NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES
(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

Common:
East and West Potomac Parks

And/or Historic:
Potomac Flats

2. LOCATION

Street and Number: area bounded by Constitution Avenue, 17th Street, Independence Avenue, Washington Channel, Potomac River and Rock Creek Park

City or Town: Washington

State: District of Columbia

3. CLASSIFICATION

<table>
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<th>MOVEMENT</th>
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<td>Being Considered</td>
<td>Yes: Unrestricted</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. AGENCY

National Park Service, Department of the Interior

Regional Headquarters (If applicable)

National Capital Parks

State: District of Columbia

5. LOCATION OR LEGAL DESCRIPTION

None exists--parks are reclaimed land

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Title of Survey: National Park Service survey in compliance with Executive Order 11593

Date of Survey: Federal

Depository for Survey Records:

National Capital Parks

Street and Number:

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

City or Town: Washington

State: District of Columbia

For NPS use only

Entry Date: 

County: 

State: 

Code: 

11 District of Columbia

Code: 

001
Most of the land known as Potomac Park was originally underwater, unnavigable shoals, or useless swamp land. That the area was reclaimed, beginning in 1834, was merely as an incident in the construction of the "Long Bridge" (currently the railroad bridge site), and later as a vital sanitary measure. In order to construct the "Long Bridge," it was necessary in 1834 to build an approach on a solid earth causeway. This was done on top of the shoals on the District side of the Potomac, and the fill used was mud from the dredging of the river channels and from excavations under Dupont Circle. After most of the present area had been filled, the Potomac River which had once flowed very near the base of the Washington Monument, was now some distance westward from the Monument. The Washington Channel, which lies between Hains Point and the Naval Air Station, was kept open and separate from the river to provide a quiet harbour. Unlike the river, however, the Channel was inclined to fill with mud. To remedy this, it became necessary to regulate the tidal pools in the western part of Potomac Park used for washing out the Channel daily. This necessitated the creation of the Tidal Basin, an artificial body of water, which at high tide fills up with water flowing through the inlet bridge and at low tide expels the surplus water under the 14th Street Bridge at the lower end of the Basin. Thus, it sweeps through the Washington Channel taking away mud and sand and keeping the ship lanes of the Channel open.

The reclamation of the Potomac Flats and the excavation of the Tidal Basin had been authorized by Congress by an Act of August 2, 1862, which appropriated $400,000 for the project. It was not, however, until March 3, 1897, by another Act of Congress that:

"the entire area formerly known as the Potomac Flats, and now being reclaimed, together with the tidal reservoirs, be, and the same are hereby, made and declared a public park, under the name of the Potomac Park, and to be forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people."

This Act began the refinement and landscaping of the land for recreational purposes. The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds had received the land from the Corps of Engineers and set out to develop a new park area which "preserved the features of its natural beauty or enhanced the natural landscape." This was done primarily through the clearing of the land for playing fields and picnic grounds and by the erection of several memorials.

The West Potomac Park area was the first to be developed. West Potomac Park is the land west of the railroad bridge, including the Tidal Basin, to Constitution Avenue on the north and to 17th Street on the East. Most of the early work done on the area consisted of grading and paving a roadway, and in 1904 of lining the parkway west of 17th Street with portrait statues from St. Louis. In 1907, a boat dock was built near the bathing beach on the Tidal Basin, and in 1908, the polo fields west of the Tidal Basin was graded and a wooden bandstand erected. Meanwhile, macadam
7. Description (2)

Potomac Park

roadways, the inlet bridge, bridle paths and walkways were being completed throughout the park. On March 25, 1912, 3,000 Japanese cherry trees were received as a gift from the City of Tokyo and ceremonially planted by the Japanese Ambassador's wife and by Mrs. William H. Taft around the Tidal Basin. To these were added 55 flowering peach trees making the area a prime visitor site in the spring. A statue of Captain John Paul Jones, sculpted by Charles H. Niehaus, was unveiled at the foot of 17th Street near the Tidal Basin, in 1912. This was the first permanent monument completed in the park. Work on the Lincoln Memorial, to be built in West Potomac Park, was begun in 1913 with Henry Bacon as the commissioned architect and Daniel Chester French as the Lincoln statue sculptor. The Memorial was dedicated on May 20, 1922, and its construction had done much to improve Potomac Park, notably, the improvement of roadways and the construction of permanent approaches to the Memorial, as well as necessary reinforcement of the land itself as some settling was beginning to occur. During this time, progress was continually being made throughout West Potomac Park with seeding, planting and taming a few more acres into park-like appearance every year.

In 1918 a public beach was completed on the present site of the Jefferson Memorial, and a liquido chlorine plant was installed under the Tidal Basin inlet bridge. Elsewhere in West Potomac Park, the Wilson Administration had authorized the construction of two concrete office buildings along Constitution Avenue, west of 17th Street, to be occupied by the War and Navy Departments during World War I. They were completed in 1918 as "temporary" but were not demolished until 1970. With the completion of the Reflection Pool and the smaller transverse pool at its east end in 1922, the basic present design of West Potomac Park was completed. Although there were to be later constructions in the park, all land was now reclaimed and in use for recreational purposes.

The first improvements in East Potomac Park consisted of the construction of a macadam roadway around the fringes of the park. During this time, several low places behind the sea wall surrounding East Potomac Park were reinforced and filled. Other improvements included clearing the land, planting more cherry trees and laying out a bridle path. During the war years, several acres of the park were used by the Boy Scouts as "war gardens" to produce corn. The first nine of the present golf greens were constructed in 1917 and the last nine completed in 1922. During this era, 15 acres of East Potomac Park were occupied by 41 wooden buildings housing regular army troops on guard duty in Washington. A ferry was launched at this time and for 3 years carried visitros from 7th Street across the Washington Channel to Hains Point.
Potomac Park

7. Description (3)

An automobile tourist camp was set up in 1921 near the railroad bridge on the site of the buildings which had housed the troops during the war. Since 1920, the Girl Scouts had operated a refreshment concession at Hains Point. In 1924 a new concession, the Teahouse, had been erected for them and the Girl Scouts continued to run the concession until 1925.

Up until this time - 1925 - the supervision of Potomac Park had been under the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. In this year, however, that office ceased to exist and was replaced by the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the Nation's Capital. One of the first jobs accomplished by this new department was the elimination of the Tidal Basin bathing beach in 1925, thus restoring the lawn area around the Tidal Basin.

In 1926, a memorial statue to John Ericsson, a Swedish immigrant and designer of the U.S.S. Monitor was completed. Charles Fraser was commissioned as the sculptor and the statue is located on Ohio Drive south of the Lincoln Memorial. In 1928, the 100th anniversary of the opening of the C & O Canal, a memorial plaque was dedicated on the old lock house at 17th Street and Constitution Avenue. Also in 1928, a large ornamental marble urn donated by the President of Cuba to President Coolidge was placed in the rose garden in West Potomac Park. This urn was a fragment of one of the columns that had supported the monument to the U.S.S. Maine in Havana.

In November, 1931, a marble memorial bandstand was dedicated by President Herbert Hoover to District of Columbia residents who had served in the armed forces in World War I. The memorial was designed by Frederick Brooke, Horace Peaslee, and Nathan Wyeth and constructed in West Potomac Park, south of the reflecting pool and west of 17th Street. After the completion of the D.C. War Memorial, the wooden bandstand near the polo field was demolished.

The Arlington Memorial Bridge had been under construction since 1925, and its construction necessitated more reinforcement of parkway approaches. In 1932, the Bridge was first opened to traffic.

On June 10, 1933, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the Nation's Capital was reorganized under the Department of the Interior and on March 2, 1934 was further reorganized as a part of the National Park Service. The administration of the Potomac Parks was thus shifted to its present status.

Rudolf Evans was commissioned in 1931 to design the memorial to Thomas Jefferson. Frederick Law Olmstead was commissioned to do the landscape architecture for the memorial. However, World War II delayed work on the memorial and it was not dedicated until 1947.
7. Description (4)

World War II also brought a reversal in the use of parts of Potomac Park as park land. As during World War I, many temporary war-time measures affecting Potomac Park were enacted. Notably, the covering of the polo field with six inches of asphalt as a parking lot. More temporary measures were the construction of dormitories providing housein for girls working in Washington during the war. In 1949, these buildings were converted into offices for the War Assets Administration and were finally demolished in 1965.

The construction of the Rochambeau Bridge (completed in 1958), the Case Memorial Bridge (completed in 1966), and the George Mason Bridge (completed in 1967) have also somewhat changed the face of Potomac Park due to the necessary approaches, plazas, and overpasses that cut through park land.

In 1954, a 300 year old granite Japanese lantern was presented by the Governor of Tokyo to commemorate Commander Perry's visit to Japan. The lantern is in West Potomac Park and its ceremonial lighting begins the Cherry Blossom Festival each year. In 1958, the Mayor of Yokohama presented a stone pagoda, also placed in West Potomac Park in commemoration of the Treaty of Yokohama. That same year, a plaque memorializing the first air mail flight from Washington, D.C. was dedicated near the river in West Potomac Park. At one time several acres of the park had been used for an air field and the first air mail flight to New York, via Philadelphia had taken three hours, in 1918. Other changes in recent years have been the necessary and recurrent dumping of dredged mud onto Hains Point because of constant settling. The bicycle center, horse stables and Girl Scout Teahouse have all been closed. The Teahouse has become the Ecological Services Lab of the National Park Service and the bicycle center has become offices for a mobile tourist concession. In the Johnson Administration, Potomac Park was the recipient of other additions as a part of Mrs. Johnson's Beautification Program. In 1967, an anonymous gift of $160.00 made possible the 150 foot jet fountain off Hains Point. In that same year, a set of playground equipment donated by the President of Mexico, was presented to the citizens of Washington in commemoration of the Johnson's visit to Mexico.

Today, the landscaping of Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin is a part of a well-integrated plan which includes not only recreational areas, but serves as a background for several memorials and acts as a buffer between the Potomac River, in an area where the river serves as a backdrop to the Federal City, and the parks, drives, and monumental buildings of the Nation's Capital.

Presently, Potomac Park consists of 723.86 acres, most of it open park land ringed by parkways, and divided by concrete walks along the river. Beginning in West Potomac Park, standing memorials and buildings are; the Watergate amphitheater, the Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pools, the statue of
7. Description (5)

Potomac Park

John Paul Jones, the D.C. War Memorial, the John Ericsson statue, the Flowering Japanese cherry trees, the Stone Pagoda, the Japanese Lantern, the Kutz Memorial Bridge, the Jefferson Memorial, the Pansy Gardens and Fountain, the Tulip Gardens, the National Park Service, National Capital Parks Headquarters, the U.S. Park Police Headquarters, tennis courts, golf links, swimming pool, children's playground, and the Lady Bird Johnson Fountain.
The uses of Potomac Park as a recreational facility and its many visitor attractions constitute its significance and uniqueness as an urban park area. Its size, 723.86 acres, allows for a wide variety of activities and special events in a city that not only has a large population but also attracts millions of tourists yearly. With the exception of wartime infringements on some areas of the park, Potomac Park has fulfilled its designers intent "to be...used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people." Some of the recreational facilities are large open playing fields which are used for everything from baseball and rugby to kite flying, a children's playground, and a system of walkways and roadways which are used as bicycling and jogging trails as well as a means for visitors to sightsee at a leisurely pace. There are also several operating concessions including boat rides on the Tidal Basin, tennis courts, golf links, and a swimming pool.

Potomac Park also lends itself to many special event activities, the most famous being the annual Cherry Blossom Festival. This festival has been held every year since 1935 and began as a commemoration of the planting of the first Cherry Trees. The festival is focused in West Potomac Park around the Tidal Basin and is held early in the Spring. The Park has also been the scene of activities such as civil-rights and anti-war demonstrations and has even hosted several weddings. The annual President's Cup Regatta is held on the Potomac and viewed yearly from East Potomac Park.

Another equally important aspect of Potomac Park is providing a setting for the memorials and monuments within it. And, in addition to complementing the memorials within its boundaries, Potomac Park provides a backdrop for many other federal buildings and monuments within Washington. Across 17th Street, Potomac Park becomes part of the Monument grounds and the Mall, and to the Northwest, it becomes part of Rock Creek Park and Parkway.

That the design of Potomac Park was evolutionary and utilized the talents of many architects, artists, and landscape architects is even more important when one realizes that over 100 years of designing were involved, yet each new addition enhances others before it and none can be said to...
8. Significance (2)

be most prominent. The people who worked on, directed, and designed for the creation of Potomac Park are numerous. During the years from 1867 to 1913, the reclamation project was under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers. Major Peter C. Hains, for whom Hains Point was named, was the officer in charge during the years 1882-1891. The designer of the Tidal Basin, Major W.C. Twining, was another member of the Corps of Engineers and at one time the Tidal Basin was popularly known as "Twining Lake". Potomac Park also contains many memorial to Washingtonians, one of the few areas of Washington to do so. The Kutz Memorial Bridge across the Tidal Basin was dedicated in honor of Charles W. Kutz who was Commissioner of Engineering for the District from 1914-15, 1918-20, and 1941-44. Another prominent Washingtonian, Charles Carroll Glover, financier and philanthropist, was instrumental in getting President Cleveland to sign the Act of August 2, 1882. The D. C. War Memorial honors 435 of the District residents who served in the armed forces during World War I.

Architects who designed or helped plan various memorials in the park were: Henry Bacon, Lincoln Memorial; John L. Nagle, Arlington Memorial Bridge; Frederick D. Ocm, Frederick H. Brooke, Horace W. Peaslee, and Nathan Wyeth, D.C. War Memorial; John Russell Pope, Jefferson Memorial; Paul P. Cret, Rochambeau and George Mason Memorial Bridges; and Archie Alexander, Kutz Memorial Bridge.

Sculptors included Charles H. Niehaus, John Paul Jones Statue; Daniel Chester French, Lincoln Memorial Status; James E. Fraser, John Ericsson Statue; and Rudolf Evans, Thomas Jefferson Statue.

Among the many landscape architects involved were those from the Corps of Engineers, the Office of Buildings and Public Grounds of the National Capital, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, and the National Park Service. Frederick Law Olmstead, who designed the landscaping for New York's Central Park, was commissioned to work on the Potomac Park development and is responsible for the grounds around the Jefferson Memorial.
9. Bibliography


National Capital Parks, a pamphlet by the National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1934.


A History of National Capital Parks, Cornelius W. Heine, Washington, D.C.
**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**


**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF PROPERTY** 723.86 acres

**11. FOR PREPARED BY**

- **NAME AND TITLE**: Helen Dillon, Historian
- **DATE**: July 15, 1972
- **BUSINESS ADDRESS**: National Capital Parks
- **STREET AND NUMBER**: 1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.
- **PHONE**: 426-6957
- **CITY OR TOWNSHIP**: Washington
- **STATE**: District of Columbia

**12. CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION**

- **State Liaison Officer recommendation**:
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No
  - [ ] None

- **State Liaison Officer Signature**

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

- [ ] National
- [ ] State
- [ ] Local

- **Federal Representative Signature**
- **Date**

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

- **Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**
- **Date**
- **ATTEST**
- **Keeper of The National Register**
- **Date**

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**GPO 935-449**