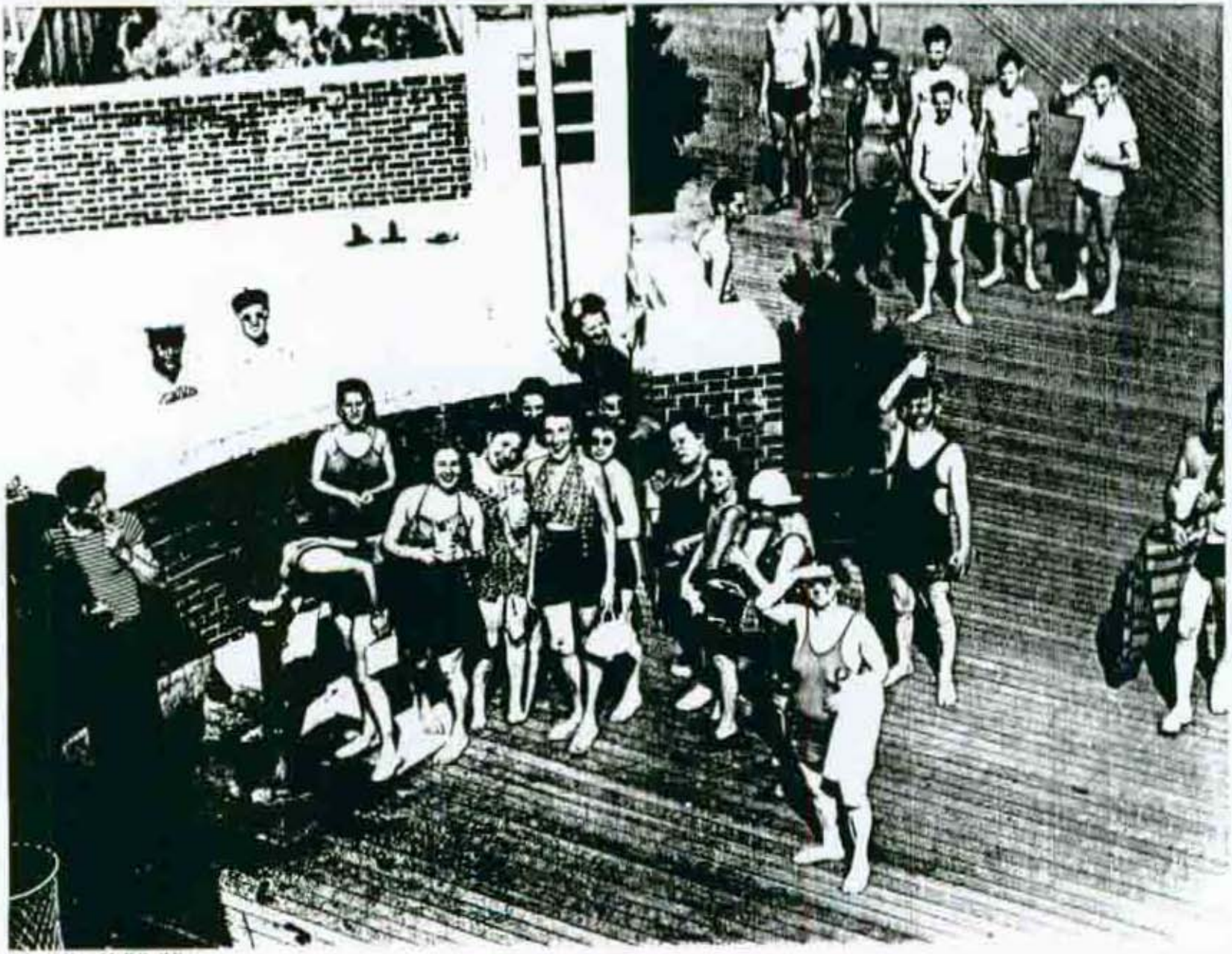


Fig. A-13 Metal Fountain at East Mall Building (7/18/37; Max Ulrich)



Fig. A-14 East Boardwalk, near Mall Building, with relationship to Back Beach and Beach (8/16/37)



Fig. A-15 Promenade and early lights, in front of Beach Pavilion (8/15/37)

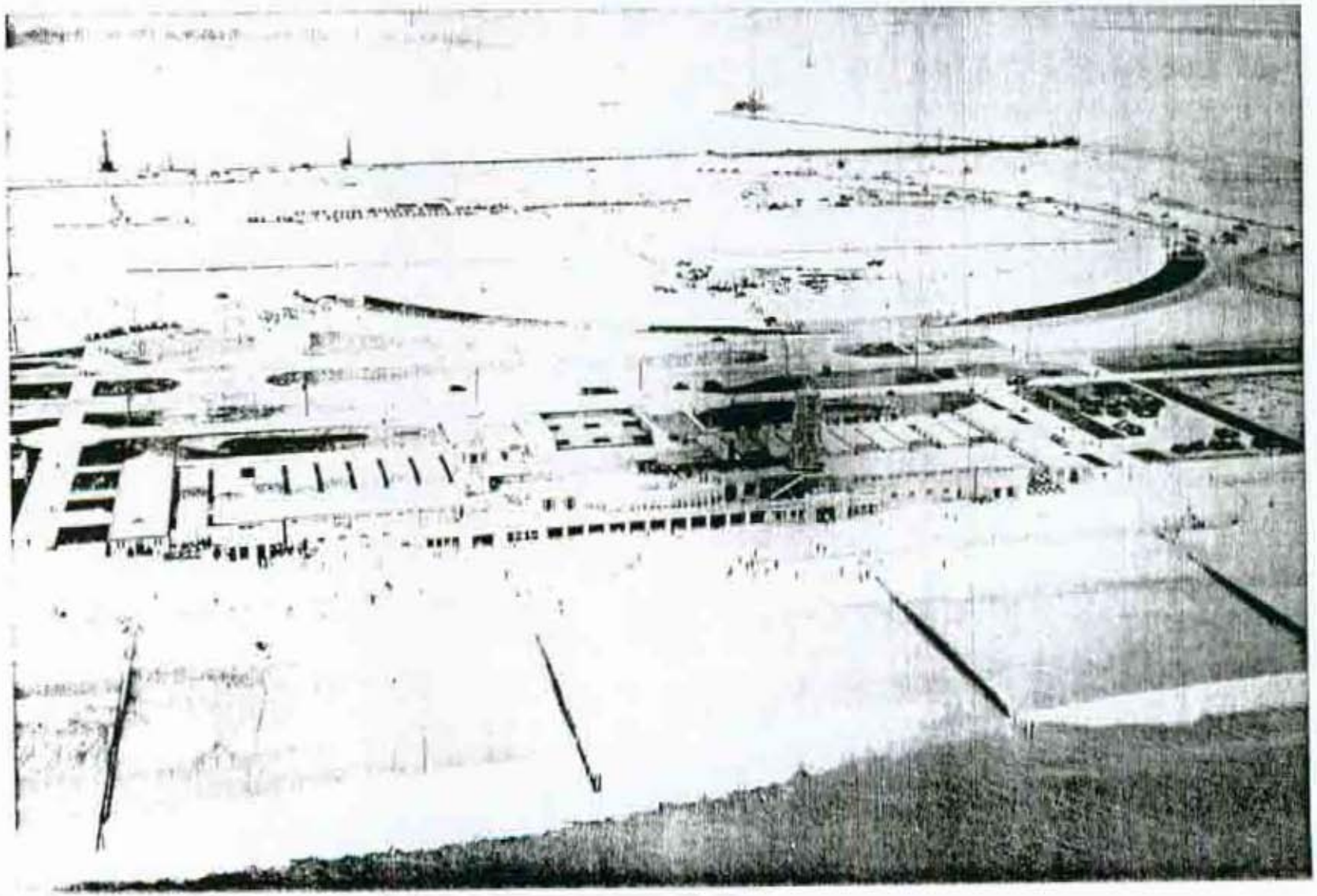


Fig. A-16 Aerial view of Bathhouse and surrounding area (8/16/37)

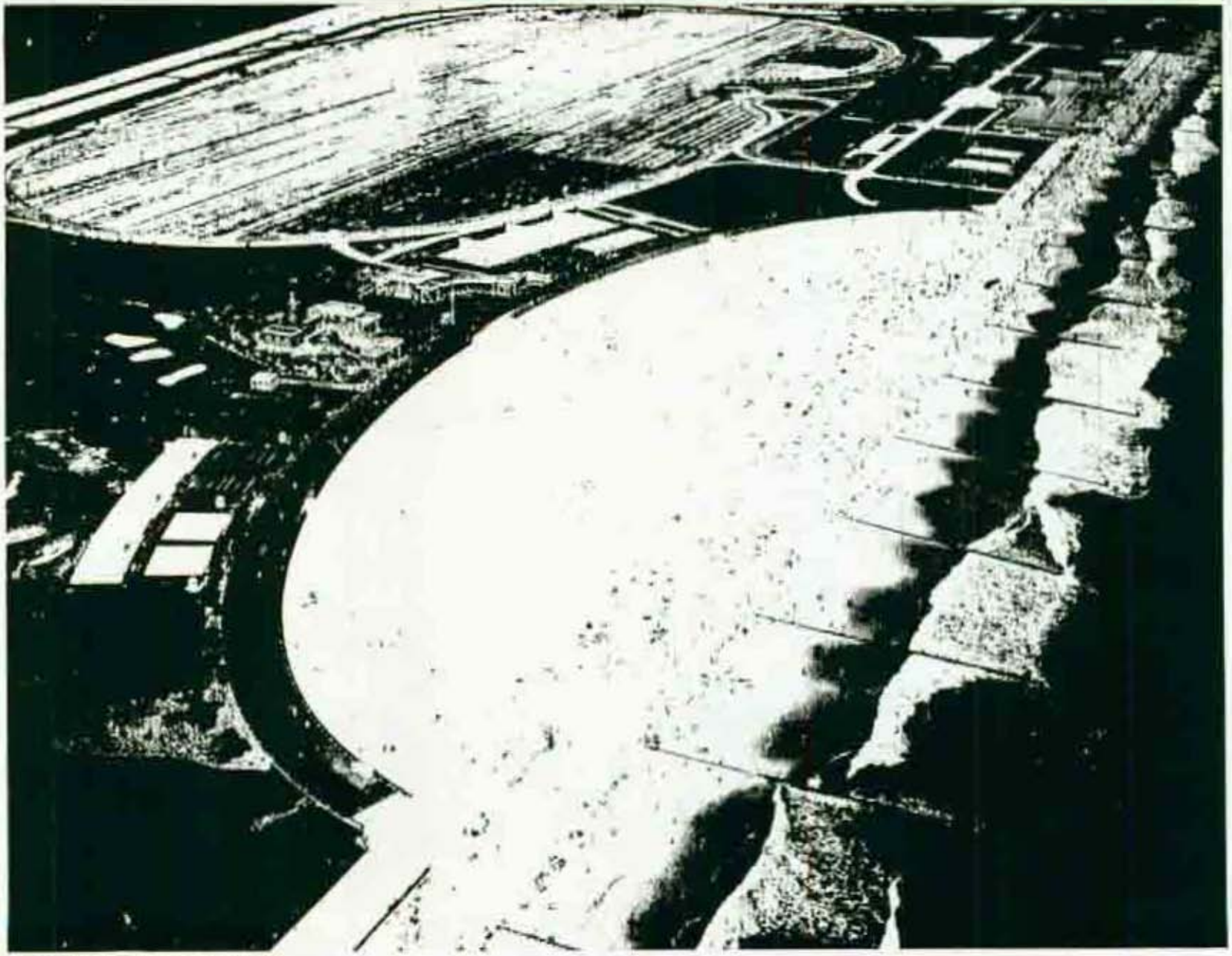


Fig. A-17 Aerial view of Boardwalk and Crescent, including mall Buildings (9/9/37)

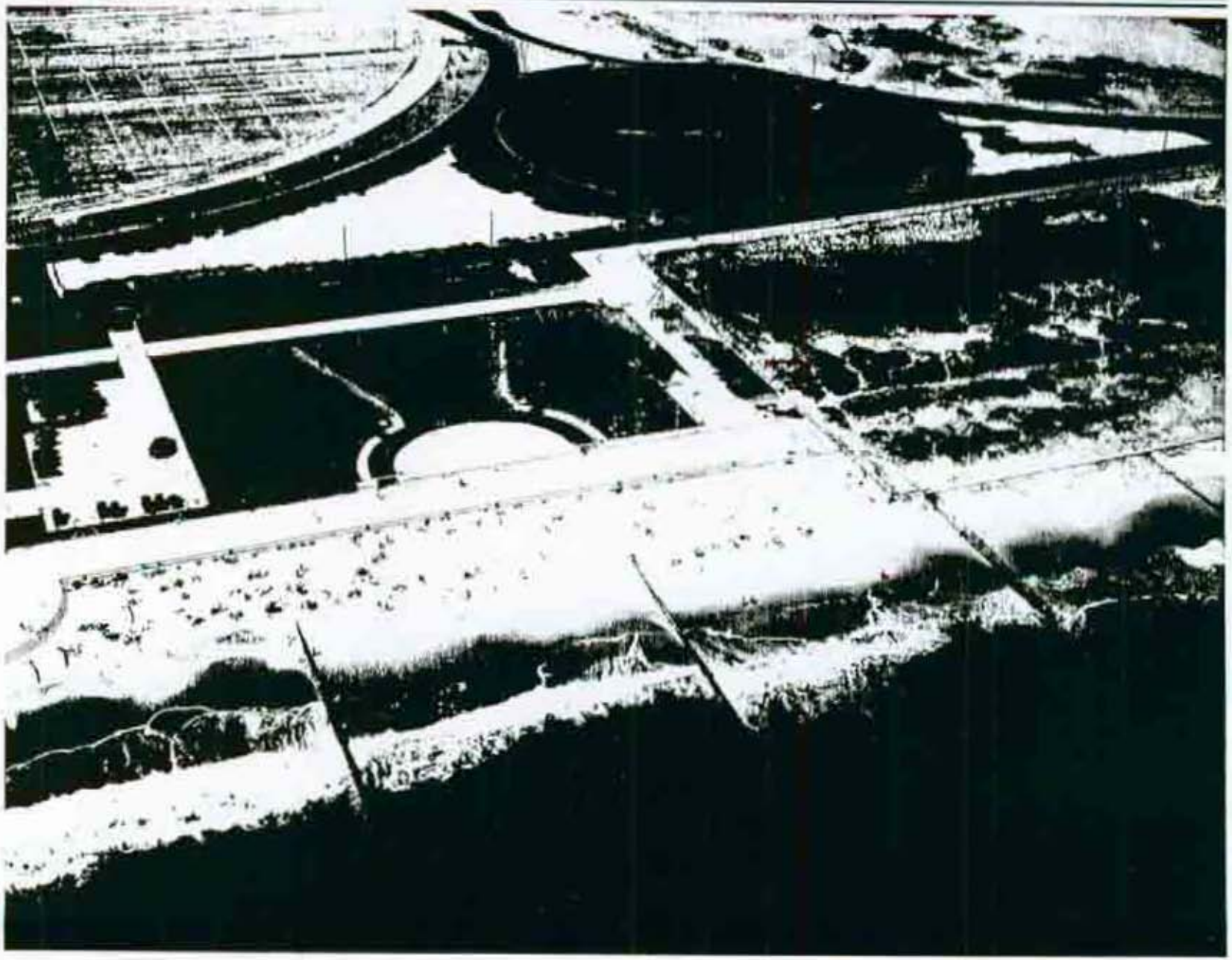


Fig. A-18 Aerial view of Childrens' Play Area (9/9/37)

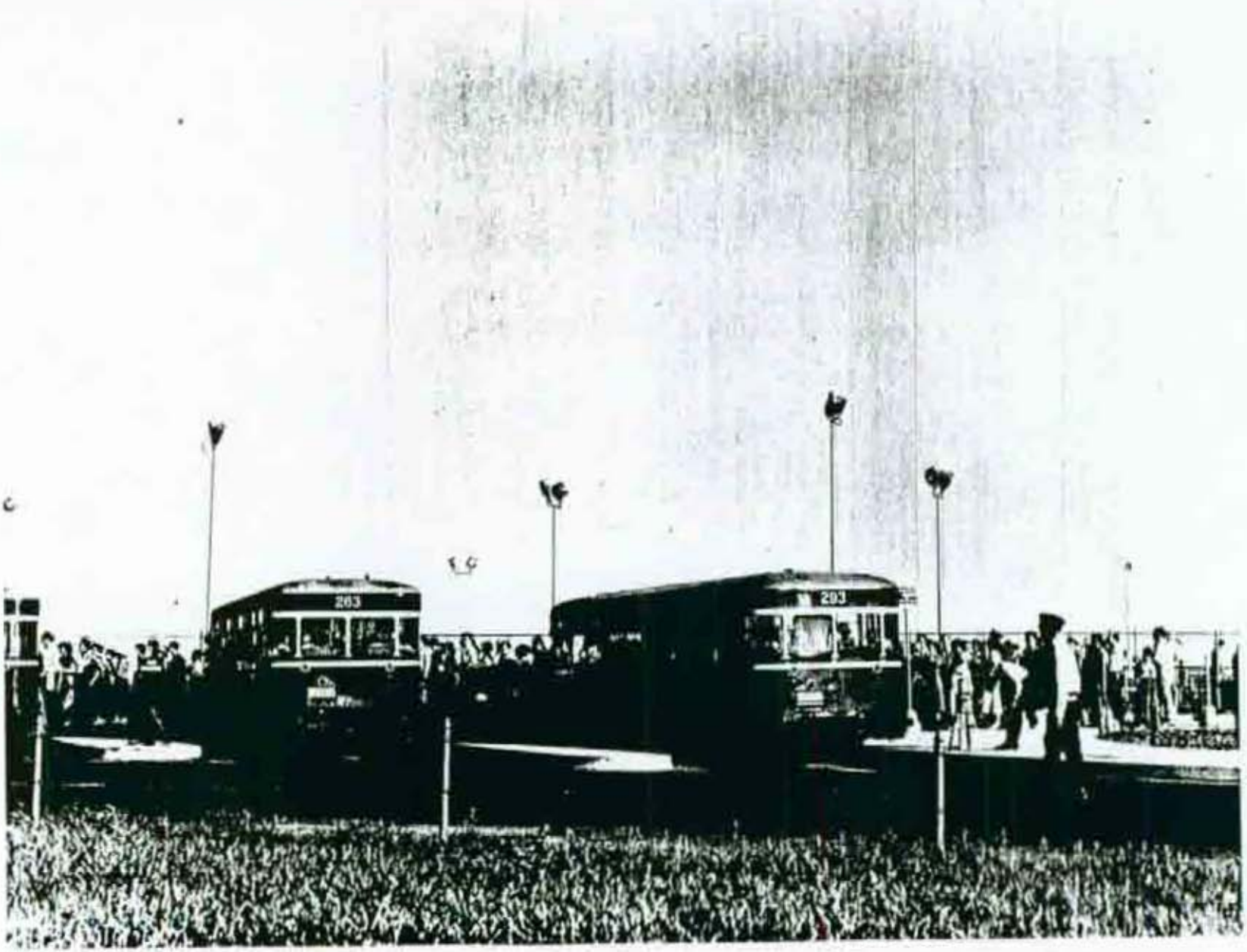


Fig. A-19 Entrance and Bus Stop (ca. 1937)



Fig. A-20 Concessions at west end of Beach Pavilion (7/23/38; Max Ulrich)

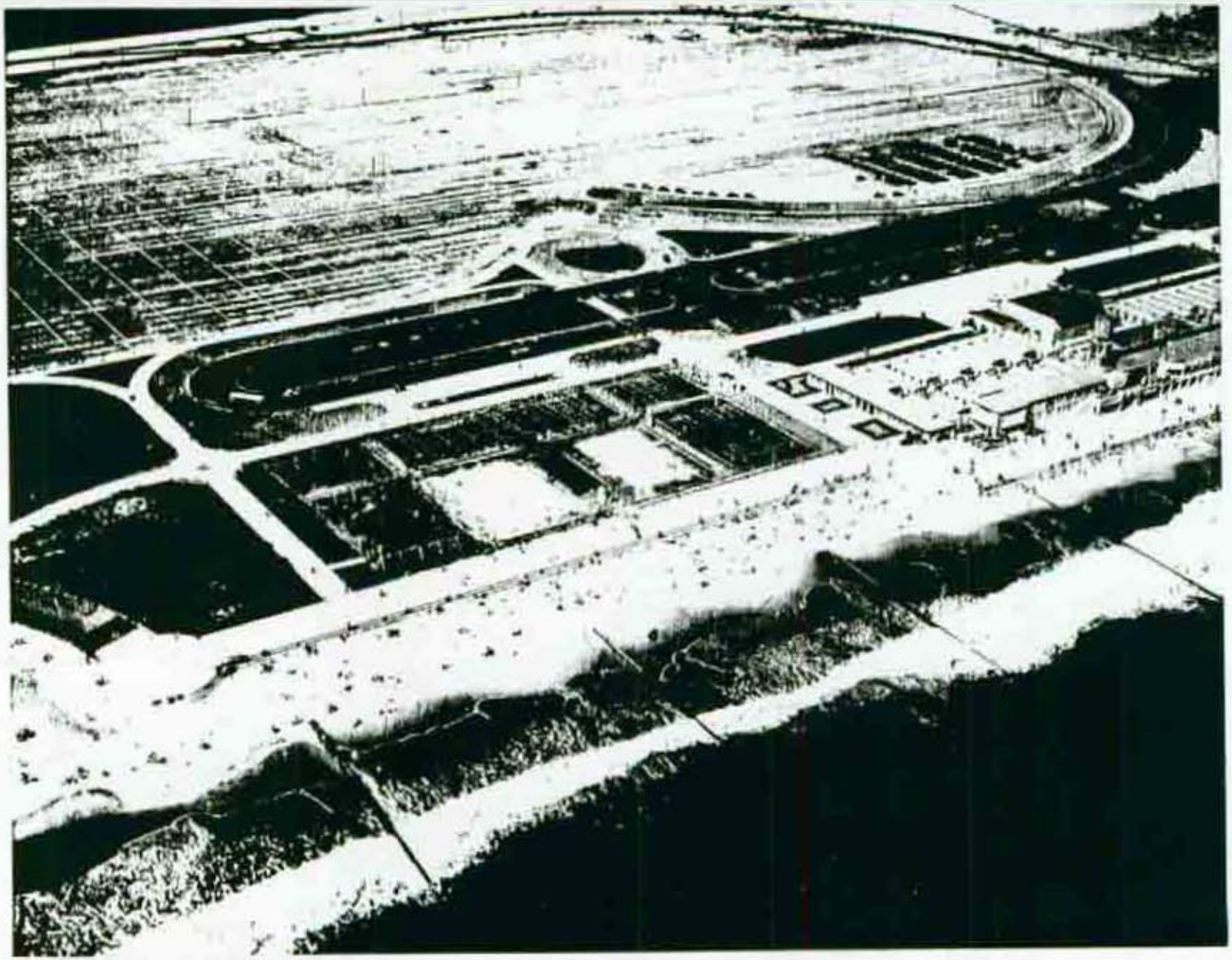


Fig. A-21 Aerial View of game areas to west of Bathhouse (9/9/38)



Fig. A-22 View from Beach Pavilion terrace to beach and Promenade (9/28/38; Max Ulrich)

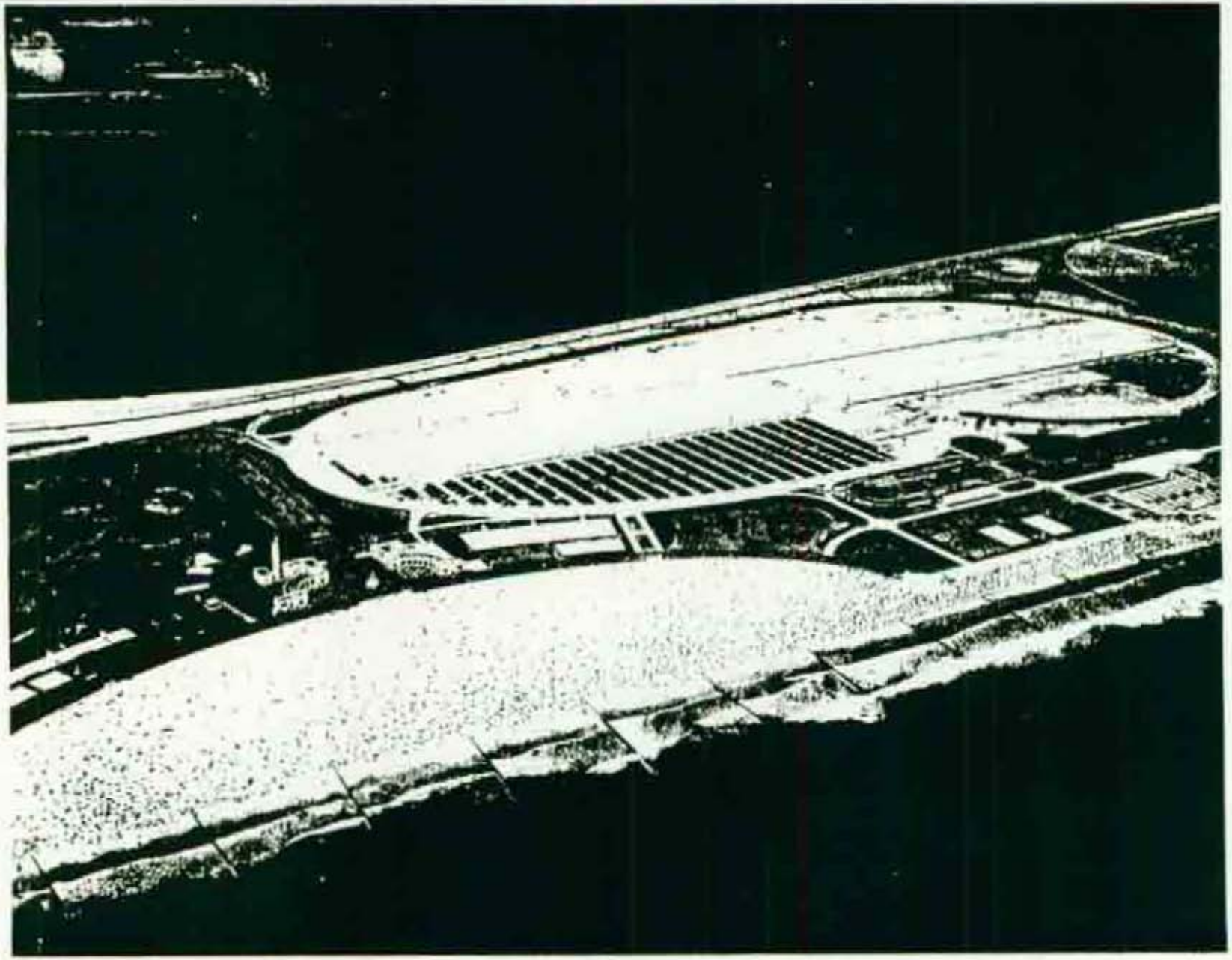


Fig. A-23 Aerial view of Park (ca. 1939)

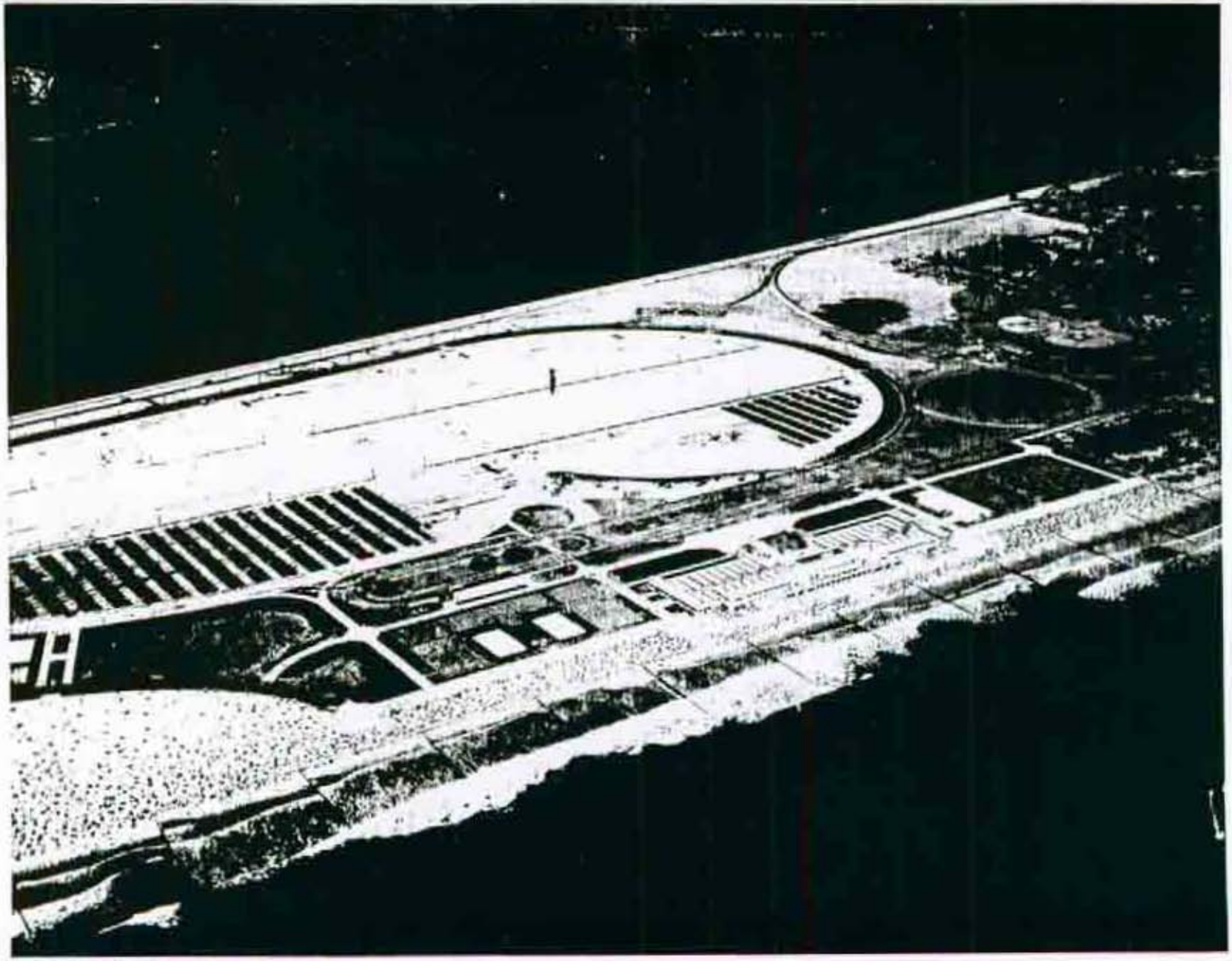


Fig. A-24 Aerial view of Park (ca. 1939)

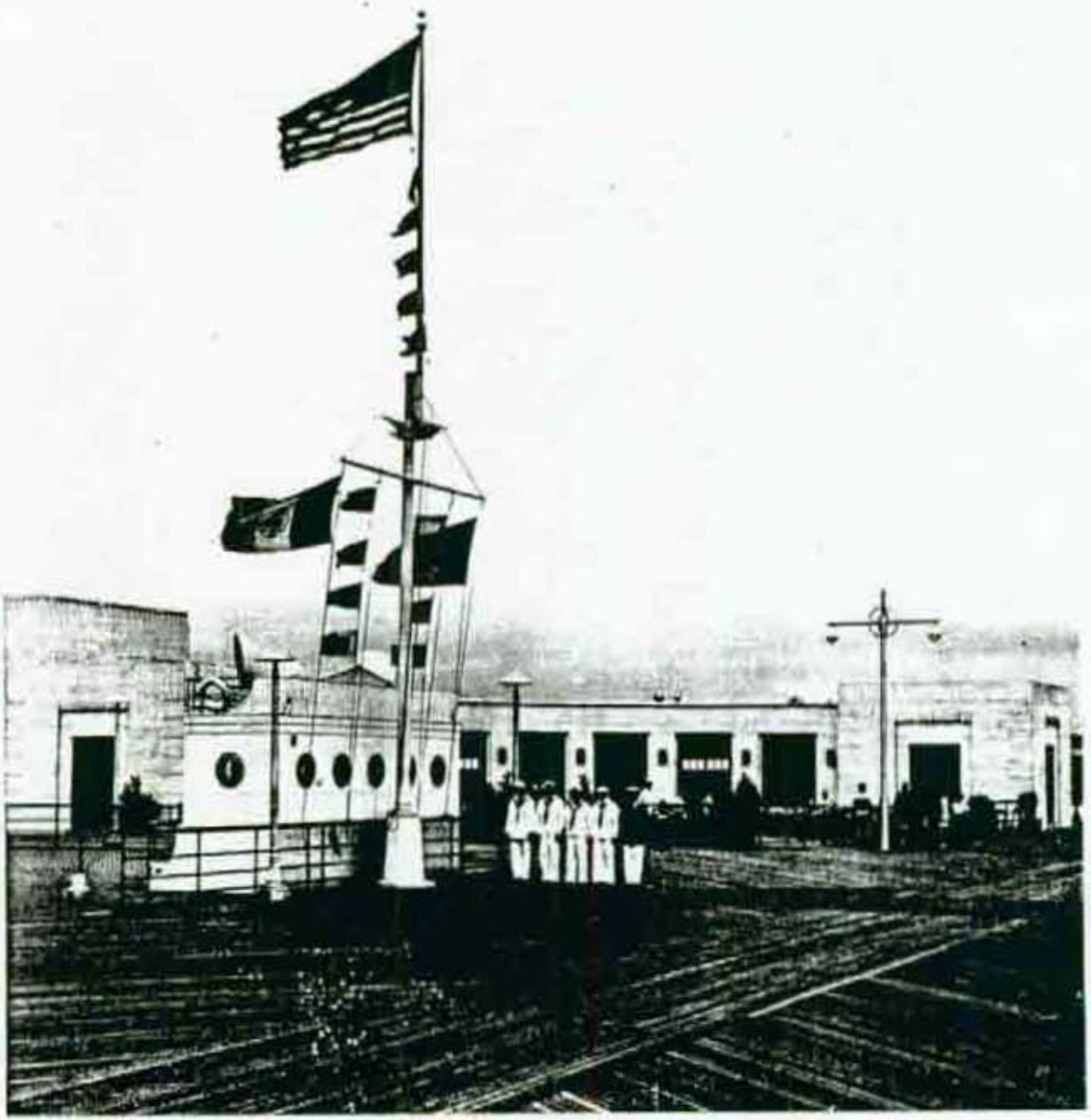


Fig. A-23 Bandstand and Flagpole at Mall Buildings (6/2/39; Max Ulrich)



Fig. A-26 Concession area along Promenade at Beach Pavilion (9/15/40)



Fig. A-27 Chairs and tables at East Mall Building (9/15/40)

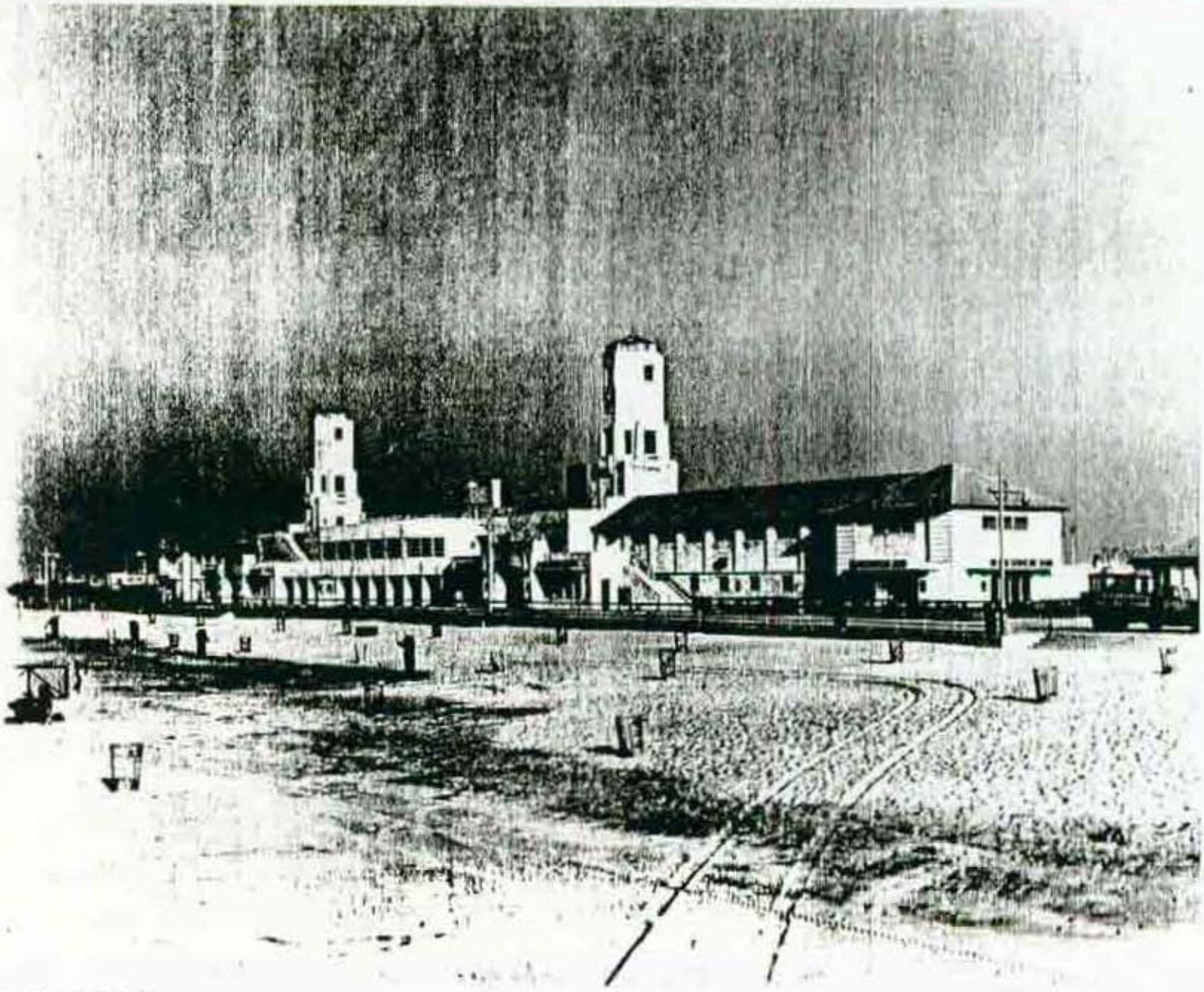


Fig. A-28 View of beach and Bathhouse (ca. 1941)

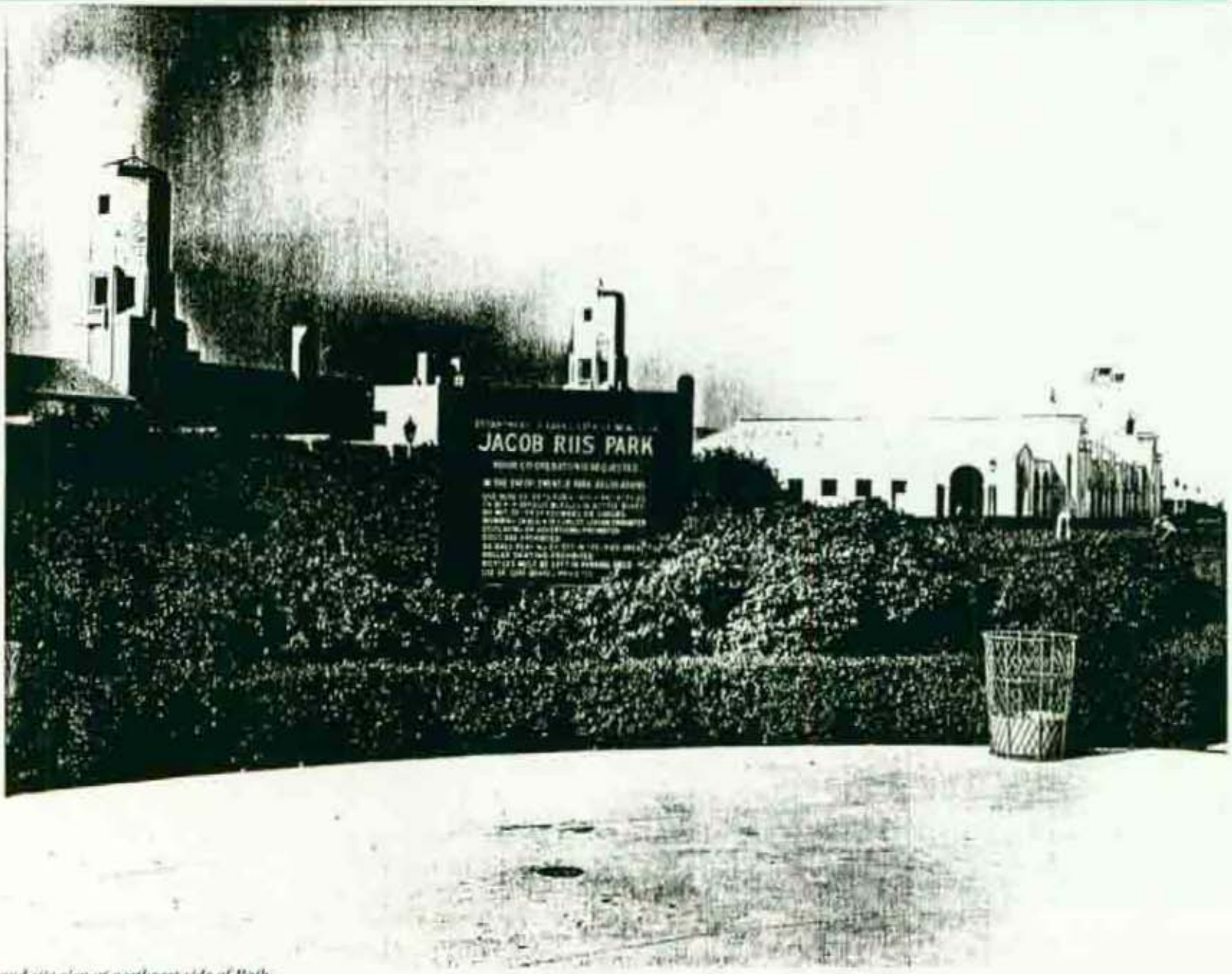


Fig. A-29 Plantings and site sign at northeast side of Bathhouse complex (ca. 1941)



Fig. A-30 Promenade and Beach, with ships' railing (ca. 1941)



Fig. A-31 Aerial photo of Jacob Riis park (8/4/437)

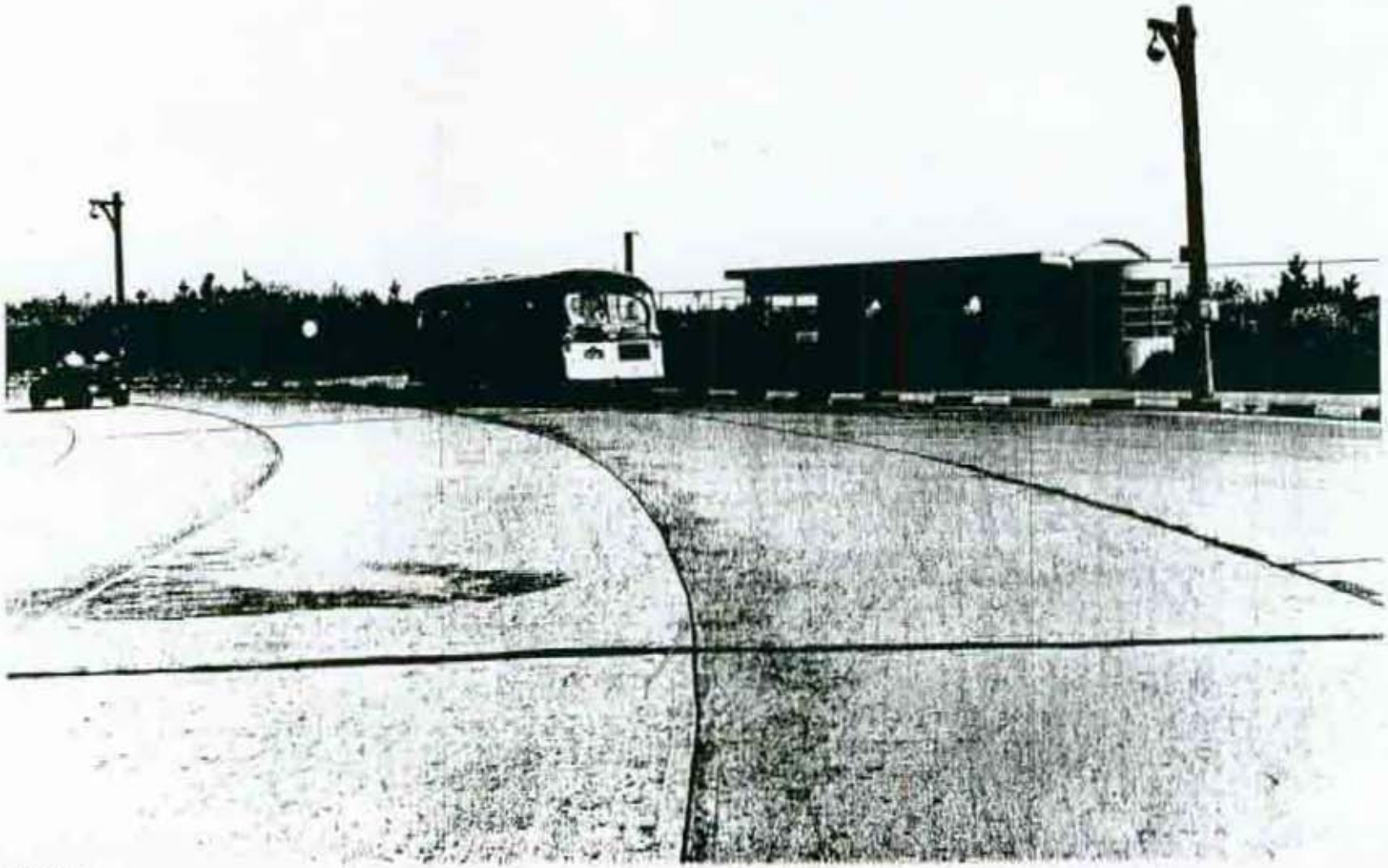


Fig. A-32 Bus shelter (10/4/43)



Fig. A-33 Concessions at Beach Pavilion (3/22/47)



Fig. A-34 East end of Boardwalk and Wise Clock (7/6/63)

Appendix B:
Historic Plans

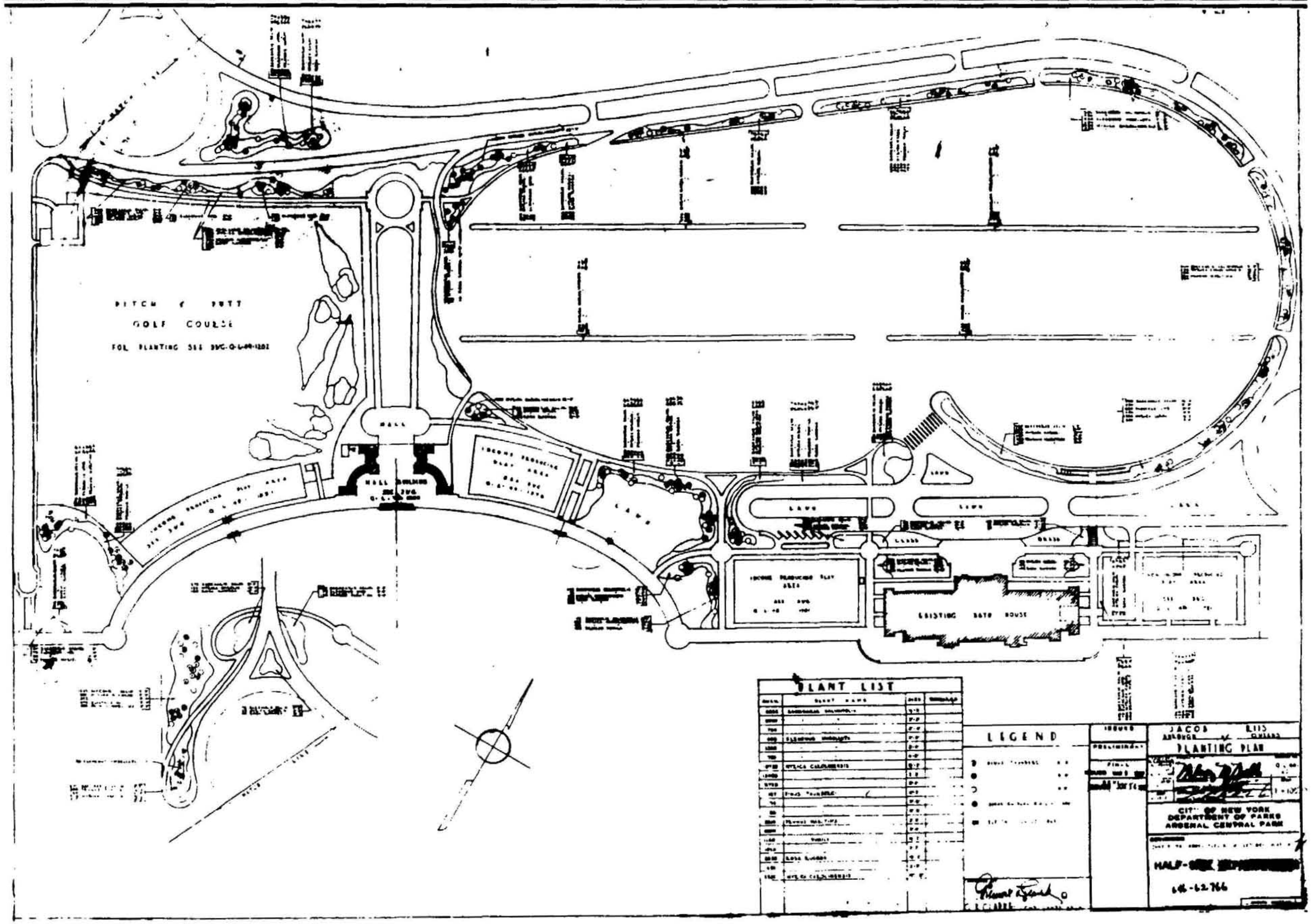


Fig. B-1 1937 Overall Site Plan; Jacob Riis Park

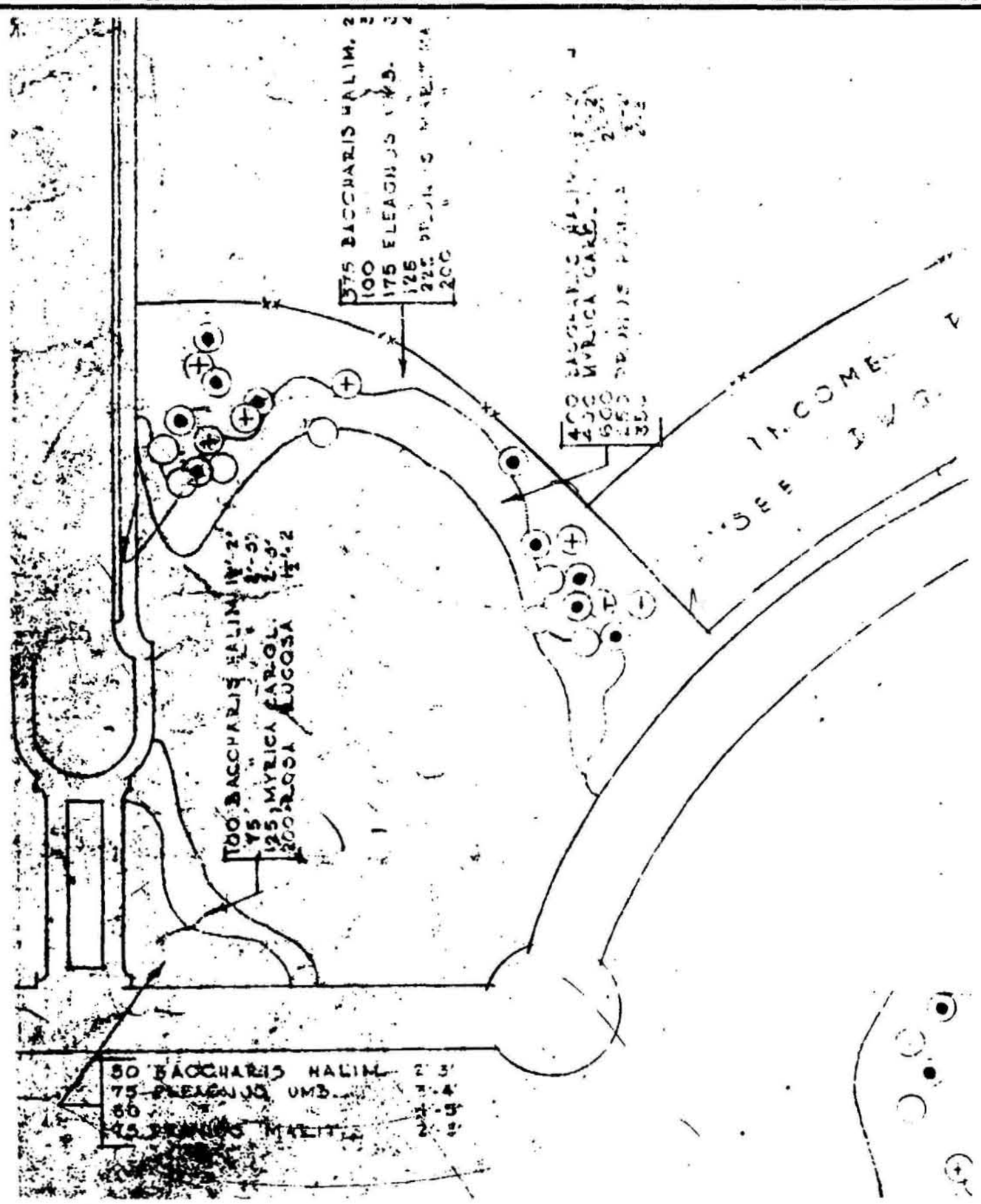


Fig. B-2 1937 Sub-area Plan; Westernmost Back Beach parcel

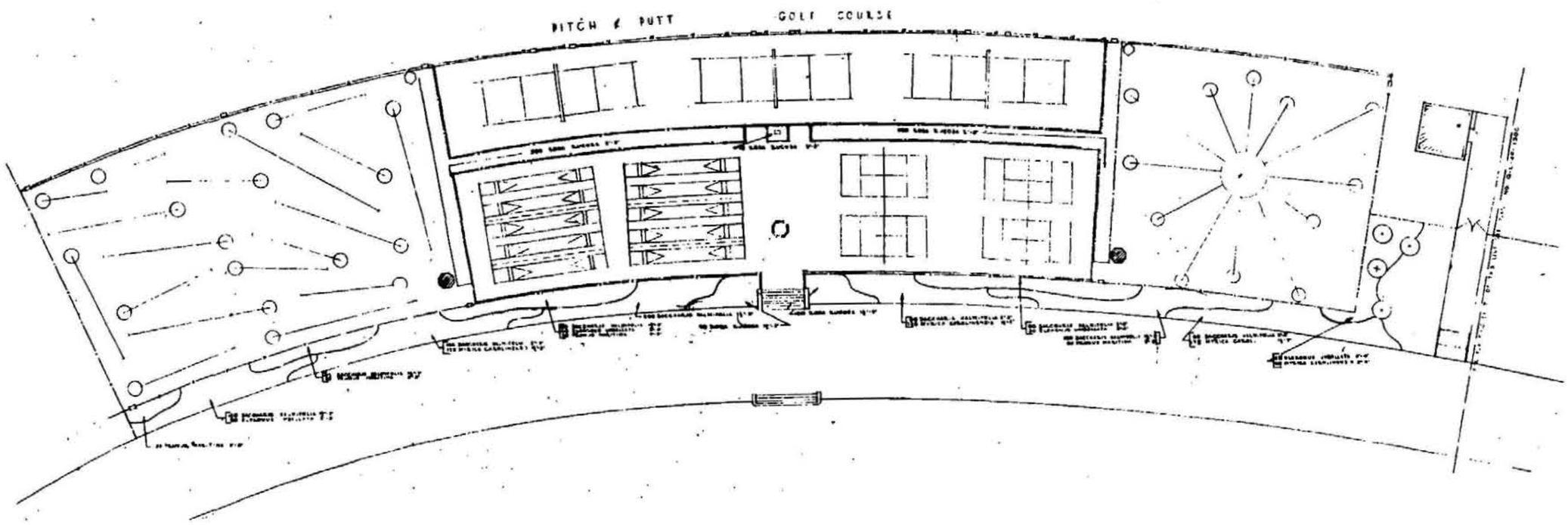


Fig. B-3 *1937 Sub-area Plan; Game Courts west of the Mall Buildings*

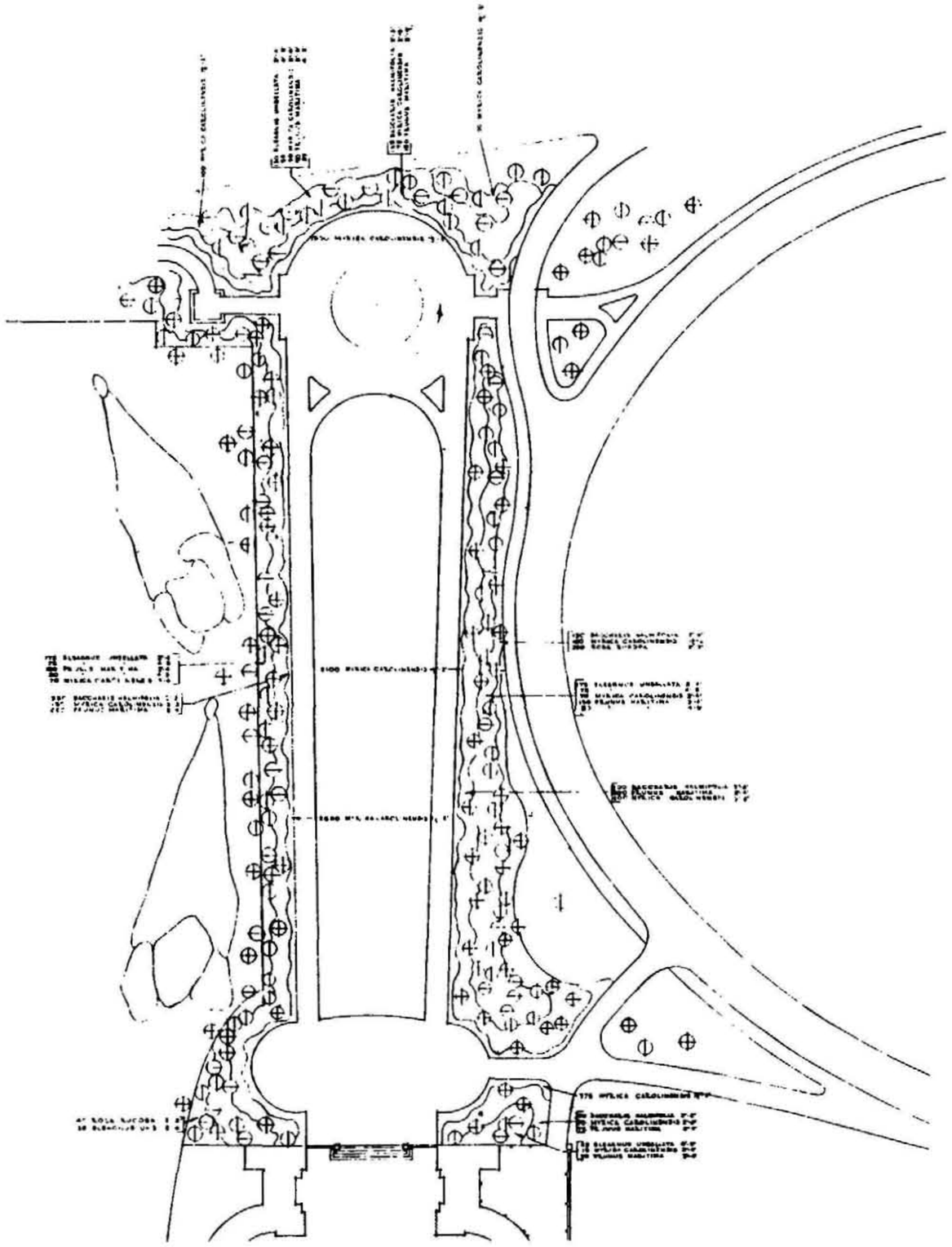


Fig. B-4 1937 Planting Plan; the Mall area

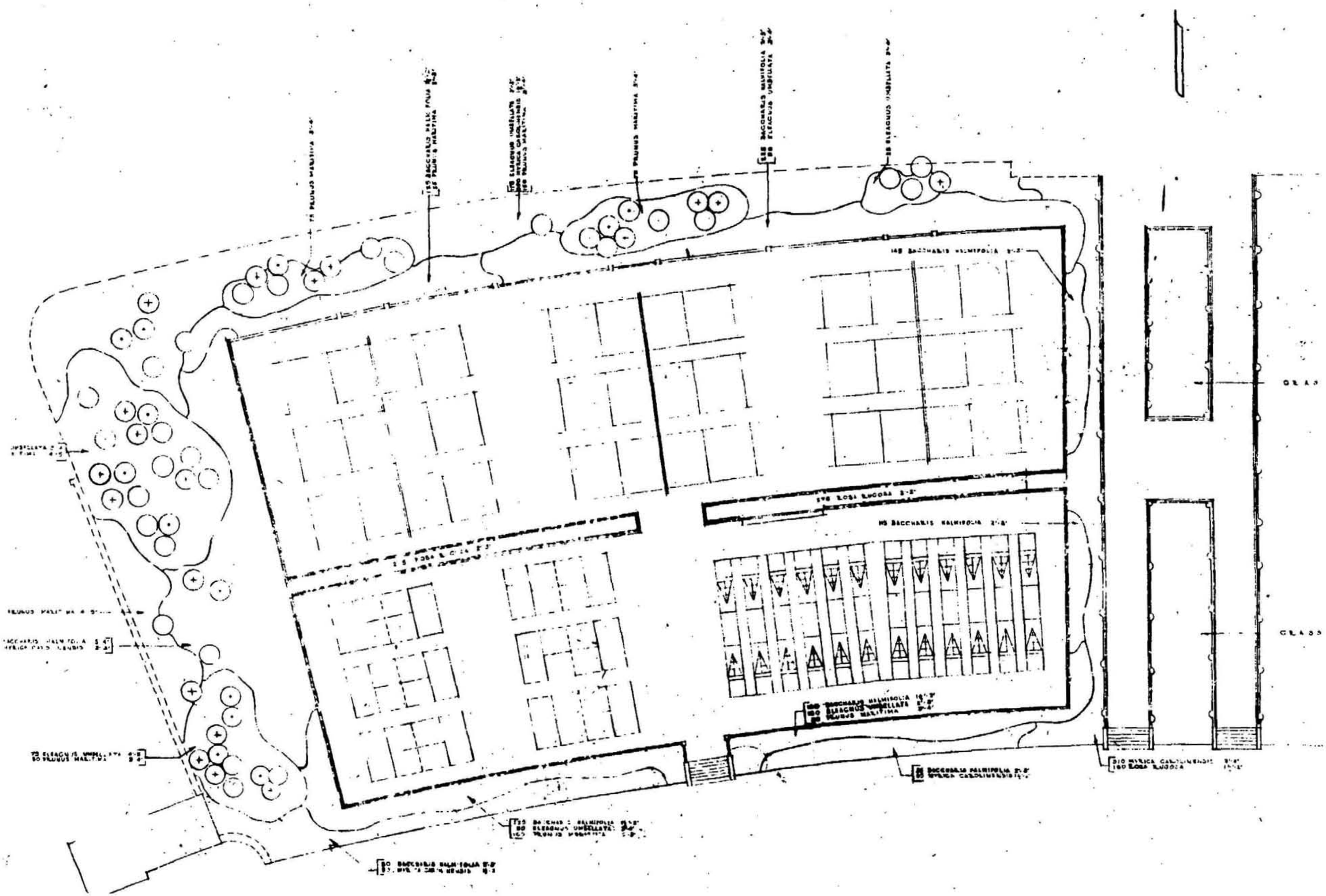


Fig. B-5 1937 Sub-area Plan; Game area east of the Mall Buildings

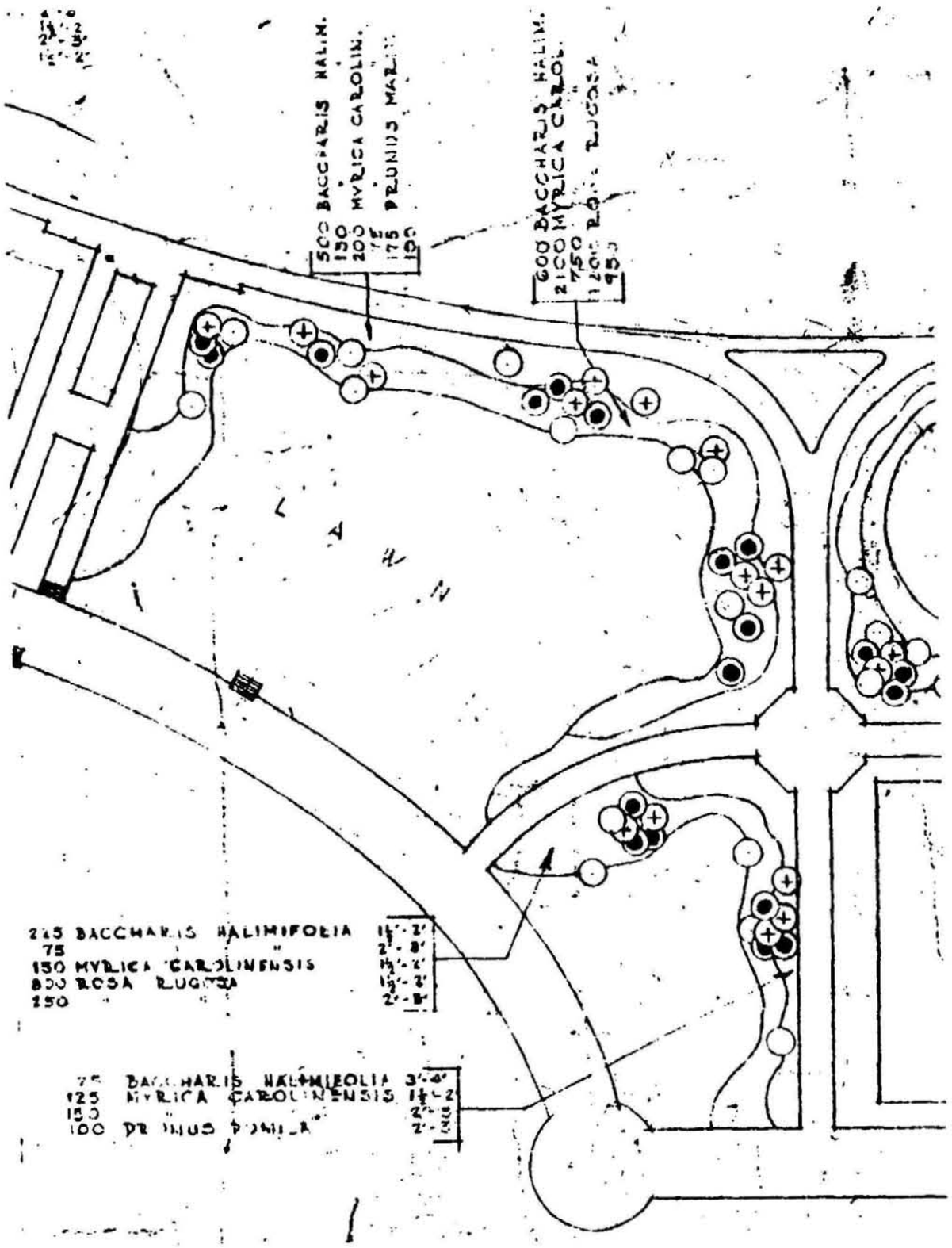


Fig. B-6 1937 Sub-area Plan; lawn areas at east end of Boardwalk

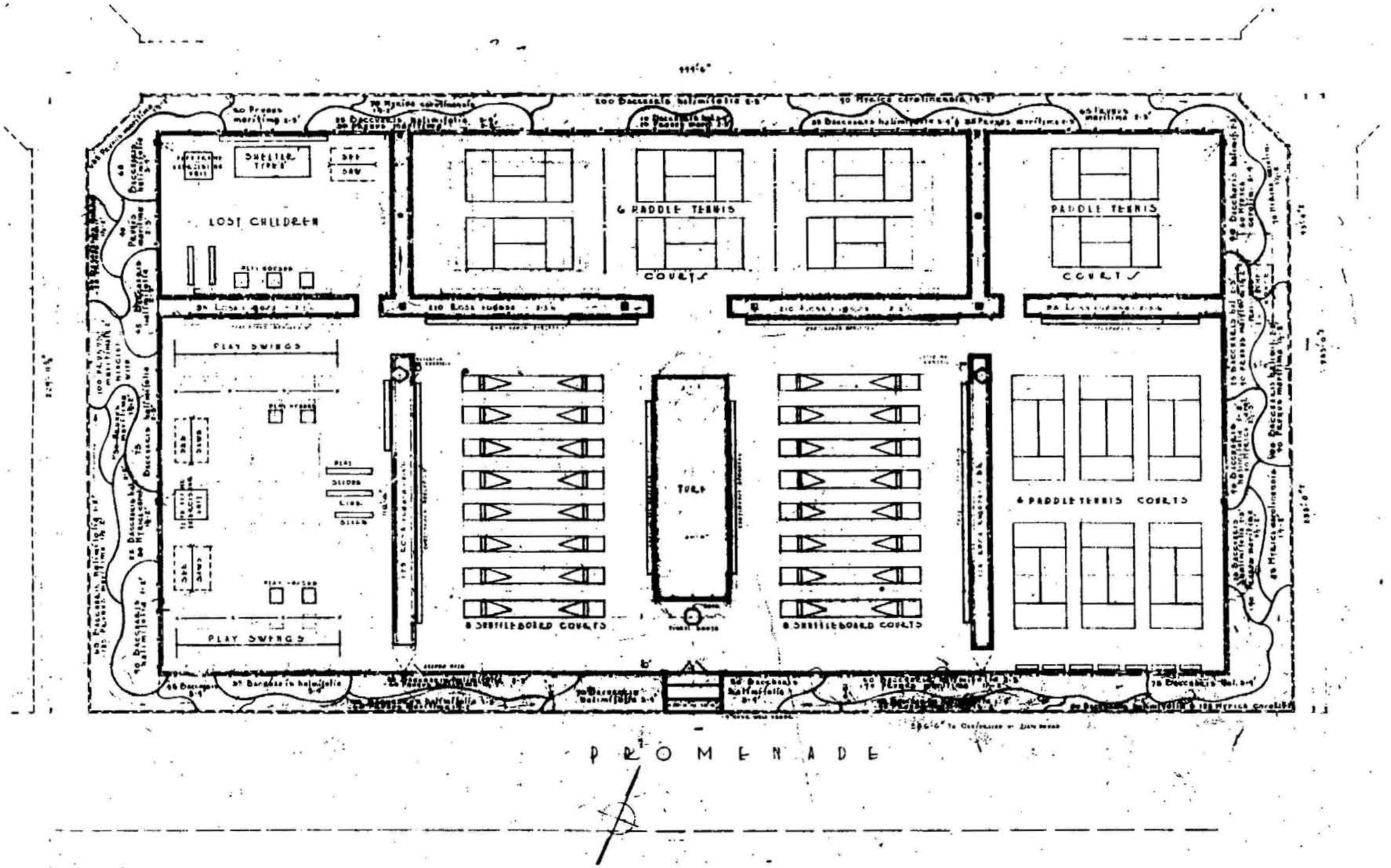


Fig. B-7 1937 Sub-area Plan; Game court area west of the Bathhouse

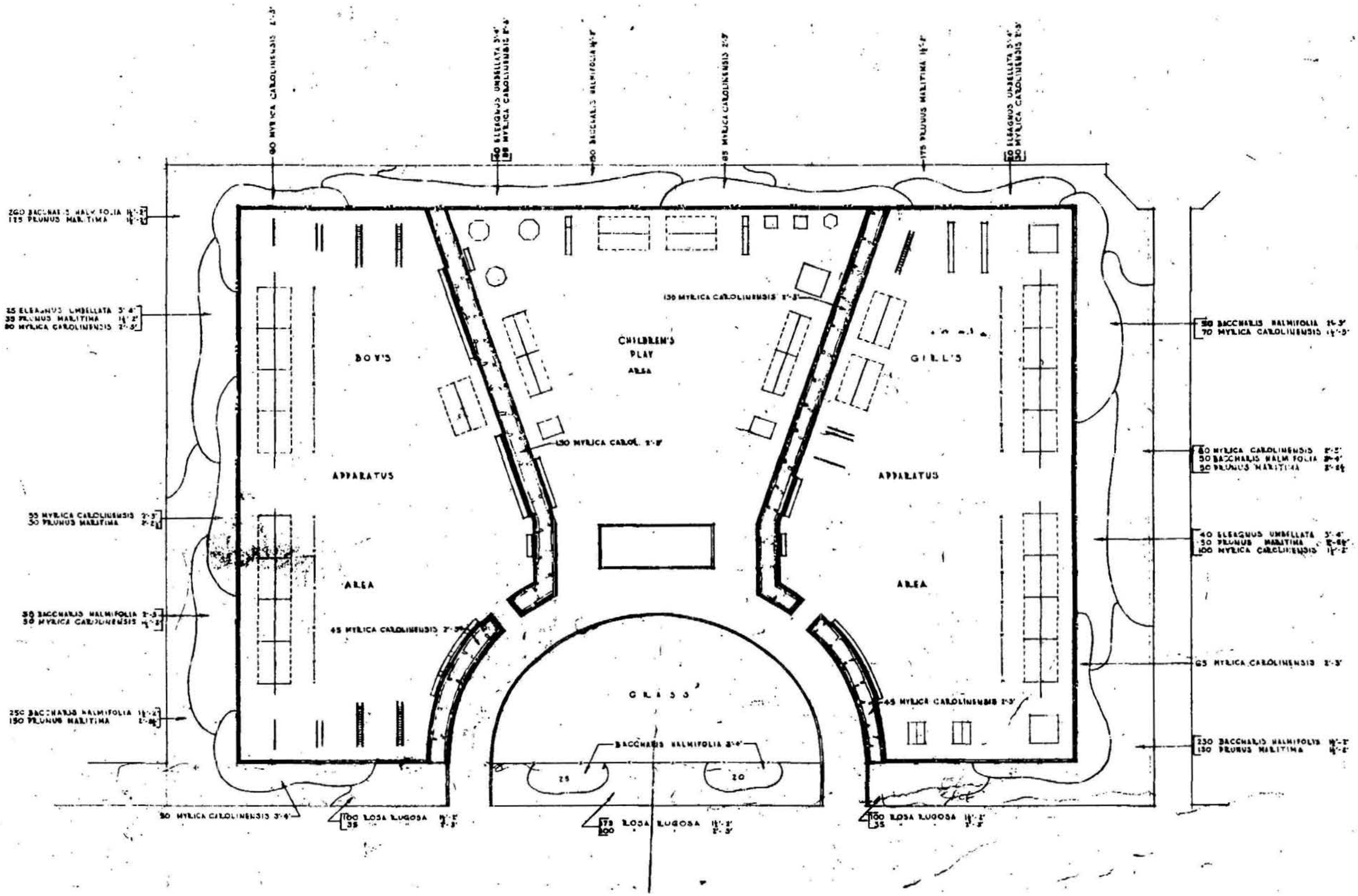
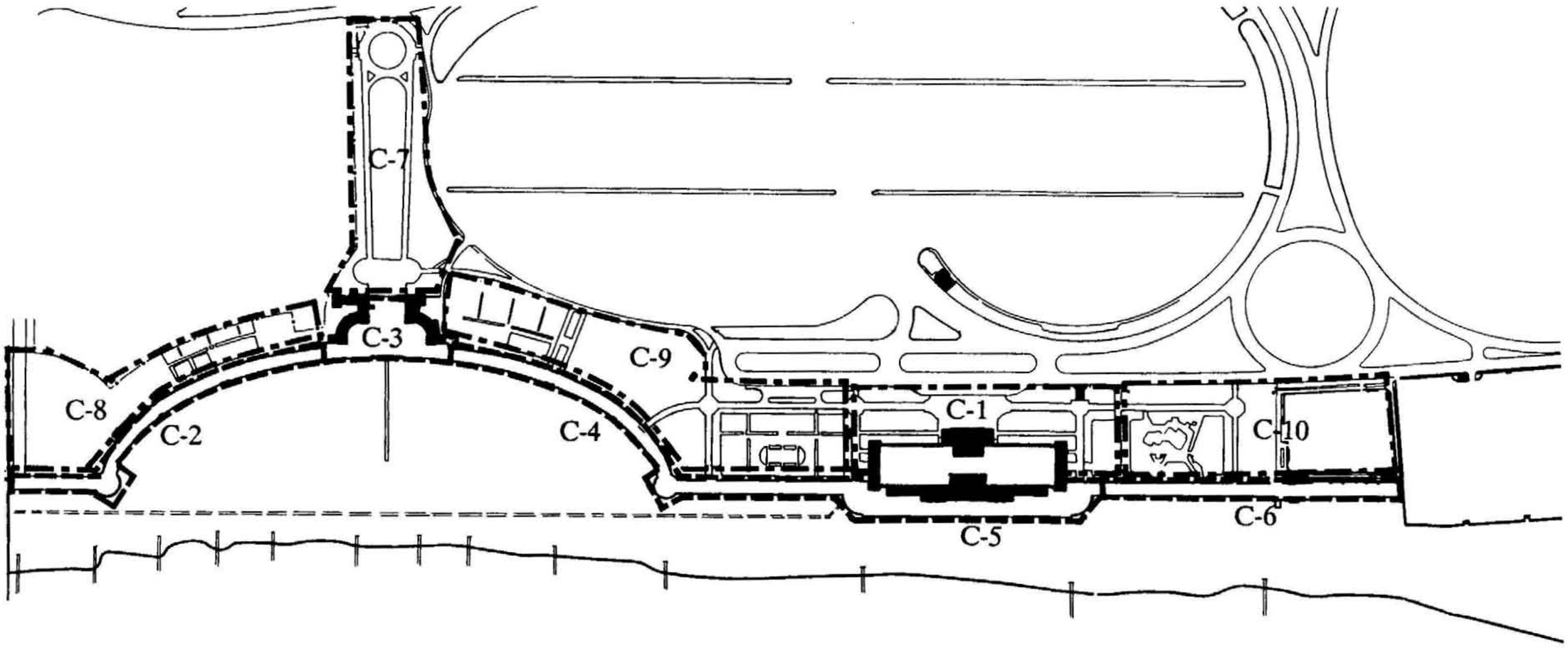


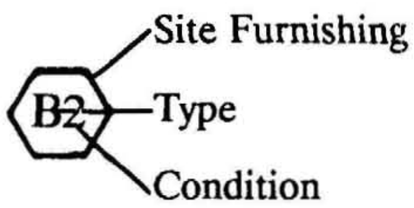
Fig. B-8 1937 Sub-area Plan; Childrens' play area east of the Bathhouse

Appendix C:
Existing Condition Plans



Key Map to Existing Condition Plans

Legend



Note: ***This legend shows type and condition of site furniture and applies to figures C-1 through C-10***

Type

Conditions

Benches

A Wood and Concrete Bench with back

B Wood and Concrete Bench without back

C Wood and Steel Bench with Back

D Wood and Steel Bench without back

1 Good

Minor finish peeling or Fading.

2 Fair

Moderate Finish peeling, fading, chipped or bent bases with occasional missing or broken slats.

3 Deteriorating

Severe finsh peeling, fading or splintering broken bases with several missing or broken slats.

Lights

A Boardwalk/Promenade Light

B New York Type "B" Light

C East Promenade Light

D Street Light

E Ballfield Light

1 Good

Minor finish damage.

2 Fair

Moderate finish damage broken light fixture and/or slightly leaning pole.

3 Deteriorating

Severe finish damage, broken light fixture and/or leaning pole.

Ship's Rail

A 42" Ship'S Rail

B 36" Ship's Rail

1 Good

Minor surface damage.

2 Fair

Moderate peeling paint, rotting wood and/or metal blistering.

3 Deteriorating

Severe peeling paint, rotting wood and/or metal blistering.

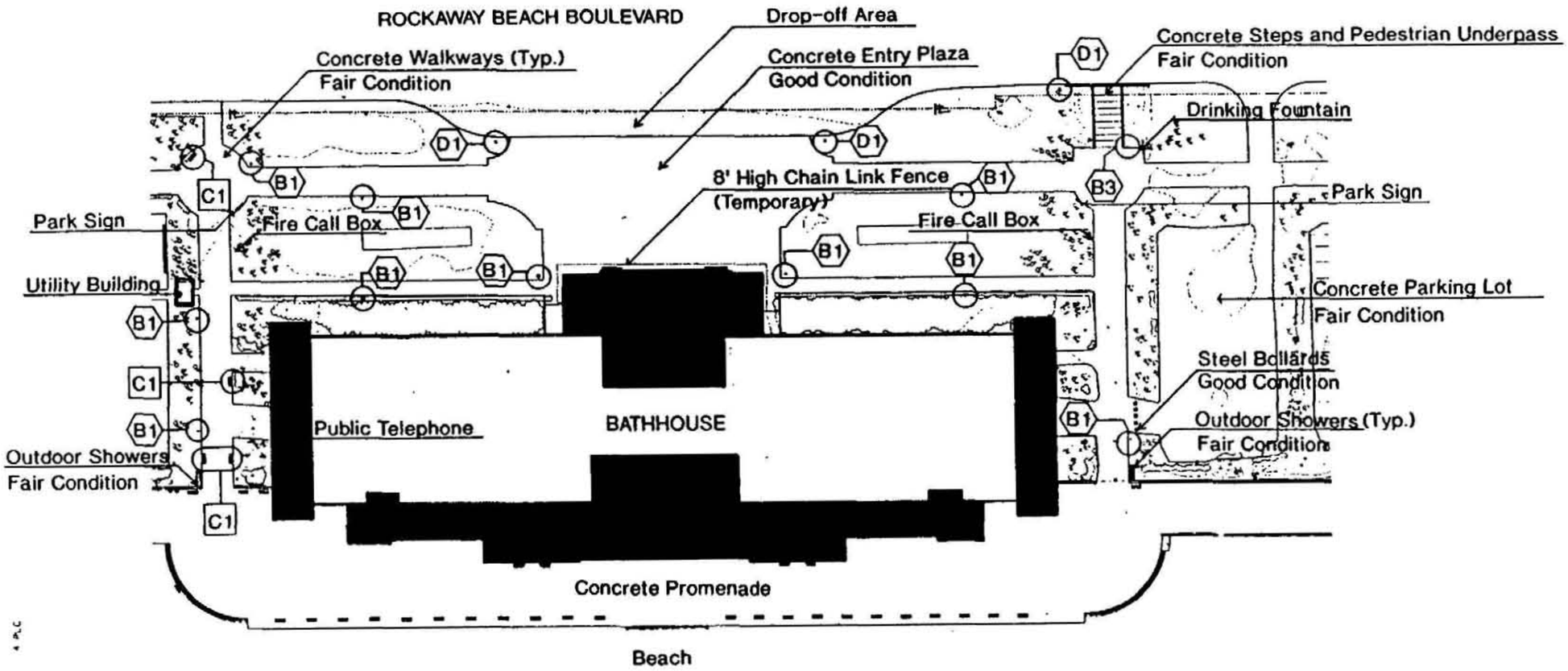


Fig. C-1 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Bathhouse Area***

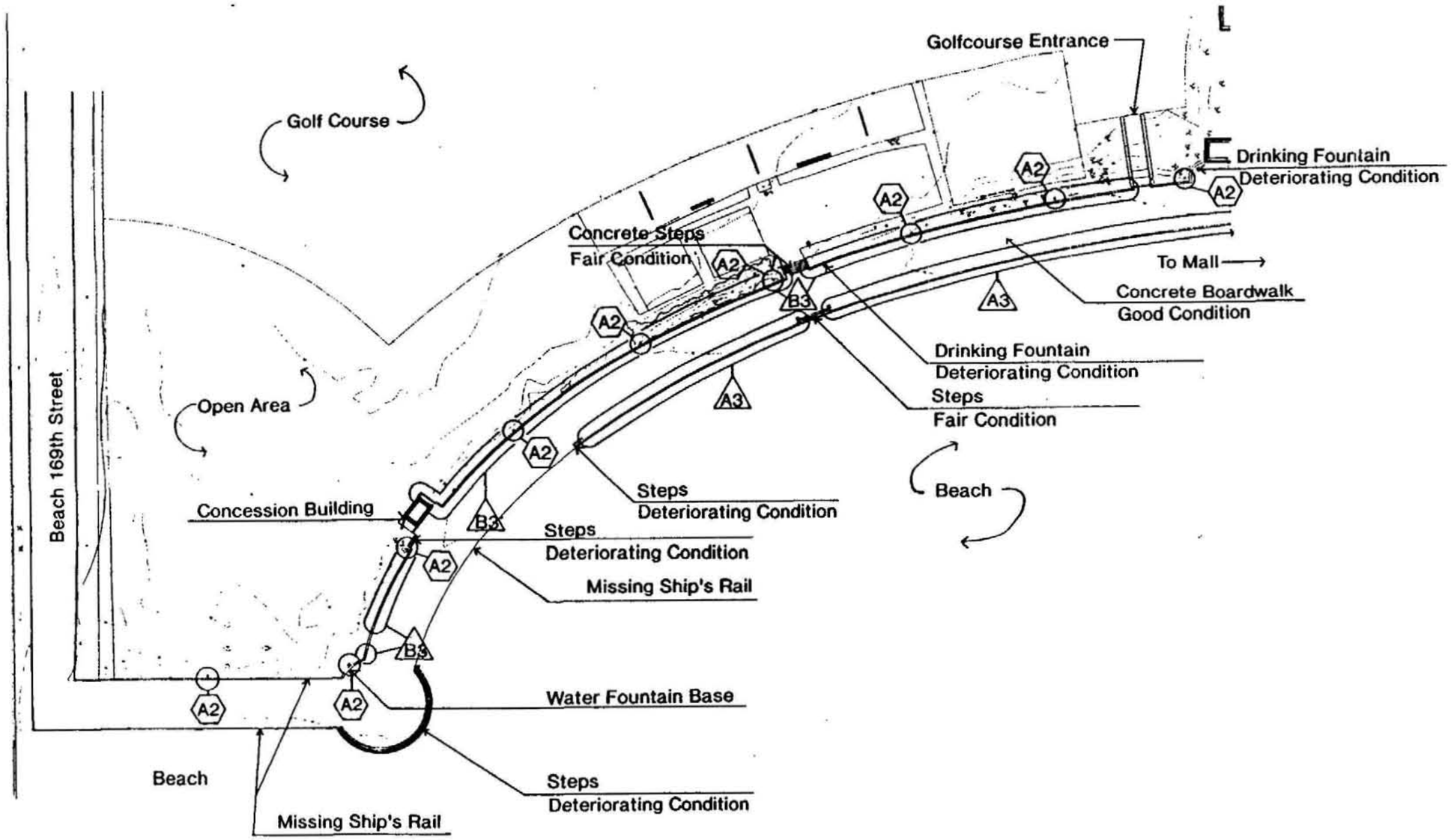


Fig. C-2 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 1 of 5)***

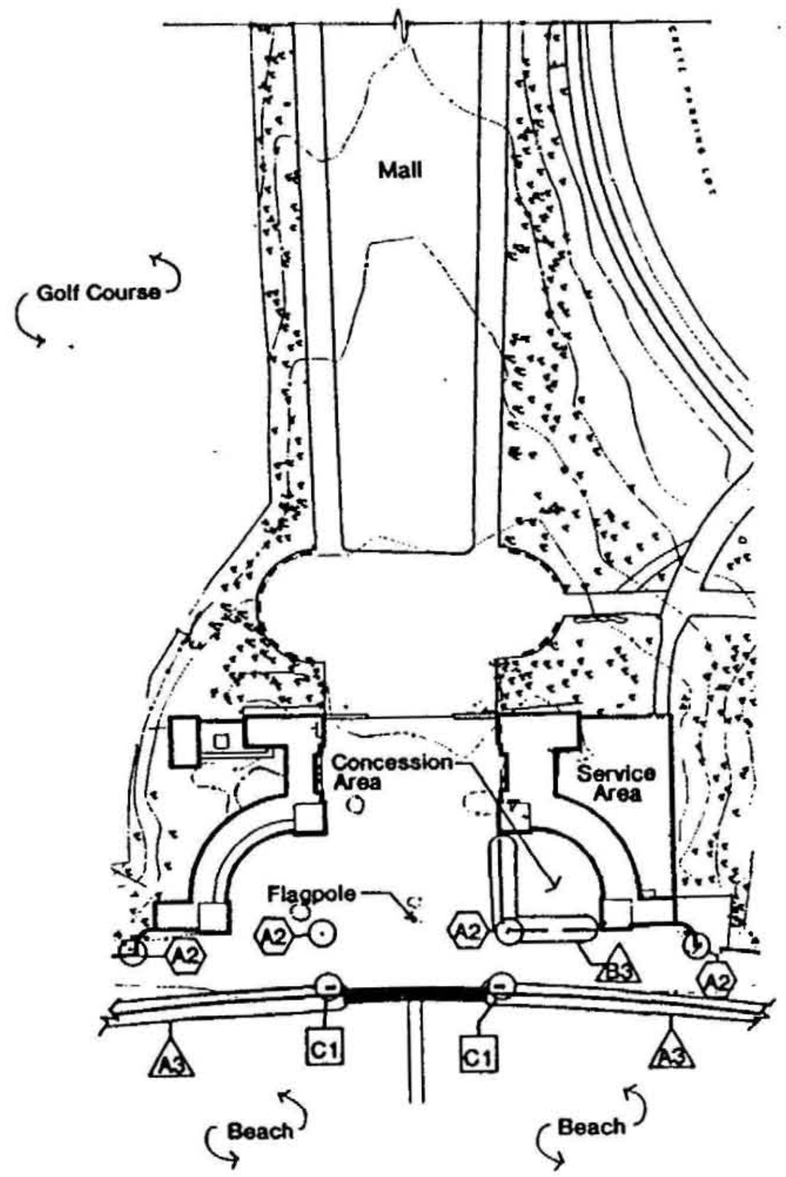


Fig. C-3 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 2 of 5)***

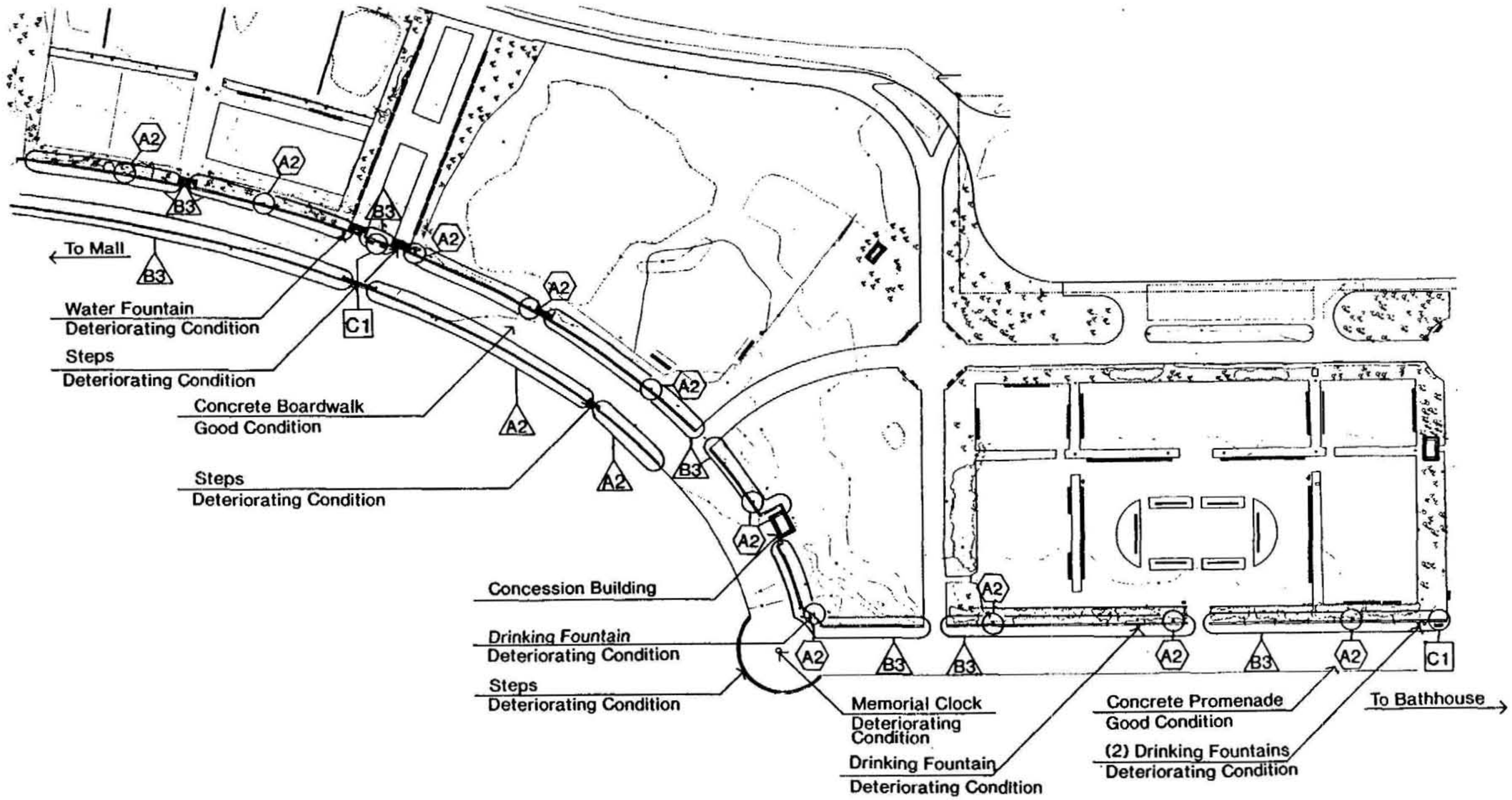


Fig. C-4 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 3 of 5)***

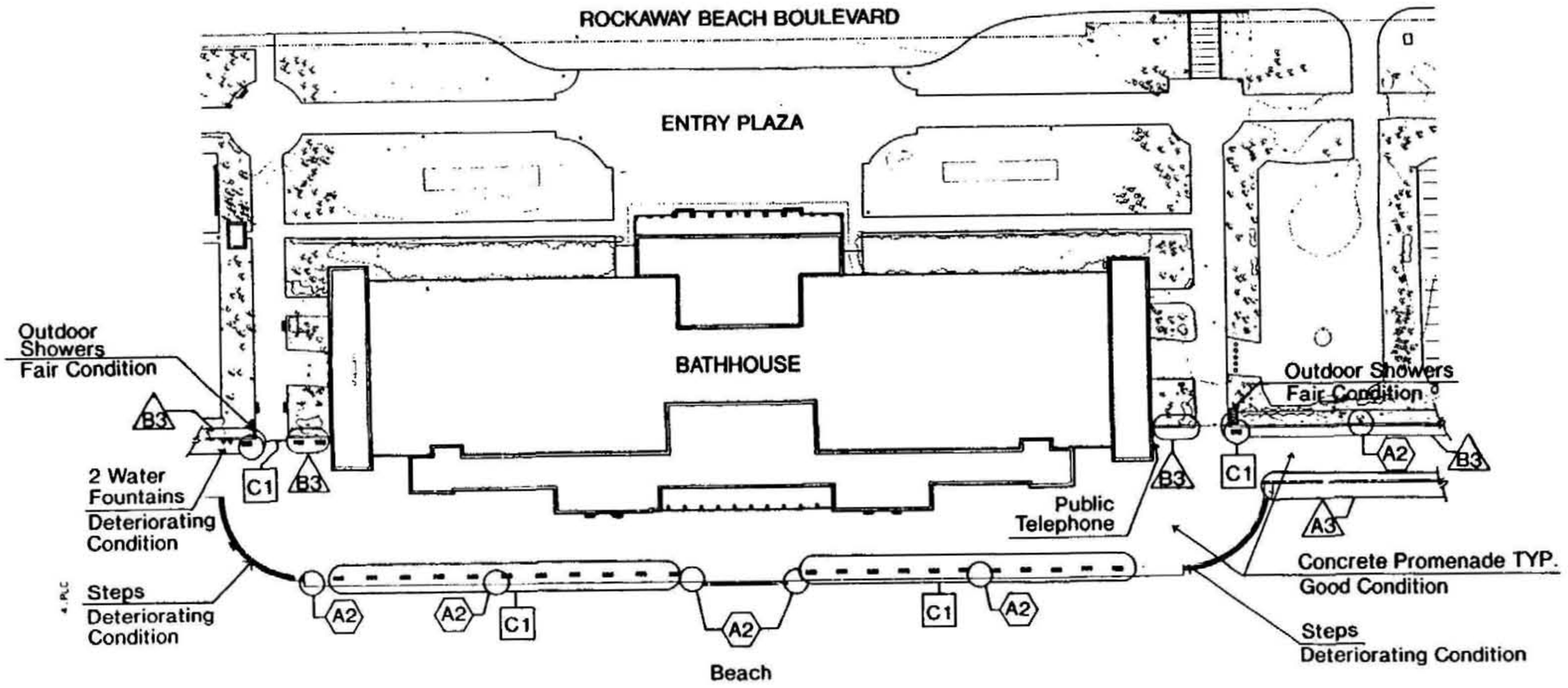


Fig. C-5 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 4 of 5)***

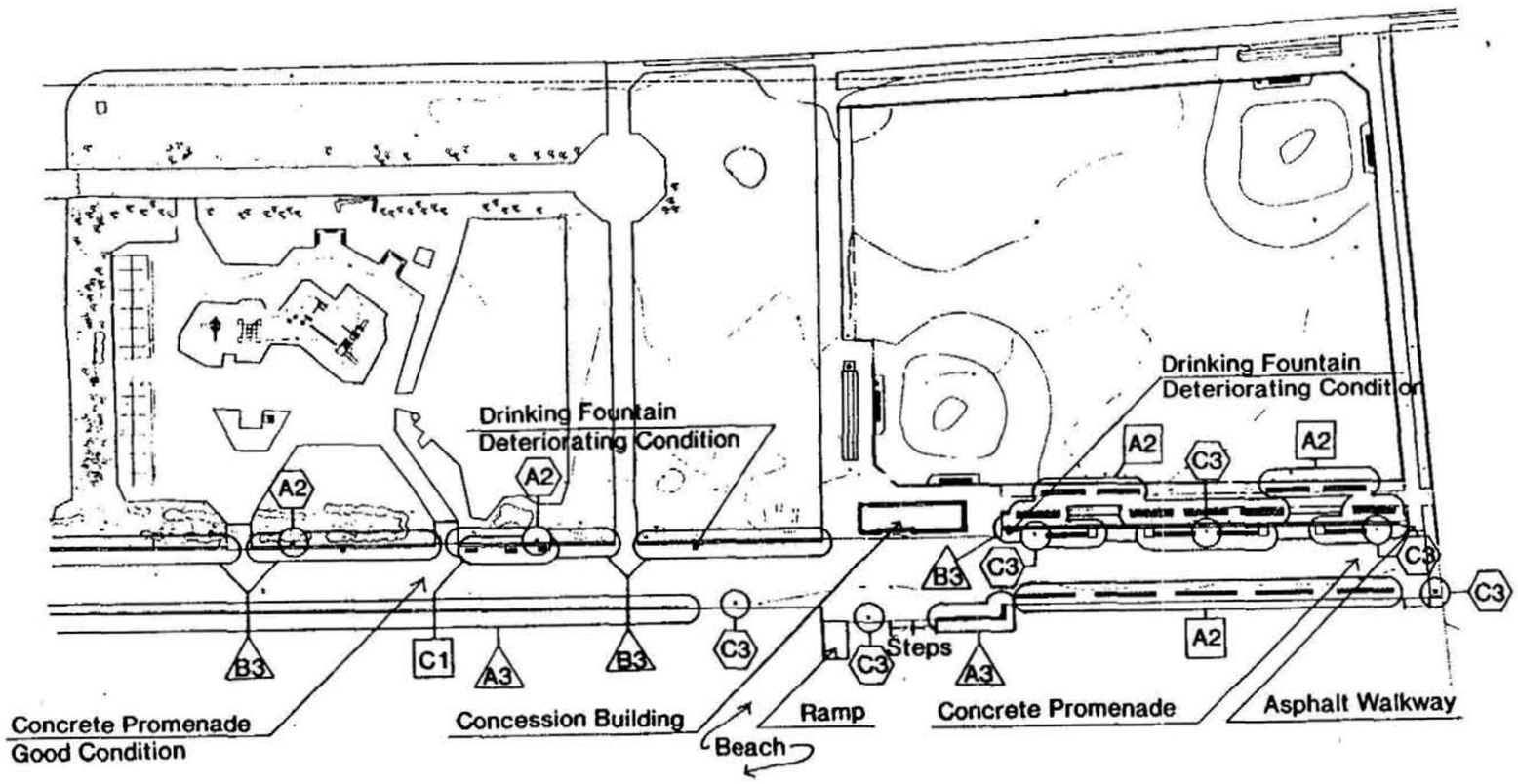


Fig. C-6 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Boardwalk / Promenade Area (Plan 5 of 5)***

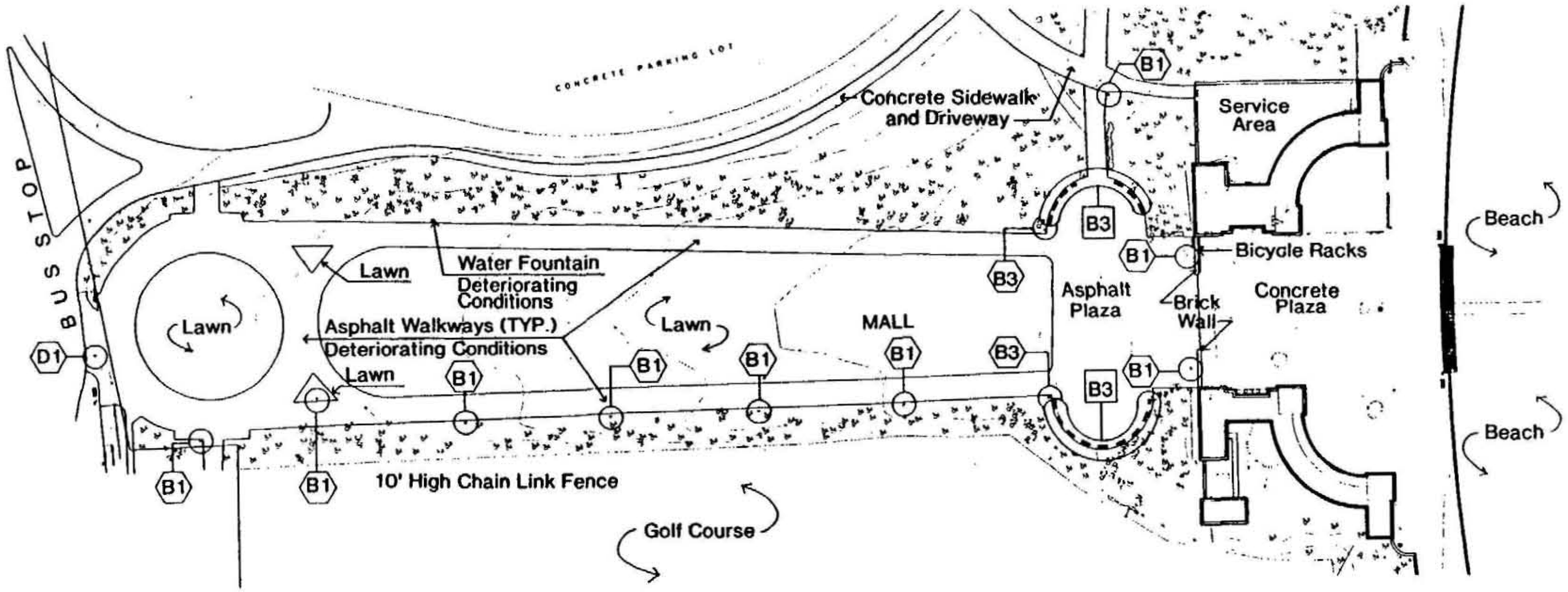


Fig. C-7 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Mall Area

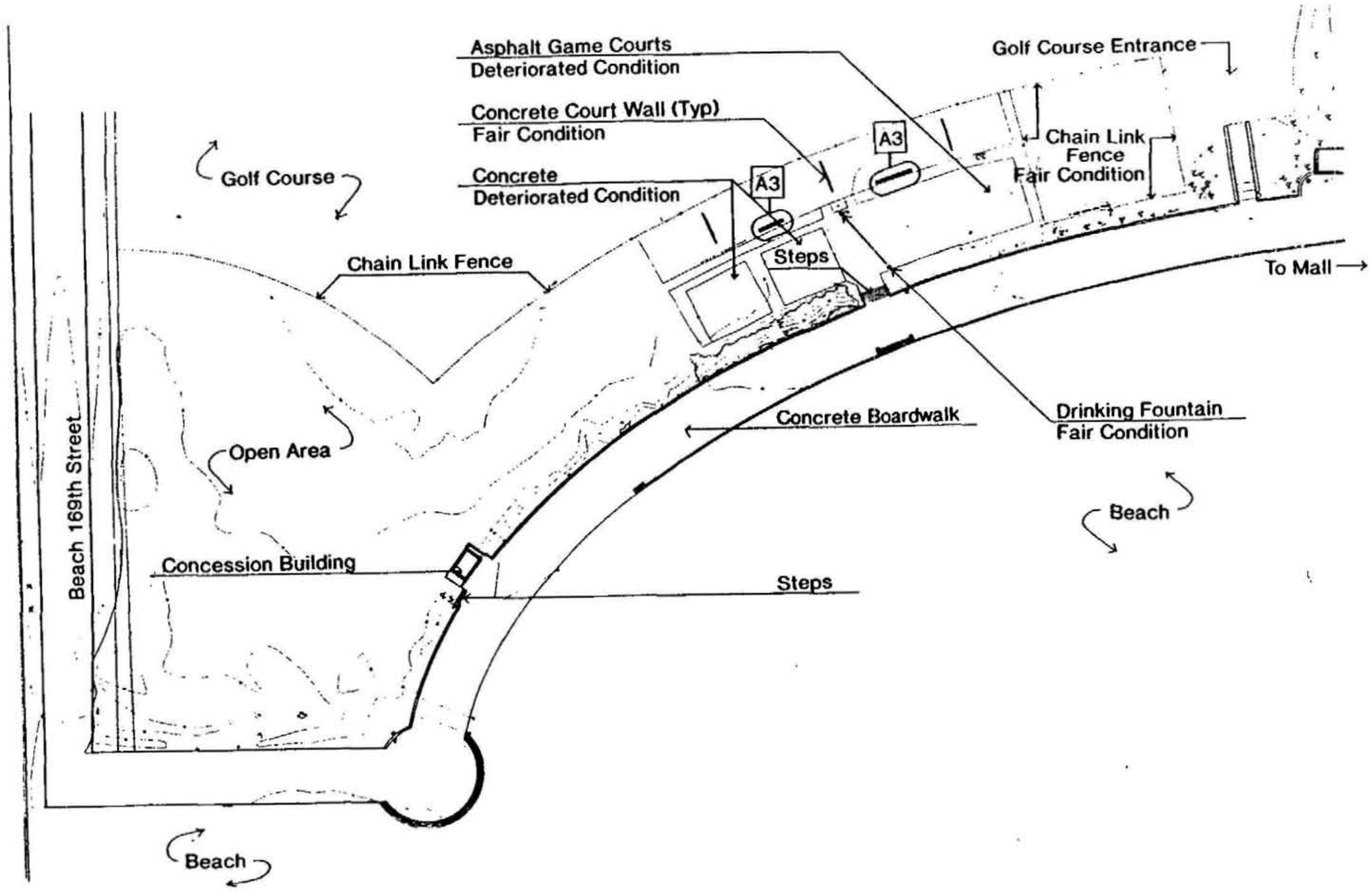


Fig. C-8 ***Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 1 of 3)***

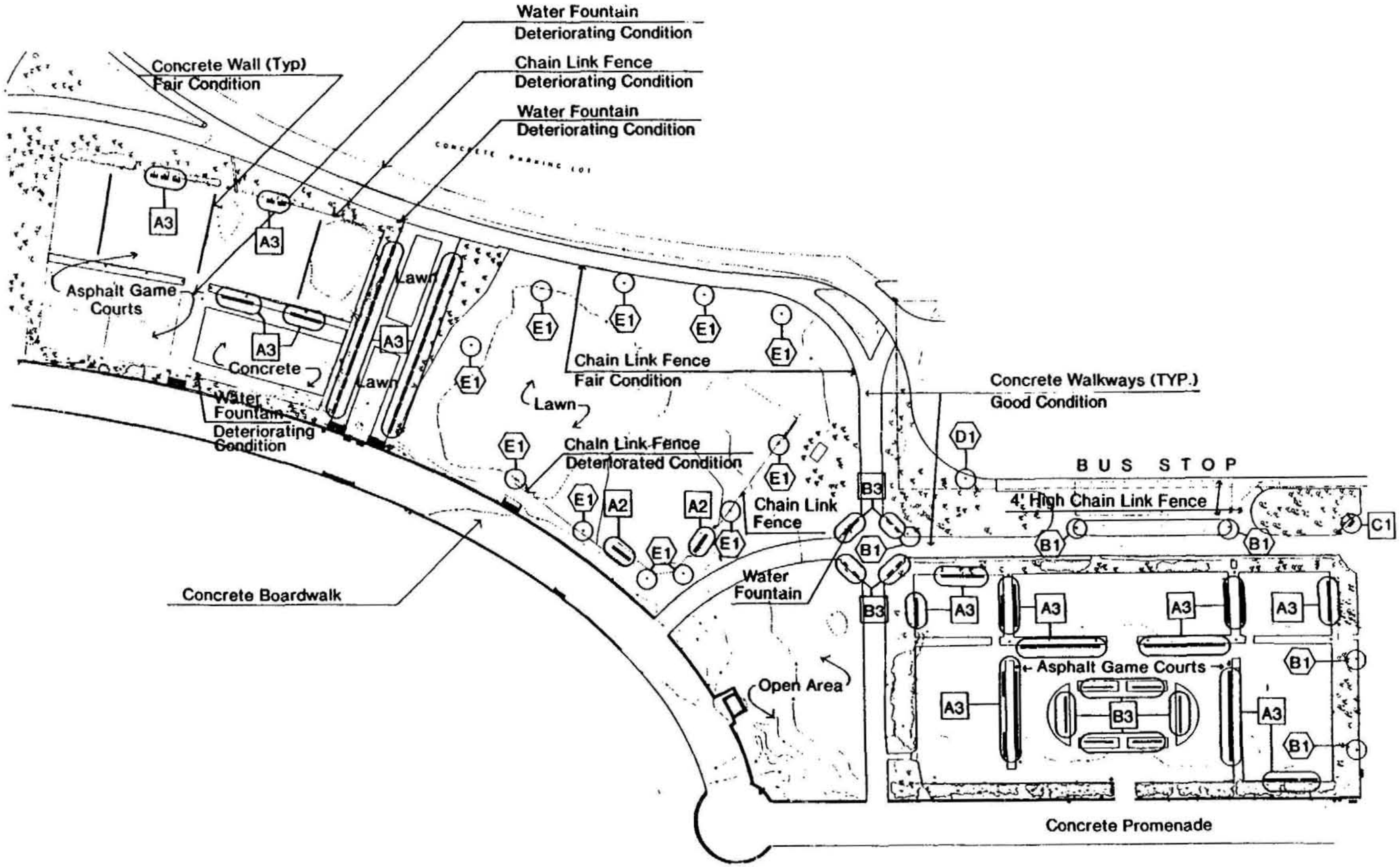


Fig. C-9 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 2 of 3)

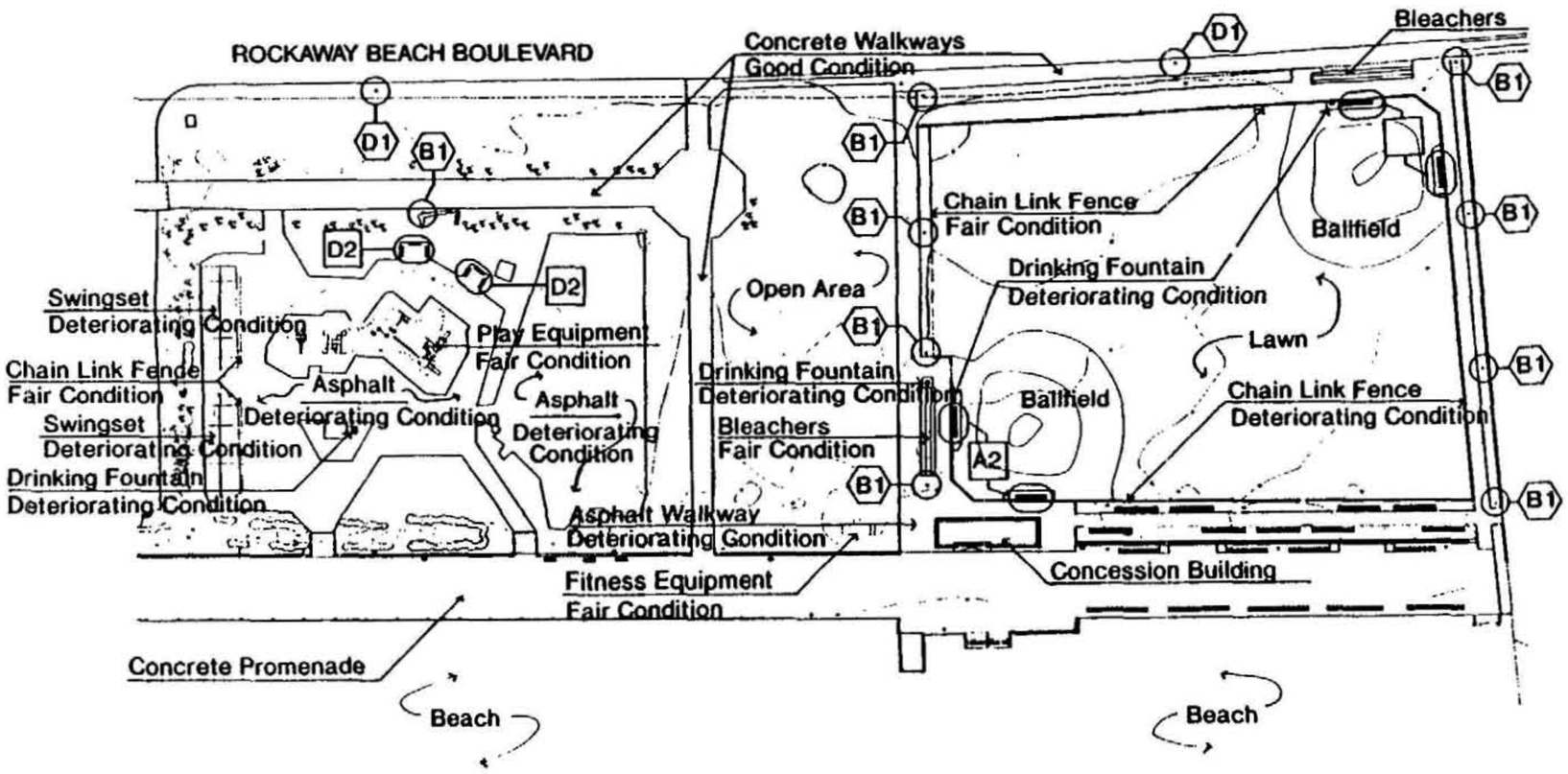


Fig. C-10 Site Furnishings and Existing Conditions: Back Beach Area (Plan 3 of 3)