

1074

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Southport Beach House
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number	7825 First Avenue	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Kenosha	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Kenosha	code 059 zip code 53140

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alicia Z. Goehring Nov. 20, 2002
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Southport Beach House

Kenosha County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

1-8-03

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as
as apply)

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)

district

structure

site

object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources
in the count)

contributing

noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

0 total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property
listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE/sports facility

RECREATION/CULTURE/music facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE/music facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation limestone

walls brick

roof slate

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section 7 Page 1 Southport Beach House
Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

The Southport Beach House sits along Lake Michigan in the southeastern corner of Kenosha, a medium-sized city in the southeastern corner of Wisconsin. Not far from the Illinois border, Kenosha is a lakeshore community with a long industrial and commercial history dating to the earliest era of settlement in Wisconsin. Recently, due to migration from the Chicago area, whose northern suburbs are only about 30 miles away, Kenosha has seen a large influx of new residents, many of whom commute to the Chicago area. A commuter rail link and easy access to Interstate 94 makes such a commute possible. This influx of new residents has meant considerable development of some areas on the outskirts of the city, but there has been less of an impact on the older part of the city, itself. The most significant new development of the older city has been redevelopment of the lakeshore, just east of downtown. This area, once the site of a large industrial complex, has been and is currently being developed into residential housing and expanded harbor facilities.

About two miles south of this lakefront development is the large Southport Park. The 29-acre park was added to the city of Kenosha in two sections. In 1928, 25 acres were purchased for the park and in 1934, a donation from Mrs. W. H. Alford increased the park area to almost 37 acres. However, eight acres have been removed from the park since its initial acquisition. Because of its late acquisition, it was one of the last parks to be developed and almost all of the park work was done during the mid to late 1930s using the federal government's work relief program, the WPA. In fact, the building being nominated, the Southport Beach House was finished during the late years of the program, 1939-1940.

Southport Park is relatively flat, with only a small amount of grade change throughout the park. The land does slope down toward the beach, which is protected along much of the lakeshore with an abundance of stone and concrete rip-rap. The park is formally landscaped with curving asphalt paved drives, concrete sidewalks, and many mature trees and shrubs. Much of the formal landscaping and planting was completed during the mid and late 1930s. The Southport Beach House sits near Lake Michigan and there is no landscaping except for lawn areas around the north, south, and west sides of the building. A large circular drive runs in front of the west elevation of the building, making a circular lawn. At the center of this lawn is a large circular bed planted with shrubs.

On the beach side of the building is a large concrete patio defined by a concrete balustrade. The balustrade has a flat railing and arches between the posts in an arcaded effect. Similar balustrades run along the north and south sides of the building, which slope down since the building is set into the raised landscape above the beach. Because the building is raised on the east elevation, the west elevation of the building exposes only the first story, with the lower level hidden on this side. The east elevation of the building is raised, allowing access to the lower level.

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Section 7 Page 2 Southport Beach House
Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

DESCRIPTION, EXTERIOR

The Southport Beach House has a generally rectangular form, although the variety of roof types and abundance of ellis give the building an irregular plan. The roof over the main section of the building is wide and hipped, but there are several other gable, parapet and flat roofs covering the various wings and ellis of the building. All of the roof surfaces are covered with recycled slate tile and projecting from the north and south ends of the main hip are two massive brick corbeled chimneys. All of the walls of the building are constructed of recycled cream bricks that have numerous tan hues.

The west elevation is the main elevation of the building. It is one story in height and leads into the raised first floor. The elevation consists of a large main block with recessed ellis flanking each end wall. At the center of the main block is a raised parapet section that includes the main entrance into the building. The parapet is stepped and defined by a row of brick dentils. Two very shallow brick pilasters decorate each end of the parapet section. They have stone cornices and brick corbeling suggesting capitals. Between each set of pilasters are rosettes at the upper level and tall, narrow openings with stone jack arches at the lower level. These openings are filled with glass blocks that are not original.

At the center of the parapet section is the main entrance decorated by a flat frontispiece of pilasters supporting an entablature with a cornice, dentils and frieze. Above the entrance is a transom space decorated with a stone plaque with a geometric Art Deco-inspired design. A border of small rectangular stones surrounds the plaque. The main entrance, itself, consists of a set of modern doors. Above the frontispiece is an arched opening decorated with a round brick arch and brick keystone. The opening is filled in with modern glass blocks and an enclosed arch.

Flanking the parapet section of the main block are two hipped-roof sections that are identically decorated. They have friezes with dentils and central openings sitting under round-arched reveals. The round arches extend down to form surrounds. Set into the reveal are oculus panels with rosettes and filling the window openings are rectangular panels under glass blocks. The glass blocks are later additions. Since other openings of the building are filled with multi-pane metal casements, this type of window probably filled these openings.

Recessed enclosures flank each side of the main block of the west elevation. These enclosures consist of brick walls attached to the side of the building and they have no roofs. They are the walls of the two open air dressing rooms that are part of the lower level of the beach house. The side walls of these enclosures slant downward toward the lower level of the building, but the enclosures, themselves, are part of the lower level. On both the north and south elevations, these

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slanted enclosure walls sit next to wide two-run concrete staircases. At the bottom of the staircases are the extensions of the main block.

The north and south elevations of the building are similar and feature irregular elements. The north elevation will be described, and all of the features mentioned are identical to those of the south elevation except where noted. Under the eaves of the side walls of the main block are dentils and the side walls of the open-air dressing rooms are stepped and angle sharply down toward the ells that project from the main block. The first ell is a two-story rectangle with a parapet roof. The parapet is stepped and decorated with a pediment at the center. A small hip roof connects the parapet wall with a one-story perpendicular gable-roofed ell. The north wall of the ell is seen on the north elevation and it is punctuated with three openings enclosed with wood paneling. On the south elevation, these openings are doors, also enclosed with wood paneling. Both walls are decorated with rows of dentils under the roof eaves.

The east elevation of the building is dominated by the central section of the building that projects over the raised lower level. The east elevation also includes the east walls of the north and south projecting ells already mentioned. These ells are slightly recessed from the large projecting central block and their east walls are two stories in height. The upper level of these walls feature tall, brick pilasters topped with recessed enclosed round arches. The lower levels are slightly different. On the north end, the lower level has several enclosed openings. On the south end, the lower level has long, rectangular enclosed openings. All of the enclosures are made of wood panels.

The east walls of the perpendicular gable-roofed ells are slightly different, as well. On the north end, the gable-roofed ell has one opening filled with a large garage size door enclosed with wood panels. Above the door is a wide jack arch and a large shallow arched reveal with an oculus opening. On the south end the details are identical except that instead of a garage type door, there is a pair of openings enclosed with wood paneling.

Dominating the east elevation is the large hip-roofed section that projects from the main block. This section features gables at each end and symmetrical details flanking a central row of casements. The projection off of the main block creates an overhang or porch over the openings of the lower bathing facilities. This overhang is supported by square brick columns between three large and two smaller elliptical arches. The arches are decorated with smooth limestone arches and stepped keystones. Recessed behind the arches are the openings to the lower level. They are all enclosed with painted wood panels.

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Above the arches is the set of window openings filled with paired metal casements surrounded by multi-pane borders. The five windows at the center are decorated with brick jack arches and keystones while the flanking casements sit in the matching gables under large round arches that are filled in and decorated with brick round arches and keystones. The gables above these windows are also decorated with shallow reveals and oculus openings. Oculus openings that have been filled in decorate the area above the five central windows. Both the north and south ends of the end gables slope sharply down. Five very narrow openings that get progressively shorter as the roof slopes down decorate the gable ends. These openings are filled with tall boards and wood cross pieces. Each sloping gable end stops at a small projecting gable-roofed ell that has a side wall enclosed entrance.

DESCRIPTION, INTERIOR

Like the exterior of the building, the interior has had few changes either to the floor plan or to interior details. And like the exterior, the interior is lavish and complex. While the exterior resembles a Classically influenced English manor house in its form and massing, most of the interior resembles a 1930s Art Deco nightclub. The lower level interior is largely undecorated with utilitarian features. It will be described first.

The lower level is reached through a door under the large projecting overhang on the east elevation of the building. The entrance leads into a hallway on one side of a central office. A hallway runs along the other side of the office and both hallways curve either right or left and lead into the large open-air dressing rooms. When the bathing facilities were in use, patrons entered and exited the dressing rooms via these hallways, passing each side of the office. Metal pipe railings are angled behind and in front of the office, so patrons could not enter or exit into the wrong bathing facilities. Behind the office is an open area accessed only through small entrances behind the office. At the rear of this area is a large U-shaped boiler and utility room.

To the east of the open-air dressing rooms are three identical rooms on each side of the building. One is currently marked as a concession room, while the others are marked as storage. Since the bathing facilities are not in use today, these rooms are vacant or used for storage. An original plan of this building could not be located, although if the bathing facilities are compared to the Simmons Island Beach House, these rooms were probably used for first aid, equipment rental and storage, and lifeguard rooms.

The entire lower level of the beach house is unfinished, meaning that there are brick walls, concrete floors and plain ceilings. The office is an exception, with plaster walls and wood floors.

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The doors in most of the lower level are utilitarian period wood doors. In the office area, the wood doors have a large lower recessed wood panel topped with six-light glazing. There are windows in the office that are also filled with multi-light glazing, but some of the windows have been vandalized. At the back of the office are large openings covered with grills. These grills served the check areas of the lower level. The open-air dressing rooms feature large elliptical arches sheltering raised dressing booths. Wood panels separate the booths.

The main entrance in the west elevation leads into the first floor of the beach house. The first floor includes a lobby with two large restrooms and a large ballroom with kitchen facilities and a stage. The entire first floor is lavishly decorated with Art Deco motifs. Beginning in the lobby, the main entrance is decorated with a wide molding with an incised rectilinear design. The very tall top rail of the molding has a line of incised stylized arrow with feathers. Rising from the top rail are two wood panels with incised curved lines topped with rosettes. There are also tab decorations above the top rail, the largest with an incised fret design.

The same types of moldings decorate the two double-door entrances into the ballroom. Above each top rail is a vertical wood panel with incised curved lines. The moldings around the restroom doors of the lobby are narrower with an architrave type shape. These moldings are decorated with incised rectilinear designs that are less elaborate than the moldings of the entry doors. In the moldings over the men's and women's restrooms and the cloak room are inscribed "Ladies Lounge," "Gentlemen," and "Cloak Room," in stylized letters.

The lobby itself is decorated with a marble floor, marble wainscoting and marble baseboards, all recycled from the old post office building in downtown Kenosha. The rest of the wall surfaces and ceiling are covered with plain plaster. A large stylized decoration rises between the sets of double entry doors that lead into the ballroom. This decoration suggests a very vertical, stylized candelabra on a very tall base. The decoration is accented by a wooden molding that resembles the moldings around the doors in the lobby. Underneath this decoration is a period water fountain that sits in a well in the middle of a raised platform. The water fountain has a ceramic bowl sitting on a metal pipe stand.

The doors leading into the ballroom and into the two restrooms are identical. They are flush panel wood doors decorated with octagonal openings. Under the openings are four horizontal metal strips. Each door has a large brass handle with a corresponding plate on the other side of the door. The handles and plates are decorated with stylized arrow feathers and the plates feature an additional grooved and stepped molding.

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The ladies restroom consists of two separate rooms, a lounge and a toilet room. The lounge features a built-in counter under a mirror and a built-in curved bench. The bench has a wood seat and a back of pine board paneling topped with a rail. Above the curved bench, the wall curves, as well. Three thin, stainless steel moldings run around the plaster wall surfaces of the lounge. There is a wide, stepped, dark-stained cornice molding around the entire room. The floor is a continuation of the marble floor in the lobby. On each side of the mirror above the counter are two funnel wall sconces and a globe light fixture hangs from the center of the ceiling. The toilet room in the women's restroom is reached through a plain two-panel wooden door with a less elaborate handle. In this area there are three stalls with toilets and a sink. A door to the outside allows access to the bathrooms when the first floor is closed.

The men's restroom only includes the toilet room. In the area where the women's lounge is located is the cloak room. The cloak room is accessed via a door in the foyer of the men's room. The cloak room has a large open window with a counter in the wall facing the lobby for patrons to check their belongings. A plain wood-paneled door leads into the men's toilet room. The room has two stalls with toilets, two urinals, and a sink. Like the women's restroom, there is a door that leads to the outside of the building. The men's restroom is decorated with the marble floor and plaster walls like that of the women's restroom.

The ballroom has two sections: a larger main room, and a "porch" or sitting area on the other side of two massive elliptical arches. The "porch" corresponds to the large upper story projection on the east elevation of the building. The entire ballroom has a floor covered with narrow wood boards. The walls of the main section of the ballroom are plastered and decorated with many elaborate Art Deco motifs. Except for the area around the double entrance into the ballroom and the arched opening into the "porch," a very wide stepped molding separates the plaster walls from a recessed frieze. The ceiling has massive exposed beams that intersect to form squares that are covered with decorated acoustical tiles and square light fixtures.

All of the moldings and beams in the room are painted white. Some of the Art Deco decoration is painted in tones of gray and tan. The wall surfaces are painted white or gray and the gray acoustical tiles are decorated with geometric designs in green, red and yellow. A small amount of pine board paneling is used in the kitchen area and along one wall of the "porch."

Some of the most elaborate decoration sits over the entrances into the main section of the ballroom and the arched openings into the "porch." The decorations are massive stylized arch moldings made up of several components. The "arch" moldings are complete over each of the large arched openings into the "porch," but the motif is split into two sections over the entrances from the lobby. The arch molding consists of two sections of stepped overlapping boards that

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rise toward the center. Under the boards are stylized clouds. Panels with a raised, abstracted "fiddlehead" fern motif decorate the arch moldings and flank a large vertical board with a chevron and fret motif over the arches into the "porch." Over the entrances into the lobby, the scroll panels flank a stylized stepped bracket, one of several of these brackets located throughout the room.

Another frequent decoration in the room is a group of shallow carved moldings of tall, stylized ferns. Funnel sconces are located at intervals throughout the room. At the southeast corner of the main section of the ballroom is the kitchen, which is closed off by the pine board paneling that creates a "snack bar." The panels can be opened for kitchen service. The kitchen, itself, has some rudimentary appliances and fixtures. It is accessed from the "porch" area, as is an enclosed storage area next to the kitchen.

At the northeast corner of the main section of the ballroom is the curved stage. The stage has a narrow board floor that is slightly raised from the main ballroom floor. The walls of the stage area are decorated with stainless steel moldings in a stepped and rectilinear pattern. At the center of the stage, these moldings rise to form a more elaborate stepped design. Above this design is a set of five curved stainless steel moldings. Flanking this central area of the stage are multiple sets of the tall, stylized, shallow volute moldings. The volutes are stepped lower, then taller in a running pattern at the back of the stage. A plain two panel door leads off of the stage into another storage area, probably for sound and/or musical equipment.

Some elements of the ceiling in this part of the ballroom have been described earlier. Additional details include moldings that accent the ceiling beams. Attached to the ceiling beams are stylized brackets, as well. The recessed frieze is painted gray and decorated with a repeating zig-zag, diamond and dot motif. As indicated previously, the ceiling beams create ceiling squares filled with decorated acoustical tiles. The acoustical tiles are made up of small rectangles and larger squares and around a plain center square there is a designed border. The border design features a repeating pattern of chevrons, rectangles, squares, arrows, frets, and other rectilinear motifs. In many of the plain center squares there are square ceiling fixtures with triangular glass panels attached to decorative metal frames.

The "porch" area of the ballroom has an east wall covered with pine board paneling, which is a contrast to the remainder of the décor in this area. Decorating the other plain plaster walls are bands of thin stainless steel moldings applied in horizontal, vertical and stepped patterns. Painted detail in this room consists of zig-zag, rectilinear, arched, and wavy motifs. Funnel sconces also light this room, as they do the main ballroom. A stepped cornice molding decorates the area between the walls and the ceiling.

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The ceiling of this area of the ballroom is slightly different than in the main ballroom. Instead of acoustical tiles and large beams, this ceiling features plain panels laid horizontally across the ceiling. Every other panel is painted a light or dark gray. At the center of the ceiling, running perpendicular to the panels, is a long Art Deco decoration that features geometric shapes, rectilinear motifs, wavy lines, and volutes. At the center of the decoration is a stylized medallion with identical panels extending from it toward the end walls.

While there has been some deterioration of the exterior wall surface due to spalling, the building retains a high level of integrity on both the interior and the exterior.

The planter is not counted in the inventory because it is of insignificant size and scale.

Southport Beach House
Name of Property

Kenosha County
County and State

Wisconsin

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1936-1941

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Borggren, Chris

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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The Southport Beach House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. It is being nominated under criterion A, for significance at the local level in the area of planning and community development. The building was part of a decades-long planning and community development process that, by 1940, resulted in a large system of parks and recreational facilities in Kenosha. Beginning with individuals who pressured the city to establish parks as a means to create the "city beautiful" and provide public recreation for all citizens at the turn of the twentieth century, the movement grew and developed during the 1920s and park planning was extensively covered in the 1925 Harland Bartholomew city plan for Kenosha. For the next 15 years, the ideas suggested in this plan were carried out, particularly during the 1930s, when the city used work-relief money from the federal government to formally landscape all the parks and to build recreational and service facilities to support them. The result was a first-class park system that was the result of historically significant planning and development efforts made by individuals, the Bartholomew city planning team, and, especially, by local parks director and planner, Floyd Carlson, during the 1930s. The construction of the Southport Beach House was a historically significant event that is part of the history of the planning and development of Kenosha's park system and its facilities.

The beach house is also being nominated under criterion C, because it is a fine and unusual example of an eclectic period revival building that suggests a classically-influenced English manor house with an impressive Art Deco interior. The building was designed by a noted city parks architect of the 1930s, Chris Borggren, and features atypical details both inside and outside. One of the most intriguing elements of the building is that it was constructed with recycled materials: bricks taken from old houses and/or factories, and marble taken from the old post office building interior. The use of old materials on the exterior gives the building an added historic or "authentic" appearance that period revival buildings tried to emulate. The interior marble trim gives the inside of the building additional elegance. The building's unusual stylistic elements, interesting building materials, and high level of integrity all combine to make up an architectural gem on Kenosha's lakefront.

The period of significance begins with the construction of the building in 1936 and ends with its opening to the public in 1941. Because the actual construction of the beach house is an important component of the building's significance, the period of significance begins with commencement of the building project. The specific period of significance for Criterion A is 1936-1941; the period for Criterion C is 1941.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In late 1834, a group of New Yorkers met to form the Western Emigration Company, a land company whose members were interested in acquiring land opening up for settlement on the west side of Lake Michigan in what would become Wisconsin. Company members Warters Towslee, Sydney Roberts, and Charles Turner left New York in March of 1835. After arriving in Chicago, the group traveled up and down the Lake Michigan shore looking for a suitable area to make a land claim for their company. The men eventually found a site in June of 1835, when they arrived on Simmons (Washington) Island and found the mouth of Pike Creek. The men established claims and Kenosha was born.¹

Through the summer of 1835, additional settlers came, establishing a fledgling community, at first called "Pike" after Pike Creek. Some were settlers associated with the land company, while others came on their own or traveled further inland, looking for farms to claim. Included among the earliest Kenosha settlers was John Bullen, Jr., who was meant to be part of the original land company settlers, but was delayed leaving New York state. He was eventually joined by three generations of the Bullen family. The early settlers established the tiny community of Pike largely between Lake Michigan and 13th Avenue on the west, and between 45th Street on the north and 60th Street on the south. The settlers set about to create a lake port and the settlement's second name, "Southport," reflects this plan. One of the first projects the settlers undertook in the new community was to build a primitive road to connect the lake and the village.²

Between 1836 and 1840, the population of "Southport" grew from 84 to 337. Aside from the usual challenges of a new community, the early settlers were having difficulty developing their hoped-for lake port. The natural harbor was not very good and dredging was necessary to make it large and deep enough for schooners to dock. In 1840, the United States Congress appropriated funds to dredge Southport's harbor and a substantial pier was built, giving the village an economic boost. During the 1840s, additional money was acquired for harbor improvements, helping the little community grow. By 1850, Southport was a notable port along Lake Michigan and the settlement, now officially a village, had grown to over 3,400 people.³

For several decades, Kenosha was a successful lake port, but constant dredging was needed to keep the port operational. As the nineteenth century progressed, other communities with better natural harbors, in particular, nearby Racine and Milwaukee, were able to compete more

¹ Carrie Copley, *Kenosha From Pioneer Village to Modern City 1835-1935*, Kenosha: Kenosha County Historical Museum, 1958, pp. 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-9.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

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effectively for lake traffic. And, the development of rail lines during the 1850s and 1860s meant that the importance of lake transportation declined. Even so, Kenosha continued to grow during this period and by 1880, the city had a population of 5,000. Much of this growth was related to the city's location near good farmland and its strategic location along the lake. But after 1880, the most important growth in the community took place when the city made a transition from lake port and commercial center to a successful industrial center during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The industrial boom began in the 1880s as some small companies grew into major industries. The Bain Wagon Works was an example. Wagon making was dominated by small shops during the mid-nineteenth century, but during the late nineteenth century, the industry was consolidated into a few large firms, Bain being one of these companies. The N. R. Allen Sons' Tannery was developed from a small factory into a major leather-making industry. Similar growth occurred in the Simmons Manufacturing Company, makers of wire mattresses. Other firms that were important to Kenosha included brass works, clothing manufacturers, and companies making a variety of metal goods. The new factories both employed and attracted new immigrants to the city during this period and Kenosha developed numerous ethnic European neighborhoods. The new immigrants came primarily from eastern and southern Europe and joined the many German, Norwegian and Irish people already in the city.⁴

The effect of this industrial growth on the city can be seen in the following statistics. Between 1900 and 1905, the number of factories doubled, the city extended its boundaries and more than 1,000 houses were built. In 1907, the factories of Kenosha employed over 6,000 men, over 1,000 women and 300 boys and girls under 16. A 1914 manufacturing census showed a 22 percent increase in industrial activity in Kenosha since 1909. In 1916, employment in Kenosha topped the 10,000 level. One of the companies that developed during this time had a profound impact on the city a few years later. The Jeffery Company began producing automobiles after 1900, then in 1916, Charles Nash and a partner purchased the company. Nash Motors became a major producer of automobiles during the next few decades and was the fourth biggest auto company after World War II. Other companies continued to grow during the early twentieth century, including the Simmons Manufacturing Company, the Chicago Brass (American Brass) Company, Black Cat (Allen A) textile company, and Coopers (Jockey) underwear company.⁵

The growth of industry in Kenosha resulted in the development of a powerful group of wealthy families and a growing middle class. Like many middle and upper-class people at the turn of the twentieth century, some of these Kenoshans became interested in social and political reform.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 89-90.

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This group tended to support prohibition, feeling that saloons were a powerful force for moral decay, particularly in regard to immigrant groups. They also felt that some politicians fostered corruption and easily manipulated immigrant groups for their own purposes. They were generally supporters of the Progressive Movement, which worked for civil service reform, honest government, and other social and political reforms.

At the turn of the twentieth century, some Kenoshans formed a Citizen's League to try to curb saloon abuses. In 1906, the Civic Federation was incorporated to lobby for a stricter enforcement of local laws and to fight gambling. Some of the members of the Civic Federation supported a change in government from the mayor-council system to a commission system as a means to end what they saw as local political corruption. The reformers' efforts continued during the 1910s and were successful in getting the commission form of government on a referendum in 1914, although it was defeated. In 1917, Kenosha's reformers pushed a referendum for another change in government, this time to the council-manager form, but the state government did not allow such a change for cities at that time. But, in that same year, the reformers made gains when the city council and Chamber of Commerce formed a city planning committee and funded a brief planning report. In 1922, political reform was successful when Kenosha voters approved a change to the council-manager form of government. Although the mayor-council form of government would return to the city a few decades later, much in the way of civic reform was accomplished during the council-manager era.⁶

It was within this reform context of the first three decades of the twentieth century that the development of Kenosha's parks took place. Many of the individuals involved in developing Kenosha's park system were the same reformers that changed the political landscape of Kenosha. Their interest in city planning was part of their interest in overall city reform. The reformers not only wanted to change the ideas that ran the city, but also change the physical landscape of the city. They were influenced by landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted, who had designed elaborate city parks and new suburban "garden" communities that rejected the grid plan and emphasized open, natural landscaping.

The reformers in Kenosha were also influenced by the "City Beautiful" movement. This movement stressed the idea that cities and their buildings should be planned with a unity of design, a magnitude of purpose, and include monuments, arches and statues in public spaces to instruct citizens in the importance of civic virtue. Another element of the city beautiful movement was the improvement of city landscaping through formally designed parks and public

⁶ Nelson Peter Ross, "Architecture, Planning and Transportation," in John A. Neuenschwander, ed., *Kenosha County in the Twentieth Century: A Topical History*, Kenosha: Kenosha County Bicentennial Commission, 1976, pp. 430-431.

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open spaces. The city beautiful movement also embraced the return to classical architecture that was being practiced by most of the nation's prominent architects at the turn of the twentieth century. The city beautiful included large, classical buildings that were suitable to house the new, planned and clean governments ushered in by reformers.⁷

Classical architecture and city beautiful ideals came together at the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. At the exposition, Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham was the chief designer of the major buildings and their landscaping. He created the famous "white city" of classically-influenced buildings centered around formal green spaces, pools and fountains. According to Burnham and others, this "white city" was the epitome of what a city could be. The Classical Revival architectural style soon became popular for institutional buildings across the nation, as architects tried to create the city beautiful idea in their own communities.⁸

Because of Chicago's proximity to Kenosha, it is likely that many of Kenosha's wealthy and middle-class citizens attended the exposition, and there is direct evidence that the "white city" influenced Zalmon Simmons, a wealthy industrialist and philanthropist. In 1899, Simmons, a proponent of free public library reform, donated money to build a public library for Kenosha. The building was erected on the old "commons," later known as Library Park. The architect Simmons chose for the building, completed in 1900, was none other than Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago and Columbian Exposition fame. Burnham created an outstanding Classical Revival library building that embodied his vision of what important city buildings should look like.⁹

Simmons was also an early proponent of park development in Kenosha. He was the first president of the Kenosha Park Association, formed in 1906. He had also been responsible for bringing noted landscape architect O. C. Simonds to Kenosha to design the grounds around the new library in 1900. Later, he acquired much of the land on Washington Island (Simmons Island) and donated 40 acres to the city in 1916 for Simmons Island Park. Also noted in the parks movement was the wife of industrialist George Yule, who in 1905 gave a speech entitled "The Town Beautiful." In this speech, Mrs. Yule advocated clean streets, better architecture, more landscaping, and a park system.¹⁰

⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District, 1988, on file in the Historic Preservation Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁸ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District.

⁹ Ross, p. 391.

¹⁰ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District; Ross, p. 433.

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After Kenosha changed to the council-manager system of city government, many planning and city beautiful ideas were implemented during the later 1920s and during the 1930s. A civic center of classical buildings was started during the 1920s and completed during the 1930s when the old Beaux Arts style post office was moved to form the fourth side of the center, joining the Kenosha County Courthouse, the old Kenosha High School, and the new post office building. These four classical buildings were Kenosha's version of the "white city" of the Columbian Exposition.¹¹

The implementation of the city beautiful movement also included the development of the Kenosha park system, which reached fruition during the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to the 1910s, only a few small open spaces existed as public parks. In 1839, two small "town squares" were included in the city's original plat: the "commons," later Library Park, south of downtown, and a public square, Union Park, north of the downtown. In the very late nineteenth century, the small Bain and Eichelman parks were donated to the city. During the 1910s and 1920s much of Kenosha's existing park system land was acquired, much of it in large tracts acquired by wealthy individuals who donated it to the city or gave the city generous terms of repayment for the land.¹²

The development of the park system is part of the important planning and community development era that occurred in Kenosha during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s and will be discussed under the Community Planning and Development Area of Significance. This information will complete the history of the park system and the building being nominated, along with providing the context for the historic significance of the building.

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Southport Beach House is historically significant at the local level because its construction was an important event related to the history of community planning and development in the city of Kenosha. The planning and development of the beach house occurred near the end of a long history of park development and planning that took place in the city during the first four decades of the twentieth century and was part of an overall city reform effort that occurred at almost the same time. Beginning around 1900, civic reformers, "city beautiful" adherents, and progressive-minded citizens in Kenosha began social and political reform efforts that had a significant impact on the growth and development of the twentieth century city. Some of their accomplishments included a change in government to the council-manager form, the development of a city plan, the construction of a civic center, and the development of a large park system. During the 1930s,

¹¹ National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Civic Center Historic District.

¹² Ross, pp. 432-433.

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the city of Kenosha used the federal government's work relief programs to continue the civic improvements begun during the previous decades and, in particular, to continue the planning and development of city parks and their facilities.

Historic Planning

There is a long history of community planning in the United States. Some early colonial towns, such as Williamsburg and Philadelphia, were planned or designed communities. One of the most important features of these early city plans was the designation of areas set aside for public use, specifically "town squares" or "commons." The idea of town squares was taken across the United States with Yankee settlers who included this feature in new town plats. But, other than carrying "Yankee" style town plats west, there was little progress in the area of formal planning until the late nineteenth century.¹³

Between 1893 and 1930, progressive-thinking engineers began developing the planning profession and introducing urban areas to the idea of comprehensive city planning. The new planning ideas were embraced by civic reformers in the early twentieth century as a way to control what they felt were cities that had grown in an unattractive and poorly organized manner. Many chambers of commerce in the country sponsored planning as an aid to business. By the 1920s, many cities were engaged in planning activities and enacting zoning and building regulations. The federal government's Standard State Zoning Enabling Act of 1922, the U. S. Supreme Court's 1926 decision upholding the constitutionality of zoning regulations, and the 1928 federal government's Model City Planning Act all moved city planning efforts forward. It was also during the 1920s that the profession of planning reached maturity and planners like John Nolan provided comprehensive plans that suggested ways for cities to control growth, reorganize existing conditions, and beautify the environment.¹⁴

During the Great Depression years of the 1930s, planning efforts shifted largely from local communities to the federal government. The federal government's planning efforts, including model communities, resettlement, and natural resource planning, helped states and local communities at a time when they had few resources for planning efforts. After World War II, there was a period of accelerated growth in the United States that lasted into the 1960s. In order to bring some order to this growth, all levels of government engaged in planning activities. While some of these efforts at planning brought important gains in land use regulation and environmental preservation, in the area of historic preservation, many of these efforts were

¹³ *The Plan for Planning: City of Janesville Comprehensive Planning Program*, Janesville: City of Janesville Planning Department, 1982, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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harmful. Urban renewal projects were supposed to improve “blighted” areas, but the way these projects were carried out, leveling large urban neighborhoods and rebuilding, destroyed many historic buildings and ethnic areas that would have benefited from a less radical approach. The urban renewal approach had one positive result, though. By destroying so many historic buildings, the projects brought a heightened interest in historic preservation.¹⁵

Historic Planning in Kenosha

The first formal planning effort in Kenosha involved establishing a building code. In 1909, the City Council appointed a committee to draw up building regulations, but never approved them. In 1913, the local fire department lobbied for a code, and in 1915, with state law behind it, the department began inspecting public and commercial buildings for fire hazards. In 1916, the council finally passed the building code and approved the appointment of a building inspector.¹⁶

The new council-manager system of local government, established in 1922, embraced the idea of planning. In 1925, the Kenosha city council hired a planning professional to prepare a comprehensive city plan. Their choice, Harland Bartholomew, was trained as an engineer, as were many early planners. In 1916, he was working as a planning engineer in St. Louis and by 1919 he had established his own practice. He practiced during the formative years of professional city planning and had an impact on the development of the profession. Between 1920 and 1926, Bartholomew’s firm wrote 20 of the 87 plans developed for cities. Although Bartholomew was not an innovator in city planning like John Nolan, he was a leader in the field and made an impact on the profession as a teacher and writer.¹⁷

The plan that Bartholomew prepared for Kenosha was one of the first he did for a small city. Bartholomew’s associates, Earl O. Mills, L. D. Tilton, and William D. Hudson did much of the work for the plan under Bartholomew’s supervision. Fred Graf prepared the drawings. The plan was a major accomplishment not only in the history of planning in Kenosha, but also in the history of urban reform in the city during the early twentieth century. Bartholomew’s plan addressed several major areas: streets, mass transit, transportation, recreation (including parks), zoning, and civic art. Each section included an analysis of current conditions and proposals for the future.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ross, 431-432.

¹⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Civic Center Historic District.

¹⁸ Ross, 436-438.

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The streets section of the report suggested that the city establish major arterial streets running both north-south and east-west, along with major arterials in the downtown. Arterial streets would be widened and have no dead ends or major curves. This part of the plan was enacted and to further organize the city streets system, street names were changed to a number only system. All north-south streets were changed to numbered avenues and east-west streets were renamed to numbered streets. This system was continued throughout Kenosha County. As was the fashion of the time, the plan also suggested a parkway along Pike Creek for beautification and recreation. In the mass transit and transportation sections of the report, Bartholomew suggested a streetcar system that would serve the entire community and was easily expanded. His plan concentrated on rail transportation and how it could best serve the community, especially industry. In the area of zoning, the plan primarily supported the city building code and zoning ordinance, one of the most comprehensive zoning ordinances in the state. Under the heading of civic art, Bartholomew suggested a plan for beautification of the community in the form of tree planting, street cleaning, removal of utility poles and wires, beautification of personal property, and development of the area's natural beauty along the lake shore.¹⁹

A large section of the plan discussed recreation and parks, the most relevant section related to this nomination. Bartholomew supported the activities Kenosha had already achieved in this area, but encouraged an even greater and more systematic program for recreation and parks. He emphasized the development of playgrounds close to schools and in existing and new parks. He encouraged the development of all types of parks, including small neighborhoods parks, a lake front park, large parks, and pleasure drives. The plan suggested that parks should include a myriad of recreational facilities including golf courses, beaches, floral displays, a zoo, and community centers. It also encouraged expanding existing parks and acquiring park land beyond the city limits.²⁰

Early Development of the Kenosha Park System

As indicated in the historical background section, several small parks existed in Kenosha prior to 1900, but, by the time Harland Bartholomew's city plan was published in 1926, the city of Kenosha had acquired a considerable amount of park land, although much of it was undeveloped. The acquisition of this park land came as a result of another movement related to city planning, a private citizen-led movement of community development meant to beautify the city. This movement was related to the social and political reform movements in Kenosha described in the historical background. Some of the same individuals involved in those reform movements were involved in developing a park system.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-441.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

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In 1906, these citizens organized the Kenosha Park Association, and with the help of both private donations and taxpayer money, important land acquisitions were made during the 1910s. In 1911, the city purchased five acres for Baker Park, and between 1912 and 1915, the city borrowed money to purchase 120 acres of park land, including Columbus Park, Lincoln Park, and much of Washington Park. In 1912, a park commission was established. In 1916, the park system was given a major boost with the donation of much of Washington Island (Simmons Island). The Simmons family donated the 40 acres making up this park, land that was worth several hundred thousand dollars. Simmons Island, with its fine lakefront footage, was the jewel in the crown of early park development, but most of the park system activity during these early years revolved around land acquisition. Some park facilities were built in the parks, but they were few and largely utilitarian, such as a small bath house on Simmons Island, and rustic park shelters. Some trees, shrubs and flowers were also planted in the existing parks.²¹

During the 1920s, additional park land was acquired and more formal park development took place, especially after the 1925 city plan was developed. In 1920, over 20 acres of landfill were acquired for Lake Front Park. In 1923, the council appointed the first parks director and in 1924, Pennoyer Park, lake front land on the north side of the city, was acquired. The most important development in park facilities occurred in 1922, when the city built the Washington Park golf course and a small rustic clubhouse.²²

After Bartholomew's plan was finished in 1925, the parks department began more formal park development. A zoo, sunken garden and new landscaping improved Lincoln Park. More neighborhood playgrounds were developed near schools, and the council passed an ordinance requiring new subdivisions to have a set-aside of at least five acres for new parks. In 1928, Floyd Carlson took over the position of parks director. It was under Carlson's leadership that most of the formal planning and development occurred in Kenosha's parks. Because of the Bartholomew plan and Carlson's planning and management skills, Kenosha was able to take advantage of the federal work programs of the 1930s to develop Kenosha's parks and recreational facilities, including the building being nominated.²³

One emphasis of the Bartholomew plan was to take advantage of the natural resources of Kenosha for recreational purposes. Carlson followed through on this suggestion by promoting more lakefront land acquisition for parks. Adding to the existing Simmons Island, Eichelman and Lake Front parks, in 1928, the city arranged to purchase an additional 120 acres of lakefront

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 433; Cropley, pp. 103-106.

²² Ross, pp. 453-454; information on the development of the Washington Park golf course in the files of the Kenosha Parks Department, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

²³ Ross, pp. 453-454.

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property that W. H. Alford and A. H. Lance had acquired for this purpose in 1924. Later, this park was named after Alford. During the late 1920s, the city purchased another 25 lake front acres on the south side of Kenosha, forming the core of Southport Park. During the peak development era of the mid and late 1930s, additional park land was donated to expand Southport and Washington parks and new recreational facilities and new landscaping were added to both existing and new parks, completing much of the vision of the Bartholomew plan.²⁴

The pace of park development dramatically changed once Carlson became the parks director and during the 1930s, when federal money became available for projects. Right after Carlson took over the park system, he began making formal landscape plans for undeveloped areas in new or existing parks. In 1929, Carlson published his landscape plan for Simmons Island. This plan included curved drives lined with numerous plantings, a large beach house along the lake front, tennis courts, playground equipment, a small amphitheater, a memorial, and a large lagoon. The plan was not completed right away, but the work was started in 1929. Park workers graded and seeded some areas of the island, built tennis courts, and installed ornamental lighting. In 1928 and 1929, recreational facilities were improved at Lincoln and Pennoyer parks, and a putting green was added to the Washington Park Golf Course. Other park work was primarily in the area of maintenance.²⁵

Park Planning and Development During the Early Years of the Great Depression

In 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, the city's annual report suggested that the parks had been a great asset to the city, "acting as safety valves for unrest and ease of mind," in "periods of economic changes." In the 1930 report, Carlson published a plan of the city showing the locations of all the major parks and their facilities. At that time, the Kenosha park system consisted of almost 20 parks that totaled over 420 acres. Most parks had some recreational facilities. The large parks at the time included Lincoln, Washington (including the golf course), Simmons Island, and Pennoyer. Alford and Southport existed, but were undeveloped. Smaller parks included Columbus, Sheridan and Eichelman, and smaller still were the older Union, Bain, Library, and Civic Center parks. Several miscellaneous parks completed the system. New parks were not established during the 1930s; instead, the city concentrated on development. Two donations from W. H. Alford added land to existing parks in 1934: 12 acres for Southport and 20 acres for Washington.²⁶

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 454.

²⁵ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Eighth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1929, pp. 62-69.

²⁶ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Ninth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1930, p. 61.

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The major projects completed in the park system during 1930 included improvements to the Lincoln Park gardens; the construction of a sprinkler system on Simmons Island; landscaping with hundreds of trees, shrubs and plants also on Simmons Island; and, most important, a comfort station in Washington Park. This comfort station was built to blend in with the neighborhood of period revival style homes. It was built in the Tudor Revival style with brick walls, stone accents, and leaded windows. This attractive building would be a precursor of the larger, more elaborate buildings erected in the parks in the years to come.²⁷

The parks report for 1931 showed little change from 1930. The parks were not yet formally using relief workers and the slowing economy appeared to have an impact on the amount of money the city spent for projects in the parks. The small projects completed in that year included improved recreational and playground equipment, and some landscaping in existing parks. Nothing was done in undeveloped parks, such as Alford and Southport. The only new project was at Lake Front Park, located on landfill along the lakefront near downtown. A preliminary design was published for the park that showed that it would be a sports park with an athletic field that could be used by the high school. The only physical work completed was adding more fill to this park. What was important in relation to this park was that it showed that Floyd Carlson was continuing to implement the 1925 Bartholomew city plan, which recommended more lake front parks and more systematic recreational facilities.²⁸

The increasingly poor economy had an even more serious effect on development in the Kenosha park system in 1932, and for the first time, people on local work relief were used for the few park projects that were done. Floyd Carlson oversaw the preparation of landscape and development plans for Washington and Alford parks, but little work in the parks was actually accomplished. Instead, only a few physical improvements were made to parks, including a parking lot on Simmons Island, more landscaping at Lake Front Park, and some clearing of wild areas in Alford Park. The work at Lake Front and Alford parks was done by relief workers and wood cut at Alford Park was given to families on relief who could use it. It was probably the lowest point in the development of parks in Kenosha since the parks movement had begun.²⁹

After Franklin Roosevelt took office in March of 1933, his "New Deal" administration quickly pushed through new federal programs meant to help the economy and the unemployed. One of these early programs was the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Because Floyd Carlson had

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-69.

²⁸ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Tenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1931, pp. 39-47.

²⁹ "1932 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file at the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 22-26.

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done considerable planning for the park system, following the guidelines of the Bartholomew city plan, Kenosha was able to quickly take advantage of this new program and submitted applications for park projects to be funded by the CWA. Although the new CWA program did not take effect until November of 1933, Kenosha's quick action got some federal money at the end of the year and was able to provide work relief in the parks to some of the unemployed. The park projects included building a gravel road, constructing three picnic shelters, initial construction on two lagoons, and some landscaping. Since Kenosha was a largely industrial city, with a high level of unemployment at the time, the fact that the city could quickly apply for federal work relief grants to do park work was a great help to many people in need.³⁰

In March of 1934, the city of Kenosha applied for more federal aid through work relief projects, which were now being run under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Under the FERA provisions, the federal government paid for 70 percent of wages, with the local government paying 30 percent. The local government would also have to provide materials. This provision was of particular importance in relation to the buildings constructed under this and future federal programs. Of the nine projects that the city applied for in 1934, eight involved work in the parks, including the construction of the Simmons Island Beach House.³¹

The Simmons Island Beach House was planned in the spring of 1934 and construction began that summer. Much of the building was completed by the fall of 1934, but there was still work to be done on landscaping and finishing, so the official opening of the building was scheduled for June of 1935. Built in the Tudor Revival architectural style, the new beach house was lauded in the press as a modern facility that included open air dressing rooms, showers and restrooms, a check room, and spacious rooms for lifeguards, concessions, and first aid. The most interesting detail was that most of the building was constructed of recycled materials. Because the city had to pay for materials, they came up with the idea to use recycled materials from condemned houses and factories. The relief workers would also get jobs demolishing the old buildings, as well as building the new ones. In fact, in January of 1935, the city announced that it now had a formal plan to "eliminate" decrepit buildings that had salvageable materials and that some buildings that had been removed had already been used in FERA projects.³²

The opening of the Simmons Island Beach House was the first major triumph of the development of the parks using federal work relief money. And, it was a testimony to the expert leadership

³⁰ Summary of Parks Department Annual Reports, unpublished outline on file in the Parks Department, City of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

³¹ "City Applies to Continue CWA Projects," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 29 March 1934, p. 7.

³² "New Building for Beach is Nearly Ready," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 27 September 1934, p. 2; "City in Plan to Eliminate Old Buildings," *Kenosha Telegraph Courier*, 10 January 1935, p. 2.

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and planning of Floyd Carlson, parks director, that the building was constructed so soon after the first federal programs became available. Building on this achievement, Carlson continued to stay abreast of the changing federal programs, adding more and more projects each year until the start of World War II. In the city's annual report for 1935, Carlson described how local and federal work relief programs had helped both unemployed men and the park system. He also indicated that most of the projects had been funded by the federal government.³³

The WPA Years of Park Development

Aside from completing the Simmons Island Beach House in 1935, other projects in the parks that year included smaller scale recreational facilities, hardscaping and utility work, and landscaping work. In August of 1935, the federal government consolidated and expanded all of its work relief programs into the Works Progress Administration (WPA). According to the 1935 parks department report, one of the changes that came with the new WPA program was a more precise and thorough application process. Carlson's planning expertise was probably a factor in Kenosha successfully competing for federal dollars. Because he had an overall plan and vision for much of the city's park development, Carlson was able to direct his staff of engineers, architects, and supervisors to prepare as many applications for park projects as possible. And, given the scale that WPA projects would take on in Kenosha during the next few years, Carlson and his staff's work paid off.³⁴

The following three years were peak years of WPA work projects in Kenosha parks. In 1936, alone, several major projects were begun that would be completed in the coming years, including the development of Southport and Alford Parks. In both 1936 and 1938 park projects totaled over \$1,000,000 and employed an average of over 1,000 men per month. In 1937, projects totaled around \$600,000 and employed over 700 men per month. During this time period, landscaping work was extensive, especially in the previously-undeveloped Southport and Alford parks, but more impressive was the size and number of buildings constructed during this era. These buildings included the large Art Deco Lincoln Park foot bridge, the Tudor Revival Washington Park Golf Course Clubhouse and Golf Course Warehouse, the Alford Park Warehouse and rustic comfort stations, and the Art Deco Fieldhouse and Stadium for the Lake Front sports park.³⁵

³³ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Fourteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1935, p. 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-35.

³⁵ "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Fifteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1936, pp. 38-43; "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Sixteenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha, 1937, pp. 36-41; "Park Department," *City of Kenosha, Wisconsin Seventeenth Annual Report*, Kenosha: City of Kenosha,

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Several of the above-mentioned projects were completed or neared completion in 1936. The Lake Front park's fieldhouse and recreation facilities were completed except for finishing work. This project turned a former landfill into a sports park with two football fields, a baseball diamond, ¼ mile track, bleachers, broadcast booth, and a fine Art Deco fieldhouse. The facility was dedicated in July of 1936. Unfortunately, these park facilities are no longer extant. Another sports facility nearly completed in 1936 was the new Washington Park Golf Course Clubhouse and improvement of the golf course. The new Tudor Revival clubhouse was, like the Simmons Island Beach House, built of recycled materials, but contained high-quality modern facilities such as a lounge, sun room, concession stand, kitchen, ladies locker room, and extensive locker rooms on the second floor for men.³⁶

The Art Deco foot bridge in Lincoln Park was a major accomplishment in 1936. Restored in 1987, this bridge is an outstanding historic landscape feature in the park today. In 1936, work finally began on the development of Southport Park, a 39-acre lake front park that could serve the south side of the city as Simmons Island served the north side. WPA crews graded, excavated, and landscaped much of the park and installed utilities, roads, walks, parking areas, and small buildings. Construction on the Southport Beach House began and its design made it, arguably, the best building in the park system. The beach house was much larger than its counterpart on Simmons Island, and its English manor house-Classical Revival influenced architecture made an impressive architectural statement. Some picnic shelters and landscaping was done at Alford Park, but the major project was the commencement of construction of twelve jetties of about 300 feet each were started to protect lakefront parks. These jetties would considerably ease lakefront erosion by slowing currents and causing sand deposits on the beaches.³⁷

In 1937, the cost of parks projects was slightly lower as fewer new projects were started. The most extensive work took place at Alford Park, where roads, parking areas, utility work, and landscaping were completed to more formally landscape the park. Comfort stations and shelter houses were started in Alford Park, as was the foundation for the park warehouse. Some finish work was done on the facilities at Lake Front Park, and excitement was generated when notable heavyweight boxer Joe Louis used the facilities in preparation for his fight with James Braddock in Chicago in that year. The new clubhouse at the Washington Park Golf Course was opened to

1938, pp. 36-39; "1938 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 3-13.

³⁶ *Fifteenth Annual Report*, p. 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

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the public in May of 1937, and additional work was done on the course, itself. Work on the jetty system was part of the 1937 parks program, and work was done on the Southport Beach House.³⁸

In 1938, WPA work in Kenosha's parks again topped \$1,000,000, largely because of extensive work at Alford Park. Along with additional landscaping that included extensive planting of trees and shrubs, the WPA workers constructed three large comfort stations, three picnic shelters, a concrete and stone bridge, parking areas, utilities, and the Alford Park Warehouse building. A large storage building was also built for the Washington Park Golf Course, and maintenance and improvements were made to other parks during the year. At Southport Park, more landscaping was completed, along with a small warehouse. Work on the Southport Park Beach House was completed to 90 percent, including much of the impressive Art Deco interior.³⁹

WPA Work in the Kenosha park system continued in 1939 and 1940, but not at the pace of previous years. One of the major changes was a transfer of funds to the construction of a sewage disposal plant at the edge of Southport Park. The funding for this project cut the amount of money available to develop parks and park facilities. Perhaps, at this time, after all of the park work that had taken place during the previous few years, the city determined that much of what Carlson wanted to accomplish in developing the parks in Kenosha had been achieved, and a sewage treatment plant was a greater need. In any event, some park work did continue with the help of the WPA.

In 1939, some finish landscaping was completed in Alford Park, including planting lawns, adding trees and shrubs, and fine grading of roads and parking areas. Other completion work was done on the warehouse and the comfort stations. Considerable landscaping was done in Washington Park and in Pennoyer Park. The construction of the sewage plant halted most work on the Southport Beach House and in fact, during the summer of 1939, the park was closed due to work on the sewage plant. In 1940, the warehouse and comfort stations in Alford Park were opened and more planting of trees and shrubs in that park was completed. In Southport Park, the landscaping was completed, including paved walks, roads and parking areas. But, once again, work to complete the beach house was delayed until the fall of 1940, so it was not open during the summer. In the fall, the concrete balustrades around the beach house were completed along with other concrete work, and interior electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and decoration was finished. The beach house was finally opened to the public for the summer of 1941.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-41.

³⁹ "1938 Annual Report of the Department of Parks."

⁴⁰ "1939 Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 4-7; "1940 Annual Report of the

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The year 1941 was a watershed year for the City of Kenosha and its parks. The country was already gearing up for World War II and Depression-era projects were ending as the economy was finally improving. At the end of the year, the country would be officially in the war, and Kenosha's factories geared up for war production, providing full employment to workers. Also in 1941, the third city manager, Harold Laughlin, one of the series of progressive city managers that served Kenosha between 1922 and 1941, left to work for the federal government. In November of 1941, the biggest blow to the parks department came when Floyd Carlson departed for a position as director of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, one of the first regional planning commissions in the country. In 1944, Carlson came back to Wisconsin, but as the City of Racine's planner and, later, as planner and director of parks. It is clear that the planning he accomplished as Kenosha's director of parks gave him considerable experience he was able to use as a full-fledged urban planner.⁴¹

During and after World War II, Kenosha took advantage of the first-class park system that had been started early in the twentieth century. Thanks to early twentieth century reformers and "city beautiful" proponents, the expertise of an early professional planner, the federal government's work relief programs of the 1930s and the professional planning efforts of the parks department staff that successfully exploited these programs, Kenosha built a park system that continues to serve the public today.

But, in recent years, the maintenance on the almost 70-year old park buildings, constructed during the 1930s, has become problematic. Budget concerns and changing uses and needs in the parks have meant that some of the buildings constructed during the Great Depression have been demolished, are currently underutilized, and/or are in need of considerable renovation. Current budget constraints make the preservation of these important resources a difficult task at best. Considerable planning and innovative solutions will need to be found so that these historically and architecturally significant park resources, built with considerable planning and innovation on the part of the parks department of the past and with the labor of many citizens of the community, can be maintained for a future generation

Significance of the Southport Beach House

The Southport Beach House is historically significant at the local level for its importance in the area of planning and community development in Kenosha. The context given for this significance is broad, but its scope is important because it explains how the building fits into the

Department of Parks of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin," unpublished report from the parks department, on file in the Simmons Library, Kenosha, Wisconsin, pp. 4-6.

⁴¹ Ross, p. 480.

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overall history of park planning and development during the important development years of the city's park system. By itself, the Southport Beach House would be a historically interesting recreation building. But, the historic significance of the building goes beyond its obvious historic function. Its construction was a notable event in the broad plan that developed the extensive park system in Kenosha. The plan began with the community development and reform ideas of a small group of progressive citizens, then was formally articulated and expanded on in the 1925 city plan, and was finally brought to fruition during the Great Depression under the guidance of an expert planner who was able to take extensive advantage of federal government programs to achieve the park system's goals. As such, the Southport Beach House is important because it physically represents the historic planning and community development efforts that improved not just the city's park system, but the entire community.

The construction of the Southport Beach House was the literal culmination of all of the work done in first half of the twentieth century to establish and development Kenosha's park system. It was the last major building project during the development years of the 1930s, and marked the completion of Kenosha's planning goals, many of which were specified in the 1925 Bartholomew city plan. These goals were to provide recreational facilities for the public, take advantage of the natural features of the city, especially its lakefront, and, during the 1930s, to take advantage of federal money to aid the unemployed in a time of economic crisis. The beach house is also the last major achievement in the career of Floyd Carlson, the city's important parks director and parks planner between 1928 and 1941. For its significance to the history of planning and community development in Kenosha, the Southport Beach House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and an important community landmark.

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: ARCHITECTURE

The Southport Beach House is architecturally significant at the local level as a fine and very unusual example of a period revival style building that takes stylistic elements from several areas. It is also significant because it has an outstanding Art Deco interior that could rival most nightclubs of the era. It is an example of the fine work of a notable parks department designer, an example of high quality craftsmanship using a large amount of recycled materials, and a building with a high level of integrity, even after decades of intensive recreational use. Parks department draftsman Chris Borggren designed the building in 1936, but construction delays and other projects put off its completion until the fall of 1940, and its opening to the summer of 1941. Built by work relief employees funded by the WPA, the Southport Beach House was a final architectural highlight of the park development era of the 1930s.

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The period revival styles of architecture were popular between 1900 and 1940. They were based on historic architectural styles and included the Colonial Revival, Georgian Revival, Tudor Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean Revival styles, as well as some less well-known variations. As their names suggest, these styles revived historic Colonial, Georgian, Tudor, Spanish, and Mediterranean architectural details. A related style was the Classical Revival style, used primarily for institutional buildings because it features massive classical details such as columns and pediments that were more suitable to those buildings.⁴²

The Southport Beach House includes details from several period revival styles. Its overall appearance suggests an English manor house with details from Classical, Mediterranean, and Tudor Revival architecture. For example, the west elevation stresses classical motifs such as the parapet roof, pilasters, frontispiece, and round-arched reveals. The symmetrical proportions of the building and its massing and composition evoke a manor house set in the English countryside. Yet, on the east elevation, there are details that also suggest the Tudor Revival style. The casement windows and the stepped openings sloping down each end of the projecting gables are examples of this influence. The large arches over the lower level even suggest a Mediterranean Revival influence, which is further suggested by the round-arched concrete balustrades that suggest an Italian piazza.

The use of all of the different motifs described above might ordinarily create something unattractive and stylistically confusing, yet, here, the features all work together to create a building of unusual beauty and elegance. Much of the beauty of this building stems from its proportions. It has very symmetrical features and each side is a mirror image of the other on all the elevations.

Another stylistic surprise of this building is its Art Deco interior. Entering the first floor of the building is like stepping into a 1930s nightclub where you might easily find Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing to a swing combo on the small stage in the ballroom. The Art Deco details are lavish and well-executed. Even small details, like the door handles and plates, or the ladies lounge in the women's restroom, were not overlooked in creating the nightclub atmosphere. The details include many common motifs like chevrons, stylized volutes, rectilinear designs, fern motifs, and stylized geometric motifs. Even the acoustical tile ceiling features Art Deco details of impressive quality and design. The first floor of this building is not only architecturally significant, but it is also an important artifact of popular culture during an important era in American history.

⁴² Barbara Wyatt, ed., *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II*, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Architecture, pp. 2-28--2-33.

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The Southport Beach House was built at the end of the WPA period of park development in Kenosha, although it was designed earlier. But, it took four years to complete. During that time, it would have been easy to cut corners on the building, removing details to save time and costs. In fact, one of the last items completed for the building was the construction of the concrete balustrades on the exterior. This detail could have easily been altered, yet it was built as designed, and it adds to the overall architectural interest of the building. It is likely that other such details were completed at the end of the project rather than being altered or removed.

There is a high quality of craftsmanship that is evident throughout the building. Rather than create a simple, utilitarian building for the beach, the parks department decided to give this building an elegant design and unusual interior that made it a multi-functional structure. In fact, after building another beach house with fewer facilities, it is apparent that in this building, the parks department went all out to create a large recreational building that could be used for many purposes. The high quality of craftsmanship of the building is particularly interesting because it was done by relief workers, most of whom had no training in construction or had worked in outside jobs. Floyd Carlson, the parks director at the time, stated in one of his parks department reports that the men on work relief projects in the parks had given a "good account of themselves," and this building is evidence of the high quality of their work.

Another feature that adds architectural interest is the use of recycled materials. Recycled bricks or other materials were sometimes used for period revival buildings to evoke an authenticity modern materials could not give. In the case of the beach house, the recycled bricks, slate tiles and interior marble trim were combined to make an attractive and stylish building.

The building's unusual design came from Chris Borggren. Borggren was a native of Denmark and trained in architecture in Copenhagen and in Chicago. He was a draftsman for the parks department in the 1930s, but his work shows a skill equal to many architects of the period. His first designs were for simple picnic shelters in Alford Park in 1933 and they stood out for their high quality and innovative appearance. The Simmons Island Beach House was his first major work and it shows that he was well trained in the historic styles. The Southport Beach House is an even better example of Borggren's skill in using many historic style motifs to make an architectural gem. His Art Deco interior is outstanding, but earlier he showed he could use this style on the exterior of a building when he designed the impressive Art Deco fieldhouse at the lake front park (not extant). Borggren's buildings show that he was adept at the historic styles and the modern ones, as well.⁴³

⁴³ Ross, p. 458.

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Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

Finally, what adds to the architectural significance of this building is its high level of integrity. There have been some alterations to the exterior, primarily boarding up openings. But, these alterations do not overly detract from the building's historic integrity. In particular, the Art Deco ballroom and lobby has seen little remodeling. It exists as an almost completely intact artifact of another era when nightclubs were in vogue and ballroom dancing was a weekly occurrence. The lower level bathing facilities are also highly intact. These facilities, including the open-air dressing rooms and the office and check areas of the lower level, are in need of some rehabilitation, but their historic features are largely intact.

The Southport Beach House is architecturally significant at the local level because of its unique architectural style and outstanding Art Deco interior. It is also the work of an important local designer, used interesting building materials, and it has a high quality of construction and a high level of integrity. The combination of fine historic style elements, a lavish interior, and interesting recycled materials give the building a distinctiveness not seen in other similar public buildings. Rather than build a simple, functional bath house, the parks department presented the citizens of Kenosha with an multi-functional recreation "mansion." The high quality of construction has withstood decades of use with few modern alterations, resulting in a high level of integrity. For all these reasons, the building is an important architectural landmark in the city, a landmark that anyone who helped build it would be still proud of today, and a landmark that gives the community an interesting choice when looking for public facilities for parties and public events.

Southport Beach House
Name of Property

Kenosha County
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested previously listed in the National Register previously determined eligible by the National Register designated a National Historic landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
 Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	433300	4712210	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Carol Lohry Cartwright	date	9/5/02
organization	prepared for the City of Kenosha	telephone	262-473-6820
street & number	W7646 Hackett Road	zip code	53190
city or town	Whitewater	state	WI

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARY

The boundary of the Southport Beach House is a rectangle whose sides are described below, and as indicated on the attached site map:

The north boundary corresponds to a line 75 feet north of the building (this line generally corresponds to the end of the embankment located north of the building);

The east boundary is a line drawn 50 feet from the east façade of the building;

The south boundary corresponds to a line located 75 feet south of the building (this line generally corresponds to the end of the embankment located south of the building), except for where it runs along the line of riprap on the shore;

The west boundary corresponds to the base of the planting circle located within the circular drive leading to the building; this line is located approximately 175 feet from the west façade of the building.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary encompasses the historic setting of the beach house, including an area sufficient to encompass the historic setting of the building, while drawing out the active areas of the park and the parking lot surrounding the building. The entry drive includes a very low scale circular planting bed, which is included because it serves to visually frame the approach to the building from the street. The boundary reflects the area where the beach house has been located in Southport Park since its construction dates between 1936-1941.

Southport Beach House

Kenosha County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Art Strong, Director		
organization	City of Kenosha Department of Parks	date	9/5/02
street&number	3617 65 th Street	telephone	262-653-4052
city or town	Kenosha	state	WI
		zip code	53142

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Kenosha, Kenosha County, WI

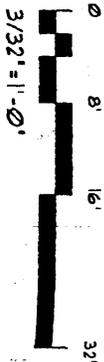
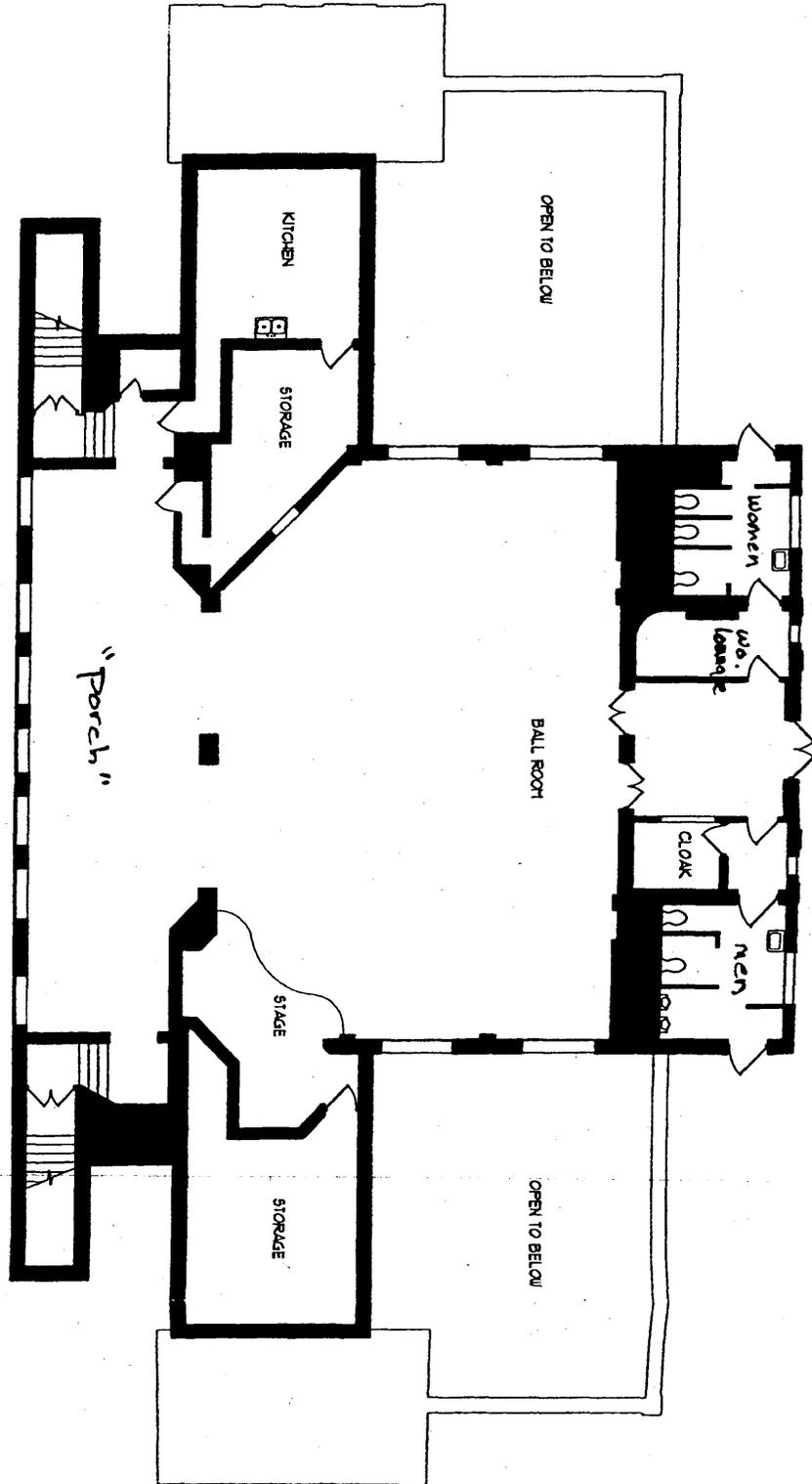
SOUTHPORT BEACH HOUSE, Kenosha, Kenosha County, Wisconsin. Photos by Carol Cartwright, July 2002. Negatives on file in the Historic Preservation Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

Views:

- 1 of 16: Site view, from the southwest.
- 2 of 16: Main elevation, from the southwest.
- 3 of 16: Main or west elevation, central block.
- 4 of 16: East and north elevations, from the northeast.
- 5 of 16: East and south elevations, from the southeast.
- 6 of 16: Interior, main entrance and lobby.
- 7 of 16: Interior, lobby entrance into men's room.
- 8 of 16: Interior, north entrance into main ballroom.
- 9 of 16: Interior, Art Deco detail in lobby between entrances into main ballroom.
- 10 of 16: Interior, ballroom looking into "porch."
- 11 of 16: Interior, stage area of ballroom.
- 12 of 16: Interior, ballroom.
- 13 of 16: Interior, ballroom, looking back at entrances into lobby.
- 14 of 16: Interior, detail over entrances into lobby and of the ceiling.
- 15 of 16: Interior, ballroom.
- 16 of 16: Interior, "porch" area.

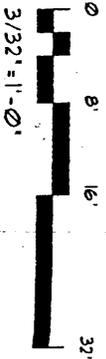
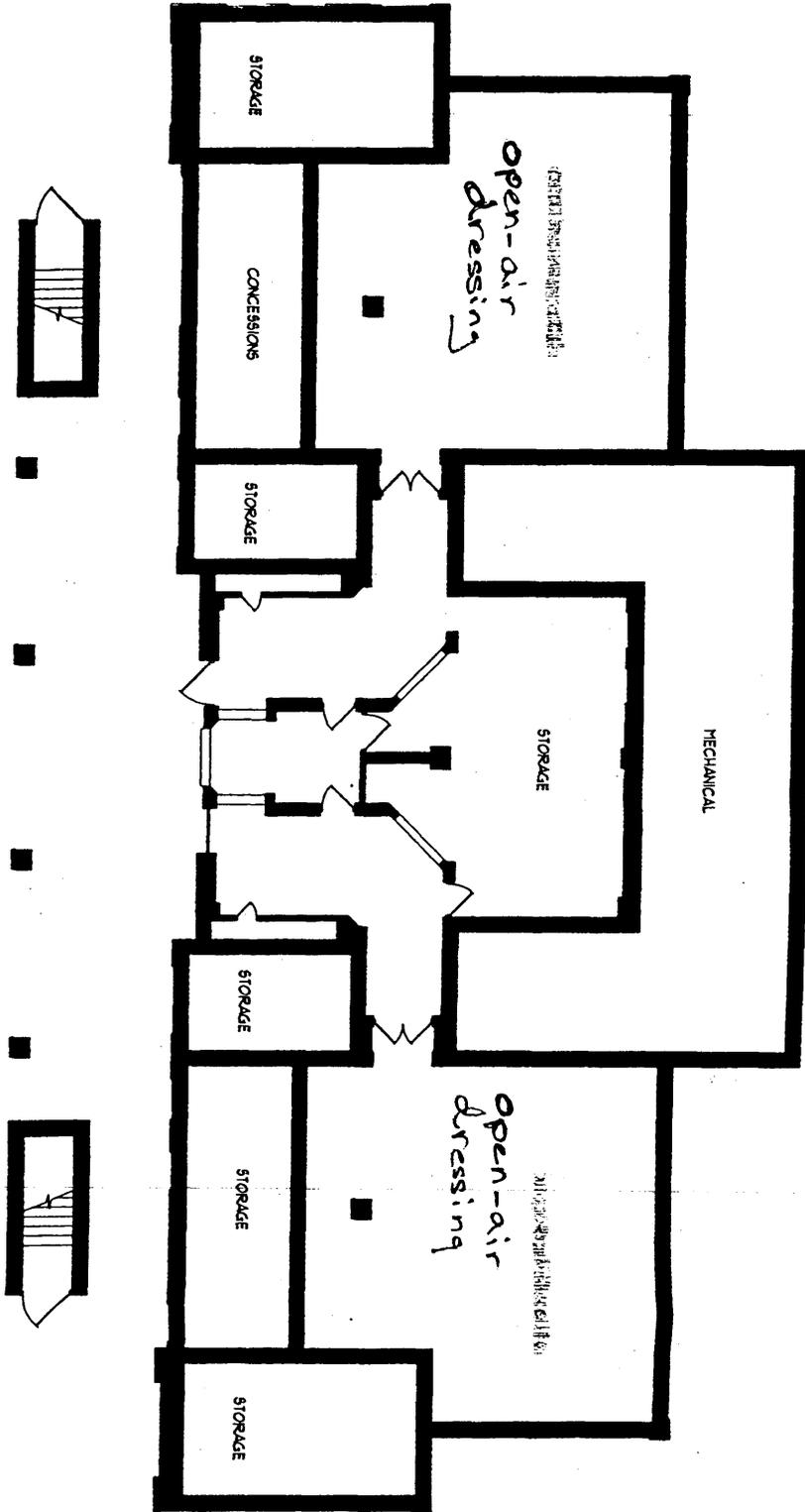
SOUTHPORT BEACH HOUSE
 KENOSHA, KENOSHA COUNTY, WI

FIRST FLOOR



SOUTHPORT BEACH HOUSE
 KENOSHA, KENOSHA COUNTY, WI

LOWER LEVEL PLAN



SOUTHPORT PARK

Kenosha, Kenosha County, Wisconsin

— Boundary

