



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2007
No. 07-23

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HIGHBRIDGE POOL COMPLEX BECOMES A NEW YORK CITY LANDMARK

Washington Heights Facility Is the Seventh of 11 WPA-Funded Swimming Pools Constructed Under La Guardia and Moses To Gain Landmark Designation

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously voted to grant landmark status to the Highbridge Play Center and pool in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, recognizing the recreational facility for its scenic location, unique construction materials and distinctive design and configuration. Built under former Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, and funded by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), the pool was one of 11 that opened across the City in the summer of 1936, at the height of the Great Depression.



The Highbridge Play Center stretches along Amsterdam Avenue between 172nd and 174th streets on 2.54 acres in an elevated area of Highbridge Park, and offers sweeping views of the Harlem Valley. The center was constructed over a reservoir, near a stately, 19th-century water tower that was once part of the system that supplied water to the City, and arranged in a way that recalls the former use of the site. The complex is surrounded by a vast retaining wall made of cut stone, the same material that was used to face the water tower, also a designated New York City landmark.

"The ingenious location of the complex, and use of cut blocks of stone are reminders of the historic importance of the site," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "Visitors now read the pool in the same way they read the reservoir in connection to the water tower more than a century ago. The entire facility was, and remains to this day, an architectural and engineering marvel whose future deserves to be secured."

"The summer of 1936, deep in the Great Depression, broke local heat records but the debut of Highbridge Pool and Play Center opened as a refuge to residents of Washington Heights," said Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe. "Not only was the massive pool able to accommodate more than 4,800 people, it was an example of state-of-the-art engineering and fine design that was sensitive to the site's water-related past. In the shadow of the historic Highbridge Water Tower and the old Highbridge receiving reservoir, this monumental ensemble of structures is a focal point of the neighborhood that rightfully deserves its new landmark status."



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The Highbridge pool opened to the public on July 14, 1936, and measures 166 by 228 feet. The Art Moderne-style bath house features an entry distinguished by a curved, slightly projecting portico with two, large fluted cast-concrete piers.

The pool was the fifth of 11 that opened that summer, and joins six others that have been given landmark status since June 2006: Astoria, Crotona, Jackie Robinson, McCarren, Thomas Jefferson and Sunset. The other pools and recreational facilities that remain under consideration for landmark designation are the Betsy Head and Red Hook Play Centers, in Brooklyn, and the Tompkinsville Play Center (also known as Joseph H. Lyons Pool), and interior of the Tompkinsville Play Center Bath House on Staten Island.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to some 24,000 buildings, including 1,172 individual landmarks, 108 interior landmarks, nine scenic landmarks and 88 historic districts in all five boroughs. Under the law, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough. There are 11 commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the Mayor for staggered three-year terms.