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 National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any 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.

1. Name of Property
   Historic name: Belle Isle Park Additional Documentation and Boundary Increase
   Other names/site number: __________________________
   Name of related multiple property listing:
   __________________________
   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location
   Street & number: Detroit River, accessed from E. Jefferson Avenue and south extension of E. Grand Boulevard
   City or town: Detroit
   State: MI
   County: Wayne
   Not For Publication: [ ]
   Vicinity: [ ]

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 at the following level(s) of significance:
   ___ national ___ statewide ___ local
   Applicable National Register Criteria:
   ___A ___B ___C ___D

______________________________________
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date
___MI SHPO ________________________________
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Title: ___________________________ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification
I hereby certify that this property is:
___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain: ) ___________________________

Signature of the Keeper ___________________________ Date of Action ___________________________

5. Classification
Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: ___________________________
Public – Local X
Public – State ___________________________
Public – Federal X

Category of Property
(Check only one box.)

Building(s) ___________________________
District X
Site ___________________________

Sections 1-6 page 2
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Wayne Co., MI

County and State

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Contributing</th>
<th>Noncontributing</th>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>90</td>
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</table>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register ___ Belle Isle Historic District (listed 1974) - nomination did not count resources; Detroit Yacht Club (listed 2011- 2 Contributing buildings, 10 Contributing structures, 3 Non-contributing structures).

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- LANDSCAPE/city park
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/monument/marker
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility
- COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

(see continuation sheet Section 6, page 1 for other historic functions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- LANDSCAPE/city park
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/monument/marker
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility
Belle Isle Park  
Name of Property

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant  

(see continuation sheet Section 6, page 1 for other current functions)
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
__Gothic Revival, Late Victorian________
__Tudor Revival________
__Shingle Style________
__Italian Renaissance____
__Beaux Arts________
__Bungalow/Craftsman________
__Art Deco, International Style________
Other: Mediterranean

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: __CONCRETE, STONE, WOOD, METAL________

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Introduction

Belle Isle was listed in the National Register in 1974. This new nomination form with new mapping and photographs is intended to serve several purposes:
• Update and amplify the information to meet current register standards: The 1974 form provided information about only those features of the park deemed to be of key historic importance as of 1974. This new form meets current standards in providing information about all features, contributing and non-contributing.
• Include the Detroit Boat Club and Detroit Yacht Club properties as part of the district: The 1974 form provided no specific boundary description. The Detroit Boat and Yacht Clubs were not mentioned and whether these properties was included was not clear. This new nomination includes information on both properties (the Yacht Club has also been individually listed in the register in recent years) and the new boundary description specifically includes those properties.
• Establish the case for Belle Isle Park being eligible for the National Register at the national level of historic significance as one of the nation’s pre-eminent parks: The 1974 form listed the level of significance as state.
Summary Paragraph

Belle Isle Park is a 985-acre, roughly oval-shaped, island park in the Detroit River whose west end is approximately two miles upstream (east) from the city of Detroit’s major downtown intersection of Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. The island covers roughly 1.5 square miles and is 15,000 feet in length from east to west and 4,800 feet wide at a maximum from north to south. The mostly level, low-lying island features a designed landscape with open lawn areas, many of them studded by large mature trees; several man-made lakes connected by winding canals; and a roughly 200-acre forested area near its east end. The park’s road and path network, which has not been greatly changed since the original layouts in the 1880s, features curving, mostly one-way roads, some of which have been widened to accommodate automobile traffic. The island contains over 200 above-ground resources dating from the nineteenth century to the present that range from large primary park buildings and structures such as a casino, conservatory, aquarium, athletic building, and boat and yacht club quarters to a lighthouse and carillon tower to comfort stations and picnic shelters, bridges each of distinctive design, and a series of outdoor public memorial sculptures that are mainly grouped along the island’s main thoroughfare of Central Avenue. The island also hosts numerous recreational facilities, including a golf course, putting/driving range, environmental center, ice skating pavilion, beach, playgrounds and athletic fields, and a music shell that mostly date to the early to mid-twentieth century. Also present are several governmental installations sited here because of the park’s location along an important navigable waterway and water supply source, and adjacent to an international boundary – these include U. S. Coast Guard and city police, harbor master, and water department facilities.

Narrative Description

The 985-acre island is oriented west-southwest and east-northeast in the Detroit River, but in this nomination all cardinal directions will reference an east-west orientation of the island to simplify the descriptions. The Detroit River is a twenty-four nautical mile long strait between Lake St. Clair on the northeast and Lake Erie to the southwest, part of the connection between Lakes Huron and Erie, and forms part of the U.S.-Canada border. At Detroit the adjacent part of Canada is located south of the United States. The river contains numerous islands, with Belle Isle being the third largest, after Grosse Ile (in the U. S.) and Fighting Island (in Canada) downstream. In the vicinity of downtown Detroit and Belle Isle, the river averages about one half mile wide. At Belle Isle, the river forms a north channel between Belle Isle and the Detroit/American side averaging 2,100 feet wide and a south channel between Belle Isle and Canada (Windsor, Ontario) that is roughly 2,000 feet in width.

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1 The city of Windsor, Ontario, Canada lies due south of Belle Isle Park and downtown Detroit.
2 The north channel’s width ranges from 1,900 to 3,600 feet, while the width of the south channel is more even with a range from 1,800 to 2,700 feet.
The island park is accessed from the intersection of E. Jefferson Avenue, a primary Detroit street running along the river northeast from the city’s downtown, and E. Grand Boulevard via a southern extension of the boulevard as a landscaped wide divided road that leads past Gabriel Richard Park to the massive 1923 concrete arch bridge spanning the north channel to the island’s northwest shore.

Belle Isle provides a diverse panorama of water views along and down the Detroit River and up Lake St. Clair (which begins a short distance east) and inland views along the park’s lakes and open spaces. The views include shoreline views of downtown Detroit and its skyline, including the city’s tallest building complex, the GM Renaissance Center, and the Ambassador Bridge, and E. Jefferson Avenue properties and also those of Windsor, Ontario, on the Canadian (southern) side of the Detroit River (see Photo 9 for the view of Detroit’s downtown skyline, the Ambassador Bridge, and downtown Windsor, Ontario (far left) from the western tip of the island/park). The Detroit riverfront across from the island contains several small parks interspersed with high-rise residential buildings that date to the early twentieth through mid-twentieth century, a small number of residential subdivisions, and private marinas. On the Windsor side to the south, the riverfront is dominated by residential areas of twentieth-century single-family homes on streets oriented perpendicular to the river, along with clusters of high-rise residential towers.

The island that became Belle Isle Park was roughly 650 acres in size at the time of its purchase by the City of Detroit in 1879. The low-lying level island, with an average elevation of only a few feet above the river level, was expanded by over 300 acres through several landfilling episodes in the early twentieth century. Three artificial islands were created in the twentieth century on the north shore, all of them accessed by small bridges. The island was expanded to the west for the Scott Fountain in the 1910s and 20s and to the east for the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse in the late 1920s. The southern shore was extended for the model yacht basin in the mid-1930s and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum in the 1950s. The north shore received new fill for the beach and for the artificial islands in the early twentieth century. The shores of the island are now buttressed with either stone or concrete rip-rap or metal sheet pilings; in the past, the shoreline was reinforced with debris from demolished buildings from early twentieth century downtown Detroit construction projects.

Spatial Organization and Land Patterns

The park is composed of a series of natural, recreational, commemorative, governmental, and cultural spaces that occupy portions of both shoreline areas and the park’s interior. The locations of some of these correspond to functional needs, such as the lighthouse at the east end, while others are the result of the original late nineteenth-century park plans which laid out functions within the park. With the ever-increasing usage of the park, new attractions or facilities either were added where there was a vacant area or, as was the case later in the twentieth century, replaced earlier functions. Most of the resources are easily accessed and adjacent to roads and parking.
An overview of the arrangement of the island’s major resources is presented from west to east, as a primary part of the circulation system, mostly one-way roads, is a series of roads making a counterclockwise circuit that includes the riverfront on both sides. The island is accessed by land from the Belle Isle Bridge, now called the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge, south of the Jefferson Avenue and Grand Boulevard intersection. Narrow strips of grass-covered lawn flank the north-south boulevard approaching the bridge to the island from the mainland. The lawn areas have double rows of crabapple and maple trees arranged in a half-circle, complemented by rectangular planted flower beds. A triangular-footprint grass-covered lawn separates the north and south lanes at Jefferson Avenue and Grand Boulevard. Gabriel Richard Park lies east and blends seamlessly with the eastern strip of land that borders the bridge’s northern approach road. This park is not included in the historic district’s boundaries. On the west side of the bridge approach area between E. Jefferson and the river is the former site of the huge Uniroyal tire plant, demolished in 1985 and still vacant land. A chain link fence separates the bridge approach area from this former industrial area. North of the bridge approach area along E. Jefferson, the area is generally commercial in nature, with mid-to late twentieth-century one-story restaurant, gas station, and other commercial structures.

Coming southward off the bridge onto the island, directly ahead the island’s entrance area features a large grass-covered mound with a floral clock display (Photo 4), with a lawn-covered triangular island in front of the mound where the road divides. The triangular island is bordered by Sunset Drive, the one-way west-bound entrance road on the island, on the west and on the east by the west-bound Picnic Way, which leads to the bridge to exit the park. A narrow roadway between the triangular island and circular mound allows one-way passage from Picnic Way west onto Sunset Drive.

West from the bridge off Sunset Drive along the river’s north channel are located a small cluster of fenced-off governmental and public service facilities – the Harbormaster Complex, Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) facility, and the Detroit Police Radio Station – set unobtrusively well back from the drive.

The rest of the island’s west end contains passive recreational and open areas. The original northwest end of the island held a large extended ferry dock that served as the main visitor entry point. Today the Scott Fountain with its large lagoon and a small triangular open space at the island’s pointed tip occupy the present western end of the island, land created through filling for the fountain project in the early twentieth century.

The island’s long south shore features one of the man-made lakes at either end, connected by one of the nineteenth-century canals. East of the Scott Fountain, the Aquarium and Conservatory complex and park administration/maintenance area are situated just north of the south shoreline road, which is called The Strand. To their east of them is the athletic complex, which includes playing fields, tennis courts, a running track, handball courts, and the 1899 Athletic Building. This complex dominates the south side of the island’s central area. Along the south shore itself are mostly open areas, but also two fishing piers, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, the former Model Yacht Basin, and the U.S. Coast Guard facility.
Belle Isle Park  
Wayne Co., MI  

At the far east end of the island is the Blue Heron Lagoon, the largest body of water within the island. It is flanked by an open meadow area on the south and a golf putting course/driving range on the northwest. A 1970s Nature Center complex is located nearby to the lagoon’s west. The Forest Area occupies a large part of the park’s interior, west of Blue Heron Lagoon and south of Lake Muskoday, in the island’s eastern portion. On the island’s north shore, the Detroit Yacht Club (DFC) complex dominates the view as the one-way Lakeside Drive rounds the island’s northeast corner and heads west. The currently unused golf course, with the Forest Area east of it, are located to the club’s southeast, across Lake Muskoday. The bathhouse and beach complex is further west on the north shore, followed by the Detroit Boat Club (DBC) complex, which stands just east of the mainland bridge.

The island’s interior contains open picnicking areas, punctuated by many mature trees, and the formal west-east Central Avenue, which displays a series of bronze and stone memorials and statues along much of its length. The roughly 200-acre Forest Area, which is bisected by a curvilinear section of Central Avenue and a roughly parallel road on either side, lies east of the picnic area.

Views and Vistas

The island’s exposed setting in the middle of the Detroit River offers many opportunities for dramatic views and vistas, including downstream views of the skylines of both Windsor and Detroit and the Ambassador Bridge, a 1929 suspension bridge which connects the U.S. and Canada. Upstream views are dominated by open views of Lake St. Clair, which is northeast of the island. The island park’s location has also historically provided a prominent viewing spot for boating events on the river and the annual joint fireworks display in late June that is part of the Windsor-Detroit International Freedom Festival.

Circulation networks

The roadway and path system of Belle Isle Park consists of a series of perimeter and connecting interior roads that circulate mainly in a one-way direction around and crossing through the island. Most of the roads follow curvilinear routes. The exceptions are Central Avenue – the major west-east road – and Inselruhe Avenue, which crosses the island in a north-south direction, intersecting Central at right angles. The shoreline roads, which total five and one-quarter miles, were first developed in the 1880s.³ The perimeter roads – Sunset Drive on the west side, The Strand along the south side, Lakeside Drive on the east, and Riverbank Drive along the north side – and Central Avenue through the island’s center – today range between three and five lanes in width and are all one-way roads. The inner connecting roads – which include Inselruhe Avenue, Loiter Way, Vista Avenue, Woodside Drive, Oakway Trail, and Picnic Way – are mostly two-lane, although some are dedicated as one-way routes.

Sidewalks and paths are located throughout many areas of the park, although they are not consistently present and do not connect with one another in organized ways. There were five

³ Anderson 2001, p. 51
miles of gravel pedestrian walkways by 1900 and separated bridle and walking paths were located in the Forest Area on the east end of the island.\textsuperscript{4} Widths and paving treatments vary on them, the variation illustrated by the wide concrete walkway that connects the Kiley Pavilion to the small lagoon south of the Casino \textit{versus} the more narrow concrete walkways around the Aquarium, Conservatory, and the administration/maintenance complex. The area around the Scott Fountain and lagoon has a small number of sidewalks, all of which are arranged in formal, straight routes. Paths, mostly unpaved, are present in the Meadow (No. 125) adjacent to the Blue Heron Lagoon (No.120) and through the Forest (No. 91). The paths through the Forest Area remain in place, although some have become overgrown and not passable. A few “social” paths have been created, including one that accesses a small beach on the extreme northeast corner of the island. Most of the picnic shelters are approached via the lawns next to the roads and there are no dedicated pathways or sidewalks to most.

Parking on the island consists of some dedicated areas along most of the roads for parallel parking and some diagonal parking. Individual surface parking lots are concentrated around the major attractions, including the Casino, Conservatory/Aquarium, Nature Center, Flynn Skating Pavilion, Scott Fountain, Bathhouse/Beach area, golf putting course/driving range, and the boat and yacht clubs. The island’s largest parking area, located east of the Scott Fountain, was only recently created for the Grand Prix events held annually at the west end of the island.

There are no public marinas or docking sites at the island. Access to the island by water is only possible at the Detroit Yacht Club, but access there is limited as it is a private club. Access to the boat club is currently not available as the facility is closed to the public.

Alterations to the circulation system consist of some widening of roads and the truncating of Vista Avenue in the island’s center for the Safariland Zoo around 1980. Sunset Drive was constructed in the 1920s when the western end was extended with fill. Otherwise, there has been little change to the number of roads, their general orientation, and their original names.

\textbf{Boundary demarcations}

The majority of the island’s places and attractions are not separated from one another by formal boundary demarcation. Although the island is entirely owned by the City of Detroit, except for 1/4 acre owned by the Coast Guard, several areas are fenced off due mostly to functions that require limited access for security or safety reasons. These functions include the Detroit Waterworks, CSO facility, and Detroit Police Radio Towers/Station areas on the north side of the island, which are all delimited by chain link fences and locked gates. Both the Detroit Boat Club and Detroit Yacht Club complexes on the north side of the island have gate houses/fences at their entrances and both are accessed via small bridges to the artificial islands on which they are located.

\textsuperscript{4} Anderson 2001, p. 51, 1930 Plan of Section 1, Belle Isle Park
Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI

The Coast Guard complex near the southeast corner of the island is also bordered by a tall chain link fence around the land (north) side and the east and west sides. The Conservatory and formal garden on the south side are also enclosed by an iron fence with gates; a brick wall and iron gate close off the south end of the Aquarium and Conservatory grounds. The park administration maintenance yard is enclosed by a low early twentieth-century brick wall, with a chain-link gate at the yard’s entrance.

Several of the recreational attractions are bordered by chain link fences due to their “attractive nuisance” nature. These attractions include the giant slide east of Inselruhe Avenue, the pool area and water slide in the public bathhouse/pool area on the island’s north side, and the closed Safariland Zoo and the golf course and its ancillary buildings in the island’s interior. The Safariland Zoo area was always enclosed, as it contained zoo animals and had turnstiles at the entrance since it was a paying concern.

Within the athletic field area, the tennis courts are also enclosed by tall chain link fences, but these courts, present in the park since the late nineteenth century, always had some kind of fencing. A black chain link fence encircles the area that contains the mid-twentieth-century driving range and putting course on the northeast end of the island.

The mainland approach to the island via the Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge is distinguished from its surroundings on the west by a tall chain link fence between the grass-covered lawn of the approach and the former site of the Uniroyal plant, which is now vacant. To the east of the E. Grand Boulevard extension leading to the bridge, there is no hard demarcation between the landscaped approach and the parkland of Gabriel Richard Park, except for a concrete sidewalk that, forming a half-circle path to Jefferson Avenue, is lined by a single line of small crabapple trees.

Although not functioning as boundary demarcations, modern split rail wood fencing along Lakeside Drive at the east end bordering the meadow area, around the east part of Lake Okonoka, and at the White House in the park administration area east of Vista Avenue provides physical edging in these areas.

Vegetation related to land use

The island features both natural and designed vegetation that reflect the intent of original park designers, as well as the designers that followed in subsequent episodes of the park’s development. The roughly 200-acre Forest Area (No. 91) near the east end of the island originally covered much more of the island. Retaining and conserving the forest as a natural area was strongly recommended by the park’s original designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Olmsted’s vision for this part of the park has been maintained down to the present. The Forest Area contains mature red ash, pin oaks, red oaks, Shumard oak, elms, silver maples, sycamores, and other native tree species, and includes the largest known pumpkin ash in the state of Michigan. The Forest Area has experienced some invasive and other understory growth and the loss of many trees to disease, insect infestation, and limited maintenance.
Belle Isle Park

Wayne Co., MI

Name of Property

County and State

The picnic areas west of the Forest Area hold many mature trees, especially oaks and maples, but an even greater number have been lost through the years and not replaced. Aerial views of the island from the 1920s reveal substantially more tree cover in the Forest Area and picnic areas. Most of the groupings of oaks, maples, locust, sycamore, horse chestnut, and elm trees, especially in the Forest Area and picnic areas, appear to be original to the island and were not specifically planted for the park. But these areas also contain more recently planted stands of evergreen and deciduous trees, including additional maples, horse chestnut, and locusts. The small islands in the man-made south lakes of Lake Takoma and Lake Okonoka are mostly infilled with quaking aspen trees and shrubby growth. Historic views indicate that the islands were always covered with trees and low-lying vegetation.

Arranged groupings of trees are seen at the west end of the island and around the lakes. The most formal arrangement is a single row of maple trees at the west end around Sunset Drive, which date to the 1930s-1940s; while some trees have been removed, the formal linear row is basically maintained. A double linear row of trees just east of the Scott Fountain which dated to the late 1920s-early 1930s was removed for the large parking area east of the fountain. The open lawn area west of the fountain was also planted with trees in the still present formal double row by 1931.

Single rows of crabapple and maple trees ring the mainland side of the Belle Isle Bridge approach; these trees date to the 1980s when this area was reconfigured for a new entrance/exit circulation system.

Large old weeping willow trees are clustered around the three lakes and along The Strand and Nashua Creek on the island’s south side. Mature, and more recently planted, maple trees also line The Strand and Riverbank Drive on the south and north sides. Mature cottonwood trees are mostly seen along the north and south shores. Rows of locust trees are also commonly seen along The Strand and Riverbank Drive.

Evergreen trees are not present in large quantities, but are grouped around the Belle Isle Pump Station (No. 8) at the northwest corner, in the grass-covered traffic island that holds the Samuel Smith Flagpole (No. 89) north of The Strand at Vista Avenue on the south side, and at the public beach on the north shore.

Flower beds were a much more common feature throughout the island in earlier decades, although they are still located in certain areas. The most extensive are within the Conservatory’s formal garden that dates to the 1930s, around the Scott Fountain, and at the south end of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge at the floral clock mound and within the grassy lawns at the E. Jefferson Avenue/E. Grand Boulevard approach to the north.

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5 The Anderson book presents the number of flower beds at various times.
Buildings, structures, and objects

Buildings, structures, and objects comprise the highest number of the island park’s character-defining resources. The earliest building that remains on the island, and the only extant resource that pre-dates the park’s establishment in 1879, is the White House (No. 48), a c. 1860s wood-frame Gothic Revival residence located close to the island’s center. After the island became a park in 1879, the house was used for park superintendent and administrative purposes, a use it still serves today after more than 130 years. Altered in the 1920s and the 1980s, the house still retains its basic form and materials and much of its interior woodwork and is one of very few examples of this style in the city.

All of the other resources, which number over 200, date from 1883 to 2013 (a small bridge at the east end is the newest addition) and are associated with the park’s many functions and events. Buildings, structures, and objects are described chronologically by four periods: 1863-1899, 1900-1940, 1941-1964, and 1965-present.

Major sites within the park are described under Vegetation and Water Features, but are briefly described within the periods below when they were created. The Forest Area (No. 91) is the only original natural site that remains on the island.

Nineteenth-Century Buildings, Structures, and Objects

1860-1899

The late nineteenth-century resources, those that date from the 1860s through 1899, include the oldest extant building on the island, the lakes and canal system, police station, athletic shelter, and the earliest park comfort stations and rain, or picnic, shelters. The lakes and canal system was the earliest construction project on the island and commenced with the construction of the Loop Canal (No. 12) in 1883 on the west side of the island. The canal, which varies from roughly twenty-eight to ninety feet wide, runs in a curving course to the east, southeast, and south, connecting the Detroit River on the northwest corner of the island to Lake Takoma on the south. The canal is crossed by four bridges, two of which date partly to the 1890s. The second canal, called Nashua Creek (No. 84), was built in 1890. The longest of the canals, it travels in a curvilinear manner from west to east between Lake Takoma and Lake Okonoka near the east end of the island. Nine bridges cross this canal, which is typically thirty-eight feet in width, but which also varies from ninety feet down to eighteen feet.

Three of the most prominent buildings on the island date to this early period of its development. The Belle Isle Police Station (No. 66), built in 1893, is a fieldstone and wood shingled Shingle Style structure on Inselruhe Avenue close to the island’s physical center. The brick and half-timbered Stables complex (No. 57) that forms the northern and most visible end of the park’s

6 The canals are counted as structures in the resources list. Lakes and the lagoon are counted as sites, but both are also described under Water Features.
administrative/maintenance area further south off Inselruhe Avenue dates to 1894 (with additions) and features Elizabethan elements. The 1898 Athletic Pavilion/or Field House (No. 81) anchors the northern end of the athletic field on the south central area of the island. The brick two-story structure displays elements of the Queen Anne style, complemented by wide overhanging eaves and exaggerated supporting brackets. All feature large, deeply pitched, prominent roofs with intersecting towers and cupolas. One smaller building within the maintenance area also dates to the 1890s: the wood-frame lumber shed (No. 56), which dates to c. 1895. It is a simple gable-roofed building and now in very poor condition.

During the late nineteenth century, the city constructed many shelters and comfort stations on the island. Many were rustic wood structures that did not survive for long due to their construction materials, but two shelters and two comfort stations, and a combination shelter/comfort station, from the 1890s remain. Each reflects a distinctly individual rather than standard design for its building or structure type. The two shelters, Picnic Shelter #12 (No. 76), which dates to 1890, and Picnic Shelter #1 (No. 29) from 1895, are open structures with large, deep conical-shaped or gable roofs supported by decorative columns. The combined shelter/comfort station, Shadynook Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter #2 (No. 26) is an 1895 brick building that exhibits elements of the Elizabethan and, like the majority of the 1890s buildings, features a prominent roof; the building has a south open area for the shelter whose space is outlined by wide brick and stone columns. The two comfort stations, Stone (No. 38) and Bear Pit (No. 65), date to 1895 and 1896, respectively. The Stone Comfort Station is distinguished by its rock-face coursed ashlar stone construction and concave hip roof, while the Bear Pit Comfort Station, named for a former adjacent animal attraction, retains its copper hip roof and features a detailed brick frieze and grouped windows with simple Gibbsian surrounds.

The first of the park’s greenhouses was constructed in 1899, although the series of seventeen low, gable-roofed glass structures that are now concentrated in the administration/maintenance area east of Inselruhe Avenue date to the early twentieth century.

The canals and lakes that were an early feature of the park required a number of road bridges. Rustic designs, crafted from hickory trees from the Forest Area, were used for the original bridges. These original bridges were replaced within ten to fifteen years after their construction by bridges of more permanent materials of stone, brick, and concrete after they wore out due to heavy public usage and decay. The earliest remaining bridges on the island are two much renovated 1893 structures over the Loop Canal that display ornamental wrought iron railings fabricated by the King Bridge Company, although both have been altered through widening and one was moved a short distance. The bridge that carries Central Avenue (No. 14) remains in its original location, but it was rebuilt in much wider form in 2009, although the outside finishes including the stone abutments were retained. The other bridge with an iron railing (No. 16), located south close to the Casino and carrying a wide sidewalk, is really a c. 1980 bridge with concrete abutments and deck, but retains the earlier bridge’s wrought iron railing.

Late nineteenth-century objects in the park are scarce today; most were elaborate drinking fountains and horse troughs. Although the park is known today for its many statues and memorials, only one dates to the nineteenth century. The Newsboy Memorial Fountain (No. 28)
at the west end of Central Avenue was dedicated in 1897 and consists of a bronze statue of a boy (1997 replacement) with his dog atop a granite drinking fountain. The William Kerr Muir Memorial Fountain, erected in 1896 near the park entrance on the island, was paid for by this former park commissioner and was the first memorial sculpture in the park. It was removed in the mid-twentieth century.

Sites, 1863-1899

The Forest Area (No. 91) is the only natural, original site on the island. The forest features many old-growth trees and rare examples of native trees. The area has not been left entirely alone, with trails and roads built through it over the years and diseased and dead trees removed. Its acreage has been slightly eroded by nearby developments, including the golf course and picnic areas, but otherwise it remains admirably intact. The other sites that date to this period are Lake Takoma (No. 17), Lake Okonoka (No. 116), and Lake Muskoday (No. 103), which were created from low-lying swampy areas at the southwest, southeast, and northeast edges of the island in the 1880s and 1890s. Early recreational sites included a speeding track on the north side of the island which no longer exists and a beach nearby that dated to 1893. The current Beach Area (No. 72) occupies an earlier wading beach area.

The Athletic Field in the central southern area was originally laid out by the early 1890s (the 1887 grounds plan does not depict this area). Its original acreage has not changed, although the configuration of baseball fields and certain uses and their required layouts have been added.

Twentieth-Century Buildings, Structures, and Objects

The twentieth-century resources on the island are presented in three periods: 1900-1940, 1941-1964, and 1965-the present. Buildings are described first, followed by structures and objects.

1900-1940

Buildings, 1900-1940

The period from 1900 until 1940 represents the greatest expansion and development of the park and coincides with the city’s most rapid rise in population and urban growth and economic development. During this period, many new attractions were added to the park, which necessitated new buildings and structures. Most of the existing bridges date to the earliest years of this period, second-generation replacements of the original nineteenth-century rustic wood bridges. The buildings, structures, and objects represent both major and more minor improvements to the park, some of which by this time were constructed to replace earlier buildings or to accommodate new technologies.

Many of the resources from this period date to the first decade, when the park received many improvements that accorded with its status as one of Detroit’s most popular destinations for both residents and visitors. The Detroit Boat Club built their third, and existing, complex (No. 31a) just east of the island’s entrance in 1902; the club, founded in 1839 in Detroit, was housed in
several previous locations on the Detroit River before 1890 when they first leased a spot on the island. The fire-proof reinforced concrete and tile building, described as a “large, elegant Basque country house,” features fenestration with large round-arched openings, stuccoed exterior, and red tile hip roofs. Two of the park’s most significant buildings – the 1901-04 Aquarium (No. 42) and the 1904 Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory (No. 41a) – dominate the south-central part of the island and form an extensive complex. The Aquarium is a long and narrow, stone-trimmed brick building with an oversize Beaux Arts frontispiece around the entrance. It is connected to the Conservatory, a greenhouse structure that is dominated by a tall rounded dome section in the center, to form an H-footprint. The Conservatory roof’s steel framing replaced the original wood framework in the early 1950s. The new structure did not retain most of its ornate trim.

In 1904 the city of Detroit constructed its first water intake system, which captured raw, unpolluted water from Lake St. Clair at the upper (east) end of Belle Isle. A 3,160-foot long tunnel connected the Detroit City Waterworks complex on the mainland to the northwest with a circular granite crib house (No. 102e) on top of the tunnel. The crib house lies approximately 330 feet from the north shore of the island. The 1907 Second Renaissance Revival Casino Building (No. 19) on the western end of the island replaced an earlier building nearby that served the same ballroom/restaurant function. The blond brick building complements the Detroit Boat Club building with its complex hip roof, large round-arched motifs, and historical revival style.

Another large building complex also appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century: a sprawling bathhouse constructed east of the Detroit Boat Club on the north shore. The classical revival brick and stone building was demolished in 1974, but a small part (No. 68) that functioned as an electrical transformer house was retained and survives today. This remaining section’s brick walls display the decorated stone and brick panels that distinguished the former complex.

Only two buildings from the second decade of the twentieth century are documented, although the dates of construction of other buildings discussed may fall within this decade. Both are ancillary buildings that reflect early twentieth-century technological changes: a c. 1910 brick electrical building (No. 30) and a c. 1910 brick garage (No. 50a) within the park administration/maintenance yard. The small electrical building features Tudor Revival styling, seen in the half-timbered walls and the Tudor basket-handle arch above the door. The appearance of the tall brick garage at the entrance to the park maintenance yard is relieved by panel brick designs along the cornice, with square brick pilasters between bays filled almost entirely with large, multiple-paned steel sash windows. The garage is one of the earliest buildings on the island that displays a mostly utilitarian appearance, unlike the earlier rustic, revival, or more ornately styled buildings that dominated the island.

Only eight other buildings on the island date to the 1920s. Like the 1910 garage, the Harbormaster Complex (No. 8), built around 1920 on the northwest corner of the island, close to the island’s entrance, also displays a utilitarian finish. The two main buildings are tall, one-story brick, flat-roofed structures with large windows filled with metal industrial sash. During the 1920s, architectural revival styles that remained popular are seen in the Detroit Yacht Club (No. 97), which was built in 1921-23 to replace an earlier clubhouse destroyed by fire. The Italian
Renaissance or Mediterranean main building displays a red clay tile hip roof with prominent tower and large round-arched windows, similar to the boat club and casino from previous decades. Three of these buildings are associated with the new municipal golf course, the first non-private one in the city, which was built just south of the Detroit Yacht Club complex around Lake Muskoday in 1922. The brick Oakway Trail Comfort Station (c. 1922, No. 94) and the wood-frame Golf Concessions/Golf Starter Building from 1922 (No. 95b) face one another across Oakway Trail; both are one-story buildings with low-pitched hip roofs. The third building associated with the golf course is a simple one-story, flat-roofed brick garage/storage building further east off of Oakway Trail. The Woodside Comfort Station (No. 109) also dates to 1928 and bears similarities to the Oakway Trail Comfort Station with its saddleback hip roof and brick, banked windows placed at the top of the walls, and smooth concrete trim.

Construction projects on the island during the Great Depression were, with only a few exceptions, funded as federal New Deal projects. The 1930s brick Sawmill (No. 55) is a Colonial Revival building. The Detroit Waterworks Complex main pumping station (No. 102), which dates to the early 1930s, is rendered in smooth limestone blocks with a copper-clad hip roof and displays Art Deco styling in the bas relief panels and stepped pilasters. The 1936 Detroit Police Radio Station buildings (No. 6) west of the Harbormaster Complex was a Works Progress Administration project; the one-story brick, flat-roofed buildings display a simple Art Deco appearance, distinguished by corners with stepped pilasters.

Structures, 1900-1940

Early twentieth-century structures on the island consist of shelters, greenhouses, bridges, pump houses, a lighthouse, a carillon, and a canal. Five picnic shelters date to the first decade of the twentieth century, although exact dates of construction are not known for most. Likely the two earliest are Picnic Shelter #5 (No. 32) and Picnic Shelter #6 (No. 37), which are both large circular shelters with deep conical roofs crowned by circular vents. Picnic Shelter #6 retains its latticed metal supports. The 1908 Bus Stop Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter #7 (No. 39) features a long saddle-back hip roof that shelters both the small brick comfort station and longer open shelter that is supported by wood posts with round concrete bases. Picnic Shelter #9 (No. 45b) is similar to the Bus Stop Shelter, with its long saddle-back hip roof and simple supports set into large bases; this structure may also have served the ferry landing here. The Bath Lunch Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter (No. 67) likely dates to c. 1909 when the bathhouse complex was built to the north; the central octagonal comfort station with conical roof features segmental-arched openings with limestone trim, with flanking open shelters supported by metal columns.

Two of the island’s most iconic structures date to this period. The 1930-31 Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse (No. 121), commissioned by the Lake Carriers Association, is a unique structure for a federally operated lighthouse, faced in white Vermont marble and adorned with bas relief panels and motifs in the Art Deco style. The second structure, the 1939-40 Nancy Brown Peace Carillon (No. 24) is a limestone-clad tower whose design combines Neo-Gothic and Art Deco features.
The third major canal on the island, Sylvan Creek (No. 85), dates to 1910. The canal, which ranges from eighteen to forty feet in width, branches north from the Nashua Creek Canal and terminates east into Lake Muskoday. One early twentieth-century pump house and the remnant of another that were part of the system of lakes and canals survive. The Lake Takoma pump house (No. 22) has an unusual rock-faced stone block exterior, with its construction date of 1928 marked in the entrance threshold. An earlier (c. 1900) brick pump house and remnants of its retaining walls (No. 119a and b), which consist of brick, stone, and concrete elements, stands at the northeast end of Lake Okonoka. Loop Canal outlet dam (No. 5), the only remaining original canal dam, is estimated to date to c. 1915 and is a concrete structure with two steel gates.

Six bridges represent this period of Belle Isle Park’s development. Three date between 1900 and 1903: Picnic Way/Lake Takoma Bridge from 1901 (No. 43); Oakway Trail/Sylvan Creek Bridge, also from 1901 (No. 96); and the Nashua Creek Bridge west of the Athletic Field, 1903 (No. 58). The Picnic Way Bridge is a brick and stone-faced concrete bridge executed in a classical style that features a stone railing with shaped balusters and panels. The concrete bridge on Oakway Trail is inlaid with colored tiles in Arts-and-Crafts-inspired geometric patterns. The Nashua Creek Bridge over an abandoned roadway just south of Loiter Way is faced in limestone blocks with a pierced metal railing and stone ball finials. Only the stone abutments of a fourth bridge, built in 1904, the former Bridge #16 (No. 111) on Woodside Drive over Nashua Creek, remain; the superstructure appears to have been replaced around 1980. The 1913 Central Avenue Bridge over Sylvan Creek (No. 92) has low paneled smooth concrete walls that terminate in tapered cones that originally held light standards, only two of which remain. The park’s largest and most prominent bridge, the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10), crosses to Detroit’s mainland from the island’s entrance. Completed in 1923, the bridge is a steel-framed cantilever structure that, faced in concrete, contains nineteen arched spans and looks like an open spandrel concrete arch structure. Single light standards each topped with an acorn globe light fixture at the top and two smaller globes below line the entire length of the bridge, as does an aluminum railing; both features, designed to complement the bridge’s historic design, date to the late 1980s rehabilitation of the bridge. A distinctive pedestrian bridge, the so-called covered Pullman Bridge of 1939 (No. 95f) was partially built with WPA funding and served the park’s municipal golf course as a crossing over Lake Muskoday and a rain shelter. The narrow wood bridge has vertical board walls pierced with a series of rectangular and oval windows that give it the appearance of a railroad car.

**Objects, 1900-1940**

Most of Belle Isle Park’s numerous monuments and memorials date to the early twentieth century, especially the 1920s, and many are situated along Central Avenue. In 1928 the City Plan Commission prepared a formal plan to regulate memorials’ location along Central Avenue,
Although most pre-dated this plan. The Schiller Monument from 1907 (No. 78), a bronze life-size statue on a granite base approached by curving granite steps, is located on Central Avenue at the now-truncated Vista Avenue. The next monument, featuring an equestrian figure of Michigan Civil War hero Major General Williams (No. 64), was erected in 1921; the bronze figure, placed on a high granite plinth, is prominently located at the intersection of Central Avenue and Inselruhe Avenue. The 1923 General Poe memorial (No. 35) on Central Avenue at Picnic Way is the smallest, and one of the simplest, composed of an upright granite plaque with a bronze tablet.

Although work on the Scott Memorial Fountain (No. 3) began in 1914, this extraordinary fountain with its lagoon and bronze statue of its sponsor, James Scott, was not dedicated until 1925. The fountain dominates the lengthened west tip of the island, which was created by extensive landfilling and configured into a triangular shape. The circular marble fountain is accompanied by a bronze seated statue of James Scott atop a marble plinth. A large lagoon receives the water cascading down through a series of marble basins. The 1927 Kolb Sundial (No. 41e) is located within the Conservatory’s formal garden and features a bronze peacock on a granite base.

Three additional monuments were added to Central Avenue in the late 1920s and early 1930s: the marble bust of Dante Alighieri on a marble base (No. 77) in 1927; the granite and bronze James J. Brady Memorial (No. 33) in 1928; and the Spanish-American War Memorial (No. 34) in 1932, also executed in granite and bronze and featuring a soldier and sailor on opposite ends of the rectangular marker. The Rev. Samuel Smith Flagpole (No. 89) that dates to 1932 is located at the intersection of The Strand and Vista Avenue; the metal flagpole rises from a decorative marble plinth with a plaque containing a bas-relief of Mr. Smith encircled by marble steps. To the west in the Conservatory’s formal garden is the Levi L. Barbour Memorial Fountain (No. 41c), which dominates the garden’s center, and features a leaping bronze gazelle on a high granite pedestal within a low circular pool.

There are four sites that date to the period of 1900-1940. The golf course (No. 95) is the earliest, dating to 1922, when the nine-hole course was laid out. The Belle Isle Approach area (No. 11), an open landscaped area that frames the park’s entrance at E. Jefferson Avenue and E. Grand Boulevard on the Detroit mainland, was originally designed in 1928 after a former amusement park here was purchased through a contentious eminent domain process. The configuration of the entrance and adjacent landscaping has been modified, but still conforms to its original general appearance and function. The Blue Heron Lagoon (No. 120) was created c. 1930 as part of landfilling activities that extended the east end of the island. The Formal Garden (No. 41b) east of the Conservatory was set out in the 1930s and features the 1936 Levi L. Barbour Memorial.

1941-1965

Buildings, Structures, and Objects

Although this period includes the two decades (1950s-60s) of the city’s highest population, only a small number of buildings were constructed in the park. During this period, several prominent
buildings were introduced to the island that displayed elements of the International style and other versions of the Modern Movement.

**Buildings, 1941-1965**

The earliest building, actually a complex of buildings, in this period is the U.S. Coast Guard Complex, which dates to 1941-42. The complex was originally International style in appearance, with several flat-roofed sections forming a cohesive complex. The facility has been re-sided and some sections removed, but the multi-level sections still read similar to the original design. Several years later, in 1949, the 1899 Lake Takoma Skating Pavilion was replaced by a much lower and sleeker flat-roofed pavilion designed by J. Robert F. Swanson, a former partner with Eliel and Eero Saarinen. The 1950 Remick Music Shell (designer unknown) features a soaring canopy above the stage, similar to expressionist architecture from this period. The small gable-roofed golf practice center building dates to 1952 when this small facility on the island’s northeast corner was established. The latest building built on the island during this period is the Dossin Great Lakes Museum of 1959. The building, with its distinctive dark blue brick front, was designed by William E. Kapp, the former head of the architectural department of one of Detroit’s leading architectural firms, Smith, Hinchman and Grylls, who founded his own practice in the 1930s. Like the earlier buildings from this period, the main block has a flat roof and rectilinear appearance, although this building features larger expanses of glass in the supporting walls and entrance. Its design incorporates, on the water side, the pilothouse of a Great Lakes freighter, projecting out over the water.

**Structures, 1941-1965**

Although their exact dates of construction are not documented, a series of Detroit Yacht Club docks, the club’s tennis courts and other ancillary buildings in the complex (No. 97) are assumed to date from this period. Two large steel radio towers that may date to the 1940s-1950s are part of the Detroit Police Radio complex (No. 6 c and d), and can be widely seen in their location at the northwest corner of the island, although it is presumed that earlier towers dated from 1936 when the complex was originally built.

Although slight physical evidence remains visible today, the southeast corner of the island was the site of a double launcher installation for two Nike missile sites nearby on the Detroit mainland. Today this area is occupied by an open meadow area bordered by walking trails that lead to and around the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse at the east end of the island.

**Objects, 1941-1965**

Two memorial objects, both from the 1940s, represent this period. The International Peace Memorial (No. 24c), erected in 1941 by the Monument Builders of America, is a low, monolithic rectangular concrete and granite panel with no base and now enclosed by a metal picket fence that is part of the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon complex. Located at the west end of Central Avenue, and the last memorial erected along this major road, the GAR Memorial/Civil War Monument (No. 27) depicts a single standing granite soldier at parade rest atop a granite base.
Only one site, a portion of the golf practice center/putting and driving ranges (No. 105), dates to this period. Originally created in 1952 at the northeast corner of the island just east of the earlier golf course, it retains its original function, but has been modified through the addition of new buildings and revised layout.

1965-Present

Buildings, Structures, and Objects

This period covers nearly fifty years of the island’s development, which saw great strides in physical upgrades to many of the existing major buildings and structures, but which also introduced many more ancillary features. No existing structures, buildings or objects are known to date to the 1960s; a small canoe concession building was built in 1964 but no longer stands. It is possible that some structures may date to this decade, including the Detroit Yacht Club swimming pool (No. 97q) and a Public Lighting Department utility structure (No. 60), but no documented dates can be found for them.

The period beginning in the mid-1970s has been one of major revitalization that has seen a large number of buildings and structures constructed in the park, following a period of neglect in the 1960s. These new resources often reflected activities new to the park – including a Nature Center and additional golfing facilities – but also included replacements of deteriorated older structures (bridges and culverts) and additional facilities such as comfort stations. While these many buildings, structures, and object post-date the period of significance, their combined impact on the park’s integrity is minimal, mainly due to their small scale and their lack of concentration in any one area of the park.

Buildings, 1965-Present

Three major complexes were built in the 1970s and 1980s, two of which remain in use with their original function. The earliest is a Nature Center complex completed in 1977, which features a flat-roofed, stuccoed circular Visitor Center and associated structures on Lakeside Drive at the east side of the island. The large Safariland Zoo complex near Central Avenue and Vista Avenue in the island’s center, completed and opened in 1980, consists of a series of animal enclosures and environments spanned by an elevated wood walkway system and also includes a number of round and square hut-like structures with pointed wood-shingled roofs. Closed since 2002, the entire complex is enclosed by a tall metal chain-link fence. The 1980s Bathhouse complex, which replaced the 1909 bathhouse demolished in 1974, contains a tall brick building with wide metal fascia, waterslide, and pool.

Other buildings include two comfort stations and small buildings that serve the golf course, putting range, Detroit Yacht Club, and park administration area. The comfort stations are the brick, gable-roofed building at Sunset Point on the west end of the island, which features an open central entry to the restrooms, and the Oxbow Comfort Station (No. 101) in the 1980s picnic area east of the yacht club, which is a front gable, brick building with wide overhangs supported by
brackets. The smaller buildings associated with the early twentieth-century golf course, late twentieth-century putting range, yacht club, and park administrative area include wood-frame and brick sheds, lifeguard station, office, guardhouse, and the c. 1980 Cornelius Golightly Annex (No. 49), which is within the park administration area. The annex is a one-story, hip-roofed brick building with gabled dormers.

**Structures, 1965-Present**

The structures represent infrastructure improvements to the park, mostly in the 1970s-80s when so much work was undertaken to update and improve the park after a period of neglect and increased public pressure to improve conditions. Structures include thirteen vehicular and pedestrian bridges which appear to date mostly to the 1980s; all of the vehicular ones are replacements of earlier ones. A small number of new dams and culverts also date to the late twentieth century. Nine picnic shelters that date to c. 1974-75 are low-pitched gable-roofed structures with either metal supports (six) or heavy wood supports (three) and two date to 1995 that both feature multi-sided hip roofs with wood supports, reminiscent of some of the island’s early twentieth-century shelters. Two wood and concrete fishing piers from 1975 and c. 1980 are located on the north and south shores and accessed by narrow paths from parking areas. An open metal pavilion structure and associated walkways that dates to c. 1980 in a new activity area is associated with the only executed design by landscape architect Dan Kiley in the park. Other structures are the swimming pools at the Detroit Yacht Club and Detroit Boat Club c. 1978 handball courts east of the main athletic fields; a water slide at the c. 1980 bathhouse, and a giant slide near the park administration area, which reflect recreational activities popular at the time.

**Objects, 1965-Present**

Few objects have been erected on the island since the early 1960s. The earliest of the four is an abstract composition of two metal boxes that allude to the city’s riverfront industrial heritage that dates to 1972 at the extreme west end of the island. A small Japanese-inspired stone lantern in the conservatory’s formal gardens dates to 1985. Another monument framed by formal rows of cherry trees next to the Scott Fountain dates to 1994. The most recent sculpture, dated 1991, is a metal abstract representation of a gazelle that dominates a c. 1980 picnic area east of the Detroit Yacht Club.

Major sites in this period are the Meadow Area (#125), the Nature Zoo deer enclosure (No. 106) and the Safariland Zoo (No. 79) that date from the 1970s to the 1990s. The Meadow Area in the southeastern corner of the island replaced the site of a 1950s Nike missile launcher facility. The Safariland Zoo and the Kids’ Kingdome Playscape were both created in the late 1970s within an earlier zoo area.

**Small scale elements**

Small-scale elements within the park that are typically not individually counted as resources include several very small memorial markers, a single older water fountain (No. 114), the 1980s wood signs that are placed at the entrance to many of the park’s attractions and at its main
entrance on E. Jefferson Avenue, and the bronze Michigan Historical Marker plaque in front of the Detroit Police Station that commemorates the construction of the first police radio station in the country on Belle Isle. Major intersections are marked with metal road name signs affixed to open metal posts.

Lighting fixtures on the island consist primarily of metal shoebox lights mounted on tall poles, with other areas lit by cobra head lights affixed to wood utility poles. The athletic fields and tennis courts are individually lit by more modern field lighting. The area around the Scott Fountain at the west end of the island is encircled by individual poles with traditional light heads. The General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge is lit by a series of single fluted metal light standards with side arm globes that are topped with acorn light fixtures.

Water Features

The island’s setting with the Detroit River is one of its most significant character-defining elements. But the island’s interior also contains a series of original man-made water features, as well as three late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century fountains that are some of Belle Isle’s most beloved hallmarks (discussed in Buildings, Structures and Objects – Newsboy Memorial Fountain, Scott Fountain, and Levi L. Barbour Fountain).

The original lay of the island, an average elevation of eighteen to twenty-four inches above the river level, included some low-lying swamps. A canal system (discussed above under Buildings, Structures and Objects), which both diverted water from the swamps out to the Detroit River and provided a source of boating recreation was an early idea. It was included in the original 1883 plan by Frederick Law Olmsted, whose plan called for them to parallel Central Avenue. However, Olmsted’s proposal to fill the swampy areas in order to create a more undulating landform was nixed for the creation of a series of lakes interconnected with the canals.

The majority of the lakes and canals were the earliest man-made features on the island, dating to the late 1880s and early 1890s. The lakes and lagoons are the eleven-acre Lake Takoma (No. 17) in the southwest corner and the eighteen-acre Lake Okonoka (No. 116) in the southeast corner, which both date to 1887 and have small wooded islands within them; Lake Muskoday (No. 103), which is twenty-five acres in size, and located in the northeast corner, was constructed in 1893; and the Blue Heron Lagoon (No. 120) at the island’s eastern tip, which was built within a concurrent landfilling development in 1930. The canals’ outlets to the Detroit River were closed in the 1950s, although canoeing activities continued on them until the 1980s.

Integrity

Despite changes in its physical appearance and an expansion of uses on the island over the last 135 years since its purchase by the City of Detroit in 1879, Belle Isle Park possesses a remarkable integrity of its most significant features. These significant features include its system of roads, lakes and canals, large forest area which dominates the eastern area of the island, recreational fields, park shelters and comfort stations, aquarium, conservatory, club houses, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century bridges, and commemorative sculpture.
The park retains integrity of **location** as the island’s location in the middle of the Detroit River between Detroit on the north and Windsor on the south has not changed. Its immediate **setting** has not changed as the island remains surrounded by water, connected to the mainland of Detroit by a bridge as it has been since 1889; but its land views have changed incrementally throughout the period of significance. The island’s views to the west have changed substantially due to the construction of the GM (former Detroit Renaissance Center) towers. Previous adjacent settings included an amusement park and large industrial plants on the north side, while the south side in Canada was primarily residential and industrial. The integrity of the park’s numerous **design** features – its circulation system, spaces for recreation and accompanying amenities, such as comfort stations, the old forest, location of the bridge entry, lakes and canals – has been substantially retained. The park maintains integrity of **materials**, despite alteration to many of the individual resources through the removal of historic materials and the addition of some incompatible materials. Additionally, certain additions of materials are considered reversible. The resources on the island represent the work of both locally and nationally significant architects and artists and the integrity of this workmanship is visible and has been maintained. Many designed landscape areas, including trees and plantings, also retain integrity of workmanship, which is especially seen at the Scott Fountain and Lagoon area, the picnic areas, and at the Scripps Conservatory. Belle Isle Park has developed and changed over the last 135 years in response to Detroit citizens’ needs, functional demands, prevailing fashions in architecture, and changing concepts of the park’s purpose, but it retains its integrity of **feeling** as the property continues to convey the feeling of a large urban park that offers a wide variety of both passive and active recreational pursuits, some of which are not available in any other city park in Detroit, within its extraordinary river setting. It retains its integrity of **association** with the city’s original and continued intent of Belle Isle Park as the city’s premier park and significant gathering place.

**Inventory of Contributing and Non-Contributing Resources**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

Belle Isle is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), but the island’s archaeological significance, which is typically assessed under NRHP Criterion D, has yet to be evaluated. The State Archaeological Site Files (Michigan SHPO) show that archaeological sites have been identified on Belle Isle, and that the potential is high for the presence of additional sites that have yet to be discovered. Archaeological resources have the potential to provide information on early Native American use, early European settlement, nineteenth-century uses prior to the establishment as a public park, and later transformations of the island into various incarnations of an urban park. A comprehensive archaeological survey of the island has not been conducted. Only a small portion of the island – approximately one-third acre – has been surveyed.

To date, two prehistoric and five historic period sites have been identified on Belle Isle. These are located in riparian contexts, with one located on the inland shoreline of Blue Heron Lagoon. The prehistoric sites have not been dated and their functions have not been assessed. The historic
period sites represent late nineteenth to early twentieth-century fill or refuse dumps and a late nineteenth-century lighthouse foundation. Little is known about these seven sites and none have been evaluated for NRHP eligibility. The State Archaeologist may provide detailed site locations for planning purposes upon request.

Previously Reported Archaeological Sites on Belle Isle

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State Site</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Integrity</th>
<th>NRHP Status</th>
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<td>Underwater fill and surface scatter</td>
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Belle Isle has undergone extensive physical modifications. Despite this, there is the potential for the presence of intact archaeological deposits. This potential increases in inland areas not previously subjected to extensive filling or other modification. Furthermore, historic modifications may be significant in their own right. There is the potential to locate landscaping and structural features (such as filled ponds) directly related to the evolution of the urban park that may inform restoration or reconstruction efforts.

Unevaluate archaeological sites exist within the urban park, and the potential for the location of additional sites is high. Whether archaeological resources may contribute to the NRHP status of the island remains to be assessed; limited previous survey makes such an assessment difficult at this time. It is the opinion of the State Archaeologist that the long term stewardship of Belle Isle should include an archaeological sensitivity study and comprehensive archaeological survey. Any future ground-disturbance on the island may adversely impact potentially significant archaeological resources. Ongoing consultation with the State Archaeologist is advised, with resource eligibility under NRHP Criterion D assessed as needed.

**ABOVE-GROUND RESOURCES**

Belle Isle Park contains over 200 above-ground resources, which are individually described and evaluated for their contributing or non-contributing status within the historic district. The resources are numbered and arranged roughly from west to east. Certain resources are grouped into functional complexes, with individual resources within them assigned a letter after their
shared number. Four maps are included with this nomination that show their locations, as well as the photograph locations.

**Contributing and Non-Contributing Above-Ground Resources, Belle Isle Park Historic District (from West to East)**

**Index** to Above-Ground Resources (by number in list in pages 28-88 below)

- Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory/Formal Gardens – 41
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1. Untitled sculpture
   West of Sunset Drive
   1972
   Non-contributing object

This abstract sculpture is located on Sunset Point, in open ground near the west tip of Belle Isle. It was designed by Detroit artist Stanley Dolega (b. 1942), and consists of two painted steel rectangles set next to one another; originally painted gray, they are now a dark green color. Only a small gap separates the two sections, while the outside ends of each rectangle have been
rounded. The work references the concrete silos that once were prominently located along the Detroit River waterfront.\(^7\)

2. **Sunset Point Comfort Station**
Sunset Drive
2008-09
Non-contributing building

This comfort station is located on Sunset Point, at the west end of Belle Isle. The two sections of the building, each containing a separate restroom, are connected by an arched breezeway set into the end-gable roof. The brick walls are elaborated with brick buttresses and wood brackets under the wide eaves. Multi-paned aluminum sash windows are grouped into sets of three, with a cast stone sill under each set. Large arched vents are located on the slope of the roof, which is covered with asphalt shingles.

3. **Scott Memorial Fountain, Statue, and Lagoon (Photos 5-8)**
Fountain Drive
Commission awarded 1914, completed and dedicated 1925, new seawall 1934, restoration 2005-10
2 contributing structures, 1 contributing object

When local businessman and life-long Detroit resident James Scott died in 1910, he bequeathed the bulk of his fortune to the city for the purpose of building a memorial fountain and statue on Belle Isle, in his name. The resulting memorial cost more than $500,000 and took more than ten years of design and construction, including the filling of several dozen acres of land to extend the west end of the island. The feature includes a central white Vermont marble fountain structure, overlooking a seated bronze statue of Scott on the east, and a large, roughly V or triangular-shaped lagoon on the west.

The circular marble fountain (No. 3a, contributing), with four tiers of basins or pools and the large lagoon, was designed by architect Cass Gilbert (1859-1954). On the fountain’s bottom tier is a broad pool, which was originally constructed with a floor of Pewabic Pottery tiles; these tiles were removed during a 2010 rehabilitation due to deterioration.\(^8\) This lowest basin displays a number of bronze turtle sculptures with spouts directed toward the center of the pool, toward the three upper tiers rising out of the water. In the next tier above, bas relief panels spaced along the short marble wall display four sculptures of recumbent lions, each overlooking a small separate projecting basin. This tier is surmounted by a third one, whose front displays a series of rectangular bas relief sculptures depicting man’s labors to overcome land and sea. At the top, a large circular basin is supported by a platform decorated with a number of spouts incorporated into sculptures of Neptune and dolphins. A large spout located in the center of the bowl spurts water vertically into a large plume.

\(^7\) Nawrocki 2008, p. 113

The fountain is surrounded by wide concentric terraces of brick and grass that lead down to a circular roadway on the bottom terrace. Broad upper and lower marble staircases spill down the slope from the fountain to the circular drive and then down to the lagoon on the west side, flanking a sculpted waterfall cascade in the center decorated with marble lily pads and lion head-shaped spouts. The large V-shaped lagoon (No. 3b, contributing) narrows toward the west, its sides paralleling the shoreline of the filled land coming to a point at Belle Isle’s west end. Cherry trees are grouped around the east side of the lagoon; they were a 1994 gift to the city from its sister city, Toyota, Japan (see No. 4, Cherry Tree Monument). The east side of the lagoon nearest the fountain has a curving central portion to accommodate the circular terraces surrounding the fountain. The marble wall of the lagoon has two semispherical drainage basins on each end.

East of the fountain, a life-sized, seated bronze statue of Scott (No. 3c, contributing) is set on a high marble plinth engraved with “James Scott 1831–1910” and faces west toward the fountain. Designed by sculptor Herbert Adams (1858–1945), the statue depicts Scott as an older man, seated in a chair with a cloak draped over his knee. On the back (east side) of the chair, an inscription contains Scott’s dedication to the city, adorned with embossed marine designs and reading “For// the enjoyment// of the people// and for the adornment of// his native city// James Scott// bequeathed to Detroit// his fortune// to be used// in the construction// of this fountain// Erected MCMXXIII// From the good deed of one comes benefit to many.” A second inscription on the base of the plinth identifies Adams and the year he created the sculpture.

4. Cherry Tree Monument (Photo 6, left edge)
Fountain Drive
1994
Non-contributing object

This small granite monument rests on a short granite plinth. The monument is unfinished, except for a rectangular plaque which is angled to face up to the viewer. Engraved in the plaque is the dedication, “These 100 Japanese cherry trees planted around the Scott Lagoon have been donated to the people of Detroit as a token of our friendship and goodwill jointly by the Japan Business Society of Detroit, and the citizens of Toyota, Japan // A sister city of Detroit, Michigan on April 19, 1994.” The cherry trees are grouped in straight lines around the east end of the Scott Memorial Lagoon (No. 3b).

5. Loop Canal Outlet Dam
Sunset Drive
c. 1915
Contributing structure

This concrete dam is located on the north side of Sunset Drive, south of the Detroit Police Radio Station (No. 6). The dam is served by two steel gates, which lower into the water to cover two metal culverts. The gates are embossed with “WATERMAN// RED 48 TOP// CANAL GATE.”

6. Detroit Police Radio Station (radio towers visible Photo 6, right edge)
The Detroit Police Radio Station is located near the west end of Belle Isle, north of Sunset Drive and the Scott Memorial Fountain (No. 3a). It is physically separated from much of the island by the Loop Canal, with driveway access from Pleasure Drive/Mroch Drive and over the canal at the Loop Canal Outlet Dam (No. 5). The facility is enclosed by a chain-link fence. The facility consists of a central brick building, with a newer smaller annex on the west side, and two large radio towers. On the north side of the property, the two radio towers on concrete pads are each serviced by a small trailer or structure located just a few feet away.

At the center of the Radio Station facility is a 1936 one-story rectangular brick building (No. 6a) with a flat tar-and-gravel roof and modest Art Deco detailing. At the corners of the building, clusters of brick pilasters are capped by cast stone capitals. Other decorative touches include soldier course and header row stringcourses, and a cast stone cap at the roofline. The window openings have mostly been infilled with concrete block, but the windows on the southeast elevation retain two rows of glass block along the bottom. An attached one-story garage, which also dates to 1936, is located on the northeast side of the building. A c. 2000 vinyl-covered office trailer (No. 6b) is located on the southwest side of the brick building. It has a side-gable roof and sliding aluminum windows on each elevation.

On the north side of the property, two radio towers, thought to date to the late 1940s or early 1950s (radio towers [6c and 6d] are first indicated on the 1952 USGS quad) rise approximately 80 feet into the air. Each tall steel frame tower is set into a concrete pad foundation, with a small rectangular trailer adjacent (No. 6e and 6f).

The Detroit Police Radio Station was initially built c. 1936, with funding from the Works Progress Administration. The radio station was originally located on the second floor of the Detroit Police Department station on Inselruhe and Central Avenue (No. 66). Belle Isle Park was chosen as the radio station’s location due to the strong radio signals that could be broadcast here throughout the city. The two radio towers appear to date to the mid-20th century; a 1938 USGS quad shows the station here, but no towers are indicated; the 1952 USGS quad does indicate “towers” at this location.

7. Belle Isle Pump Station and Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Facility
Pleasure Drive/Mroch Dr.
2008
2 non-contributing buildings
Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI  
Name of Property  County and State  
This 1 ½-story hipped-roof facility (No. 7a, non-contributing) is located on the west side of Belle Isle, just west of the Harbor Master Facility (No. 8). The exterior is of variegated red and brown brick, with thin curved metal brackets supporting the overhanging roof. A cast stone stringcourse runs below the roof brackets, interrupted by a number of metal louvered vents. A long, flat-roofed rear ell is located on the northwest of the building. Several metal doors, for staff members and vehicles, are interspersed along the southeast façade, northeast elevation, and southwest elevation. These are accented by brick soldier course trim. On the east side of the property, a small concrete block utility shed (No. 7b, non-contributing) is covered by a sheet metal gable roof.

8. Harbor Master Facility  
Sunset Drive  
c. 1920–c. 2000  
3 contributing buildings, 1 non-contributing building (8c)

The Harbor Master Facility is located on the west side of Belle Isle along the north riverbank, just west of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10). The main facility contains two rectangular brick buildings connected by a breezeway covered by a common roof between the two buildings. Northeast of the building is a more recent office trailer, and the facility’s buildings are surrounded by temporary wood and metal storage sheds. There is a small guardhouse at the entrance. The facility is surrounded by a chain-link fence.

A one-story brick building (No. 8a) is set back from the riverbank, with a tall single-story garage on the west side (No. 8b). A tall brick exterior smokestack/chimney is located on the south façade next to the side entrance. Windows throughout the building consist of large multi-paned aluminum or steel sash, with cast stone sills. Full-height corrugated metal doors are located on the north and south sides of the garage. Along the waterfront, the second building in the facility, a boat garage (No. 8b) is open to the river on the north side. The materials are similar to those in the office/garage facility. A wood sign over one of the entrances to the river reads “HARBORMASTER// DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT.”

A c. 2000 office trailer (No. 8c) is set away from the two older buildings on the west side of the property. It is covered with vertical vinyl siding. A small flat-roofed brick structure next to the gated entrance may have served as a guard house; a wood-frame front gable structure is attached to it on the west (No. 8d).

9. Floral Clock Mound (photo 4)  
1893/1979/1990?  
Picnic Way and Sunset Drive  
1 contributing site; 1 non-contributing object

The Floral Clock Mound is located at the south end of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10), at the entrance to Belle Isle. Set on a mound in a traffic island between Sunset Drive and Picnic Way, the clock face is composed of brightly-colored flowering plants, with simple 8-foot and 10-foot hands marking the time.
The reported installation dates and origins of the clock differ and no one source appears to have more authority than another. A newspaper article published in 1979 notes the new floral clock was installed at the entrance for the centennial anniversary of Belle Isle.\textsuperscript{11} It has also been reported that the Belle Isle Floral Clock is the original 1893 clock, designed by Elbridge Scribner, which was first placed in Waterworks Park on Jefferson Avenue east of Belle Isle. Henry Ford acquired the clock for display at Greenfield Village in 1934, and the water-powered mechanism was replaced by an electrical motor. The clock was returned to the city in 1989. One source states that the 1893 clock was installed in Belle Isle in 1990 following the city’s re-acquisition of the feature;\textsuperscript{12} another reports that as of 2012 the returned clock was still in storage at Waterworks Park,\textsuperscript{13} suggesting that the current Floral Clock at Belle Isle is not the original feature installed at Waterworks Park and Greenfield Village. The clock’s hands are quite simple and are not the same as those shown in historic photos of the Waterworks Park’s floral clock.

10. \textit{General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge/Belle Isle Bridge (Photo 1, in distance, and 3)}

East Grand Boulevard
1921-23, rehabilitated 1986
Contributing structure

The Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge connects Belle Isle to the mainland on the north side of the island, carrying East Grand Boulevard across the Detroit River’s north channel. It is the only current access to the island for pedestrians and automobiles. On the mainland, East Grand Boulevard extends southeast from the intersection of East Jefferson Avenue, the landscaped boulevard passing alongside Gabriel Richard Park to the bridge approach on the southeast side of the park; the city acquired the land on either side of the approach in 1928, in order to beautify the setting of the north approach to the bridge. At the south approach on Belle Isle, East Grand Boulevard ends at the rotary intersection of Sunset Drive and Picnic Way. Plans for the bridge were prepared in 1917 by Lewis M. Gram, as engineer, and Emil Lorch, as architect, under the direction of a consulting board of engineers, for the city’s Department of Public Works. Gram and Lorch proposed a nineteen-span structure that, while presenting the appearance of an open spandrel concrete arch design, was actually a steel-frame concrete-faced cantilever structure that was viewed as more suitable than an arch design for this location given the clay rather than bedrock base on which the footings would rest. As originally designed the cantilever structure would extend out to the outer edges of the bridge with its roadway and 12-foot wide sidewalk on either side. Detroit engineering firm Esselstyn, Murphy & Hanford were retained to prepare final plans from the Gram/Lorch design and to serve as supervising engineers for the project.

\textsuperscript{11} “Belle Isle,” article about history of Belle Isle and planned activities for centennial celebration, no date or source provided.


When all construction bids were rejected because they came in well above the budgeted funds, the city directed successor firm Esselstyn-Murphy to revise the plans to bring the cost within the available $2,500,000. Horace H. Esselstyn was credited by the Free Press as the designer of the bridge as built. His revised plans substantially reduced the width of the supporting structure to the area beneath the roadway through cantilevering the twelve foot wide sidewalks out from either side. The cantilevered sidewalks, less elaborate open metal railings, and metal rather than bulkier concrete lamp standards were the primary differences from the Gram/Lorch design. Esselstyn stated that in revising the design, “we are treating with the most careful consideration the original accepted design, and we believe that by adopting one of the original designs considered by the commission we are acting in the spirit of those who carried out the fundamental engineering studies.”

The new bridge was built by the Greiler Bros., contractors, with construction begun in the fall of 1921. The Wisconsin Bridge & Iron Works served as subcontractor for the steel structure. The spans, each consisting of “two cantilever arms and a short suspended span in the middle,” were assembled near shore off Belle Isle and floated into position on two scows, which were then sunk with the base of the arms in position atop the footing, thus avoiding the need for falsework. A July 1922 notice in Engineering News-Record stated that “several of the umbrellas, consisting of the adjoining halves of two spans, have already been set in place.” The completed bridge was formally accepted by the city and opened to traffic November 1, 1923.¹⁴ A major, and sensitive, rehabilitation of the bridge was carried out in 1986. New railings and lamp standards installed then are very similar to the originals. Originally known as the “Belle Isle Bridge,” the crossing was renamed after WWII Army General Douglas A. MacArthur in 1942.

The bridge is 2,193 feet long and consists of 19 spans, gradually increasing in height to a maximum clearance of 30 feet. The spandrels between the “arches” display simple vertical concrete elements that support the deck. The bridge’s 85-foot width accommodates a five-lane roadway plus a sidewalk along each side. The superstructure includes aluminum railings and

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¹⁴ Adams, William H., “Data of Reinforced-Concrete Arch Design Recently Proposed.” Engineering News-Record, 3/17/1921, 454-55; Cooley, Mortimer E., et al., Report on Proposed Belle Isle Bridge by the Consulting Board, Belle Isle Bridge Division of Engineering and Construction, Department of Public Works, City of Detroit, 1918; Esselstyn, H. H., “Development of Official Design and Its Revision,” Engineering News-Record, 3/17/1921, 452-53; “Belle Isle Bridge Steelwork Placed by Floating,” Engineering News-Record, 7/27/1922; Council approved plans for Belle Isle Bridge, prepared by Esselstyn, Murphy and Hanford; bids probably to be opened late October, Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record, 9/25/1920, p. 22; “New Belle Isle Bridge Opened,” Detroit Free Press, 11/2/1923. (Charles K. Hyde, The Lower Peninsula of Michigan, Historic American Engineering Record survey report (1976), states (212) that after the bids for the initial bridge design were rejected as too high, Indianapolis-based concrete bridge design specialist Daniel B. Luten submitted an open spandrel concrete arch bridge design and that this design was accepted and the bridge built from his plans. While the 3/17/1921 Engineering News-Record indicates Luten did submit a plan after the bids were rejected, it is clear his plans received little consideration.)
electric lightposts which, spaced evenly along the roadway, were part of a 1986 rehabilitation project that, using an $11.5 million federal grant, was done in consultation with the SHPO.\(^{15}\)

11. *Belle Isle Approach (photos 1 and 2)*

East Grand Boulevard

c. 1928/1986

Contribution site

On the mainland side of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10), the approximately 800-foot long approach to the bridge is lined with lawn and trees, providing a park-like link between E. Jefferson Avenue and the Belle Isle Bridge leading into the park. The approach is bounded on the north by Jefferson Avenue, the west by the former Uniroyal site (formerly the Detroit and Michigan Stove Works site), and the east by Gabriel Richard Park and the west end of the Detroit Riverwalk. The broad entrance on Jefferson Avenue is defined by broad sidewalks and curved allées of cherry and maple trees on each side paralleling the rounded approach, providing pedestrian access directly from Jefferson Avenue to the bridge, away from road traffic. In the center, a grass-covered median with a Belle Isle Park sign divides the north and south roadways. Closer to the bridge at the south end of the approach, the roadway is surrounded by open parkland, providing clear views of Belle Isle across the channel.

The basic layout of the current approach was established during the early 20th century. In 1906 an amusement park was constructed on the east side of the Belle Isle Bridge along the waterfront, adjacent to a large brewery complex. The amusement park, commonly referred to as “Electric City” (as well as several other names), quickly expanded. It eventually took over the brewery site as well as a narrow strip of land on the west side of the bridge adjacent to the Stove Works, thereby extending along the entire waterfront on both sides of the bridge. When the Belle Isle Bridge burned in 1915, a temporary bridge was constructed slightly to the west of the bridge crossing, in order to accommodate automobile travel while the new bridge was being constructed. In order to accommodate the approach to this temporary bridge, the portion of Electric City located on the west side of the main bridge was razed. When the new permanent bridge was constructed in 1923, the intersection of East Grand Avenue and Jefferson Avenue was configured to allow access to a trolley tunnel underneath the bridge. After being plagued by a number of fires, the remainder of Electric City was condemned by the city and torn down in 1928. A park was constructed in its place on the east side, named “Gabriel Richard Park” in 1936 for the influential French priest who served Detroit during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a Catholic pastor for Detroit, missionary to the Indian tribes in the area, a newspaper publisher, school promoter, and Congressman.

The only building left on the east side of the approach was the former 1921 Belle Isle Coach Station, which was demolished in 1980. During the restoration of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge in 1986, the intersection of East Grand Avenue and Jefferson Avenue was once again redesigned, and the trolley tunnel removed. It is likely that the current allées of trees

date to this time period. Despite the recent features of the Belle Isle Approach, its park setting has served as a link between Belle Isle and the mainland since the early 20th century.

12. **Loop Canal (Photos 11, 12, 14, beneath bridges)**
   Casino Way
   1883
   Contributing structure

The Loop Canal, at the west end of the island connecting Lake Takoma with the Detroit River’s north channel, was one of the first features of the park, completed in 1883. Canoeing on the canal was a popular activity, and the original bandstand was located in the center of a bridge over this canal. The southern end features paved plazas, part of the Dan Kiley design executed for this area (see No. 20). The rest of the Loop Canal to the north is surrounded by open lawn and field areas, with little vegetation along the banks.

13. **Sunset Drive/Loop Canal Bridge**
   Sunset Drive
   Construction date unknown/1980s?
   Non-contributing structure

This concrete bridge carries Sunset Drive over the Loop Canal, south of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10) and the Flower Clock (No. 9). The walls and abutments are constructed of concrete, with a metal railing along the top.

14. **Central Avenue/Loop Canal Bridge (Photo 62)**
   Central Avenue
   c. 2009, but retaining metal and stonework from previous 1893 bridge
   Contributing: historic outer face material; non-contributing: c. 2009 structural components

Built over the Loop Canal at Central Avenue, this reuses parts of what was up to then one of the two oldest bridges remaining on the island – one of two Loop Canal bridges built in 1893 by the King Bridge Company to replace earlier rustic wood ones. The second bridge (No. 16) is located to the south, just east of the Casino (No. 19).

Like the other 1893 bridge (No. 16), this bridge is more ornate than most found on Belle Isle. It has cut stone abutments and molded concrete posts at each end. Each side displays an ornate openwork iron grill arch below the deck and decorative openwork iron railing with rosettes and elaborate scrollwork. Part of the railing is missing at the southwest end of the bridge. Concrete posts at each approach have acanthus leaf patterns along their tops, with inset rectangular panels in the tapered shafts; one of the panels set into a post on the east approach contains the Parks and Boulevards names, along with "Built by The King Bridge Co., Col. H. Kallman, Engineer, 1893." A second panel on the west approach has the same inscription as the one on the east. In 2009 the bridge was rebuilt in widened form by the Posen Construction Company but retaining
the historic decorative railings, arch finish, and wing walls.\textsuperscript{16} Except for the stonework and metal railings and arches along the outer edges, the bridge is a new structure, built c. 2009, and much wider than the earlier one.

\textit{15. Loop Canal Pedestrian Bridge}
Muse Road

c. 2009

Non-contributing structure

This single-span steel truss bridge is located just south of Central Avenue, and carries a paved pedestrian walkway over the Loop Canal from Muse Road to a parking lot on the east side of Casino Way. The bridge is set on abutments of textured concrete block, with paved approaches that rise at a gentle angle. The superstructure is a subdivided Warren through truss.

A second duplicate bridge is sometimes utilized nearby, north of the Central Avenue Bridge over the Loop Canal. However, this second bridge appears to be a temporary one, seasonally installed for the annual “Grand Prix” event. For this reason the temporary bridge was not included in this nomination, while the more permanent bridge south of Central Avenue was included.

\textit{16. Casino/Loop Canal Bridge (Photo 12)}
The Strand
c. 1980, but railings re-used from previous 1893 bridge

Non-contributing structure

This pedestrian bridge crosses over the Loop Canal at Lake Takoma just east of the Casino (No. 19) and north of The Strand. It retains the railings from one of the two bridges on Belle Isle constructed in 1893 by the King Bridge Company to replace earlier rustic wood ones that had quickly deteriorated. The other 1893 bridge is located close by to the north, carrying Central Avenue over the Loop Canal (No. 12).

The arched steel girder bridge is set on modern concrete abutments and carries a concrete deck. The elaborate 1893 iron railings are decorated with openwork scroll patterns, anchored by square posts topped with finials. Fluted posts mark the approaches. The concrete abutments are recent and likely date to the 1980 renovation of this area as the only completed section of landscape architect Dan Kiley’s plan for a Promenade along Lake Takoma. Although there has been a bridge crossing the Loop Canal in this area since the park’s earliest years, it appears the current bridge stands at a slightly altered location to align the new walkway from the Kiley-designed plaza on the bridge’s east end to the driveway south of the Casino. It appears that only the railings of the 1893 bridge were re-used when the structure was rebuilt c. 1980.

Two bronze dedication plaques are affixed to the middle of the railing on the north side of the bridge. One lists the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards, as well as the King Bridge

Company, Engineer Col. H. Kallman, and the construction date of 1893. The second plaque contains a bas relief of the seal of the City of Detroit.

17. Lake Takoma (Photo 11, 21, 26)
The Strand
1887/west end reconfigured and boat basin added c. 1980
I contributing site

Lake Takoma is one of the earliest lakes created on Belle Isle, formed from naturally low-lying areas in the years just after the city’s acquisition of the island. The lake was completed in 1887 along with the first Casino, which was perched on its north bank.

The lake’s amorphous outline was altered at the far west end near the Casino in 1980 as the result of a plan for a Promenade along Lake Takoma prepared by landscape architect Dan Kiley in 1977. The plan’s design reconfigured the west end banks of the lake into straight geometric forms (No. 17a) and created a circular paddling basin (No. 17b) south of the Casino. There is little vegetation along the banks, mostly limited to sparse copses of weeping willow trees. A lake contains a number of small islands.

18. Casino/Lake Takoma Pedestrian Bridge
The Strand
c. 1980
Non-contributing structure

This single-span steel bridge is located immediately south of the Casino (No. 19) and carries a paved pedestrian walkway over a short channel at the west end of Lake Takoma that leads into a circular paddle boat basin. The bridge was constructed as part of Dan Kiley’s planned promenade along Lake Takoma, along with the steel Trellis (No. 20) located east of the Loop Canal. The bridge is constructed with steel arches set on concrete block abutments, and the concrete deck has aluminum railings.

19. Casino (Photo 16-19)
Casino Way
1907
Contributing

The Casino is a two-story social hall designed by the Detroit firm of Van Leyen and Schilling, and located on the south side of the island overlooking the circular boat basin. The 12x5 bay rectangular Renaissance Revival building is set on a high foundation, with rectangular towers at the two front corners. The blond brick walls are pierced by large, regularly spaced openings, consisting of arcaded areas on the first story and broad rectangular window openings on the second story. Limestone stringcourses above the raised foundation and beneath the second-story

windows surround the building. A hipped roof with overhanging eaves is supported by a series of brackets and covered with red terra cotta tiles. A plaza with flat terra cotta tiles surrounds the Casino on the north, east, and west sides, with a set of wide concrete steps leading up from the plaza to the main entrance in the center of the north façade. The south elevation has a projecting three-bay section in the center, overlooking the basin and the river beyond. Two long, shed-roofed dormers and window openings in the raised basement provide additional water views on the south elevation.

The first-story arcades have square-plan piers, trimmed in limestone, supporting the arches, forming verandas that extend around nearly the entire building. A terra cotta roundel with raised relief design is centered in each spandrel. Full-length aluminum sash windows illuminate the first story, with a band of the windows framing the center entrance. In the second story, windows consist of paired 16/8 aluminum sash windows, separated by paired brick piers. The second story was originally surrounded by a veranda, which was enclosed by the aluminum windows at an unknown date. The two corner towers located at the ends of the north façade are three stories in height, each capped by a hip roof. The façade towers each have a small patio surrounding the third story; additional architectural details in the towers include raised bands of brick, keystones surmounting the first-story arches, and projecting semicircular patios on the east and west ends of the façade. Two corner projections located on the south elevation are wider, and only two stories high. Sets of triple rectangular windows on the first story and triple arched windows on the second story are connected by shallow piers, with limestone sills contrasting with the brick walls. Some of the windows in the south corner projections have been infilled.

20. Trellis/Plaza (Photos 12-13)
Loiter Way
c. 1980
2 non-contributing structures

This triangular-footprint plaza with overhead open trellis (No. 20a) is located at the west end of Loiter Way, just across the Loop Canal from the Casino (No. 19) and overlooking the west end of Lake Takoma. It appears to be a Dan Kiley-designed feature, included in a 1977 “Schematic Proposal for a Promenade,” prepared by his landscape architecture firm Kiley, Tyndall and Walker, following a 1976 Master Plan that Kiley completed for the park. The plan for the promenade is focused on the north bank of Lake Takoma, using a series of paved paths and plazas to link the Casino to other Lake Takoma features such as the Flynn Pavilion (No. 21), Remick Music Shell (No. 23), and Peace Carillon (No. 24). In the plan, two square plazas are shown at the junction of the Loop Canal and Lake Takoma, the uppermost of which is divided into two triangles, with a trellis outlining the south triangle. The plan for the promenade was never fully carried out; however, some open plazas in the area of the Casino and the squared-off retaining walls enclosing the west end of Lake Takoma mark a first stage in the intended implementation of Kiley’s plan (No. 20b). This open trellis and plazas appear to be two of the three executed above-ground structural elements associated with the planned promenade – the other structure is the pedestrian bridge over Lake Takoma at the paddle boat basin (No. 18).
Belle Isle Park ...................................................... Wayne Co., MI
Name of Property ........................................ County and State

The trellis is composed of interlocking steel ribs overhead, supported by round, hollow steel columns. Overhead, a wood trellis forms a canopy that partially shields the structure. It is set on a triangular raised concrete platform, reached by a set of full-width steps on the hypotenuse. Interestingly, rather than outlining the lower triangular half of a square plaza as the Kiley plan shows, it outlines a triangular plaza that would be the north triangular half of a full square, essentially mirroring the 1977 design.

21. William H. Flynn Memorial Skating Pavilion/Flynn Memorial Recreational Building
(Photos 21-23)
Loiter Way
1949, renovated 2004-2006
Contributing building

Constructed at the same time as the nearby Remick Music Shell (No. 23), the Flynn Pavilion replaced an earlier skating pavilion along the north shore of Lake Takoma. The building was designed by J. Robert F. Swanson (1900-1981), who worked with Eliel and Eero Saarinen during the 1930s and 1940s before starting his own firm, Swanson Associates, in 1947. William H. Flynn, a native Detroiter, bequeathed funds to the city of Detroit for the Flynn Memorial, which he specified for a place of assembly on Belle Isle with multiple recreational functions. In his 1927 will, Flynn envisioned a two-story marble building with surrounding Italian gardens. The bequest was not accepted by the city until 1936, and it took another fourteen years for the funds to be made available. They were used to defray the costs of the $200,000 skating pavilion that was completed in 1950, and which bore Mr. Flynn’s name to fulfill his bequest.

The Modernist building was constructed to allow for year-round recreational use including boat and skate rentals, concessions, and shelter during inclement weather. It has a long, low rectangular form with a glass-walled center section flanked by two sections with rusticated square cut ashlar walls, that are illuminated by long bands of casement windows. The flat roof of the center section rises slightly to the south, providing a wide view of Lake Takoma. Wood trim is utilized in the glass walls, around the banded windows, and under the eaves.

22. Pump House (barely visible, Photo 21, right center)
Loiter Way
1928/roof replaced late 20th century
Contributing structure

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19 “City Waits 18 Years for $48,142 Gift,” Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Wayne Co., MI

County and State

This small pump house is located on the north side of Lake Takoma, approximately halfway between the Flynn Pavilion on the west and the Remick Music Shell on the east. The walls, which appear to be faced in an artificial stone or concrete block veneer, support a flat roof with wide eaves. The flat roof appears to be a relatively recent alteration from the original form. A metal door on the west elevation is capped by a wide stone lintel and has a concrete threshold that contains the date “1928.” A window on the south elevation has metal ventilation slats and an artificial stone sill.

23. Remick Music Shell (Photo 24)
Loiter Way
1950
Contributing structure

The band shell is located east of the Flynn Skating Pavilion and Pump House between Loiter Way on the north and Lake Takoma on the south. It was constructed in 1950 to replace a previous band shell that was constructed near the same spot in the 1920s but had since fallen into disrepair. The new music shell was named in honor of prominent Detroit music publisher Jerome H. Remick (1867-1931). The designer has not been identified.

The starkly modern design of the Remick Music Shell has a dramatic cantilevered rectangular sounding board ceiling supported at an angle over the stage by a system of steel ribs along the top of the structure. The ceiling is constructed of wood boards, with a sheet metal covering over the roof and long narrow recessed lights along the length of the underside. A one-story square cut ashlar building with a flat roof wraps around the stage, housing rehearsal space, restrooms, a broadcast room, and dressing rooms. A brass dedication plaque is affixed to a concrete accessibility ramp on the north side of the stage; currently only half of the plaque is still hanging in place. Spectator seating is accommodated in a large paved area facing the stage, overlooking Lake Takoma on the south. Metal amplifiers on tall posts are set into concrete and stone bases on each side of the building.

Loiter Way
1939-40
2 contributing structures, 1 contributing object

This tower is located on the north bank of Lake Takoma, on a small, square manmade island surrounded by a moat, which is enclosed by a tall ornamental metal fence. It was constructed in 1939-40 after a campaign by Detroit News columnist Nancy Brown (c. 1870-1948). Her readers successfully raised the money to build a peace monument as an outgrowth of an extremely popular annual sunrise service they had instituted in the 1930s at the earlier music shell on the south side of Belle Isle. A dedication ceremony on June 16, 1940, attracted 50,000 attendees, and the first carillon concert was held on July 4th of that year.20 The 85-foot-tall monument was designed by architect Clarence E. Day, of the Detroit firm Harley, Ellington and Day. Other local

commissions for the firm included the Rackham Building at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the Coleman E. Young Municipal Center and Veterans Memorial Building in Detroit.

The Carillon Tower (No. 24a, contributing) is a unique structure that presents a Gothic appearance from a distance but actually possesses details more akin to Art Deco upon close inspection. It is faced in four-inch thick limestone panels over a brick and reinforced concrete inner structure. The tower has a square-plan base, with a projecting pier at the outer edge of each face each containing a panel of Art Deco relief sculpture appearing to depict a human figure engaged in some occupation at its top. The square base is topped by a much taller octagonal shaft whose limestone walls are pierced by long, narrow recesses on four sides, each of the four sides containing three lancet windows, each topped by a tracery panel, atop one another; these originally were simply openings, but ornamental aluminum grills with bird screening behind were installed probably in the late 1960s or 70s. The shaft is crowned by a slightly thinner octagonal “belfry” containing a tall limestone tracery-filled window opening with three-sided head in each face separated by raised buttresses. It contains an automated musical device inside that replaced the original chime carillon in the 1970s. The top of the tower is decorated with tracery patterns, divided by a series of ribs. The north façade is marked by a central round-head paneled bronze door containing a relief portrait of Nancy Brown, a clock inset into the stone, and “NANCY BROWN PEACE CARILLON” carved over the door (the south side contains a second paneled arch-head bronze door). The west side of the monument is carved with a quotation by Abraham Lincoln, “A JUST AND LASTING PEACE AMONG OURSELVES AND WITH ALL NATIONS,” and a second quotation by John Greenleaf Whittier, “AS ON THE SEA OF GALILEE/ THE CHRIST IS WHISPERING PEACE,” is engraved on the east side. The tower is set on a large octagonal flagstone-paved upper terrace, accessed via a short set of steps on four sides, which is surrounded by a larger square, with cut-off corners, lower terrace that contains flagstone walkways in a lawn setting with shrubbery. This lower terrace is surrounded by a narrow moat lined with low stone retaining walls and iron fencing (the fencing apparently installed sometime after the 1960s). On the north side of the tower, a gateway with cut limestone posts and iron gates leads to a small stone “causeway” (No. 24b, contributing) providing access across the moat. A large concrete and granite panel, known as the International Peace Memorial (No. 24c, contributing), along Loiter Way is inscribed with the Great Seal of the United States, along with the inscription “WITH THIS EVERLASTING WITNESS WE KEEP PEACE WITH OUR NEIGHBORS AS THEY HAVE KEPT PEACE WITH US THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.” At the base of the inscription, concrete seating faces south to the Carillon Tower. This panel and seating area was installed in 1941 by the Monument Builders of America.

This octagonal picnic shelter replaced a previous wood shelter removed in 1994.\textsuperscript{23} Square steel columns support the conical roof, which is covered with asphalt shingles and is capped by a cupola ventilator in the center. The wood ceiling is supported by wood trusses, and several steel picnic tables have been affixed to the concrete pad foundation.

26. \textit{Shadynook Comfort Station (Photo 20)}
Muse Road
1895
Contributing building

This dual-purpose comfort station and picnic shelter is located on the east side of Muse Road. The building is constructed of brick, with stylized limestone details imitating quoins, trim, and capitals. The structure has asphalt shingle roofing, which replaced the original wood shingles. On the south side of the building, a steeply-pitched hipped roof is supported by thick brick piers separated by brick arches, providing shelter for the picnic area. The comfort station on the north side of the building has a more complex form, with hipped-roof and gabled projections shielding the entrance from view from the street. A stepped-form mock chimney rises from the west façade, and a half-timbered design is set into the end gable of the entrance. A set of four steel casement windows on the façade is set into a wood frame. The entrance vestibule contains a similar four-part window frame, with turned wood columns set in front of the window.

27. \textit{GAR Memorial/Civil War Monument}
Central Avenue
1948
Contributing object

This granite statue is located at the intersection of Central Avenue and Muse Road, in a square flower bed surrounded by a metal picket fence. It was the last memorial to be erected along Central Avenue. Sculpted by Angelo Ziroli (1899-1948), the memorial depicts a bearded Civil War soldier at parade rest, with a rifle at his side. The monument was commissioned by the Woman’s Relief Corps Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). A tall rectangular base is engraved with a flag and the GAR badge, along with the inscription “THERE ARE NOW FORTY-EIGHT REASONS// WHY WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER// THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC” and information about the monument’s dedication on November 11, 1948.

28. \textit{Newsboys Memorial Fountain}
Central Avenue
1897, restored 1997
Contributing object

\textsuperscript{23} Score 1994, p. III-11
This fountain is located on the north side of Central Avenue, opposite Muse Road. Sculptor Frederick Alexander Turner Dunbar (1849-1921) created the work in 1897. The bronze sculpture of a boy and his dog companion is placed atop a granite drinking fountain on a concrete base. When the sculpture of the boy was stolen for the second time in the 1970s, the fountain was left incomplete until 1997 when Grosse Pointe-based sculptor Janice Trimpe was commissioned to recreate the original design of the young boy, which was incorporated into the monument.

The fountain was commissioned by the *Detroit Evening News* and dedicated to the newsboys of Detroit in a large ceremony on Belle Isle in 1897. It was the first memorial sculpture placed on the island. The sculpture, “Partners,” depicts a young boy holding a newspaper, with a dog looking up at him intently. Engraved on the face of the fountain is the inscription “The Evening News to the// newsboys of Detroit// 1897,” and a small bronze sculpture of three boys’ heads adorns the spout. A brass plaque on a short granite plinth identifying the artists was installed in front of the fountain during the rededication of the monument in 1997.

29. *Picnic Shelter #1 (Photos 14-15)*
Central Avenue
1895
Contributing structure

This early wood shelter is located on the north side of Central Avenue, near the Newsboys Memorial Fountain (No. 28). The conical-roof open octagonal shelter has a wall section, with broad arched opening, in the center of each side, and an open octagonal conical-roof pavilion, with turned columns supporting round arches beneath the tall concave conical roof, projecting from each angle of the main roof. The central conical roof is supported by a series of interior turned columns as well as the wall sections and pavilion columns on the perimeter. The roof is covered by wood and asphalt shingles that appear to have been placed over the original slate tiles, and wood columns throughout the structure are set into concrete bases. A number of fixed metal picnic tables have been bolted to the concrete foundation.

30. *Public Lighting Department (PLD) Building*
Central Avenue
c. 1910
Contributing structure

This small rectangular building, constructed to house electrical equipment, is located off Central Avenue, north of Picnic Shelter #1 (No. 29). The one-story building has half-timbered walls, set on a brick water table. A steep hipped roof is covered by slate shingles. On the southwest façade, the central entrance has a wood surround, with a Tudor arch over the paneled door. Paired wood windows with six glass lights each are located on either side of the door, while the northwest and southeast elevations have sets of three 4/6 wood sash windows. Two transformer boxes are set

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just northwest of the building. A 1915 sewer system plan map of the island shows a building here that is labeled “Electric light transformer house.”

31. Detroit Boat Club (Photos 91-96)
Picnic Way
1902 (main clubhouse), additions 1913 and 1922
1 contributing building, 1 contributing structure, 3 non-contributing buildings, 4 non-contributing structures

The Detroit Boat Club (DBC) complex is located along the north shore of Belle Isle, just east of the Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge (No. 10). The clubhouse, two outbuildings, and pavilion are located on a manmade rectangular island approximately 50 feet offshore from Belle Isle in the Detroit River. The DBC Island is surrounded on the north, east, and west sides by a series of wood docks and boat slips that extend into the river. A concrete pedestrian bridge, marked by a small guard’s booth, provides access to the clubhouse entrance from the parking lot on Belle Isle proper. A secondary utilitarian metal bridge located east of the main bridge leads directly to the open space surrounding the clubhouse. The DBC has used the building on only a limited basis since the late 1990s.

The DBC, founded in 1839, constructed the main part of the clubhouse (No. 31a, contributing) in 1902, replacing a previous clubhouse that burned (the clubhouse before that also succumbed to fire). The three-story Mediterranean style clubhouse was designed as a fireproof structure by Alpheus Chittenden.25 The building has a complex form and compound roofline, partly due to a number of verandas and patios surrounding the building as part of the original design, and partially as a result of 20th century additions and renovations to the building. Much of the building is covered by low-pitched hipped roofs of red terra cotta tile, with flat roofs covering some sections. It stands on cedar pilings and is constructed with a reinforced concrete frame and stucco-covered structural tile exterior walls. The main entrance is in the second story, marked by a projecting two-story section with three large arches and accessed via a concrete staircase that splits at a landing above the first story. A tile-clad hip-roof rectangular tower rises in the center of the roof, and there is also a second tile-roofed tower along the side facing the water. Although the entrance is currently off-center, an early 20th century photograph indicates that the entrance section was the center of the south façade prior to a later addition to the east side of the building.26

A square hipped-roof section and a flat-roof section flank the entrance on the west and east, respectively. These sections were part of the original design, though they have been much altered by modifications to windows, enclosure of colonnades, and small additions. On the east end of the building, a three-story hipped-roof section was added at an unknown date. A series of verandas and porches surround much of the building, featuring colonnades, arcades, and parapet roofs on multiple levels. A four-story square tower is located on the north elevation facing the water. Large door openings on the first story, now mostly infilled, once provided direct access to

25 Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 45
26 Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 45
boat launches. Windows throughout the building vary in sash material and size; however, window openings have been altered throughout the building and several of the windows are modern replacements.

An early 20th century photograph of the clubhouse shows the building isolated in the water without the adjoining skirt of land now present, indicating that this “island” was constructed after the building was completed.27 The same photograph shows that the entrance over the water was originally much longer, consisting of two bridges with a small round island in the center of the channel. Currently a short single-span pedestrian bridge (No. 31b, contributing) leads to the island terrace in front of the clubhouse entrance. The bridge is constructed of stucco-covered concrete with balustrades formed of series of square balusters with arches spanning the openings between, capped by a concrete railing. A similar design is used as a railing along the edge of the island on either side of the bridge. Elsewhere, sheet steel piling borders the exterior structure of the island. A square guardhouse (No. 31c, non-contributing) on the Belle Isle side of the bridge has vertical wood cladding and 1/1 vinyl sash windows. A second steel bridge (No. 31d, non-contributing) is located east of the clubhouse.

The clubhouse is set in the southwestern corner of a rectangular island, surrounded by narrow grass-covered lawns crossed by paved pathways. Two in-ground pools (No. 31e and 31f, non-contributing) are located just north of the clubhouse. On the east edge of the island, a long rectangular shed (No. 31g, non-contributing) is covered with vinyl siding and capped by a front-gable roof with asphalt shingle roofing. A round pavilion (No. 31h, non-contributing) with a round sloped roof is located on the northeast corner of the island, facing a round paved area. A small hipped-roof outbuilding (No. 31i, non-contributing) is located north of the pools, and may have served as a lifeguard station.

The three-story building’s main/second story contains the building’s primary rooms, a two-story lobby, two-story ballroom to its west, and two large single-story rooms to the east. The dining room to the lobby’s immediate east is finished with white-painted paneled dados and square wood posts supporting a plastered ceiling divided into panels by cased beams treated as classical entablatures with modillion bands.

The lobby and ballroom are the interior’s visual highlights. The roughly square two-story lobby, topped by a skylight monitor, is finished in dark stained wood and has an arcaded lower story at the front and back, the arches springing from a pair of wooden columns with stylized Corinthian capitals. The walls up to the height of the column capitals are finished in paneled wood dados. A staircase off the northwest corner provides access to a gallery that surrounds the space. The gallery fronts to the room’s front and rear are also arcaded, though without the columns, and the arched openings contain wooden twisted columns at the sides and centers supporting open wooden mullions or tracery forming in each opening a pair of arches topped by a central circle. The railings of the staircase and gallery display wonderfully inventive wooden seahorse-design balusters. Opposite the staircase in a short corridor connecting the lobby with the verandah on the river side of the building is a fireplace set in a tall flat-top mantelpiece surround decorated

27 Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 45
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Name of Property __________________________ County and State

with terra-cotta twisted columns at the outer edges and cap displaying egg-and-dart and modillion band cornice above a broad frieze featuring six equally spaced “human” face grotesques or “green men.”

The ballroom is a rectangular room with a raised platform in an alcove in the center of the long side opposite the entry from the lobby. It is finished with single and paired white-painted fluted wooden Corinthian pilasters, rising above paneled bases (and paneled dado) to support a husky cornice decorated with oversized modillions. Above this main cornice is a low “attic” displaying more inventive pilasters featuring a shell motif and, between them, round windows set within richly detailed swags. Spanning the entrance from the lobby is a projecting balcony, supported by large console brackets and displaying a balustrade of massy balusters framed by paneled posts. The ceiling is the timber underside of the room’s hip roof, with its wooden kingpost roof trusses, purlins and ridgepole, struts, rafters, and boarding exposed and one of the club’s rowing boats hanging from the center.

The clubhouse is suffering from structural problems that will need to be addressed, and the Detroit Boat Club no longer uses the building for its social events because it can no longer afford to maintain the large building. While it has moved to new quarters off Belle Isle, it continues to use the building for training exercises, and the main rooms now house rowing equipment. Despite the many small alterations, the Detroit Boat Club’s character as an outstanding example of early 20th century clubhouse architecture remains very evident.

32. Picnic Shelter #5 (Photos 67-68)
Riverbank Road
c. 1900
Contributing structure

This picnic shelter is located between Riverbank Road on the north and Central Avenue on the south, west of Inselruhe Avenue. It is a large 12-sided shelter, similar to nearby Picnic Shelter #6 (No. 37), with 24 steel columns made from built-up members and arranged in outer and inner rings around the structure. Each column is set into a thick concrete base. The wood ceiling is supported by steel trusses, and the conical roof is covered with asphalt shingles, with a cupola ventilator in the center. The roof was originally covered with wood shingles, which were replaced at an unknown date. A number of steel picnic tables have been bolted to the concrete floor, which is raised several inches above grade.

33. James J. Brady Memorial
Central Avenue
1928
Contributing object

The James J. Brady Memorial was designed by architect Frederick O’Dell (1891-1979) and sculptor Samuel Adolph Cashwan (1900-88) to honor the founder of the Old Newsboys’
Goodfellow Fund of Detroit (also known as the Detroit Goodfellows), which used the extra proceeds from newsboys’ sales during the holiday season to provide services to area children. The fund was established in 1914 by James J. Brady. The monument is set on a low granite platform, with a tall granite pedestal in the center for Brady’s statue, and two small low-relief bronze plaques set into granite endposts. The life-size bronze statue shows Brady with a newspaper and pouch, with a large cloak shielding a small child. The endpost plaques contain more information about Brady’s work with the organization, with illustrations of children.

34. Spanish-American War Memorial (Photo 63)
Central Avenue
1932, restored 1999-2000
Contributing object

This granite monolith rises on the northeast corner of Central Avenue and Picnic Way, and is located across from the General O. M. Poe Memorial Marker (No. 35). The rectangular marker has incised fluting atop the base, forming panels in each face, those on the broad sides surrounding central rectangular inscription plaques, and in the cap. Two bronze statues depicting a soldier and a sailor flank the memorial, and a round bronze plaque is centered at the top of the monument. The inscription reads, “Erected by the People of Wayne County, Michigan in commemoration of the service of her Volunteer Sons in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps of the United States during the War with Spain 1898-1902.” The figures were designed by sculptor Allen George Newman (1875-1940); the soldier is the sculptor’s well-known “The Hiker,” reproduced on a number of monuments throughout the United States. On the back of the monument is a second inscription, “In commemoration of the Volunteer Services of Wayne County Sons during the Insurrection in the Philippines and the Chinese Relief Expedition 1898-1902.” A small plaque, located near the base of the memorial, commemorates the 1999-2000 restoration, funded by the Oliver Dewey Marcks Foundation and the Detroit Recreation Department.

35. General O. M. Poe Monument
Central Avenue
1923
Contributing object

This granite upright monument is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Central Avenue and Picnic Way, across from the Spanish-American War Memorial (No. 34). It is dedicated to Brigadier General Orlando Metcalf Poe (c.1832-1895), a graduate of West Point who became a leader in the U. S. Army Engineer Corps, achieving the rank of captain in 1863 and gaining notoriety for his service in Civil War battles at Knoxville, Atlanta, and Savannah. In 1867 he became Major of Engineers, and later served as Engineer Secretary to the Lighthouse.

Board, as well as Engineer of the Upper Lakes Lighthouse District. A bronze plaque is affixed to the front of the monument with flower-shaped rivets and embossed with the inscription, “1923// This tablet is dedicated to Gen. O. M. Poe Post No. 433, Grand Army of the Republic, by its auxiliary, Gen. Poe Woman's Relief Corps No. 8// ‘Not for selfish gain or applause, but for honor and the glory of the cause they did that which will never be forgotten.’”

36. Picnic Shelter #4 (Photos 59-60)
Picnic Way
c. 1995
Non-contributing structure

This hexagonal picnic shelter is located on the north side of Picnic Way, set into the trees north of the Stone Comfort Station (No. 38). It replaced an earlier 1895 shelter, known as “Greystone Shelter.” A steep concave conical roof rises above the shelter, covered with asphalt shingles. Inside the shelter, the ceiling is constructed of wood, with trusses supported by a square wood column at each corner. A small number of steel picnic tables are bolted to the concrete pad foundation.

37. Picnic Shelter #6
Central Avenue
c. 1900
Contributing structure

Located on the southwest side of the intersection of Central Avenue and Inselruhe Avenue, this structure is similar to Picnic Shelter #5 (No. 32), located on the north side of Central Avenue. The twelve-sided shelter has built-up columns at the angles, with latticed webbing connecting steel plates. They are set in concrete bases, themselves set into the concrete foundation. The conical roof is covered with asphalt shingles, but originally had wood shingles. Underneath, the wood ceiling is supported by steel trusses. A metal ventilator cupola is centered on the roof.

38. Stone Comfort Station (Photos 64, 66)
Picnic Way
1895
Contributing building

The Stone Comfort Station is located near the south end of Picnic Way, just south of Picnic Shelter #4 (No. 36). The building is constructed with walls of rusticated granite, capped by a hipped roof, with an entry porch for each gender on the east and west elevations. The porches have small gable roofs, with arched openings supported by thick granite piers. Wood fascia boards line the roof overhang, which are echoed in the square window frames used on each elevation. The windows are located in round-corner recessed areas that fill most of each façade.

31 Score 1994, p. IV-039-1
adjacent to raised corner piers and frieze areas. Each window has a projecting unfinished granite sill and contains a single-paned hopper window. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles, and large gable dormers on the north and south elevations contain ventilators. Originally, flat clay tile shingles were used on the roof and the windows contained leaded diamond panes.32

39. Bus Stop Shelter/ Picnic Shelter #7
Loiter Way
1908
Contributing structure

This rectangular dual-purpose picnic shelter and restroom building is located just south of Loiter Way, north of the Conservatory (No. 41a) and Formal Gardens (No. 41b). Known as the “Bus Stop Shelter,” the building is set on a raised brick foundation with a concrete slab floor, and is protected by a hip roof with asphalt shingles. The roof of the open picnic shelter on the east side is supported by steel columns and trusses, under a wood ceiling. Several steel picnic tables are affixed to the floor. The restroom section on the west is enclosed in a brick building, decorated with panels composed of brick patterns. The roof over the restroom section is slightly lower than that over the picnic shelter, and contains an eyebrow dormer ventilator. The entry porch for this section is located on the southwest elevation, opposite the picnic shelter. Wood caps outline the tops of the windows, which have been covered with plywood.

40. Pump House
Loiter Way
Construction date unknown (c. 1930?)
Contributing structure

This small brick pump house is located north of the Formal Gardens (No. 41b), but it is unknown whether it was directly associated with the operation of the garden. The structure is set partially underground, and has wood windows and a sheet metal roof. It is surrounded by a metal fence.

41. Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory (Horticultural Building) and Formal Gardens (Photos 28-31)
Insleruhe Avenue
Conservatory constructed 1904, wooden structural frame and entrance replaced in metal 1955/ Formal Gardens c. 1920s, garden sculptures added 1927, 1936, and 1985
1 contributing building, 1 contributing site, 3 contributing objects

The Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory (No. 41a, contributing) was constructed in 1904, designed as part of a recreational complex with the Aquarium by Albert Kahn (1869-1942), then of the firm of Nettleton and Kahn. The entire building is of steel frame (originally wood) and glass construction, providing light to plants within the conservatory’s various rooms. In the center of the building, a large round glass dome rises above the entrance. Each end of the building has a projecting pavilion with a smaller square dome. A glass barrel-vaulted hall

32 Score 1994, p. IV-37-1
connects the Aquarium to the Conservatory. The original wood framing of the horticultural building was replaced with a steel frame in 1955, due to its poor condition, and the building was then re-dedicated as the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory in honor of one of the project’s biggest donors. Early 20th century photographs of the building show a Beaux Arts pavilion entrance, with large arched windows separated by Corinthian pilasters. This was likely replaced by the current glass and steel entrance during the 1950s renovations. A narrow Japanese garden borders the exterior of the west elevation.

On the west side of the Conservatory a terraced formal garden (Photo 28), named the Henry A. Johnson Memorial Gardens (c. 1953), for the Detroit Recreation Department’s recently deceased floriculture supervisor (No. 41b, contributing), extends from the Conservatory to Picnic Way.33 The rectangular terraces are outlined in closely clipped low bushes, surrounded by an iron fence; a brass plaque notes that the fence was donated c. 1970 as a memorial to local architect Leonard B. Willeke (1889-1970) by his wife.

The garden contains three monuments which are positioned in a line along a central axis with the Conservatory entrance. In the center of the garden is the Levi L. Barbour Memorial Fountain (No. 41c, contributing), named for a Detroit lawyer who was instrumental in the acquisition of Belle Isle for the city and supported the park financially in its early years (Photo 27). The fountain was created in 1936 by Michigan sculptor and Cranbrook Academy of Art professor Marshall Fredericks (1908-1998), and features a leaping bronze gazelle on a high granite pedestal. Fredericks would repeat the gazelle motif in a number of his other works.34 The central composition is set in a circular pool, and surrounded by bronze statues of a rabbit, a hawk, an otter, and a grouse, all species native to the Detroit area. It was restored in 1994. A Japanese stone lantern (No. 41d, contributing) is located near the entrance of the Conservatory, donated by Detroit’s sister city of Toyota, Japan, in 1985. At the opposite end of the garden near Picnic Way, the Francis X. Kolb Sundial (No. 41e, contributing) features a bronze peacock on a high granite base. It was erected in 1927, but was later moved to its present position (on the site of a former drinking fountain) in 2009.35

42. Aquarium (Photos 31 (L), 32-34)
Inselruehe Avenue
1901-04
Contributing building

The Belle Isle Aquarium and the neighboring Conservatory (No. 41) were both designed at the same time by Albert Kahn (1869-1942), then of the firm Nettleton and Kahn, and George D. Mason. Kahn’s work on Belle Isle also includes the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse (No. 121). Although the Aquarium closed to the public in 2005 and the fish were moved off-site, the tanks

33 Detroit Recreation Department, Mary Georgilas, Resolution (c. 1953)
Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI

were restored and the building once again opened to visitors in the summer of 2012. The Aquarium and the Conservatory are both long, narrow structures with end pavilions and broader and taller central volumes, the two connected at their midpoints by a greenhouse tie that gives the complex an H-shape footprint. The north façade of the red brick Aquarium is entered through a hipped-roof pavilion, with a striking Beaux Arts entrance executed in terra cotta. Ornately banded pilasters frame the doorway, while a similarly decorated arch is topped with a keystone bearing a molded relief of Neptune. A broken round pediment over the doorway contains an elaborate molded cartouche, with the word “Aquarium” in a plaque underneath. Limestone quoins decorate the corners of the north façade, and limestone blocks face the high raised basement. A copper standing seam roof caps the front part of the building; the rest of the building has asphalt shingle roofing.

Much of the rest of the building is utilitarian in design, with brick walls containing a variety of wood sash windows set on limestone sills. In the center of the building, a square-shaped domed pavilion is illuminated by clerestory windows in a raised conical roof. A two-story projecting section on the south side of the building with an adjacent hipped-roof section was constructed for the building’s boiler room, according to early 20th century Sanborn maps. A brick wall around this south section encloses a service area between the Aquarium and the Horticultural Building.

The interior of the building has a barrel-vaulted ceiling covered entirely in green tiles, with tanks lining the central passageway. A set of free-standing tanks is set under the large central dome.

43. Picnic Way/Lake Takoma Bridge (Photo 45)
Picnic Way
1901
Contributing structure

This bridge, originally known as Bridge No. 10, is located southeast of the Peace Carillon (No. 24), at the east end of Lake Takoma, and consists of a concrete span with brick and limestone sidewalls that curve out slightly at each approach. The arched central span is decorated with molded plaques facing the lake, and an open railing featuring molded concrete balusters. The sidewalls are decorated with limestone bands, interrupted by projecting brick piers that are capped by round limestone finials.

44. Dossin Great Lakes Museum, Detroit Historical Society (Photos 46-47)
The Strand
1959, additions 1963 and 1968
1 contributing building, 2 contributing objects, 1 non-contributing object

The Dossin Great Lakes Museum (No. 44a, contributing) is located on the south side of The Strand, overlooking the Detroit River. The museum was originally founded in 1949, and housed the wood schooner J. T. Wing until 1956 when the vessel was deemed unsafe and was removed.

36 The green tile is not from the Pewabic Pottery, as stated in some sources, according to Melanie Bazil, October 31, 2012
The current building was designed by Detroit architect William Edward Kapp, who also designed the Detroit Historical Society’s main building on Woodward Avenue, and was named for the Dossin family that helped finance the new museum. It opened as a single exhibit hall in 1960; a detached exhibit hall was added in 1963, and a third hall was added to the west side along the riverbank in 1968.\(^{37}\)

The main block of the Modernist building is a flat-roofed rectangular exhibit hall facing The Strand. Its exterior is faced in dark blue brick. A glass-walled entrance projects above the roofline, fitted with large panes of glass set into a thin aluminum frame at the building entrance. Aluminum letters spell the museum’s name across the north façade. Clerestory windows provide illumination to the main exhibit hall. At the south end of the hall, partly projecting out over the Detroit River, stands the original pilot house of the 1952 *S.S. William Clay Ford*, which transported iron ore and coal from the upper Great Lakes to the River Rouge Steel Plant, a subsidiary of Ford Motor Company. The pilot house was installed as part of the museum building in 1987.\(^{38}\)

A separate glass-walled hall on the west side of the building is connected to the main block by a metal canopy, which provides shelter for a circular driveway at the entrance to the museum. On the west side of the pilot house, an addition (Aaron DeRoy Hall) extends along the river. The addition contains a band of windows looking out south over the river, with the name noted on the north elevation in wide aluminum letters.

A number of objects have been placed around the museum’s grounds as outside displays, with identifying markers. In front of the museum, two iron cannons (No. 44b and 44c, contributing) are set atop concrete bases, facing The Strand. The cannons were used in the War of 1812, and the bases are engraved with, “Perry’s Victory// Lake Erie// September 10\(^{th}\), 1813.” They stood on the grounds of the old Detroit City Hall building until that building was demolished in 1961. In the back of the museum along the waterfront, a large iron anchor (No. 44d, non-contributing) is on display, with a brass dedication plaque. The plaque notes that the anchor is from the *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald*, the famous Great Lakes freighter that was lost in Lake Superior in 1974. The anchor was raised in 1992, and likely placed on the museum grounds soon after.

45. *Picnic Shelter #9/Fishing Pier/Old Ferry Dock (Photo 50)*

The Strand
Early 20\(^{th}\) C.
2 contributing structures

This shelter, located south of the intersection of The Strand and Inselruhe Avenue, is set on the riverbank. It is the site of an earlier ferry structure that extended into the water and served private ferry operators beginning in the nineteenth century. While the current structure dates to the early

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Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI

Name of Property  County and State

20th century, it is the only remaining ferry dock structure of three that were located on the island.\(^{39}\)

The open shelter (No. 45a, contributing) is a long rectangular structure, with wood columns and trusses supporting a hipped roof. The exterior columns are set into tapered wood bases. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles, and creates a deep overhang surrounding the building. A number of steel picnic tables have been bolted into the concrete slab floor. Extending northeast along the riverbank is a narrow concrete dock (No. 45b, contributing), approximately 15 feet wide. The deck is concrete, and a wood railing and chain link fence provide a barrier on the south side along the water.

46. *Inselruhe Avenue/ Lake Takoma Bridge* (Photo 49)

Inselruhe Avenue

1999

Non-contributing structure

This concrete bridge with brick facing carries Inselruhe Avenue over the east side of Lake Takoma, just north of The Strand. It was constructed as a replica of the original 1901 bridge, known as Bridge No. 11, in this location. The original bridge was photo-documented for the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER MI-102). The new bridge was designed by the city of Detroit’s Department of Public Works Engineering Division, and constructed by Posen Construction, Inc. The brick-faced walls feature a raised diamond pattern comprised of rough brick headers, which curve outward at the north and south approaches. The walls have thick limestone caps, with molded rolled scrolls at each approach. A small granite date stone set next to the north approach, containing the inscription, “ERECTED 1901,” was retained from the earlier structure. A nearby granite plaque contains the more recent construction date of 1999 for the current bridge.

47. *Greenhouse Complex* (Photos 35-36)

Inselruhe Avenue

1899 and later

1 contributing building, 3 contributing structures

The first greenhouses in the multiple-structure complex, located south of the White House (No. 48), were constructed here in 1899.\(^{40}\) Today the complex consists of 17 greenhouses (counted as a single structure) surrounding, and connected to, a hip-roof brick building in the center, with a number of connected cold frames (counted as one structure) set southeast of the greenhouses. A brick wall with a gated entrance separates the greenhouse cold frames from Inselruhe Avenue.

\(^{39}\) The other two ferry locations were at the northwest corner, built 1883 per Olmsted’s plans for its location, which stood until the late 1920s, and a smaller structure built in 1912 for smaller boats on the north shore between the beach and the bridge. The 1912 structure remained in use until 1957 when ferry service ceased to the island (Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 23)

\(^{40}\) Greenhouses were first built in this part of the island in 1889.
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Set on brick and concrete block foundations, the greenhouses (No. 47a) have glass walls on frames that are composed of iron, steel, wood, and aluminum. Maintenance of the structures has required the ongoing replacement of materials over the course of the 20th century. In the center of the greenhouses, a one-story hipped-roof brick building (No. 47b) has wood doors on the east and west elevations. Much of the building is obscured by the greenhouses immediately adjacent to the south and west sides of the building, as well as a brick side ell on the north side and a long concrete block addition on the east side that provides access to greenhouses situated farther away. The cold frames (No 47c) are constructed of concrete, with metal ribs and bars creating a skeleton for temporary roof covering. Wood doors set into the ends of the structures allow access when roofs are in place. The Inselruhe Avenue entrance to the cold frames area is flanked by brick piers with concrete caps, connected to a brick wall (No. 47d) with concrete cap that extends south along the road to the Inselruhe Avenue Bridge (No. 46).

48. White House/Inselruhe House (Photo 35)

Inselruhe Avenue
c. 1850s-60s, with renovations 1926 and 1984
Contributing building

This two-story wood-frame house is the oldest extant building on Belle Isle, and precedes the City’s purchase of the island in 1879. The cross-gable Gothic Revival structure is located on Inselruhe Avenue, between the Greenhouse Complex (No. 47) and the Stables (No. 57). The house has clapboard siding, and is embellished with bay windows on the north and west elevations, decorative verge boards, cornerboards, and a window hood on the west elevation. A rounded one-story addition is set into the northwest corner of the cross-gable, containing a door set into a rounded arch; the flat roof of the entrance has bracketed eaves and a decorative parapet railing. A bracketed door hood covers a second entrance in the northeast corner, and two one-story porches cover much of the south elevation. Documentation of the house’s early history has not been located. A c. 1860 construction date has been suggested over the years, perhaps based on the house’s Gothic Revival architectural style. The original 1974 Belle Isle national register nomination states that the house “was originally built as a summer residence for the Campau family and its name, ‘Inselruhe,’ means Island Rest,” and one source has Bernard Campau as the first owner and 1856 as the date of construction — but no documentation for this information is given. A 1981 newspaper story states the house dates to c. 1860 with the front portion added in 1873,41 and a sign inside the building states that the front half of the house was built about 1873 by Walter Schweikart, a stone cutter from Germany, who leased the land from the Campau family, the property’s owners, in that decade. The 1876 Belden Wayne County map shows the house standing in a part of the island then owned by “Willis,” although other portions of the island were then owned by Campau family members, and one source says that Richard Willis built the house in 1863. Gordon W. Lloyd, a noted Detroit architect, has been listed as the house’s designer, but, again, on what evidence is unclear.42

41 “‘White House’ on Belle Isle to get repairs,” Detroit News, November 16, 1981
42 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 20
Regardless of the lack of documentation of the history, Inselruhe itself is highly important in the Detroit context as one of the few Gothic Revival houses left in the city. A photograph of the house published in the 1904-05 Annual Report of the Department of Parks and Boulevards shows a one-story wraparound porch in the current locations of the rounded entrance and both bay windows. The house was remodeled in 1926 with a new rear section replacing the original kitchen (sign in building). Its earliest use after the park’s establishment was for the park superintendent’s residence and office. The house served as the park superintendent’s residence in 1882-90, but also served as a saloon (early 1880s) and a restaurant, the Dairy Refreshment House, from 1890 until the late 1930s. It then served for many decades as the Detroit Garden Center, followed by use by the Michigan Horticultural Society. During the 20th century, the house has served as a restaurant, garden center, and offices. The house was renovated by the Friends of Belle Isle in 1984; this work included a new post and rail fence that currently borders the north side.

49. Cornelius L. Golightly Annex
Inselruhe Avenue
c. 1980
Non-contributing building

The one-story Cornelius L. Golightly Annex, a vocational building associated with the Detroit Public Schools, is situated behind the White House (No. 48) and the Greenhouse Complex (No. 47). It is sited in an area commonly referred to as the “Maintenance Yard,” due to the administrative, maintenance, and operational functions concentrated there. The c. 1980 building is faced in brick, with rows of soldier courses forming a wide cornice under the roofline. The asphalt-shingled hipped roof is capped by a gable roof, with the end gables decorated in a half-timbered design reflecting the nearby Stables building (No. 57). A similar gabled dormer marks the entrance on the northwest façade. Windows throughout the building are 4/4 aluminum sash, with sills formed of rowlock brick. The annex was named for Dr. Cornelius L. Golightly (1917-1976), philosophy professor and the first African-American president of the Detroit Board of Education.

50. Garage (Photo 35, left side)
Inselruhe Avenue
c. 1910
1 contributing building, 1 non-contributing structure

A c. 1910 brick garage (No. 50a, contributing) is located just south of the Stables building (No. 57) in the Maintenance Yard. The tall one-story structure is decorated with panel brick designs below the roofline, with square brick piers between bays filled almost entirely with large, multiple-paned steel sash windows. Some of the bays contain corrugated metal garage doors.

44 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 20
45 Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Department of the Parks and Boulevards, City of Detroit, Michigan, July 1st, 1910 to June 30, 1911, inclusive, pp. 16 and 31
Belle Isle Park __________________________ Wayne Co., MI ________
Name of Property County and State

The window sills and the tops of the pilasters are both capped with simple cast stone elements. The building has a very low, almost flat gable roof supported by I beams resting on riveted steel trusses. A brick wall extends between the Garage and the Stables, interrupted by a formerly gated opening (the gate is no longer extant). In front of the Garage on the north side, a mid-20th century gas pump (No. 50b, non-contributing) is set into a concrete island.

51. Storage Shed
Inselruhe Avenue
Date unknown, but after 1951 (according to Sanborn map)
Non-contributing building

This nondescript storage shed with vertical metal profile siding and low gable roof is located in the Maintenance Yard, on the southwest side of the Garage (No. 50). The northeast end of the shed and part of the roof at that end have been removed, and a concrete ramp provides vehicle access into the building. The shed is in terminal disrepair.

52. Storage Shed
Inselruhe Avenue
Date unknown, but after 1951 (according to Sanborn map)
Non-contributing building

The second of two nondescript storage sheds located in the Maintenance Yard, this low gable-roof metal shed is located along Nashua Creek. A wood double door is located on the northwest façade, and three-pane metal sash windows are irregularly spaced along the walls of the structure.

53. Century Barn
Inselruhe Avenue
1936?
Contributing building

The 1 and 1 ½-story Century Barn is located on the south side of the Maintenance Yard, just east of the Greenhouse complex (No. 47). The barn’s history is not clear. Some references suggest the barn was part of the R. Storrs Willis farm, associated with the White House, in the 19th century, while another source gives the building’s date of construction as 1936. The general character suggests a c. 1910 construction date. The building has clapboard siding and a tall asphalt shingled gambrel roof covering the main south part, and a low mansard roof, with its flat central part largely collapsed, topping a slightly narrower north section that extends the full length of the gambrel-roof part. The barn has four-over-four sash windows. The south side of the gambrel roof and north side of the mansard each have three shed-roof dormers with wood sash windows grouped in sets of four. Most window and door openings have been covered by wood planks and plywood.

46 Score 1994, p. III-19
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

54. Power Plant
Inselruhe Avenue
1950
Contributing building

The Power Plant is located just north of the Lumber Mill/ Century Barn (No. 53) in the Maintenance Yard. It was constructed in 1950,\(^{47}\) and consists of a main two-story nearly square-plan blond brick building, plus one-story extension, with a flat tar-and-gravel roof. Tall, narrow windows on the northwest and southeast elevations extend almost the full height of the building, and consist of horizontal fixed lights and awning window sections with aluminum muntins. A one-story rear extension is located on the southwest side of the building, with large metal vehicle doors on the southeast and northwest elevations.

55. Lumber Shed
Loiter Way
c. 1895
Contributing building

The c. 1895 Lumber Shed is one of two buildings separated from the other Maintenance Yard buildings, sited near Loiter Way at the northeast edge of the complex. Located north of the Stables Building along Nashua Creek, it is a 1 ½-story clapboarded wood frame building, with very steeply pitched asphalt-shingle side-gable roof, and a low shed-roof rear ell along the riverbank. It has a series of sliding wood doors across much of the front. Above them, a large, prominent hipped-roof wall dormer contains paired wood doors, each with paneling in the bottom half topped by four lights. The building is in severely deteriorated condition, with a very pronounced lean at one end. It served as a drying shed for lumber cut at the sawmill next door.

56. Sawmill
Loiter Way
1937
Contributing building

The 1937 brick Sawmill is a side-gable structure located between the Carriage House (No. 55) and the Stables (No. 57) along Nashua Creek. Its front faces northwest. The building features a two-story square tower at the front north corner, wood fascia boards, and a hipped-roof wraparound porch across the front beyond the tower and the southwest end supported by brick piers. The boarded-in front beneath the porch contained a wide opening through which the mill’s products were carried out. A long eyebrow dormer extends above the porch on the façade, and a brick chimney is located on the east slope of the roof. The windows are multi-light wood double-hung sash windows, most with sloped cast stone sills. An open-fronted gable-roof shed at the building’s northeast end, with a deteriorated concrete drive, containing tracks, leading to it, served as the loading point for logs. Its concrete floor with depressed area containing a pair of tracks running into the sawmill remains in place. The interior retains its full array of sawmilling.

\(^{47}\) Sanborn Map Company, 1951, volume 8, sheet 105
equipment, some of it cast with the name of the manufacturer, the Enterprise Co. of Columbiana, Ohio. The present sawmill, built as a federally assisted depression-relief project, replaced an earlier wooden structure. The sawmill was used to produce lumber from logs culled from the park’s woods to provide income for the park as well as serve park needs.

57. Stables (Photos 37-39, 97-98)
Loiter Way
1894, with 2 additions before 1910 and a 3rd before 1915; restoration 2011
Contributing building

The Stables complex is located south of Loiter Way, east of Inselruhe Avenue, in an area known as the “Maintenance Yard.” The buildings were originally built to shelter the horses that pulled the park phaetons that carried passengers across the bridge and around the island from its construction through 1916. The complex is one of the earliest extant large structures on Belle Isle, designed by Detroit-based architect George DeWitt Mason (1856-1948) in 1894. Mason is known for a number of Detroit buildings, including the Detroit Masonic Temple (1926), as well as the Police Station (No. 66) and the Detroit Yacht Club (No. 97, individually listed in the National Register) on Belle Isle. He is also known for his association with Detroit architect Albert Kahn, designer of Belle Isle’s Conservatory (No. 41) and Aquarium (No. 42), acting as Kahn’s mentor and later as a partner.

This highly picturesque complex consists of several long buildings together forming a nearly square configuration, around a central courtyard, except for a gap in the southeast (rear) side. The resulting footprint covers a large area of approximately 270 feet on each side, making the complex notable for its size as well as its age. The north front and west side façade of the high-roofed building group is finished in Elizabethan mode, with ground story red brick walls below a stucco and half-timber upper façade in the taller barn along the west side. The north front facing Loiter Way has a tall red tile side-gable roof pierced by gable-roof dormers with decorative vergeboards, and toward either end there is a broad vehicular entry capped by projecting gables that, springing from timber brackets almost at ground level, displays stickwork vergeboards and gable ornaments. The center and south end of this front building display taller hip-roof sections, each with a conical-roof turret at one corner.

The building forming the complex’s west side has story-and-a-half tall walls on its west, outer facade, the lower story clad in red brick like the rest and the upper portion in stucco and half-timbering. It has a central hip-roof projection. This west building has a hipped roof and displays gabled dormers and three large square-plan hip-roof ventilators. The roof is asymmetrical in form, with a longer and lower east slope facing the courtyard, sloping down to a brick, mostly one-story façade. This east side of the west building displays three hip-roof wood shingled bays rising above the lower façade, each containing double doors for loading hay into the haymow under the roof.

At its back, the west end gable of a two-story gable-roof building forming the complex's partial south side projects beyond the west building’s west façade. This south-side building is a full two stories in height, with brick first story and stucco-and-half-timber-clad second story on the narrow “public” end facing west and entirely brick façades on the long north and south sides. The rear (east) façade has a one-story partly open/partly enclosed shed along its full length. It is unknown whether this south side building was part of the original construction, but it is shown on the 1910 Sanborn map.

An addition completed 1910-1915 extends the north front facing Loiter Way to the east, connecting the original Stables building to a long, previously freestanding one-story utilitarian flat-roof brick wagon shed that projects to the south from it, forming the east side of the Stables complex. The front addition faces Loiter Way and largely replicates the original façade, including the second cross-gable entrance. Although the façade elevation of the addition reproduces the original steep side-gable roof, the back slope of the gable is a flat roof to allow more interior space on the second story.

The large wagon shed appears to post-date the original construction but shows in the 1910 Sanborn. It is a utilitarian structure whose design lacks the picturesque qualities of the stables building. The building has long east and west facades, each capped with a low arched section of parapet at each end flanking the much longer flat-top parapet between. The parapet of the shorter south end façade also has two low arched sections, each in the center of its half of the façade. The building has steel sash windows and several broad square-head doorways, most capped with large transoms. The nearly flat roof has a steel I-beam roof structure supported by round steel columns. The inner sides of the buildings surrounding the courtyard all have more utilitarian finishes.

Brick Wall: The wagon shed is largely obstructed from view by an associated ornamental red brick wall (Photo 37, left) extending along Loiter Way from the north corner of the Stables to the creek, with a gated entrance in the center. It is unknown whether this wall dates to the construction of the addition, but it is clearly a Contributing feature. The wall also shields the Carriage House (No. 55) and the Sawmill (No. 56) from view from the street. The roughly eight-foot tall brick wall, entirely built in Flemish bond, has a gabled brick cap and is divided into sections by slightly broader and taller gable-capped piers. Larger gable-capped piers flank a single driveway gateway with chain link fence gates. A second brick wall, similar in design, connects the large rear ell on the south side of the building to the Garage in the Maintenance Yard (No. 50).

58. Nashua Creek Bridge (Photo 40)
Loiter Way
1903
Contributing structure

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49 The original U-shaped Stables and wagon shed are shown as separate structures on the 1910 Sanborn map, but are connected by the new addition on the 1915 Sanborn map.
Belle Isle Park  
Wayne Co., MI  

Name of Property: Belle Isle Park  
County and State: Wayne Co., MI  

This single-span limestone and brick-faced bridge is located just east of Loiter Way, northeast of the Stables building (No. 57). Although it is wide enough to accommodate vehicular traffic, the road has been blocked off to vehicular traffic. The bridge provides pedestrian access between Loiter Way and the northwest corner of the Athletic Fields (No. 82). It has cut limestone walls that are fitted with cast iron railings in an open grill design. At the approaches, the stone walls sweep upward into tall piers capped by round finials. The abutments are faced in red brick with limestone trim. The east approach contains a badly worn inscription on one of the limestone blocks, reading “ERECTED 1903 ________ < unreadable>”

59. Bus Shelter (Photo 38, right center foreground)  
Loiter Way  
Early 20th century; to be rebuilt, in same form, due to deterioration  
Contributing structure

This small open bus shelter is located next to the Stables (No. 57) along Loiter Way, at the south edge of Inselruhe Avenue. The structure has three sets of round metal posts supporting its low gable roof, which is covered in asphalt shingles. The structure’s low gabled ends are finished with vertical wood boarding in alternating wider and narrower boards with rounded lower ends. The shelter’s roof structure is sagging to the point where reconstruction is planned.

60. Public Lighting Department (PLD) Building  
Loiter Way  
Construction date unknown/likely 1960s  
Non-contributing building

This small transformer building is located at the northeast corner of Loiter Way and Inselruhe Way. The building is of brick, with a flat wood cornice that appears to be more recent and a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. A metal door is located on the northwest façade.

61. Giant Slide (Photo 70, far right)  
Central Avenue  
2004  
Non-contributing structure

This large slide is located on the south side of Central Avenue, just east of Inselruhe Way. The metal slide is wide enough to accommodate multiple riders, who climb the south side of the slide to reach the top. A steel structure supports the slide, which ends in a rectangular gravel pit. A waiting area in front of the slide contains multiple benches and a small metal ticket booth. The complex is enclosed in a tall chain link fence. The slide replaced a previous version on the site, constructed in 1967.

62. Kids’ Row Comfort Station and Concessions (Photo 70, left of Gen. Williams monument)  
Central Avenue

Section 7 page 61
This comfort station is located on the south side of Central Avenue, west of the Kid’s Kingdom Playscape (No. 63) and north of the Giant Slide (No. 61). The structure has a U-shaped form, with two long restrooms connected to a curved concessions section on the south side by a covered breezeway. While each enclosed section of the building is capped by a shed roof of sheet metal, the breezeway is covered by an arched sheet metal roof. The building is constructed of rock-faced concrete block, contrasted with rows of finished concrete block. Single glass blocks regularly spaced in a row in the restrooms’ upper walls provide light, and a metal door on the north side of each restroom provides access. A large window opening on the south side of the curved concessions section accommodates customer orders.

63. Kids’ Kingdom Playscape

1978 (shelter possibly c. 1930 and arrangement of boulders which may date to 1895); renovated 2004

The Kids’ Kingdom Playscape is the largest playscape on Belle Isle, centrally located at the southwest intersection of Central Avenue and Kid’s Row near the Giant Slide (No. 61) and the Playscape Comfort Station (No. 62). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the area now occupied by the playscape was the site of the Deer Park, with the Belle Isle Zoo adjacent to the west. In 1978 a $100,000 playscape was constructed, funded by the City of Detroit and the Junior League of Detroit and designed by John Lesniak. In 2004 the playscape was completely renovated, including the installation of new play equipment to replace the 1970s wood elements, and new rubberized surfacing. The roof of the picnic shelter was also replaced at this time.

The playscape (No. 63a, non-contributing) has a roughly triangular footprint, with a number of steel and plastic multiple-use pieces of equipment placed throughout the area. In the center of the playscape is a picnic shelter (No. 63b, contributing) that is surrounded by a modern unpainted open wood trellis. The rectangular gable-roof shelter has broad red brick corner piers, with every seventh course slightly recessed, and three smaller square-plan wood posts between them along each of the longer sides. Modern diagonal wood boarding fills the gables and forms a third pier in the center of each narrow end, perhaps covering another brick pier, and spans the openings between the ends’ piers. It seems likely that this structure dates prior to the construction of the playscape, and was one of the early 20th century buildings associated with the previous animal habitats located here. The picnic area at the south edge (No. 63c; see Photo 37, foreground) is shaded by trees with two steel picnic tables encircled by an arrangement of large boulders. The 1895 Deer Park attraction contained structures built using large fieldstones; it is possible these boulders could be remnant materials from those structures.

64. Major General Alpheus Sharkey Williams Monument (Photo 70)

50 Aerial photographs available through Google Earth indicate construction date.
This bronze equestrian statue on its tall granite base is located in the center of the intersection of Central Avenue and Inselruhe Avenue and faces southwest. Major General Williams (1810-1878) settled in Detroit in 1836 and before the Civil War served as a probate judge, newspaper publisher, postmaster, bank president, and a member of the Board of Education. He was Lieutenant Colonel of the First Michigan Infantry in the Mexican War. During the early days of the Civil War, Williams became a Brigadier General and served as a leader of the Army of the Potomac. He later became commander of the 20th Corps, and in 1865 was appointed Major General, leading troops in several battles. The statue was executed by sculptor Henry Merwin Shrady (1871-1922). Shrady was known for his equestrian memorials, including the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial outside of the United States Capitol.

The high granite plinth has curved ends and displays the dates of the major general’s life, 1810-78, on the front, facing southwest on Central Avenue. The two sides facing Inselruhe Avenue are carved with his numerous contributions, including military leader, Congressman, and postmaster. The life-size statue depicts Williams pausing to study a map, while his horse bows his head to rest.

65. **Bear Pit Comfort Station (Photo 71)**

Central Avenue

1896

Contributing building

This small brick comfort station is located on the northeast side of the intersection of Central Avenue and Inselruhe Avenue, just south of the Police Station (No. 66). The comfort station is roughly rectangular in plan, though with two bowed window bays on the south elevation, and has a copper standing seam hipped roof. The building is decorated with a sawtooth and corbelled detail built of brick laid vertically below the eaves, a soldier course water table at the base, and smooth limestone window surrounds. Windows are grouped into sets of one, two, and three metal casement sash each with six or eight lights of wire safety glass. The use of small cut limestone “capitals” at the tops of the corners below the vertical brick “entablature” creates a suggestion of corner piers not otherwise present. On the longer east and west sides of the building, small covered central entry porches are outlined with limestone surrounds that include panels above the open entries containing carved labels, “MEN” or “WOMEN.” The station derives its name from its proximity to the former zoo built on Belle Isle in 1895, which featured a bear den among other popular animal exhibits.

66. **Belle Isle Police Station (Photo 69, right, and 72)**

Inselruhe Avenue

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The Belle Isle Police Station is located on the east side of Inselruhe Avenue, between Riverbank Road on the north and Central Avenue on the south. The building was designed by architects Mason & Rice (George D. Mason (1856-1948) and Zacharias Rice), who together designed the massive Grand Hotel on Michigan’s Mackinac Island (1887), as well as various buildings in the Detroit area, including the Chelsea Depot (1880) and Detroit Engine House 18 (1892). Mason designed other Belle Isle buildings including the large Stables complex (No. 57) and the Detroit Yacht Club’s clubhouse (No. 97a). The Belle Isle Police Station was designated a Michigan Historic Site to commemorate the site of the first police radio dispatch on a dedicated frequency in April 1928. The equipment for the operation was located on the second floor of the building until a new structure was built on the island in 1936.\(^{52}\)

The two-story Shingle Style building is roughly rectangular in form with lower hip roofs flanking a taller one in the center and the center part of the front featuring broad semi-round conical-roof towers flanking a broad arched central entry. The west-facing front’s central part, including the towers, along with the ground story to either side, is faced in uncoursed rock-face fieldstone, the rest in wood shingling. The main mass is flanked by several shed and gable-roof extensions. The front of the central tall asphalt-shingled hip roof displays a five-sided hip-roof dormer. The broad central arch has been partially infilled with wood boarding outlining a double wood paneled door with multiple lights. On the north and south sides of the west façade, wood shingle cladding is largely used on the second story, with stone used for the first story. A two-story shed-roof section, clad in wood shingles, marks the northwest corner of the building. The south end of the Police Station contains an attached garage, which may have originally served as stables. On the east side of the building the roof is steeper, with several gabled dormers rising above a one-story porch. Fenestration varies greatly throughout the building, with windows occurring in groups or singly, with different configurations of lights set in primarily wood sash. The second-story windows above the central arched entrance feature heavy turned wood piers that supported a formerly open porch.

\(^{67}\) Bath Lunch Comfort Station and Picnic Shelter/Shelter #8 (Photo 90)
Riverbank Road
c. 1910
Contributing building

This dual-purpose comfort station and picnic shelter is located on the south side of Riverbank Drive, east of the Police Station (No. 66) at Inselruhe Avenue. The building consists of a central octagonal pavilion, flanked by a long, narrow open shelter area to either side. The front (north side) of the entrance pavilion is open, with each side framed by limestone-trimmed brick piers supporting broad brick segmental arches. The buttressed brick piers support a low conical roof with projecting eaves that rest on beefy wood brackets. Eyebrow dormers containing louvers pierce the conical roof on alternate sides. The spandrels above the arches are faced in stucco. The

\(^{52}\) Clemens 2008, p. 107
Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI  
Name of Property  County and State  
south side of the central pavilion behind the deep porch is enclosed by brick walls and contains restrooms. The rectangular picnic shelter area to either side is covered by a hipped roof, its steel trusses supported on wood columns set into concrete bases. The ceiling of each section is finished in wood. Although the roof is currently covered with asphalt shingles, the original roofing was slate shingles.53

68. Transformer House/1909 Bath House fragment  
Riverbank Road  
1909  
Contributing building  
This small transformer house54 is located on the north side of Riverbank Road, across from Shelter #8 (No. 67). It is housed in what appears to be the only remnant of the early 20th century Bath House,55 which served Belle Isle Beach until 1967. It was demolished in 1974. This large facility containing 800 dressing rooms had a three-story central section flanked by long one-story wings along the beach containing the dressing rooms; the extant limestone-trimmed red brick bay appears to have been a part of the long west section of the building that served as a transformer house. Opened in 1909, the new bath house served the new beach then opened at this location on the river (a previous beach and bath house were located farther west near today’s bridge, but the beach location was changed after that bath house burned in 1901). The building was used as overflow prisoner housing during the 1967 riots. It was never again used as a bath house, and demolished a few years later.

Set on a concrete foundation, the brick bay displays a square design in limestone with a limestone diamond form in the center outlined by soldier course brickwork. On the east elevation, a curved concrete wall marks the former connection point to the rest of the bathhouse. The entrance to the building is on the north side, where a more recent metal door has been fitted into the brick wall.

69. North Fishing Pier  
Inselruhe Avenue  
c. 1976  
Non-contributing structure  
This pier is located on the north side of the island, north of Riverbank Road, at the foot of Inselruhe Avenue. The fourteen-span, perhaps 300 foot long wood structure has a paved surface with wood railings, set on a substructure of concrete piers. Metal lampposts are spaced regularly along the railings.

53 Score 1994, p. IV-072-1  
55 Score lists the structures as an early 20th century transformer house; however, the location of the building fragment is the same as the former Bath House, and the design appears consistent with photographs of the older structure.
70. Picnic Shelter #10
Central Avenue
C. 1975
Non-contributing structure

This small picnic shelter is located between Central Avenue on the south and Riverbank Road on the north, just west of Picnic Shelter #11 (No. 71). It is a relatively simple structure, consisting of a galvanized steel frame supporting a gabled sheet metal roof. Three steel picnic tables are chained to rings bolted into the concrete pad floor.

71. Picnic Shelter #11
Central Avenue
C. 1975
Non-contributing structure

This picnic shelter is located just east of Picnic Shelter #10 (No. 70), and is identical to its neighbor. It appears to have received maintenance more recently than the other shelter, and has four cantilevered metal picnic tables set into the concrete floor.

72. Belle Isle Beach
Riverbank Road
1970s-80s
Non-contributing site

The Belle Isle Beach is located along the north shore of Belle Isle, just north of Riverbank Road and the Bath House (No. 73). The beach consists of a broad strip of sand, approximately 1,500 feet long from west to east along the water. A beach with bath house has been a feature of Belle Isle since at least the early 1890s. But both the beach and bath house location have been moved eastward along the north shore over the years. The original 19th century beach and bath house were located on the northwest end of the island, although an 1895 map by Silas Farmer shows a “Wading and Watering Beach” nearly in the location of the current beach well to the east. In 1909 the new Bath House (see #68) opened at a location well east of the old northwest one opposite the Bath Lunch Picnic Shelter east of Inselruhe Ave. The current beach is located farther east, beyond Vista Ave. The present Bath House, constructed during the 1980s (No. 73), is located near the center of the Beach. (Photo 89 shows the current bath house from near the location of the 1909 structure farther west along the north shore.)

73. Bath House (Photo 88 and 89, left distance)
Riverbank Road
1980s
1 non-contributing building

The Bath House is located north of Riverbank Road, in the center of the Belle Isle Beach, with a large parking lot separating it from Riverbank Road. The current Bath House is the third such
facility on Belle Isle, replacing two previous facilities that are no longer extant (see Nos. 68 and 72). The narrow rectangular structure has brick walls, with steel doors on the northeast end of the building. A metal fascia surrounds the top of the building, and two sheet metal shed roofs cap the building, one on each end with a gap in the center over a set of equipment doors.

74. Waterslide (Photo 88 and 89, left distance)
Riverbank Road
1990s
Non-contributing structure

The Waterslide was added to the Belle Isle Beach on the northeast side of the Bath House (No. 73) in the 1990s. The structure consists of three side-by-side slides, constructed of hard plastic on a metal support frame, that terminate in a rectangular built-in pool.

75. Substation (Photo 88, left of Beach Slide)
Riverbank Road
1980s
Non-contributing building

This small one-story brick building is located on the north side of Riverbank Road, east of the Waterslide (No. 74) and Bath House (No. 73). Similar materials were used for the substation and the Bath House, suggesting a similar construction date. A metal front-gable roof caps the building and access to it is through a metal door on the southwest gable-end façade. The gables are clad in the same metal material as the roof.

76. Picnic Shelter #12 (Photo 73)
Vista Avenue
1890, renovations c. 2000
Contributing structure

This large wooden shelter is located on the east side of Vista Avenue next to the Dante Alighieri Monument (No. 77), between Riverbank Road on the north and Central Avenue on the south. It is a 100-foot long, rectangular gable-roof structure with a cross-gable at each end of the long west side facing Vista. The cross-gable parts formerly projected outward one bay, giving the structure a U-shaped footprint, but these extensions have been removed. The shelter features exposed wood trusses under the roof, supported by turned wood columns set in concrete bases. Shaped vertical wood slats framed by stickwork trusses decorate the gable ends. Open wooden grillwork spanning the fronts of these extensions beneath the gable stickwork has been removed.

77. Dante Alighieri Monument
Central Avenue
1927, restored 1998

56 The original bath house was located on the west side of the General Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge, next to an early ferry dock.
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property
Contributing object

This white marble bust on a tall square-plan pedestal is one of several monuments lining Central Avenue, and is located at the northeast corner of Vista Avenue near Picnic Shelter #5 (No. 32). The work was commissioned in honor of the 600th year anniversary of Dante’s death and was created by Florentine sculptor Raffaello Romanelli (1856-1928). The bust depicts a stern-faced Dante, with a laurel wreath crown. The upper torso rests atop a tall marble pedestal. An embossed bronze plaque was affixed to the base of the statue during a restoration in 1999. It reads:


78. Johann Friedrich von Schiller Monument (Photo 74)
Central Avenue
1907
Contributing object

This statue is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Vista Avenue and Central Avenue, adjacent to the SafariLand Zoo, whose fencing serves as a backdrop, and across from the Dante Alighieri Monument (No. 77). It was produced in 1907 by sculptor Herman Matzen (1861-1938), who created a number of public art works in the Midwest, in honor of the German author and philosopher (1759-1805). The monument consists of a seated life-sized figure of Schiller executed in bronze, on a wide rectangular granite base. Two long, curved concrete steps in the lawn in front mark the approach to the monument on the north side from Central Avenue. Carved in the front of the base is the inscription, “SCHILLER//Erected-by-citizens-of-German descent//Detroit-Mich. // 1907.” The two long sides of the base contain quotes from Schiller’s works.

79. SafariLand Zoo (Photos 99-100)
Central Avenue
1979-80
Non-contributing site

The 13-acre SafariLand Zoo is located on the south side of Central Avenue, just north of the Athletic Fields (No. 82). The SafariLand Zoo opened in 1980, and was the third zoo to operate on Belle Isle. The original zoo opened in 1895, near the location of the Giant Slide (No. 61), and shortly afterwards a deer park was opened nearby, in the current location of the Kid’s Kingdom Playscape (No. 63). These were replaced in 1947 by a smaller Children’s Zoo (known as “Storybook Zoo”) that was located east of the old zoo. The new zoo featured a petting zoo with animals from children’s fairy tales. By 1980 the Children’s Zoo had been abandoned for many years, and a new SafariLand Zoo was completed in its place. It was designed by park designer

57 Nawrocki 2008, p. 120
Robert Garbutt of Design-4, Inc., of Ferndale, MI, to be different from many conventional zoos (such as the Detroit Zoo to which many of the previous Belle Isle animals had been relocated), as well as the drive-through safari-type zoo, first seen at Lion Country Safari in West Palm Beach, FL (1967), and perhaps best known at San Diego Safari Park (1972), the first municipal zoo like this with a drive-through experience. Belle Isle’s new facility maintained this concept of free-roaming African animals, but featured an overhead catwalk system that raised spectators ten feet into the air to observe the animals. The Safariland Zoo closed in 2002, and is now blocked off by a tall chain-link fence.

The Safariland Zoo consists of a concentration of traditional small animal enclosures on the west end, with the open habitat (No. 79a, non-contributing) occupying the eastern two-thirds of the zoo property. Although the entire property has become overgrown, the site contains the visible remains of two shallow rough concrete-bottom watering holes. Most of the structures in the zoo are round, one-story hut-type ones with wood shingled conical roofs reminiscent of thatching (No. 79, non-contributing). The largest and most distinctive huts feature prominent shingled roofs that extend to the ground at four points with wide arched openings between. There are a few different building types, including enclosed buildings for the enclosures on the west side, observation towers, and open-plan pavilions found throughout the zoo property. Enclosed huts have vertical wood or stucco/EIFS walls. Different types are clustered together, with the largest concentration of them, including grouped concessions huts and a freestanding open shelter, inside the main entrance along Central Avenue at the northwest corner of the zoo. Despite the different types of huts they are easily distinguished by their African-inspired conical shingled roofs, and number approximately two dozen. The approximately 8-foot wide raised walkway (No. 79c, non-contributing) above the open habitat is constructed of pine decking, with wooden railings, supported by reinforced concrete columns, and provided a 3/4–mile walk for visitors. The raised walkways form an elongated, irregular figure 8, with the two largest conical-roof structures, one for concessions, the other an open shelter, together labeled the Tree House, at the central intersection. The animal environments contain a number of small round, asphalt-shingle-roof and shed-roof structures. Aerial photographs indicate approximately three hipped-roof rectangular buildings (No. 79d, non-contributing) within the property. Their original functions are unknown, but their locations outside of visitor circulation patterns indicate they were likely utilized for maintenance, storage, and offices.

80. Vista Avenue/Nashua Creek Bridge
Vista Avenue
c. 1970s
Non-contributing structure

This bridge carries the north end of Vista Way over Nashua Creek, just northeast of the Athletic Pavilion (No. 81). The bridge and abutments are constructed of poured concrete, with a steel metal tube railing attached to the top of the deck on each side.

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59 Ratliff “Bird’s eye view of animals,” Cityscape, *Detroit Free Press* 1980
Belle Isle Park  Wayne Co., MI
Name of Property  County and State

81. Athletic Pavilion or Field House (Photos 41-42, in setting; Photos 43-44)
Vista Avenue
1898, enclosed unknown date
Contributing building

The Athletic Pavilion is located on the west side of Vista Avenue, adjacent to the Athletic Fields (No. 82). It was designed in 1898 by architect Edward A. Schilling, whose firm also designed the Casino (No. 19). The building was commissioned by the League of American Wheelman with an appropriation by the city. Designed as a bicycle shelter, the building originally had storage and repair facilities.60 An early 20th century photograph shows that both stories were largely open, with large brick piers supporting the exterior of the structure.61 The piers remain, but the openings between them have been filled with broad windows above brick walls. The building was converted to general athletic use at an early date. It has no current use.

The two-story brick building is rectangular in form and topped by a complex hip roof. It has a number of projecting bays, often with their own roofs, creating a complex composition with multiple planes. The asphalt shingle roof, which is capped by three octagonal ventilator cupolas, has wide eaves, which shelter verandas on the second story. The southwest façade faces the Athletic Fields, with a central projecting hipped-roof entrance that has been altered. Originally constructed with a central two-story bay and flanking arched doorway, the bay is now gone and the first story has a gabled doorway at each end. A similar design is carried out opposite the entrance on the northeast elevation, with a large two-story, three-sided projecting bay. A small hyphen connects this bay to a three-story brick tower with cast stone caps. Large decorative wood brackets, often in groups of three or more, support second-story verandas that front much of the building. A door hood on the northwest elevation sports the same decorative brackets. The original wood railings of the veranda have been replaced or covered with solid sheet metal ones. Some original window sash are extant on the southwest façade, with wood sash containing diamond panes. On the first story, arched aluminum sash windows are outlined in brick trim, with cast stone sills. The second story contains paired aluminum sash windows set into large wood panels.

82. Athletic Fields (Photo 42)
The Strand, between Vista Avenue and Nashua Canal
C. 1887-mid 20th century
Contributing site

The 1895 Silas Farmer map of Belle Isle shows a ½ mile “Speeding Track” on the location of the present athletic fields,62 with baseball and tennis grounds sited to the east where the Conservatory and Aquarium stand now. Presumably, these activities were moved to the fields in the first decade of the 20th century to make way for the Aquarium and Conservatory.

60 http://www.m-bike.org/blog/2009/10/02/the-bicycle-pavilion-on-belle-isle.
62 Farmer 1895
Belle Isle Park ---------------------------------------- Wayne Co., MI
Name of Property County and State

These extensive Athletic Fields are located on both sides of Vista Avenue, north of The Strand, and accommodate a variety of outdoor sports. In the center of the fields just south of the Athletic Pavilion (No. 81), a set of four baseball diamonds face outward, with sets of metal bleachers for each diamond. Around the outside of the fields are a paved track, a group of ten paved tennis courts, a basketball court, a rugby court, and several more baseball diamonds. Several tall light posts with concrete bases are interspersed around the fields to allow for night games. Additional basketball courts are located on the east side of Vista Avenue, behind the Handball Courts (No. 83). The individual dates of construction of the fields’ components are unknown, but all are shown on a 1976-77 plan. The current locations of the tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and oval track are shown on a 1914 plan, although the baseball diamonds were individually placed in the fields’ center, rather than grouped as they are today.

83. Handball Courts
Vista Avenue
1977 (1976-1977 plan of Belle Isle)
Non-contributing structure

The Handball Courts are located on the east side of Vista Avenue, across from the Athletic Pavilion (No. 81) and within the Athletic Fields (No. 82). The courts complex contains six open courts, arranged in two sets of three courts sharing concrete block party walls, the courts on each side separated from one another by partial walls with tops slanting downward away from the central party wall. A triangular shaped entry with flat roof connects the two sets on the south side. A number of tall light posts set into concrete bases surround the courts, which provide nighttime illumination.

84. Nashua Creek (Photo 41)
Loiter Way
1890
Contributing structure

Nashua Creek is a canal connecting Lake Takoma on the west to Lake Okonoka on the east. It was completed in 1890. Sylvan Creek (No. 85) connects to it at a point about midway between the two lakes. The creek, constructed as a canal, flows mostly through the Forest Area (No. 91), where the banks are overgrown and heavily vegetated, but also through a non-forested area farther west, where the banks of the creek are more open adjacent to the Maintenance Yard and the Athletic Fields (No. 82).

85. Sylvan Creek
Oakway Trail
1908-10
Contributing structure

Sylvan Creek, a canal, branches off from Nashua Creek just east of Vista Avenue, running through the Public Golf Course (No. 95) and connecting to Lake Muskoday on the north. It was completed in 1910.
86. Safari Island Zoo/ Sylvan Creek Pedestrian Bridge
Tanglewood Avenue
Date uncertain
Non-contributing structure

This bridge is located just north of the junction of Nashua Creek and Sylvan Creek, carrying a narrow roadway adjoining the south fence of the Zoo (No. 79). A current description of the bridge is not possible as the roadway and bridge are not currently accessible. A 1956 plan of the location of bridges on the island indicates this bridge (BW 227) is a simple span timber bridge that was 28 feet wide. It is assumed that the bridge was replaced after this date.

87. Athletic Fields/ Nashua Creek Pedestrian Bridge (west)
Vista Avenue
c. 1973
Non-contributing structure

This small pedestrian bridge is located east of the junction of Nashua Creek and Sylvan Creek, just north of the Handball Courts (No. 83) and basketball courts in the Athletic Fields (No. 82). It is not currently accessible. However, in a 1994 report the bridge is described as a steel structure constructed c. 1973, with a wood deck and steel railing.63

88. Model Yacht Basin (Photo 51)
The Strand
c. 1934
Contributing structure

The rectangular model yacht basin is located between The Strand and the Athletic Fields (No. 82) on the north, and the Detroit River on the south. The basin is approximately 1200 feet long by 300 feet wide, with low bushes and grass-covered areas along the banks. The part of the island’s south riverfront in which it is located shows as still part of the river in the 1933 U. S. Engineer map, indicating the shoreline was soon after extended with fill. The basin dates to 1934, according to that year’s annual report of the Department of Parks and Boulevards, making it one of the earliest examples of this popular Great Depression-era recreational program.64 The basin was built by workers from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), one of the earliest New Deal programs. Many similar basins were constructed by the Work Projects Administration in the late 1930s.65,66,67 The development of these basins is said to have been one of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s favorite programs due to his personal interest in yachting.

61 Score 1994, p. III-27
64 City of Detroit Department of Parks and Boulevards, annual report for calendar year ending December 31, 1934, February 1935, p. 6
89. Rev. Samuel Francis Smith Flagpole
The Strand
Dedicated July 4, 1932
Contributing object

This flagpole is located on the north side of The Strand, at the intersection of Vista Way. It was created by two designers whose works are also represented elsewhere in the park, internationally famous architect Albert Kahn (1869-1942) and sculptor Samuel Cashwan (1900-1988). The memorial honors the Rev. Samuel Francis Smith (1808-1895), on the 100th anniversary of his composition of the lyrics to “America (My Country ‘Tis of Thee).”

Standing in an open lawn area, but with a group of low pines forming a nearby backdrop, the flagpole stands atop a broad octagonal white marble base that rises in tiers, with a staircase of nine steps centered in the front and back sides. Centered in the octagonal top platform is a tall square-plan marble pedestal of simple Art Deco design, with angled corners displaying a fluted treatment and the cap a chevron design. The pedestal’s upper front contains a bas-relief of Rev. Smith’s face within a circular plaque. Beneath is an incised inscription, “Samuel Francis Smith// Author of America// The Gift of the school children of Metropolitan Detroit sponsored by the Detroit Rotary Club.” Atop the tall pedestal stands a low two-tiered octagonal base, flanked on the four “corner” faces by brass stylized bald eagle sculptures. The tall round metal flagpole, fluted at its lower end, rises from this base.

90. Athletic Fields/ Nashua Creek Pedestrian Bridge (east)
Vista Avenue
Construction date unknown
Non-contributing structure

This foot bridge is located in the heart of the Forest Area, approximately ¼ mile east of Vista Avenue. It is not currently accessible. However, in a 1994 report the bridge is described as a concrete structure, with a galvanized steel railing.

91. Forest Area (Photos 76-77)
Central Avenue
1870s
Contributing site

Olmsted’s and subsequent plans have left much of the east portion of the island undeveloped, preserving a large natural forest area now crossed only by the Central Avenue drive and a number of trails. This wooded area is significant because of the number of older extant trees and

68 http://archive.is/YsRul (Monuments and Sculptures in Detroit, Detroit Historical Museum)
69 Score 1994, p. III-28
Belle Isle Park __________________________________________ Wayne Co., MI

the rarity of two species only recently discovered here: Pumpkin Ash and Shumard Oak. The most common other species in the woodland include silver maple, red ash, pin oak, pumpkin ash, and red oak. All of the trees in the woodland are Michigan natives. The woodland is additionally considered to be significant as it represents a rare remnant of the lowland forests previously common throughout southeastern Michigan and in Ontario. A 2002 woodland survey found that the diversity of the plants was greatly reduced from a similar 1901 survey, due to the feeding habits of deer that were previously kept on the island.

92. Central Avenue/Sylvan Creek Bridge (Photo 75)
Central Avenue
1913
Contributing structure

This elegant concrete bridge carries Central Avenue over Sylvan Creek, just southwest of the intersection with Shadownook Street. The single-span concrete arch bridge with its arcing deck has a concrete plaque on the north side, set in the keystone position, cast with the 1913 construction date. The closed concrete walls splay out at the east and west approaches, ending in tapered cones that serve as bases for metal lampposts, only two of which remain. The concrete abutments are flanked by sloping retaining walls. Projecting concrete trim is used throughout the bridge and abutments, adding visual interest to the single-material structure.

93. Sylvan Creek Pedestrian Bridge
Central Avenue
c. 1973
Non-contributing structure

This pedestrian bridge is located on the north edge of the wooded area, north of Central Avenue. It is sited just north of a concrete roadway bridge (No. 92) that carries Central Avenue over the creek. The arched metal bridge is set on concrete abutments, with metal railings and a wood deck.

94. Oakway Trail Comfort Station (Photo 94)
Oakway Trail
c. 1922
Contributing building

This comfort station is located on the southeast corner of Oakway Trail and Portage Way. The one-story brick building, set on a concrete foundation, has a cross-gable roof and a metal standing seam hipped roof. A deep entrance porch extends from the north façade under the cross gable, fronted by a center arch. Each side of the building contains a restroom for either men or women, with a secondary exterior entrance to each restroom located on the east and west

70 King & McGregor Environmental, Inc., 2000, p. 2
71 King & McGregor Environmental, Inc., 2002, p. 4
72 King & McGregor Environmental, Inc., 2002, p. 3-4
95. Public Golf Course
Oakway Trail
1922; new structures 1939, c. 1973 and 2004
2 contributing buildings, 1 contributing structure, 1 contributing site, 2 non-contributing buildings, 1 non-contributing structure

The Belle Isle golf course is located north of Oakway Trail, following the south bank of Lake Muskoday. When the course opened in 1922, it was the first public golf course in the Detroit area. The nine-hole course (No. 95a, contributing site) has a long, narrow layout that abuts Belle Isle’s forested area along its south edge. The entrance to the course is on the west end near the intersection of Oakway Trail and Riverbank Road, and a small lagoon on the south side of Lake Muskoday extends into the course near the west end. The golf course also contains six associated above-ground structures, including a concessions building along Oakway Trail, a comfort station and two storage outbuildings near the center of the course, and two pedestrian bridges that connect the course over a Lake Muskoday lagoon and Sylvan Creek. The course was closed in 2008.

The c. 1922 Golf Concessions Building (No. 95b, contributing) is located on the north side of Oakway Trail, east of the intersection of Portage Way, and marked the entrance to the course. It is a small square-plan hip-roof stuccoed brick building, with a wraparound porch with deep overhanging eaves supported by square columns. On the south façade, a screen door entrance stands adjacent to a wide concessions window. A brick chimney is located on the west side of the building.

The Golf Course Comfort Station (No. 95c, non-contributing) was constructed in 2004, and consists of two rounded restrooms connected by a corrugated metal arched roof. The walls are constructed of rusticated block, with a brick course for decoration and windows consisting of single, evenly spaced glass blocks.

Two outbuildings located near the Comfort Station appear to have been used for storage. A front gable equipment shed (No. 95d, non-contributing) is located east of the Comfort Station, with vertical wood cladding and an asphalt shingle roof. The building appears to be of recent construction, and perhaps was constructed at the same time as the nearby Comfort Station. A c. 1922 rectangular shed (No. 95e, contributing), with stucco-covered brick walls and a flat roof, is located approximately seventy-five feet east of the recent outbuilding. Both buildings have door openings large enough to accommodate maintenance vehicles.

The course’s most distinctive structure is the Covered “Pullman” Bridge (No. 95f, contributing; Photos 79-80) connecting parts of the golf course over a small lagoon on the south side of Lake Muskoday. It was constructed in 1939 and designed by civil engineer Walter Bliel, with
Concrete piers support the three-span structure, which looks a bit like an elongated old railroad passenger car, thus suggesting the “Pullman” nickname. It has an arching sheet metal roof supported by wood ribs and vertical wood board walls, with distinctive paired rectangular and single circular window openings. Brick piers flank the two entrances and, inside the bridge, wood benches line both walls.

A second pedestrian bridge (No. 95g, non-contributing) constructed c. 1973 connects portions of the golf course over Sylvan Creek, just south of the Covered Pullman Bridge. A steel railing, painted a bright red, which follows the gentle curve of the concrete arch, is the most prominent feature.

96. *Oakway Trail/ Sylvan Creek Bridge (Photo 81)*

*Oakway Trail*

1901

Contributing structure

This single-span concrete bridge carries Oakway Trail across Sylvan Creek, just south of Lake Muskoday. The solid concrete side wall/parapet, with broad square-plan endpost at each end, on either side has a rough texture, inlaid with colored glazed tile patterns along the parapet cap, on a raised central “keystone” and in panels on the sides of the endpost. The endposts and the stylized projecting “ keystones” both angle outward toward the top. The concrete abutments are flanked by concrete wingwalls, which also are adorned with individual glazed tiles at the ends.

97. *Detroit Yacht Club (Photos 85-87)*

*Riverbank Road*

1921-23

4 contributing buildings, 10 contributing structures, 3 non-contributing buildings, 5 non-contributing structures

The Detroit Yacht Club (DYC) is located just off the north shore of Belle Isle on a long, crescent-shaped manmade island, which is connected to Riverbank Road via a short bridge. The DYC was listed in the National Register as a district under Criteria A, B, and C in 2010, comprised of two contributing buildings, ten contributing structures, and three non-contributing structures. There are five additional buildings and two structures on the property that were not noted in the nomination; they are listed here and classified as contributing/non-contributing as appropriate.

The DYC was founded in 1868, and in 1895 they moved to the former Michigan Yacht Club facilities on Belle Isle. The clubhouse taken over by the DYC was destroyed by fire in 1904, and although the DYC replaced it with a new structure, the growing membership soon rendered this second clubhouse inadequate. In 1920 the DYC obtained a lease from the city of Detroit for a larger offshore property near the east end of Belle Isle, in exchange for the club turning over to

73 “Belle Isle’s Officials Proud of New Boon for Golfers,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 1939
the city the former DYC property for a shoreline improvement project. The club had the clubhouse island constructed and on it built their current clubhouse, completed in 1923. The architect was George DeWitt Mason (1856-1948), who was also responsible for the Stables (No. 57) and the Police Station (No. 66); the contractors were the Candler Dock and Dredge Company for construction of the island and the Albert A. Albrecht Company for the clubhouse.

The Mediterranean style clubhouse (No. 97a, contributing) is a rambling, mainly three-story design with a number of sections, rooflines and projections creating a complex form on a long, narrow footprint. The first story is finished in brick, with stucco on the upper stories and terra cotta tiles on the roof. In the center of the building, a four-story square tower rises above the recessed entrance on the southeast façade, with arched windows highlighted in terracotta trim. The entrance doorway is marked by a carved wood surround and a cast stone mask. On the northwest elevation of the building facing the water, a number of verandas and porches take advantage of the river view.

The clubhouse is sited in the center of the small island, surrounded by parking lots and a number of DYC facilities. A wood bridge (No. 97b, contributing) crosses the narrow channel between Belle Isle and the DYC, constructed in 1925 and renovated in 1989 and 2007. It consists of a wood deck set on wood pilings that have been protected with steel cases. The concrete abutments replaced the original wood structures in 1989.

At the north end of the bridge is a small guardhouse (No. 97c, non-contributing) constructed of brick. Influenced by the clubhouse’s design, the guardhouse has its own metal hip roof that provides a wide overhang and imitates terra cotta tiles. Two maintenance buildings are located near the guardhouse, including a small, recently-constructed shed (No. 97d, non-contributing). It is square in plan, with a front gable roof and vinyl siding and window sash. The second building is a 1952 gable-roof maintenance shed (No. 97e, contributing), with concrete block walls and steel multiple-sash windows capped by heavy stone lintels. On the north side, a shed-roofed section extends the full length of the building, while a covered carport has been added to the west side of the maintenance shed.

The DYC property incorporates a number of docks and boat slips. The boat slips (No. 97f, contributing) are located on the south and east shores of the island, while six docks (No. 97g - 97l, 4 contributing, two non-contributing) extend from the island’s north shore, at the rear of the clubhouse. Four of these docks are considered to date from the early and mid-20th century, while two of the docks were constructed more recently. There are two wood gazebos (No. 97m and 97n, both non-contributing) located near the end docks. These recent structures serve the purpose of shelters, with wood columns supporting a hipped roof covered with sheet metal roofing. Underneath the roof of both structures, wood benches are built into the surrounding railing. The Office and Store are housed in a 1 1/2-story wood building (No. 97o, contributing) located between the clubhouse and the center dock. The west side of the building is one story, covered with a flat roof, while the east side of the building has a small second-story office with a gable roof. The flat roof of the first story also serves as a deck, surrounded by a wood railing and accessed by an open wood staircase on the side of the building. The building is clad in vertical wood boards, with wood trim around the windows and doors. The roofs create wide overhangs,

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shading the doorways. Paired wood doors serve the first story, while the second-story office has aluminum sliding doors and windows. The Office and Store building was not specifically identified in the nomination, but appears to be old enough to be considered as contributing to the Belle Isle Park district.

A built-in swimming pool on the east side of the clubhouse (No. 97p, non-contributing) replaced an earlier pool in 1997-1998 and was considered non-contributing in the nomination. A small wood shed (No. 97q, contributing) is located just south of the swimming pool. The rectangular shed has a front-gable roof that is covered with asphalt shingles. It is clad in vertical wood siding, with wood trim outlining the roofline, door, and corners. The shed appears to date to the 1950s-70s era.

At the east end of the island, four tennis courts (No. 97r – 97u, all contributing) share a clay pad. Tennis courts have a long history at DYC, and it is possible that these courts were installed during the early development of the property. Southeast of the tennis courts is a c. 1950 building (No. 97v, contributing), used for offices and storage. The two-story rectangular building has a hipped roof and a second-story overhang that is emphasized by a second-story deck that surrounds much of the building. The building has vertical wood cladding, with wood trim and asphalt shingles covering the roof. The main entrance is on the second story of the west façade, marked by paired French doors. The rest of the second story has 1/1 wood sash windows. On the first story, a vehicle bay door and wood door provide access on the south elevation.

98. *Picnic Shelter #20*
Lakeside Road
Construction Date unknown (1974?)
Non-contributing structure

This shelter is located at the northernmost point of Belle Isle, along the waterfront west of the Detroit Yacht Club (No. 97). Its steel structure design is similar to that of Picnic Shelter #19, located to the east (No. 100).

99. *“Gazelle” statue*
Riverbank Road
1991
Non-contributing object

This stainless steel sculpture is located on the north side of Belle Isle, in a wide field overlooking the Detroit River to the north, the Detroit Yacht Club (No. 97) to the west, and Lake Muskoday to the south. The sculpture represents a stylized rearing gazelle, defined only by the simplified square-plan forms representing the lines of its body, antlers, and rear legs, which spring from a low square concrete base. It was designed by artist Richard Bennett (b. 1954), and reflects the same pose of the gazelle in Marshall Fredericks’ 1936 Levi L. Barbour Memorial Fountain (No. 41c), located in the Formal Garden (No. 41b).

100. *Picnic Shelter #19*
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property: Lakeside Road
Construction Date unknown (1974)?
Non-contributing structure

This shelter is located near the northernmost point of Belle Isle, north of Lakeside Drive and east of Riverbank Road. It is simple in design, consisting of a gabled corrugated metal roof supported by a structure of galvanized steel with three sets of posts spanned by ribs supporting the gable roof. Four tables are set into the concrete pad underneath. The design is identical to a number of other picnic shelters on Belle Isle, including Picnic Shelter #20 (No. 98) located nearby.

101. Oxbow Comfort Station
Lakeside Drive
Late 20th c.
Non-contributing building

The Oxbow Comfort Station is located near the north point of the island, on the north side of Lakeside Drive north of Lake Muskoday. The building is distinguished by a front-gable roof that features wide, wing-like flat-top overhangs on each side. The walls are of red brick, with a double rowlock course forming the base and a single rowlock course forming a horizontal cap, below vertical boarding in the gable ends and short sliding aluminum windows on the east and west sides of the building. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles, with support for the side overhangs provided by long, wide wood brackets that are built into the brick walls. A metal door at each end of the gabled south façade provides access to the restrooms.

102. Detroit Waterworks Complex (Photos 82-83)
Lakeside Drive
1905 – c. 1980s
2 contributing structures, 1 contributing site, 2 non-contributing structures

The Belle Isle water intake complex, operated by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, is tucked into the northeast corner of the island, north of Lake Muskoday and the Blue Heron Lagoon, and east of the Detroit Yacht Club (No. 97). The entire complex is separated from the rest of Belle Isle Park by a narrow channel of water, although access between the two is provided by a bridge (gated and closed to public access). The complex’s primary features stand just offshore of an elongated triangular island and also include a separate water intake inlet to the east (No. 102a, contributing). Much of the small island’s land mass is located on the west end, consisting of an open field with a few trees along the riverbank. On the east side of the island, two long, narrow land spits frame the intake lagoon on the north and south.

The c. 1930 Pumping Station (No. 102b, contributing; Photo 82) is located on the east side of the triangular island and set into the intake lagoon. The two-story Art Deco building is long and narrow in plan, with rounded ends and a copper hip roof that has four faces on each end to
The limestone block-finish walls display broad projecting piers separating the vertical windows from one another, the piers at the ends of the long straight portion of each side wall broader and slightly taller than the rest. The tall, narrow steel sash multi-light windows that illuminate the interior are capped by dentil bands beneath shallow recessed square-plan stone panels between the piers’ upper ends. The verticality of the ribs is echoed in the building entrance on the narrow west façade, which has a limestone surround flanked by two massive corner piers. Above the door, an ornate pattern has been carved into the stone in bas relief; below it are two paneled metal doors and a multi-light transom window. A low concrete wall lines the paved pathway to the entrance of the building.

There are two c. 1980 bridges for access to the Waterworks island complex. The first bridge (No. 102c, non-contributing) carries a paved driveway from Lakeside Drive north across the channel to the Pumping Station. The continuous-span concrete bridge is set on concrete abutments and piers, with a steel railing. A similar, but smaller, bridge (No. 102d, non-contributing) connects the paved driveway at the entrance of the Pumping Station to the south spit of the intake lagoon. It has a concrete deck set on concrete block abutments, with a steel railing. Sheet steel piling forms a retaining wall at each abutment.

Approximately 350 feet north of the Waterworks island is an Intake Crib House (No. 102e, contributing; Photo 83). This circular building was constructed in 1904 as part of the Detroit Water Tunnel, which brought Lake St. Clair water into the system. The crib was placed away from the shoreline in an effort to avoid the polluted waters. The building is constructed of rusticated granite blocks, surmounted by a conical copper roof supported by closely spaced brackets. A cupola on top contains a lantern to mark the building’s location in darkness and low light. Segmental-arch-head windows and entry are regularly spaced along the wall, topped by flat voussoirs. The entire building stands on a wider low circular structure faced in limestone blocks above a granite structure at the waterline.

Lake Muskoday (Photo 84)
Lakeside Drive
1893
Contributing site

Lake Muskoday, an amorphously shaped lake located in the northeast corner of the island, was finished in 1893. In 1922 the Public Golf Course (No. 95) was constructed along the lake’s south bank, separating it from the Forest Area (No. 91). There are few trees along the bank, with weeping willow trees somewhat more prevalent along the south bank.

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74 The oval footprint of the pumping station and the inlet are shown on a 1930 unlabeled plan that is in the files of the Detroit Recreation Department.
76 Completion date provided by Voice of Detroit website, “Belle Isle History.” Information from Detroit Recreation Department website.
Belle Isle Park  
Wayne Co., MI  
Name of Property  
County and State

104. Lake Muskoday Dam and Inlet  
Lakeside Drive  
c. 1990  
3 non-contributing structures

Lake Muskoday is fed by a narrow inlet channel connecting the east side of the lake to the Detroit River, just north of the Belle Isle Practice Center. At the eastern end of the channel, a dam and pump house control the water flow, which flows through a culvert under Lakeside Drive at the west terminus of the channel.

The walls of the dam (No. 104a, non-contributing) are of concrete block, with sheet steel piling retaining walls and a steel mesh control gate. The small late 20th century Pump House (No. 104b, non-contributing) consists of a small brick building protected by a shed roof with asphalt shingle roofing. A metal door and louvered vent are located on the south façade. A late-20th century concrete culvert (No. 104c, non-contributing) allows water flow below Lakeside Drive.

105. Belle Isle Practice Center  
Lakeside Drive  
1952, 1990s  
1 contributing site, 2 non-contributing buildings

The Belle Isle Practice Center is located at the east end of the island, partially surrounding the Blue Heron Lagoon and directly south of the Waterworks complex (No. 102). The Practice Center’s office is located on the northeast side of Lakeside Drive, surrounded by a driving range and putting and chipping practice greens (No. 105a, contributing). A narrow inlet that feeds Lake Muskoday from the Detroit River separates the driving range from a short five-hole golf course on the north side; one recently constructed storage shed and a small pump station and dam are sited on a narrow promontory at the entrance to the inlet. The dam (No. 104a) and pump house (No. 104b), related to the water circulation system of Belle Isle and not directly connected to the Practice Center, are discussed separately.

The Practice Center Office (No. 105b, non-contributing) is a one-story rectangular building constructed c. 1995 to replace an earlier 1952 driving range office. The building has vertical wood siding, with asphalt shingles covering the side-gable roof. A small gabled entry porch is located on the south façade facing the parking lot, and 1/1 vinyl sash windows are irregularly spaced throughout the building. An additional storage shed is located on the north side of the driving range, along the inlet to Lake Muskoday. The one-story gabled storage shed (No. 105c, non-contributing) is clad in vertical wood siding similar to the Practice Center Office. A metal garage door provides access on the south façade.

106. Nature Zoo  
Lakeside Drive  
1977 and 2005  
2 non-contributing buildings, 1 non-contributing site, 1 non-contributing object
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property
Wayne Co., MI
County and State

The Nature Zoo is located on the east side of Belle Isle, just west of the Blue Heron Lagoon. It consists of two structures connected by a fenced animal run; the current design was completed in 2005. The Visitors’ Center (No.106a, contributing) is located at the north end of the Nature Zoo, and was constructed in 1977 as the Nature Center. The building has a strikingly geometric form, consisting primarily of three overlapping, brightly colored two-story cylindrical drums. On the north side, a rounded recessed entrance follows the outline of one of the drums, and a triangular section juts out from the south end of the structure at a sharp angle. Each drum has a flat roof, with tar-and-gravel roofing. Vertical wood siding was originally used on the entire building, but is now replaced with vertical metal siding, which is pierced by horizontal bands of narrow aluminum sash windows grouped into sets of three at the top of the walls. The entrance, deeply recessed at the north end of the building, is marked by a full-height glass wall containing a set of double glass doors.

The area immediately surrounding the Visitors’ Center is extensively landscaped, with themed gardens encircling the building. East of the building’s entrance, a small rough-hewn granite marker (No. 106b, non-contributing) set into the landscape bears a flat mid-level panel containing the inscription, “THE LEGACY PROJECT// SUSTAINING THE COMMUNITY/ & THE ENVIRONMENT// U.S. EPA, BELLE ISLE PARK// & THE PEOPLE OF DETROIT.”

A packed dirt path, surrounded by a chain-link fence and used as a one-acre deer enclosure (No. 106c), connects the Visitors’ Center with the Nature Zoo building (No. 106d, non-contributing) on the south. This shed-roofed structure, opened in 2005 as part of the Nature Zoo, is clad in wood sheathing. The asphalt shingle roof provides a deep overhang, and covers a full-width porch on the southwest elevation. Despite the building’s location adjacent to Lakeside Drive, the only access to the building is from within the deer enclosure.

107. Picnic Shelter #14 (Photo 52, distant right)
The Strand
1974
Non-contributing structure

This small wood shelter is located on the north side of The Strand, just west of the intersection of Woodside Drive, and is set well back from the road at the edge of the woods. It has four sets of square-plan wood columns set into a concrete pad, supporting an asphalt-shingled gable roof. Fixed metal tables are protected underneath.

108. Picnic Shelter #15
Lakeside Drive
1974
Non-contributing structure

This small wood shelter is located on the north side of Lakeside Drive, at the intersection of Woodside Drive. It is identical to Picnic Shelter 14 (No. 107), located nearby, which was constructed at the same time.
109. Woodside Comfort Station (Photo 53)
Woodside Drive
1928
Contributing building

This one-story brick comfort station is located on the north side of Woodside Drive, near the intersection with The Strand. The long rectangular building has an asphalt shingle hipped roof, with a large central porch on the south façade paved with terra cotta tile. This deep porch is protected by a separate hipped roof supported by broad brick piers, with shallow arch-top openings highlighted by cast stone springblocks and keystones, the keystones finished with slightly recessed vertical oval forms. Small porches with arched entries of similar design on each side of the front porch provide access to the restrooms. The windows are grouped in units of two, four, and five and trimmed with cast stone surrounds. The building’s red brick walls are constructed to produce a highly textural finish that provides strong contrasts of light and shadow – alternate courses are built of stretchers laid with a slight projection outward from the courses between, the slightly recessed courses are built with one course of headers between each two courses of stretchers, and in general the bricks seem to be laid with a calculated irregularity.

110. Woodside Drive/ Nashua Creek Pedestrian Bridge
Woodside Drive
c. 1973
Non-contributing structure

This simple pedestrian bridge is located northeast of the Woodside Comfort Station, and crosses Nashua Creek to carry a trail through the wooded portion of Belle Isle. The steel I-beam bridge, set on concrete abutments, has an arched wood deck and metal pipe railings.

111. Woodside Drive/ Nashua Creek Bridge (Bridge No. 16)
Woodside Drive
Abutments - 190477/superstructure replaced c. 1980
Abutments: contributing structure; Superstructure: non-contributing

This bridge carries Woodside Drive across Nashua Creek. The superstructure, which is composed of steel I-beams and a concrete deck, is set on the original Kelleys Island (Ohio) limestone abutments, faced in coursed rock-face ashlar below the deck but in rubble masonry, with very irregularly finished stones artfully fitted together like a mosaic. The bridge was recently (2013) modified with new four-bar square steel tube railings anchored in angled precast concrete ends. Both approaches are marked by new metal guardrails.

112. Picnic Shelter #16
Woodside Drive
1974

77 Fifteenth Annual Report, Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards, 1903-1904, p. 14 and 29
This small wood shelter is located on the north side of Woodside Drive, north of Lake Okonoka, at the edge of the wooded area. It is identical to nearby Picnic Shelters #14, #15, and #18 (No. 107, 108, and 115) consisting of wood columns set into a concrete pad, supporting a gable roof with asphalt shingles. Fixed metal tables are protected underneath.

113. Picnic Shelter #17 (Photo 54 center left)
Woodside Drive
Construction date unknown (1970s?)
Non-contributing structure

This metal shelter is located on the south side of Woodside Drive, between Picnic Shelters #16 and #18 (No. 112 and 115). Like others in the park likely built in the 1970s, it consists of a metal frame with three sets of posts and rafters supporting a sheet metal-clad gable roof, with four tables set into the concrete foundation.

114. Drinking Fountain
Woodside Drive
c. 1930
Contributing object

This metal drinking fountain is located near Picnic Shelter #17 (No. 113), on the north side of Lake Okonoka. A flared metal base supports the round-column fountain, with its small round basin, set on a small concrete pad. It appears to be the only one of these fountains left.

115. Picnic Shelter #18
Woodside Drive
Construction date likely 1974
Non-contributing structure

This small wood shelter is located on the north side of Woodside Drive, north of Lake Okonoka, and consists of four sets of wood columns set into a concrete pad, supporting an asphalt-shingled gable roof on wood rafters. Fixed metal tables are protected underneath. It is identical to Picnic Shelter #16 (No. 112), and was likely constructed at the same time.

116. Lake Okonoka (Photos 54-55)
Lakeside Drive
1887
Contributing site
Lake Okonoka, which anchors the southeast side of the island, was completed in 1887.\textsuperscript{78} It was the first man-made lake on the island. Like the other early lakes on the island, Lake Okonoka was formed by enhancing a naturally low-lying area of the native landscape. The boomerang-shaped lake is surrounded by open space with few trees, save a small number of weeping willow trees interspersed along the bank. The lake contains several small islands.

117. \textit{South Fishing Pier}
Lakeside Drive
1980s
Non-contributing structure

This pier is located on the south side of the island, extending into the Detroit River just west of the Coast Guard facility (No. 118). The wood structure is comprised of a paved surface with wood railings, set on a substructure of concrete piers. Metal lamp posts are spaced regularly along the railings.

118. \textit{Station Belle Isle, U. S. Coast Guard}
Lakeside Drive
1942, renovated 1970s, re-sided 2012
1 non-contributing building, 1 non-contributing structure

The U. S. Coast Guard station is located along the river on the south side of Belle Isle, just south of Lakeside Drive and Lake Okonoka. The Coast Guard originally purchased this land from the city of Detroit in 1881, for the token price of $1.00, and constructed a lighthouse, keeper’s dwelling, and boathouse. These buildings were removed when the current station was constructed; the existing lighthouse (not built by the U.S. Coast Guard) is now located at the east end of the Blue Huron Lagoon. The current station consists of a large central building (No. 118a, non-contributing) with a mooring basin on the east side, surrounded by parking lots off Lakeside Drive and a sea wall on the river side. A small shed of recent construction (No. 118b, non-contributing) is located in the northwest corner of the parking lot.

Station Belle Isle was originally known as St. Clair Lifeboat Station. The facilities were designed by the Ninth Coast Guard District, Civil Engineering Section, of Cleveland, OH. Contractors for the project included: Sheet Piling and Launchway Company; the Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Company; Foundation Piledriving, the Candler Dock and Dredge Company; and the Faulkner Construction Company.\textsuperscript{79}

The facility’s main building is a two-story L-shaped structure with a flat roof. The main block is set along the river bank, with a main entrance on the north façade marked by a simple projecting canopy with a surrounding patio. There is a one-story projecting bay on the south side of the

\textsuperscript{78} Completion date provided by Voice of Detroit, “Belle Isle History,” Article from Detroit Recreation Department website.

main block overlooking the water. A two-story repair facility is located on the northwest side of the building, connected to the main block by a one-story section; a boat launch leads directly to the mooring basin. The siding, installed recently, is arranged in contrasting light gray and white bands, creating a horizontal orientation across the building. Both stories have paired aluminum sash windows.

A rendering of the planned facility from 1941\(^{80}\) corresponds to the general form of the current building, with the projecting bay on the water side. However, several of the details of the original design differ from the current building, including a more complex series of individual building sections, a rectangular tower on the façade, and fenestration consisting of isolated windows rather than the current banded windows on each story. A secondary structure included in the 1941 rendering, located east of the main building and connected by an overhead canopy, was not constructed. The building was renovated in the 1970s, which is when the tower was likely removed and the building took on its current configuration. In 2012 the building was re-sided with what appears to be EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish System).

119. **Lake Okonoka Pump House**
Lakeside Drive
C. 1900
2 contributing structures

This small brick pump house is located at the northeast end of Lake Okonoka, where only a narrow isthmus of land containing Lakeside Drive separates the lake from the Blue Heron Lagoon. The one-story pump house (No. 119a) has a side-gable roof, with an unadorned wood cornice and frieze and clapboarding in the gables. There is a former window opening on the south side of the building facing the lake, but this has been infilled with brick. A partially subterranean entrance on the north side of the building has a front-gable roof, with a wood double door on the north façade. Just south of the pump house, a stone and concrete retaining wall (No. 119b) curves around the end of Lake Okonoka, with a concrete culvert leading under Lakeside Avenue and into the Blue Heron Lagoon. The north portion of the retaining wall is constructed of square-cut stone, while the south portion is a rubble stone wall with a concrete cap.

120. **Blue Heron Lagoon (Photo 60)**
Lakeside Drive
1930
Contributing site

The last lake to be completed on Belle Isle was the Blue Heron Lagoon, which was created as part of the landfill operations on the east end of the island, but also to accommodate a new beach

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and swimming area that could accommodate larger numbers of visitors than the north shore location. This function never happened, due to disputes with water board officials over the fear of such a use causing contamination to the adjacent Water Intake Lagoon. Blue Heron Lagoon was finished in 1930, approximately the same time as the erection of the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse (No. 121). There are no landforms located in the middle of this oval-shaped lake, which is mostly lined by trees.

121. Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse (Photos 57-59)
Lakeside Drive
1930-31
Contributing structure

This marble-clad lighthouse is located near the eastern tip of the island, on a strip of land between the Blue Heron Lagoon on the north and the Detroit River. Operated by the U.S. Coast Guard as an official aid to navigation, it is unique among lighthouses for its opulent exterior materials and refined Art Deco decorative flourishes. The structure’s construction was financed by donations from the Lake Carriers Association and people of Detroit to honor the association’s former president from 1902 to 1925, William Livingstone (1844-1925), who was instrumental in developing safely marked shipping channels along the Detroit River during his reign. The association hired Albert Kahn (1869-1942) to design the memorial; Kahn also designed Belle Isle’s Aquarium (No. 42), Conservatory (No. 41), and Smith Flagpole (No. 89), as well as Livingstone’s private residence. The structure is reported to be Kahn’s only adventure with lighthouse design. Although a smaller lighthouse nearby dating to the 1880s was already in use, it was replaced by the new eighty-foot-tall memorial; the earlier lighthouse was removed ten years later during the construction of Coast Guard Station Belle Isle (No. 118). The relief work on the lighthouse was designed by Hungarian artist Géza Maróti (1874-1941), who worked with Kahn on Detroit’s 1928 Fisher Building and provided decorative work for such other major Detroit area landmarks as the Guardian Building and buildings at Cranbrook.

Surrounded at a distance by an octagonal-footprint black ornamental metal fence with vertical posts framing sections of pickets with paired horizontal rails near the top and bottom, the 75-foot tall lighthouse consists of a fluted marble shaft, with an octagonal bronze lantern on the top, and stands on a 5-foot tall octagonal, stepped base. The flutes on the 58-foot-tall shaft are accented at the top by stylized eagles executed in bronze, and the shaft itself is illuminated by three sets of three narrow arched windows each. On the south side of the lighthouse, above the projecting entry portal’s chevron-decorated cap, a marble relief panel depicts man’s overcoming of nature, represented by a woman controlling the stars, wind, and water, waves apparently represented by

81 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 11-12
a chevron band beneath.\textsuperscript{85} Below the relief, the top of the entry portal displays the name “WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE” in incised letters. The entry, set into a square-head recess in the marble portal, contains a bronze door decorated with three ornamental bas relief panels. On the reverse/north side of the lighthouse, a marble panel contains an inscription in raised letters below a relief, bearing the Latin inscription NAVIGAT, of what appears to be a Viking ship, with Livingstone’s name above in raised letters in a panel flanked by two cherubs. The inscription states: THIS LIGHT HOUSE/ IS ERECTED BY THE/ LAKE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION/ AND CITIZENS OF DETROIT/ TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF/ WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE/ PRESIDENT/ LAKE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION/ 1902-1925/ AND THROUGHOUT HIS ACTIVE LIFE/ ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT/ AND PUBLIC SPIRITED CITIZENS OF/ DETROIT/ 1844-1925. The light itself is set within an octagonal bronze lantern with fluted columns framing the glass lights. The lighthouse’s marble finish clads a brick structure, and the interior contains a circular steel staircase running up to the light deck.

122. Blue Heron Lagoon Inlet Dam
Lakeside Drive
1980s
Non-contributing structure

This small concrete dam is located on the east end of Belle Isle, across a narrow inlet between the Blue Heron Lagoon and the Detroit River. The dam has concrete paneled walls and deck with a steel gate to control the water flow.

123. Blue Heron Lagoon Inlet Bridge
2013
Non-contributing structure

This small steel stringer bridge over the inlet that connects Blue Heron Lagoon to the Detroit River/Lake St. Clair has a poured concrete deck and pre-cast concrete abutments. The bridge deck is bordered on both sides by a tall black metal railing with vertical balusters.

124. Circulation System
Throughout the island
1887-1970s
Contributing structure

The island’s roads, sidewalks, and paths provide access to every part of the island and largely reflect the circulation system that was designed and built in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The circulation system, which encompasses roughly fifteen miles, consists of a series of one-way roads that form a loop around the perimeter of most of the island with smaller curving and straight connecting roadways between them. Central Avenue, the most prominent road, which is one of the major features proposed by Frederick Law Olmsted in his preliminary plan, runs east-west through the

center of the island as a straight road and then runs diagonally towards Lakeside Drive to the east.

The major roads are The Strand, Central Avenue, Sunset Drive, Lakeside, Riverbank, Inselruhe, and Vista with more narrow connecting roads, including Loiter Way, Picnic Way, and Woodside Drive. The major roads are the widest, at five lanes, while the smaller roads are typically two lanes, which are either one-way or two-way. All roads are paved with asphalt and are striped.

Sidewalks are located throughout many areas of the park, although they are not consistently present and do not connect with one another in any organized way. Most of the sidewalks serve a limited area, such as access to comfort stations and between clusters of buildings, such as the Conservatory and Aquarium and the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon and the Remick Music Shelter on the south side of the island. Widths and paving treatments vary, as seen on the wide walkway that connects the Kiley pavilion to the small lagoon south of the Casino, and those seen around the Aquarium, Conservatory, and the Maintenance Complex.

Paths are present in the meadow (No. 125) adjacent to the Blue Heron Lagoon (No. 120) and through the Forest Area (No. 91). The paths in the meadow adjacent to the Blue Heron Lagoon are composed of two legs of a route accessed from Lakeside Drive south of the lagoon that join near the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse and circle around the lighthouse. An informal path leads northeast at the eastern end of the lagoon and connects with a short path on the north side of the lagoon, which is not accessible from Lakeside Drive. The paths in the Forest Area at the eastern end consist of the remnants of two segments of a loop trail from the Nature Center: the Wildwood Trail is the longer of the two, extending further west into the Forest Area, while the Spicebrush Trail connects with Wildwood Trail to create a shorter path. A longer existing loop trail runs through the southern side of the Forest Area from Vista Avenue east of the Athletic Shelter to Woodside Drive on the east.

A nature path loop also existed in the northwestern part of the Forest Area between Oakway Road and Central Avenue (shown on the 1961 plan), but this area has now become overgrown.

125. Meadow Area/former Nike Site, 20WN1170 (Photos 56-57)
South of Blue Heron Lagoon on east end of island
1970s
Non-contributing site

The Meadow Area is an open tall grass-covered area that was created during the 1970s after the removal of the 1950s Detroit Defense Area Nike Batteries 23/26 missile launcher site whose property occupied most of the area east of Lakeside Drive to near the Livingstone Light and between Blue Heron Lagoon and the Detroit River to the southeast. The site was deactivated in 1968 and all buildings and structures later removed, leaving the present open meadow with scattered trees. Slight depressions and small amounts of concrete debris remain evident at the site. The area is located along a significant migratory bird path and features narrow, winding unpaved paths along both the north and south edges of the meadow. The paths lead to the 1930
Belle Isle Park Wayne Co., MI
Name of Property County and State
Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse (No. 121) and beyond to the east around the east tip of Blue Heron Lagoon (No. 120).

126. Woodside Shelter
South side of Woodside Drive
c. 2000
Non-contributing structure

This picnic shelter is not assigned a number like most of the picnic shelters and is not included in a 1990s historic structure report on the island’s many buildings and structures. The picnic shelter is a gable-roofed open structure supported by straight metal columns on two sides, which support arched wood trusses.
8. Statement of Significance

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

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
- COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- ARCHITECTURE

Sections 8- page 91
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Wayne Co., MI

County and State

- ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
- SOCIAL HISTORY
- ART
- MARITIME HISTORY

Period of Significance

_c. 1860-1965_

_____________________

Significant Dates

1879 (purchase of island for park purposes)

_____________________

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

_N/A_

_____________________

Cultural Affiliation

_N/A_

_____________________

Architect/Builder

_George D. Mason_

_Albert Kahn_

_Van Leyen & Schilling_

_Cass Gilbert_

_Emil Lorch_

_Lewis M. Gram_

_Horace H. Esselstyn_

_Robert Swanson_

_Dan Kiley_

_Clarence Day_

_William Kapp_

_Marshall M. Fredericks_

_Herbert Adams_

_Samuel Cashwan_
Occupying a nearly one and one-half-mile long island in the middle of the Detroit River just upstream from downtown Detroit, Belle Isle Park has served as Detroit’s primary park and public recreational place since its establishment in 1879. Throughout its existence as a city park it has been the city’s primary fresh air space, the primary public space for leisure and play, public gatherings, celebrations, and commemorations. Belle Isle meets national register criteria A and C at the national level of significance. Its development reflects broad national movements and patterns in public park design and use since its initial creation and it contains buildings, structures, and artistic objects important in the national, state of Michigan, and Detroit context. Substantial aspects of the park’s early planning, reflecting the Pleasure Grounds period of park design of the mid and late nineteenth century, remain in place. Nationally recognized landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted planned some of the existing Pleasure Grounds period components of the park, including Central Avenue and the Forest Area occupying the east end of the island. Other important Pleasure Grounds features begun during the 1880s include Lakes Takoma, Okonoka, and Muskoday, and much of the existing series of canals, roads, and pathways, designed for passive recreation. Belle Isle’s design and existing form also strongly reflect the influence of the City Beautiful movement of the 1890s to the 1920s and 30s in the Grand Boulevard approach and massive 1921-23 MacArthur Bridge leading to the island, in the Scott Fountain and its associated lagoon and terrace, designed by Cass Gilbert and completed in 1925, and the development of Central Avenue as a site for public sculpture beginning in the 1890s, though primarily in the 1920s to 40s. Belle Isle’s existing form also reflects the activities of federal Depression-relief programs, including a Model Yacht Basin constructed under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration c. 1934 – such model yacht basins were reportedly a personal interest of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Belle Isle’s was one of the first of many built across the country in the 1930s. The park’s buildings and structures include outstanding examples of park and public architecture and engineering dating from the 1890s to the 1950s. Chief among them from an architecture and engineering standpoint are the picturesque Elizabethan 1890s Stables complex; 1904/1955 Conservatory; Beaux Arts 1901-04 Aquarium; Renaissance Revival 1907 Casino and 1902 Detroit Boat Club and 1921-23 Detroit Yacht Club clubhouses; 1921-23 open spandrel concrete arch bridge; unique marble-clad Art Deco 1930-31 lighthouse structure; 1939-40 Neo-Gothic/Art Deco carillon tower; and Mid-century Modern 1949 Flynn Skating Pavilion. The Aquarium is significant not only for its Beaux Arts design, but also for housing one of the oldest public aquariums, and being the oldest aquarium building, in the nation. These and other park buildings and structures were designed by a who’s who of leading Detroit architects, including Alpheus Chittenden, George D. Mason, Albert Kahn, Van Leyen & Schilling, Clarence Day, William E. Kapp, and J. Robert F. Swanson. The park also contains a number of early twentieth-century bridges over its series of canals, comfort stations, and picnic shelters, each of individual design, that together form significant bodies of work. It also contains one of Detroit’s few surviving early Gothic Revival houses dating from before the park was created. Finally, the park also contains numerous public sculptures that make strong contributions to its overall significance including examples by artists of national and regional
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property


Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Belle Isle Park Chronology of Development

Detroit’s Parks and Belle Isle Before 1879

Prior to the city of Detroit’s purchase of Belle Isle in 1879, the total acreage of park spaces in this rapidly growing city was about fourteen acres. Divided into a few small park spaces, the acreage was concentrated in the city’s center at Woodward Avenue, its main north-south corridor, and Jefferson Avenue, the road that paralleled the northern bank of the Detroit River. The earliest park development coincided with the community’s new plan of 1805, ten years before it became a city. The new plan was devised by Judge Augustus Woodward, a lawyer who had previously lived in Washington D.C. Modeled on L’Enfant’s plan of Washington D.C., the plan provided for streets radiating out from Campus Martius, a large open space, with smaller, formal parks that totaled six acres.86

As in many large cities in the late nineteenth century, the city of Detroit and its public-spirited citizens aspired to provide its residents with new amenities that reflected the city’s stature as an industrial powerhouse and a progressive, civilized community. But it was also becoming clear, and readily acknowledged, that parks and open areas provided much-needed relief for the citizenry from cities’ urban and industrial activities that had contributed to their growth. Initially contemplated in 1868, the city’s Park Act of 1871 appointed park commissioners and appropriated $200,000 for the purchase of land for a larger urban park. The purchase was subject, however, to state legislature approval and both the act and the desired park location provoked an onslaught of public criticism throughout this decade.87 Criticism focused on the question of a single large park so far east of the city’s center versus three smaller parks more equitably located throughout it; the fear that the high cost of the purchase would overburden the city’s budget; and the concern about the healthfulness of the island due to its low-lying, swampy nature. In addition, a proposal was floated in the 1870s to convert a portion of the island into a railroad yard as part of a plan to connect Detroit and Canada by bridge and tunnel.88

86 The original parks were Harmonie, Times Square and Campus Martius. The 2.5 acre Grand Circus Park complemented these downtown parks in 1885 (Anderson 2001, p. 27; Wilbeck Ross 1973).
87 All Michigan cities’ actions were subject to state legislature approval until the 1909 passage of the Home Rule Act. It has been said that the 1870s struggle led to the passage of the 1909 act.
88 The schemes continued after the purchase, including an 1885 proposal to sell it for a soldiers’ home; private offer to buy it for $225,000 in 1886, and an 1890 idea to develop the island as an exclusive residential park for the wealthy (Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 26).
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Belle Isle becomes a city park in 1879 and early improvements

Despite the nearly decade-long debates and political controversies, Belle Isle, then a roughly 690-acre island in the Detroit River, was finally purchased after approval by the state legislature in 1879. The purchase was aided in particular by Detroit lawyer, Levi L. Barbour, who negotiated the sale with the island’s owners. A second bill, known as the Boulevard Bill, was also passed by the state legislature that approved the construction of a boulevard system. The island, located about three miles east of the city’s center, was privately owned in the nineteenth century. Early named Hog Island and used as a public common in the eighteenth century, the island had been dubbed Belle Isle in 1845 by a group holding a picnic there, a popular pastime. Although privately owned, the island had been used by the public for decades earlier in the nineteenth century and a ferry was operating to the island by the 1840s. The island also hosted a number of commercial uses, which included ice harvesting (ice houses were located on the central south shore), fishing (there were three “fishery” complexes, one at the point just east of the present Detroit Yacht Club’s island, one on the then point south of present Lake Okonoka’s southeast point, and one along the south shore south of today’s Lake Takoma), and a hotel. One of the island’s distinguishing features was a large native forested area that covered much of the east and central areas.

With the park’s establishment came the concurrent creation of a new Detroit agency to oversee the parks.89 The 1871 Park Act appointed a first set of park commissioners; however, a new Board of Commissioners was appointed in 1881. In 1899 the agency became the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards, in acknowledgement of the city’s growing boulevard system by the late nineteenth century.90 Two years later, in 1901, the parks’ oversight authority was given to the Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards.

The island park was officially named Belle Isle Park in 1881. Its first decade as a municipal park was plagued by funding and design concerns. No funds to improve the island were provided until 1881, when an initial $11,045 was appropriated. It was not until 1883 that the Commissioners could hire a professional designer to advise on the park’s design. They selected Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted was the most famous landscape architect of the time and had by this time already designed twelve other urban parks in the country. Discussed in more detail under Landscape Architecture, Olmsted’s plan was for a park designed largely for passive recreation and included the infilling of swampy areas with fill from other areas of the island. But the plan soon received criticism, most notably by Detroit News columnist, Michael Dee. The slow pace of improvements in the 1880s was both deplored (by the Commissioners) and derided (Michael Dee and other critics). Olmsted resigned in 1885 before his contract with the city expired, and two

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89 A Committee on Parks was first appointed in 1854. Beginning in 1863 and 1870, a superintendent was appointed to serve during the summer season. After 1870, smaller parks were under the care of the Board of Public Works (Silas Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan, 1890, p. 74)

90 The original Board of Boulevard Commissioners was established in 1879 (Silas Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan, 1890, p. 79). In 1885, when the townships that were part of the area within the boulevards’ layout were annexed to the city, control then passed to the Mayor and Board of Public Works (Farmer 1890).
years later a revised grounds plan was adopted, prepared by Detroit architect John Donaldson. Donaldson (1854-1941) adapted some of Olmsted’s ideas for this approved plan, which retained important elements including the major road system, preservation of the forest area, and ferry dock location. But the plan departed from Olmsted’s plan with the provision for several lakes in low spots that Olmsted proposed be filled in and for a canal system that crisscrossed through the island as opposed to being sited parallel with Central Avenue and other planned roads.

Providing better drainage to eliminate some of the island’s swampy areas was an early, important task and one for which both the Olmsted and the 1887 adopted plan provided. Olmsted’s canals were proposed to parallel many of the roads, but the approved plan showed them connecting with newly created lakes and draining directly to the Detroit River. While some of the canals did parallel roads, none were sited adjacent to Central Avenue. The Loop Canal near the west end was built first in 1883, followed by the Nashua Creek Canal in 1890 and Sylvan Creek in 1910. A fourth canal called Marsh Run was built in the 1880s, but was filled in by the late 1920s. By 1889 two marshy areas were dredged to become lakes: Lake Takoma was the first in 1887 in the original southeast corner, followed by Lake Okonoka in the original southwest corner in 1889. A large lily pond was also created in 1890 close to the bridge approach entrance to the park in the northwest section of the island, but no longer exists. Lake Muskoday in the northeast area was completed in 1893. The lakes helped alleviate the mosquito problem, but also opened up some recreational areas for activities and greatly added to the appearance and character of the island.

The road layout of the 1887 approved plan followed some of Olmsted’s concepts, especially the placement of Central Avenue, which was aligned in a straight line from a circular area on the west close to the ferry landing to an east termination in the island’s center adjacent to the forested area. Roads circulated around the perimeter, and narrow winding roads in the interior connected to them. Much of the plan was implemented within a few years, as shown in the 1895 Silas Farmer map, but some planned roads were never built and others, such as Inselruhe Avenue, soon built in alignments not shown in the 1887 plan.

The 1880s also saw other improvements, despite funding difficulties, including a ferry dock at the northwest corner (1884), which was the first structure built on the island for the park and accorded with Olmsted’s plan. A first casino housing a restaurant providing quality meals and a ballroom for public functions at the west termination point of Central Avenue was built in 1886, followed in 1887 by a boathouse near the ferry dock, and a steel truss bridge with swing span was constructed in 1889 which connected the island from Detroit’s Jefferson Avenue. The island’s oldest extant building, a residence thought to have been built in the 1850s or 60s, became the park superintendent’s residence during this decade. The residence was known as, and is still called, Inselruhe (German for “island rest”). The first of a number of greenhouses next

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91 Olmsted returned to Detroit in the early 1890s to advise on the layout of Elmwood Cemetery, initially laid out in the mid-nineteenth century, and was also responsible for the plan of Presque Isle Park in Marquette, Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula.

92 Inselruhe is also variously stated to have been built by Bernard Campau in 1856 as a summer residence or by Richard Willis in 1863. Willis was the owner of the property when it was purchased by the City in 1879.
to the house was erected in 1889 as part of the park’s administrative complex. Several rustic bridges that crossed over the canals, fashioned from the hickory trees of the forested area, rain shelters, and water fountains were also built (none of these early wood structures survive). The bridges and shelters, in particular, were quickly in need of replacement, both because of their fragile wood construction but also due to their intense public use from the park’s earliest years. As early as the 1890s, the park commissioners were calling for more permanent replacements; the earliest remaining bridges that replaced the original bridges on the island date to 1893; these were constructed of metal and stone. In 1887 the Michigan Yacht Club built its clubhouse along the north shore on land leased from the city. It was shortly after, in 1891, joined by the Detroit Boat Club further west, which also obtained a lease from the city.

An early feature of the park was its income-producing nature. The park agency received fees from private fisheries and ice houses during the park’s earliest years (both features were present on the island prior to the park’s purchase but are now long gone) and provided a number of concessions, including pony rides, canoe rentals, eating establishments (called refectories), and carriage services that transported visitors across the bridge to and around the island. The ferry companies also paid a fee to the city for the right to dock at the island. Many of these types of concessions continued in the park into the mid-twentieth century and a small number of the buildings and structures associated with the concessions remained until the late twentieth century.

The last decade of the nineteenth century saw many more changes on the island, most of them providing additional attractions to the ever-increasing numbers of visitors. A national convention held in Detroit in 1891 to celebrate the silver anniversary of the Grand Army of the Republic brought over 100,000 visitors to the island. Detroit’s popularity as a convention city in this decade (and well into the twentieth century) brought in thousands of out-of-town visitors, for whom Belle Isle Park became a leading attraction. A music pavilion built over the Loop Canal was added in 1891 and was enjoyed by many visitors, some in their rental canoes. An earlier wood frame police station was replaced in 1893 with a larger partly stone police station designed by one of Detroit’s leading architects, George D. Mason, who also designed the rambling stables facility near Inselruhe, built in 1894. Additional rain shelters and comfort stations were added, five of which still remain. A bathhouse and beach were established near the ferry dock and close to the boat house on the northwest corner of the island in 1893. The third lake, Lake Muskoday, was completed in the same year, aided by workers hired during the economic depression of the early 1890s. The two oldest (though much rebuilt) surviving bridges were built in 1893, although one has been placed on new abutments and moved a short distance. The Belle Isle Zoo, located north of the park’s administrative complex, opened in 1895 and served as the city’s only zoo until the development of the present Detroit Zoo in suburban Detroit beginning in 1928. A map from 1895 by historian Silas Farmer highlighted many of the park’s features, including baseball and tennis grounds and a circular driving track near the southern shore. An athletic pavilion, or field house, was built to support these activities in 1898-1899. Memorial sculpture made an early appearance on the island, beginning with the Muir Fountain (now removed) in 1897, along with

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91 The 1887 adopted plan showed a linear speeding track on the north shore east of the 1889 bridge’s location.
the Newsboy Fountain, the unveiling of which was witnessed by over 5,000 newsboys from southeast Michigan on July 6, 1897.  

Changes ensued again in park administration with the appointment of Commissioners of the Parks and Boulevards in 1899. Only two years later, in 1901, authority was given to a single Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards. The Detroit Public Works Department was also established in 1901, and would later take over the boulevards system. The boulevard system had a slow start, with private developments and financial contributions funding its early construction, until ground was officially broken in 1891 for E. Grand Boulevard, which ran northward from E. Jefferson Avenue opposite the Belle Isle Park entrance. The entire Grand Boulevard, running north, then west, then south back to the river around the then outer edges of the built-up part of the city, was not completed, however, until 1913. The city gained its second largest park, Palmer Park, in 1893 with the donation of 140 acres of his private country estate by Thomas Palmer in what was then the northern reaches of the city.

*Belle Isle Park in the early twentieth century*

The park continued its ascendancy as the city’s premier park in the first decade of the twentieth century, closely paralleling the city’s growth in manufacturing and commercial pursuits. Detroit’s population in 1900 was 286,000. It nearly doubled by 1910, to over 466,000 people. By 1920 Detroit was the fourth largest city in the United States, with a population of nearly one million people. The rise of the automobile manufacturing industry, and the many subsidiary industries associated with it, resulted in the city’s doubling in population between 1910 and 1920. Henry Ford’s five-dollar-a-day offer in 1914 to attract new workers met with overwhelming success, many coming from the American South and Europe, and also rural Michigan. Although recognized early in the twentieth century for its dominance in automobile manufacturing (there were thirty-two automobile and motor truck manufacturing concerns in the city by 1920), the city actually had an astounding diversity of industries at the time, which included adding machines, soda and alkali products, stoves, shipbuilding and repair, gas engines, hydraulic hoists, salt, and pharmaceutical products.

By 1900 the city had allocated $1.75 million for development of the park, and during the first decade of the twentieth century an additional $1.5 million was invested. Additional bridges of more permanent concrete, stone and brick materials, most in a classical style, were added to the park in the earliest years of the twentieth century to replace deteriorating earlier hickory wood structures. Many new buildings and institutions accompanied these needed improvements, and major proposals to transform the western end of the island resulted in one of the island’s most striking features, Cass Gilbert’s Scott Memorial Fountain.

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94 Detroit Recreation Dept. Sculptures and monuments document, 1970s?
95 http://historydetroit.com/statistics/.
96 Beautiful and Dynamic Detroit, 1920, p. 4
97 Beautiful and Dynamic Detroit, 1920, p. 13 and 17
98 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 26

Sections 8- page 98
The importance of Belle Isle as the city’s symbolic center factored into a proposal by Charles Freer, a leading Detroit industrialist and art collector, for a memorial for Detroit’s 1901 bicentennial at the west end of the island. Devised by McKim, Mead and White, the proposed design envisioned a lighthouse in the form of a monumental column that, flanked by an arcade, was strongly reminiscent of the White City in Chicago. While this proposal failed (and a much less grandiose monument was erected in Campus Martius in downtown Detroit), Belle Isle Park received two significant contributions associated with the city’s Bicentennial – attached aquarium and conservatory structures completed in 1904 that were built in the south-central area of the island on the former baseball grounds.\(^9\) Designed by Detroit architects Albert Kahn and George D. Mason, the complex was an immediate attraction, with 500,000 in attendance at the aquarium in its first year.\(^1\) The aquarium was the third largest aquarium in the world when it opened and featured both salt and freshwater exhibits.\(^1\)

Other early twentieth-century improvements included several park shelters and comfort stations, a replacement canoe shelter in 1907, a new Casino building in 1908, which was designed by the local firm of Van Leyen & Schilling, and in 1909 a new beach and bathhouse located farther east of the original area, which had been at the northwest corner near the ferry landing. Although initially criticized for its expense, the larger new bathhouse and beach proved to be a wise investment, as over 74,000 people were there at its opening and the bathhouse had to be expanded over the next ten years.\(^2\) Although not associated with the city park, an extensive amusement park named Electric Park was built on both sides of the bridge’s approach on the “mainland” at Jefferson Avenue and E. Grand Boulevard in 1906, increasing the draw of Belle Isle and its increasing number of recreational activities. Both Belle Isle Park and Electric Park were also served by a streetcar line on Jefferson Avenue by the early twentieth century. In the same year, Harry Houdini used a jump, bound in chains (considered one of his most famous stunts), from the Belle Isle Bridge into the chilly waters of the Detroit River as a way to publicize his scheduled shows in the city. The Detroit Boat Club built their third and still standing building, constructed using reinforced concrete and structural tile to stem their previous bad luck with fires, next to the island end of the bridge in 1902.

The first decade also experienced the City Beautiful movement’s initial influences on Detroit with the creation of the City Plan and Improvement Commission in 1909, headed by George Moore as president. Moore, a native of Michigan, served on the National Commission of Fine Arts and as director of the Detroit Museum of Art (now the Detroit Institute of Arts) in 1914-1917.\(^3\) The commission’s preliminary plan of 1915 stated its intent to take the “bric a brac” off of Belle Isle, as well as to design a new bridge and approach to the island that would connect with a planned new diagonal road leading to a proposed arts and culture center to the

\(^9\) Wilbeck Ross 1973:27
\(^1\) Anderson 2001, p. 67
\(^1\) Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 19. Anderson 2001, p. 67 says the aquarium was the 3rd or 4th largest in the country when it opened.
\(^2\) Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 15
northeast. Although the diagonal connecting road was not realized, the new “Cultural Center” arts and cultural center did develop at the intersection of Woodward and Kirby avenues north of the downtown. The new arts and cultural center was graced with a new library in 1919 that was designed by New York architect Cass Gilbert and new art museum in 1921, the work of Paul Philippe Cret.

An outstanding example of City Beautiful movement planning and design is the Scott Memorial Fountain on Belle Isle, which had its genesis in the 1910 will of James Scott, a wealthy, but relatively unpopular, Detroiter who had not seemed the type of person to bequeath most of his personal fortune to the City. The will specified both a fountain on the island as well as a life-sized statue of Mr. Scott. The fountain’s design was to be approved by Scott’s executors, chief of whom was Clarence Burton. Burton was a prominent lawyer in the city, but is known today for his interest in history: his massive histories of Detroit and Wayne County published in the early twentieth century continue today to serve as key historic reference materials, and his book and manuscript collections on the history of Detroit formed the core of the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library. A national design competition, whose judges included Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Daniel Chester French, and Robert S. Peabody, was won by New York City architect Cass Gilbert in 1914. The project, which was substantially completed in 1925, required extensive landfilling at the west end of the island and was subject to many delays. But Gilbert’s proposal for a war memorial in association with the fountain noted the excellence of the site as it did not intrude on any already existing park or public ground and that the fountain “would be a very conspicuous object in the landscape as viewed from the City, from the thousands of boats passing up and down the river, from the bridge to Belle Isle Park itself and from both the American and Canadian shores. No high buildings would be built anywhere near it to overtop or dominate it...” and it would be “very accessible to the city and to the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Belle Isle.”

Gilbert also produced a preliminary design for a new marble-clad arch bridge for Belle Isle as part of the 1915 preliminary City Plan produced by the City Plan and Improvement Commission. In that same year, the wood block deck of the 1889 metal truss bridge that the City had discussed replacing for years was accidentally set afire in the course of a creosoting project and most of the bridge destroyed. The city’s Public Works Department oversaw the design and completion of the new bridge, which retained the arched form Gilbert envisioned, but omitted the costly marble facades and, like most such bridges of the time, exhibited its concrete construction for all to see. The general appearance of the bridge as built reflected an initial design by Emil Lorch, the dean of the University of Michigan School of Architecture, as architect, and engineer Lewis M. Gram, professor of structural engineering at the university from 1912 until 1928, but the final design, with significant changes from what was originally proposed, was the work of Indianapolis concrete arch bridge specialist Daniel B. Luten. Work on the structure began in 1921 and the bridge was completed in 1923, with a tunnel under Jefferson Avenue at the approach end that

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104 Bennett 1915, n.p.
allowed private automobiles to more easily enter the park, one of the solutions proposed to manage the ever-increasing number of cars traveling to the island. The nineteen-span structure is the longest of its open spandrel concrete arch type – and the longest concrete arch bridge – in Michigan at 2,193 feet.

The newly created Detroit Recreation Department, established in 1915, managed recreational activities on the island. Their largest event, the Belle Isle Pageant, had its debut in 1919, joining a host of other recreational activities that included canoeing (over 1000 canoes were rented out per day in the 1920s),

107 baseball, tennis, horse riding, and ice skating. The city’s residents had also recently approved a $10,000,000 bond issue for parks, of which there were thirty-eight by 1920.

108 These parks were soon joined by Rouge Park, which became the city’s largest park in land area, in 1923. Located on the western edge of Detroit, the 1,184-acre park remained mostly undeveloped, although it had most of the typical amenities of Detroit’s other parks.

The decade 1920-1930 is considered “Detroit’s decade” due to the vast growth of the city as a result of the boom in automobile manufacturing. Between 1920 and 1930 the city grew from forty-six to 139 square miles, with the absorption of newly suburbanizing areas from adjacent townships and villages. Its final northern boundary of Eight Mile Road was achieved by the end of this decade. Despite the resulting outward growth of the city, Belle Isle Park remained the premier park in Detroit. As in earlier decades, the park gained additional improvements in the 1920s that attested to its prominence. In 1922 it became the site of the first municipal golf course in the Detroit area, a nine-hole course that was intended for people who lived near the park, but which attracted over 57,000 golfers in its first year. A new clubhouse for the Detroit Yacht Club was completed in 1923 for a club membership then reaching about 3,000. The new bridge to the island in 1923 and the completion of the Scott Memorial Fountain in 1925 greatly enhanced the park’s attractiveness and stature. In 1928 the land surrounding the island’s approach at Jefferson Avenue and E. Grand Boulevard, containing an amusement park since 1906, was finally acquired through eminent domain. Acquisition of the property had been a long-term goal of the park department since at least the 1890s. The Belle Isle approach soon became a landscaped area that complemented both the new bridge and a (no longer present) Classical Revival station for trolleys that had been built on the east side of the approach road in 1921.

110 Many of the major roads on the island were widened in this decade as the number of private automobiles rose and traffic congestion became a serious problem. In 1928 Detroit became the country’s first city to create a police radio system, which allowed faster communication with patrol cars throughout the city. It was initially housed on the second floor of the 1893 Belle Isle police station, the location chosen because of the island’s ideal location for radio transmission.

The island park is said to have been the setting for numerous (unauthorized) activities associated with Prohibition, the national ban on the sale, production and transportation of alcohol, which lasted from 1920 to 1933. Michigan had previously instituted its own prohibition before the

107 Anderson 2001, p. 71
108 Beautiful and Dynamic Detroit 1920, p. 25
109 Anderson 2001, p. 28
110 Chargot 1980, Detroit Free Press
national ban. Some accounts state that seventy-five percent of the alcohol coming into the United States arrived via the various crossings from Canada to the U.S. between Toledo, Ohio, and Port Huron, Michigan; Belle Isle Park, in the middle of the Detroit River a short boat ride from Canada, was in an especially advantageous location for these activities.\textsuperscript{111} Belle Isle Park was nearly directly across from the Hiram Walker “Canadian Club” distillery in Windsor (formerly Walkerville), Ontario. It is logical to assume that the island’s strategic location in the middle of the Detroit River provided a convenient half-way point for smugglers carrying illegal alcohol from Canada, where alcohol remained legal. The aquarium is said to have served as a speakeasy, while the island’s harbormaster was indicted for rum-running.

Although the Great Depression put an emphatic end to Detroit’s previous decades of economic growth and Belle Isle Park’s various concessions experienced a major downturn, people still flocked to the island park for recreation and events. Detroit’s vast unemployment during the Depression resulted in the city’s receipt of substantial funds for relief projects, which included park improvements. The numerous New Deal programs of the federal government greatly aided several construction projects on the island, especially landfilling projects on the east and west ends of the island; construction of the lily pond in the conservatory; and construction of a new seawall around the Scott Fountain lagoon. The Works Progress Administration program provided funds to build a new police radio station and garage on the northwest corner of the island which still remain in their original function. The Model Yacht Basin on the southern shore was built in 1934 by Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) laborers, which made it one of the earliest of many built across the country in what was a favorite program of President Franklin D. Roosevelt,\textsuperscript{112} although the activity began in the late 1920s on the island, with regattas first held on the Scott Memorial Fountain lagoon. The Works Progress Administration funds were also used to update many segments of Detroit’s aging sewer and water systems, and they may have contributed to the construction of the new Water Inlet Lagoon and structures now located on the northeast part of the island. The facility, which features an Art Deco pumping house, was built by 1940. An updated waterworks facility was contemplated by 1930 when the Blue Heron Lagoon was constructed. The Blue Heron Lagoon was to have originally served as the location of a new bathing beach to replace the smaller facility on the north shore, but waterworks officials argued against it because of concerns about pollution of the water at the intake. The small lagoon south of the Casino on the western end of the island was filled in 1937 for a parking lot.

One of the most significant events during the 1930s was the initiation of an annual Easter sunrise service in 1934 that was sponsored by the \textit{Detroit News} and their “Experience” columnist, Nancy Brown. The event, which drew over 50,000 participants annually, was held at the Orchestra Shell (now the location of the Remick Music Shell) on the south shore. A peace carillon, suggested by Nancy Brown and funded by her column’s readers, was completed in 1940 just west of the Conservatory (and east of the Orchestra Shell) on the south shore.

\textsuperscript{111} Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 68 and 69
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property
County and State

One of the most significant monuments on the island, the Levi L. Barbour Memorial Fountain, was also completed during this decade. Mr. Barbour, who had negotiated the purchase of the island for a city park and was one of its most prominent supporters, died in 1925. He willed $20,000 to the City “for the purpose of erecting some statue, monument, or other permanent structure on Belle Isle, as I had much to do with procuring the island for a park.”

Similar to the Scott Fountain situation, a competition was held to choose the designer of an appropriate monument. The competition was won in 1936 by sculptor Marshall M. Fredericks, an instructor at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and was his first competition victory. The sculpture, which features a wounded gazelle with animals native to the island at the base, and is surrounded by a circular pool, was completed in 1937.

By 1939 the park system in the city had increased to 3,693 acres within forty-six parks, which reflected the phenomenal growth of the city in the previous decades. In 1940 the Recreation Department and the Parks and Boulevards Departments were merged into a single agency, the Department of Parks and Recreation, under a Parks and Recreation Commission. At this time, the Department of Public Works took over care of the streets, boulevards, and public places. Around the same time, in 1939 the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority was authorized by the Michigan state legislature. The regional park district system was approved the following year by the residents of the five counties it serves, Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw and Livingston counties, in southeast Michigan.

In 1941 the U.S. Coast Guard significantly expanded and updated their facility on the southeast shore, originally the St. Clair Lifeboat Station. World War II brought many soldiers and sailors to the city, many of whom trained at the Brodhead Armory nearby on Jefferson Avenue east of the park entrance and just east of Gabriel Richard Park. The Department of Parks and Recreation provided a number of programs on the island for them as well as the public, which included demonstration Victory Gardens. The zoo on the island, managed by the Royal Oak-based Detroit Zoo beginning in 1941, was converted in 1947 to a Children’s Zoo, a popular trend in the post-World War II years, and featured small animals within settings of storybook tales.

After substantial population loss in the worst depression years, the city gained over 350,000 residents in the early war years due to its extensive defense industries and the arrival of thousands of new workers, many who came from the American South and Europe. In June 1943 increasing racial tensions between Detroit’s white and African American residents over defense industry jobs and scarcity of housing first erupted on Belle Isle. A fight that started on the island escalated into a large-scale riot that spread to other areas of the city, fueled by rumors both of white men throwing an African American woman and her child off of the Belle Isle Bridge and African American men raping a white woman on the island. The ensuing violence resulted in the death of thirty-four people (most of whom were African Americans) and injuries to many others elsewhere in the city until federal troops called in could stem the disorder. Belle Isle was closed

114 Anderson 2001, p. 58
to the public during this event, used as a temporary camp by the troops and National Guard.\textsuperscript{116,117} During World War II, the park and the Detroit River were used for military training and exercises conducted by the Brodhead Naval Armory just east of the park on Detroit’s mainland.\textsuperscript{118}

As in other decades, proposals for new functions on the island did not cease during these war years. Most notable were a proposal to build a small airport on the island and a more grandiose one to locate the United Nations headquarters here. A third proposal floated was to replace the aging Conservatory building, which was closed in 1947 due to its condition. A Modern Movement greenhouse was proposed in its place, but was not built. Generous contributions from the \textit{Detroit News}-related Scripps family, especially Anna Whitcomb Scripps, rebuilt the conservatory in 1950-55, which included the replacement of the original wood framing with a metal one that preserved the same form. The connecting aquarium also received renovations in this decade, which expanded the number of tanks.

The decade of the 1950s experienced major physical and institutional additions and removals to the park. The year 1950 marked the highest population, just under two million, in the city’s history.\textsuperscript{119} In 1950 a new Modern Movement music shell, named for Detroit music publisher, Jerome H. Remick, was built west of the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon. During the mid-1950s planning began for a museum dedicated to the history of the Great Lakes to include the display of a ship off the south shore of the island. After the ship developed dry rot and was intentionally burned, the Detroit Historical Society built a new Great Lakes Museum, named for the Dossin family, on the south shore in 1959-60. One of the island’s oldest attractions, the skating pavilion on Lake Takoma, was replaced with a modern structure in the same location in 1950. Designed by J. Robert F. Swanson, formerly with the firm of Saarinen, Saarinen, Saarinen, the pavilion was named for William H. Flynn, who bequeathed funds in 1932 to the city for a memorial building that would provide for multiple recreational uses. The funds were finally disbursed in 1950 and used toward the costs of the skating pavilion under construction at the time. A golf driving and putting range was added in the early 1950s to the northeast corner, tucked in between the Blue Heron Lagoon and the Water Inlet Lagoon. In 1956 the park lost a beloved and long-lived institution in the closure of the Belle Isle Zoo. Costs were considered prohibitive and the zoo was undoubtedly overshadowed by the much larger and extensive Detroit Zoo that had been established in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak in 1928. And ferry service, which had begun in the 1840s to the south side of the island, finally ceased at the remaining north shore ferry stop in 1957.

More changes ensued in the 1950s when, in 1954, the U.S. Government leased fifty-five acres on the southeast corner of the island for a Nike missile double-launcher area that actually served two Integrated Fire Control (IFC) areas located close by on the Detroit mainland. Rouge Park,

\textsuperscript{116} Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 84
\textsuperscript{117} https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/clio/detroit_riot/DetroitNewsRiots1943.htm
\textsuperscript{118} Rodriguez and Featherstone 2003, p. 85
\textsuperscript{119} http://historydetroit.com/statistics/
the city’s largest park located on the west side of the city, was also the site of a Nike facility. These sites were part of a broader arc of Nike facilities that surrounded the Detroit area.

Environmental issues also began to significantly affect the park in the 1950s. The park, like many other areas around the city and the country, experienced the overwhelming impacts wrought by the Dutch Elm disease, which resulted in the loss of many old and substantial elm trees. The park lost many trees in both the forest area in the east and in the picnic areas on the west side of the island.\(^{120}\) A rise in the Great Lakes water levels during that decade and concomitant rise in water level on the Detroit River resulted in flooding of parts of the low-lying island. As a result the southern shore road, The Strand, was re-graded between the U.S. Coast Guard Station and the Casino so that it would function as a dike.\(^{121}\)

Despite the positive developments of the early 1950s, the island park began to suffer from neglect by the 1960s. During the 1950s an exodus of auto-industry-related jobs resulting from the closing of older plants and opening of new plants outside the city, along with increasing suburbanization, greatly assisted by the expanding system of interstate and other high-speed highways radiating out from, and bypassing, Detroit’s center, resulted in the beginnings of an ongoing gradual exodus of residents to newer suburbs. In the wake of population losses in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods that the park primarily served, park use declined. A severe blow to the park was the noticeable decline in visitation by residents and others in the wake of the 1967 Detroit insurrection. The island’s 1909 bathhouse was used as a detention center for many of those arrested during the insurrection. The bathhouse was never used again for its original purpose, and was demolished a few years later.\(^{122}\)

A 1964 master plan looked at updating the park yet again, this time with a visitor center, re-designed bridge approach on the mainland side, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The plan also proposed new uses, including picnic and fishing areas, for the area occupied by the Nike launcher facility, which was finally deactivated in 1968. A 1967 proposal to build a state-owned marina at Blue Heron Lagoon was summarily rejected by the public for both environmental and political reasons. In 1969 the city threatened to evict both the Detroit Yacht Club and the Detroit Boat Club due to their exclusionary membership practices. Both clubs had continued to hold their $1.00/year site leases for “offshore” sites since the late nineteenth century. The clubs both promised outreach to African American applicants for membership in an out-of-court settlement in 1974.\(^ {123}\)

During the 1960s the park suffered from neglect as funding for improvements was focused on parks in the more newly developed areas around the city’s edges. The physical improvements that did occur to the park in the 1960s involved the construction of a canoe livery in 1964 at the northwest corner of the island, on the site of the earlier canoe facility; the construction, with

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\(^{120}\) The 1956 annual report of the Parks and Recreation Dept. optimistically reported that they had the disease “under control” in the city.

\(^{121}\) Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 12

\(^{122}\) Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 16

\(^{123}\) Anderson 2001, p. 43
federal assistance, of a two-mile asphalt-paved bike trail in the forest area; and the transformation of an area used for model speedboat racing east of the Detroit Yacht Club into a new picnic area location. The introduction of artificial hills in the area provided not only some topographic variation to the island, but also served as a raised viewing area for the multitude of boat races on the Detroit River that had been enjoyed by thousands for many decades.\footnote{Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 12}

A number of factors coalesced in the 1970s to effect an important series of improvements and a new beginning for the park. In the wake of the 1967 insurrection, in 1970 a group of Detroit business leaders that included J. L. Hudson, Henry Ford II and Max Fisher came together and formed an organization called Detroit Renaissance whose purpose was the renewal of the city. Part of their plan was to redevelop the city’s riverfront from the Ambassador Bridge, west of the downtown, east to the MacArthur Bridge gateway to Belle Isle. Approved by then Mayor Roman Gribbs, the plan included the construction of the Renaissance Center, designed by John Portman, as “a catalyst for the physical regeneration of downtown and a spiritual regeneration of the whole city,“ and also led to the development of Hart Plaza along the river in the heart of the downtown. In 1972 designer Isamu Noguchi, initially hired to design only a fountain, created the plan for this eight-acre public space, one of only four public spaces Noguchi designed in the United States.

In conjunction with Detroit Renaissance’s plans for Detroit, in 1970 the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority submitted a proposal to the city for a $40 million restoration/renovation project for Belle Isle Park tied to the regional park system taking over management of the park. This plan died due to strong public opposition to the city giving up control of the park, but led in 1972 to the establishment of a non-profit association, the Friends of Belle Isle, whose purpose was the park’s revitalization and the preservation of its historic character. The group immediately sponsored a nomination of the island park to the National Register of Historic Places, which was approved in 1974.\footnote{The original nomination did not include the Detroit Yacht Club, which is located on a separate, artificial island that is connected to Belle Isle Park via a bridge. Nor did the nomination include the bridge approach on Detroit’s mainland. Both are included in the current nomination.}

Detroit Renaissance’s revitalization efforts were continued by the city’s first African American mayor, Coleman A. Young, after his 1974 election through his support for the construction of the People Mover and the Joe Louis Arena. Young had grown up not far from Belle Isle and restoration of the park to its former glory was a personal dream as well as a campaign promise. After the election he immediately put $5 million in appropriations toward Belle Isle and doubled the park’s maintenance staff.

In 1975 the Friends of Belle Isle partnered with the Junior Women’s Leagues of Detroit and Birmingham and raised $50,000 to develop a master plan for the improvement of Belle Isle. They hired the landscape design firm of Kiley, Tyndall and Walker of Vermont, who had done work for Michigan-based architect Gunnar Birkerts’ expansion of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Kiley’s plan emphasized retaining the natural beauty of the island and integrating the separate
areas of activity into a whole “so one part enhances the other.” Kiley’s plan included eighty-five specific improvements from new signage and plantings at the island’s entrance to the removal of the sewage treatment plant. It also included the creation of a plaza at the western tip of the island “from which to engage the view of the Detroit skyline and the river traffic” and recommended that a low area on the eastern end of the island be transformed into a series of hills and ponds and that trees be added to create a new picnic area. Kiley also called for the transformation of the Casino, Bandstand, Skating Pavilion and Conservatory area by creating a series of plazas and promenades. Kiley’s plan was always considered a recommendation by a group of concerned citizens and not binding on the city. However, the city did implement some of Kiley’s ideas and suggestions. The key feature of the Kiley plan that was implemented, constructed about 1980, is what is now called Kresge Plaza – a promenade near Lake Takoma with a trellised shelter connected by a bridge to a small paddle boat lagoon in the area south of the Casino where an original lagoon had been filled in during 1937.

In 1977 the city built a Nature Center, with exhibit area and auditorium, at the east end of the island, financed with state recreation bond funds. The 1970s also saw the construction of seven new park shelters throughout the island, the construction or renovation of a number of road and pedestrian bridges, construction of a new bathhouse to replace the previous one (closed in 1967), the addition of two new fishing piers on the north and south sides of the island, rehabilitation of several buildings, and initial plans for construction on the site of the Nike facility of a picnic/ playground area. Part of this area was also reclaimed for a meadow and flyway for migrating birds, which helped to restore this end of the island to a more natural state. The riding stables, located on Lakeside Drive across from Blue Heron Lagoon, closed since the early 1960s, were reopened for business in 1976 (they closed again in the 1980s and were demolished in the early 2000s). By the centennial year of Belle Isle Park’s purchase in 1979, the park had received significant levels of attention and care.

The city’s ongoing budget issues in the 1980s slowed down revitalization activities in the park, but more rehabilitation activities continued in the 1980s with work on Inselruhe (known as the White House by this time) by the Friends of Belle Isle and the rehabilitation of the Douglas MacArthur Bridge, Casino, and Peace Carillon and infrastructure work, especially bridges, much of it funded by federal grants.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Belle Isle Park remains an object of pride to Detroit, but also of concern because of inadequate means to care for it. Detroit’s population slipped under one million between 1990 and 2000, when the number of residents went from 1,027,974 to 951, 270,126 and more recently has dropped again to just over 700,000. Visitation to the park also accordingly slipped, although there are strong signs that this trend is changing. The island has also since 1992 hosted an annual Grand Prix event on the western end.127 While the event has drawn huge crowds, some of the physical changes, including extensive areas of new concrete pavement and new bridges, detract from the island’s setting. Several monuments and buildings have been recently rehabilitated or restored, including the Aquarium, which was the

126 http://historydetroit.com/statistics/
oldest continually operating aquarium in the country until its closure in 2005. Re-opened in 2012, the attraction is now open on Saturdays and is operated by the Belle Isle Conservancy, the new umbrella advocacy organization for the island that was formed a year earlier through a merger of four existing non-profits – Friends of Belle Isle, Belle Isle Botanical Society, Belle Isle Women's Committee, and Friends of the Belle Isle Aquarium. The Conservancy has sponsored new events on the island and is leading fundraising efforts for restoration of the Pewabic tiles on the Scott Fountain, among other activities. Federal Certified Local Government funding is assisting in the on-going rehabilitation of the Aquarium, Conservatory, and the Lighthouse. New functions and activities on the island continue to be proposed and proffered, including concerts; a disc golf course on the now-abandoned public course; art installations in the Forest Area; and parties in the park’s older buildings to attract more young people to the island.

The city’s highly publicized bankruptcy in 2013-2014 and the on-going fiscal measures associated with it have impacted Belle Isle. One of the fiscal measures is the recent (October 2013) agreement for a thirty-year lease to the State of Michigan to run Belle Isle as a state park.128 The idea of a lease with the State of Michigan was considered prior to the bankruptcy filing and generated an enormous outpouring of concern and appreciation for Belle Isle’s importance to the residents of Detroit and the surrounding area. The lease provides the promise of additional funds for maintenance and improvements, but takes control of the park out of the hands of the Detroit public and city government. Belle Isle Park officially became a state park on February 10, 2014.

Areas of Significance

Belle Isle Park is important within the following areas of significance: Community Planning and Development; Landscape Design/Planning; Architecture; Art; Recreation; Social History; and Maritime History. Although there is not enough substantiated documentation to demonstrate significance under Criterion D, information about recorded archaeological sites on the island and the potential for others is presented in Section 7. Events associated with Prohibition that took place on the island are also presented in Section 8, although some cannot be substantiated at this time. It has been suggested that Belle Isle played a role in Underground Railroad activities in the Detroit area before it became an urban park. It seems very possible given the city’s importance in the movement because of its location directly across the narrow Detroit River from Canada and freedom. But no concrete documentation of Belle Isle’s role has thus far been pressed forward.

Community Planning and Development

128 http://www.freep.com/article/20131001/NEWS01/310010080/belle-isle-detroit-lease-state-deal, accessed October 5, 2013. As a result of the lease, the state will provide an initial $10 million for repairs and rehabilitation work.
Belle Isle Park is significant in the area of community planning and development as many of the events that took place here and the physical improvements to the park are associated with the city of Detroit’s efforts in community planning and development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the city’s first major park purchase in the late 1870s, Belle Isle Park was a significant step in improving the fast-growing city’s attractiveness and stature as a progressive city. The 1870s debate over the island’s future use, which included a plan for the island to be a cross-over point for a railroad line to Canada, portended the conflicting and often intense interests in the island, a situation that continues up to the present day.

The purchase of Belle Isle as a new park was paired with the establishment and development of a connecting landscaped boulevard, which was named Grand Boulevard, similar to other Grand Boulevards in Baltimore, Buffalo and other American cities in the late nineteenth century. It ran from E. Jefferson at the entry point to Belle Isle north, then west, then south again back to W. Jefferson around what were in the late nineteenth century the built-up edges of the city. Although the development of Grand Boulevard was realized slowly at first through private developments, East Grand Boulevard did ultimately provide a fitting landscaped northern entrance to the park. The establishment of Belle Isle was also associated with the enactment by the state legislature of the Parks Act of 1871, which created the first park agency for the city. The first park agency, created in 1879, was the Board of Park Commissioners, which was quickly succeeded by several new entities in the late nineteenth century.

Detroit’s first park purchase, Belle Isle Park remained pre-eminent in the city’s park system and was the largest city park until the 1920s when Rouge Park was established on the city’s west side. In 1899 Belle Isle Park was the recipient of twenty-one of the thirty park improvements implemented in that year; the park was typically the recipient of most of the agency’s funds and attentions. Although other city parks provided some of the same functions, such as concert space, playgrounds, picnic areas, and sports fields, no other park came close to serving as the site for as many events and attractions, many of which were city-wide events. The park had the only aquarium and conservatory, and the only city zoo until the Detroit Zoo was established in suburban Royal Oak in the 1920s. The island, unlike most other city parks in the country, also hosted city, state, federal, and maritime functions, many of them resulting from the park’s location in the Detroit River.

Belle Isle Park was a focal point for action of the City Plan and Improvement Commission, which was established in 1908. Like most major cities in the early twentieth century, the city appointed a commission to provide direction and design for new public spaces, roads, and important civic buildings. Their 1915 plan continued the downtown’s unusual radial arrangement and proposed a series of additional diagonal roadways, one of which (not realized) would connect the Belle Isle bridge with the new Cultural Center being developed at Woodward and Kirby avenues. Their plan also envisioned a new bridge for Belle Isle, a design modeled after Italian and French models in 1914 by Cass Gilbert, who had just won the competition for the

130 Anderson 2001, p. 35
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property
Scott Memorial Fountain on Belle Isle. In 1928 the commission also set policy as to where monuments would be placed on Central Avenue within the park. Few monuments were erected after that date, but the policy only formalized a practice already in effect by which a number of civic monuments had already been placed along the avenue.

The nationwide City Beautiful movement, inspired by the classical architecture and formal urban design of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, is evidenced in Belle Isle Park by two key features that are associated with this movement. The Scott Memorial Fountain, completed in 1925 after Cass Gilbert won the design competition in 1914, and the 1921-23 Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge display not only the classical designs characteristic of this period, but their original site plans (both only partially implemented) also demonstrate this significant period of design. Other areas of the city that were also the subject of City Beautiful planning, as proposed and substantially carried out by the City Plan and Improvement Commission, include the Cultural Center at Woodward and Kirby avenues, which holds the main Detroit Public Library (Cass Gilbert, 1921) and the Detroit Institute of Arts (Paul Philippe Cret, 1919), and the large plaza area fronting the Neoclassical Michigan Central Station on the west side of Detroit’s downtown.

The park also has a close relationship with early twentieth-century municipal functions and their impact on community development. The city’s original waterworks system was situated in Waterworks Park close to Belle Isle and a 1904 crib house that was part of the Waterworks Park system was sited more closely to Belle Isle (and is included in this as well as the 1974 nomination) in order to take advantage of cleaner water farther from the shore. Waterworks Park, accessed from Jefferson Avenue, was actually a complementary attraction to Belle Isle in the late nineteenth century, but little physical evidence remains of its Victorian period appearance. In 1930 a new city waterworks system was built on an artificial island with a separate inlet that was connected to Belle Isle Park by a small bridge; thus, Belle Isle joined the ranks of other urban parks that incorporated elements of their cities’ waterworks systems.

The park’s popularity as a community gathering spot and symbolic center of the city have historically resulted in many different schemes for the island’s uses. Some of these ideas did come to fruition – beginning with its creation, what seemed like a ridiculous idea to critics of a park this far out from where people lived in the 1870s, to the Scott Memorial Fountain, first public golf course, aquarium and conservatory, and the Grand Prix auto race that is currently run here. But many other proposals were not executed, including the 1901 Detroit Bicentennial monument and plaza at the island’s west end, United Nations headquarters, an Olympic swimming pool, and airport.

The park also has an association with many physical improvements that resulted from make-work projects during economic downturns, especially in the 1890s, 1907, and during the Great Depression. These resulted in the development of significant park elements, including some of the lakes and canals and several landfilling efforts as well as the Detroit Police Radio Station on the northwest corner of the island.

Landscape Architecture
Belle Isle Park today is a naturalistic park with many layers of planning and development dating from the late nineteenth century to the present. Belle Isle Park’s significance in the area of landscape architecture stems partly from Frederick Law Olmsted’s association with its initial design. Although Olmsted’s original plan was only partly developed before the Donaldson plan replaced it, some fundamental characteristics of its present landscape design can still be traced to Frederick Law Olmsted’s involvement with its early development. The park’s landscape design has evolved over the years to reflect both contemporary trends as well as significant examples of both the City Beautiful Movement in the early twentieth century and a partially implemented plaza and lagoon design by Olmsted’s twentieth-century counterpart, Dan Kiley, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

_Fredrick Law Olmsted’s Preliminary Plan_

Like other major U.S. cities planning parks in the late nineteenth century, the city of Detroit chose to have Frederick Law Olmsted prepare the original design of the park and serve in an advisory role to the newly formed Board of Park Commissioners. Olmsted’s 1883 plan for Belle Isle displayed philosophical and stylistic elements that he had refined over decades of public park design and planning since his early involvement at New York’s Central Park in the 1850s. With his deeply held reformist’s convictions, Olmsted, along with like-minded prominent Detroit citizens, sought to provide the expanding populace with the opportunity to escape the crowded city and relax in a naturalistic setting. As he had already put into practice in his earlier parks, Olmsted intended, primarily, to create the opportunity for restorative passive recreation and the space to commune with others, and secondarily, to provide for the enjoyment of outdoor recreation.

Olmsted explained his design intent for Belle Isle in a paper entitled “The Park for Detroit,” written a year after the completion of his plan. In it Olmsted laid out the defining elements of his vision: the concentration of activities and more heavily manipulated landscapes on the western end of the island, where a long pavilion and ferry pier was to serve as the logistical hub of the island; and taking advantage of the island’s abundant mature forest on the east end of the island to bring people into contact with the power of sylvan beauty. Typical Olmstedian elements in the Belle Isle plan included a large meadow for parades and athletic events, a hierarchy of circulation routes – one set for carriages and another for pedestrians – and the naturalistic placement of plant material in concert with circulation systems and open spaces to reveal a wide variety of foreground, middle-ground, and distant vistas across the island and across the Detroit River.

In an aesthetic as well as financial argument, Olmsted argued in favor of clustering refreshment stands, ferry services, restrooms, and other amenities near the proposed pavilion at the west end to save on policing resources and to retain the rural character of the rest of the island.131 He called this proposed western development zone the “fair ground.” It included or was in close proximity to a boat house, bathing beaches, bath houses, and the athletic fields. Exercising his

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131 Olmsted 1882, p. 44
usual propensity for taking advantage of natural conditions, Olmsted proposed the creation of a large parade ground that he referred to as the “prairie,” in the location of an existing cultivated field along the north shore of the island at its approximate midpoint. He envisioned this large pastoral meadow that was to be maintained by sheep as the location for military parades, picnicking, and scenic enjoyment in the vein of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park’s Long Meadow.

A distinct separation between the east and west regions of the park was evident in his plan to mark the unique visitor experiences intended for each region. The wooded east end of the island was encircled by a largely circular carriage road and canals to allow boaters and carriages a pleasant transportation route through the wooded area. Pedestrian trails traveled into the interior of the woodland in gently curvilinear patterns. Olmsted intended to retain much of the eastern tree coverage to create a contemplative and restful area for passive recreation amongst the established forest. However, he proposed thinning the woods to remove unsightly and unhealthy trees and underbrush to control mosquitoes, create lines of sight for easier policing, and to realize a more idealized version of nature.

Olmsted intended to connect the “fair ground” to the “parade ground” and east woodlands via a straight path that was suitable for promenading. Like in his earlier works, including the mall of Central Park, Olmsted showed his ability to mesh formal and informal elements, which was one of the many ways he distinguished himself from the strictly pastoral and picturesque model of the well-known late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English garden practitioners like “Capability” Brown and Humphry Repton. The eastern terminus of this straight road, called Central Avenue, was marked by a circular island. The straight road funneled visitors and views toward the “fair ground” area where a kidney-shaped open space unfolded in front of his grandly scaled pavilion on the far west shore. A series of curvilinear pedestrian paths traveled through this western area to provide a diversity of strolling routes for visitors.

A major issue with the existing conditions of Belle Isle that Olmsted had to address concerned drainage. Most of the island’s land mass resided two feet or less above the level of the Detroit River, leaving large areas swampy and mosquito infested. To remedy this Olmsted proposed a canal system to solve the practical drainage issues and to create a system of artificial waterways for recreation. He cited examples of the financial success of boating in parks in Buffalo and Chicago, where a leisurely canoe ride around the parks had become a major form of entertainment.\(^\text{132}\) The canal system was park-wide, with long stretches encircling the woods on the east side of the island and shorter canal segments helping to delineate the “fair ground” area as the nucleus of island programming.

Modification of Olmsted’s Plan and Construction of Belle Isle: 1880s - c 1925

From the outset Olmsted realized that the execution of his plan would not be straightforward. Park commissioners did not have adequate resources to fund a critical mass of park improvements. In “The Park for Detroit,” and a subsequent report, “Belle Isle after One Year,” Olmsted pointed out the need for additional resources to move construction along at a faster rate.

\(^{132}\) Olmsted 1882, p. 40
He stated that an economy of scale would be reached when many of the key projects were undertaken concurrently. Likewise, he argued that citizens would get more value for their money if the park was completed in a timely manner to render it useable and appropriately equipped to handle crowds. In his view, there would be perceived value and increased good will toward the project if the public could see rapid progress.

Nevertheless, unclear park administration, doubters and encroachments into his design, and financial decisions made by committee all plagued the implementation process. A story told many times about Belle Isle’s re-design was that of the influence of *Detroit News* reporter, Michael Dee. His editorials widely criticized the design, especially the filling of the large swampy areas, rather than excavating them to form lakes, which he advocated. Adding to this uncomfortable situation for Olmsted was the definition of the designer’s role. Instead of having the authority to oversee work and make direct design decisions, he served the park commission only in an advisory role. Unpleasant as this was for Olmsted, it was not a wholly unfamiliar situation for him, as similar events occurred in other parks. He withdrew in 1885 before his contract with the Commissioners expired.

Regardless, by the late 1880s, park development at Belle Isle was well underway, as documented in a new 1887 approved plan for the island produced by Detroit architect John Donaldson. Although some components of Olmsted’s plan were kept, many deviated from the plan. The important distinction Olmsted made between the east and west regions of the park was only partially implemented. His intended circular carriage road and canal ring around the east woods was abandoned in favor of improvements that may have better reflected the actual topography, with the areas of lowest ground suitable for the development of water and drainage features. Rather than just a single circular road, with canals alongside, plus a series of winding pathways, in the park’s eastern part, Donaldson’s plan provided for a series of winding “creeks” or canals apparently located in lower ground connecting three lakes, created by excavating areas of low, swampy ground, and the Detroit River. The lakes, which appear on Silas Farmer’s 1895 map, are today’s Takoma, Okonoka, and Muskoday. Donaldson’s plan for the first time provided for a series of drives along the Detroit River frontage and crisscrossing the interior in place of Olmsted’s system, in which what seem to be small pathways dominated the island, with only a few major roadways. While the canal system was developed only partially in accordance with Donaldson’s concept, the roadway system, as shown in the 1895 Silas Farmer map, was already built largely along the 1887 plan’s alignments. The Donaldson plan doesn’t provide recommendations concerning uses in different parts of the island. Perhaps Donaldson shared Olmsted’s vision of how the park should develop and who should be its users.

Against Olmsted’s advice, the “fair ground” concept that concentrated amenities on the far west shore was never fully implemented and a loose arrangement of buildings and attractions were built in many parts of the island, a deviation from the defining spatial organization of his design. Olmsted’s grand covered pavilion, the intended central meeting space and shelter along the western shore, was not realized, although a distinctive 600-foot covered ferry dock was built in
the early 1880s which extended outward from the island to the northwest in an arc similar to that shown in his preliminary plan.\(^{133}\)

The city of Detroit early in Belle Isle’s history as a park made a fundamental departure from Olmsted’s underlying principle for the park: that the island should mainly serve as a naturalistic retreat from the city for restorative gathering and recreation. It would seem that its isolated location, both in terms of its distance from the population center at the time and its location in the middle of a river, would have been easily in accord with this principle. But right from the beginning of park development and continuing to today, the city and many of its residents viewed Belle Isle as its primary civic as well as recreational space and a place for public observances and commemorations and for recreational activities far beyond the passive recreation Olmsted envisioned for it. Such activities include the Aquarium, Zoo, Botanical Gardens, Brown Peace Carillon, water slide, golf course, Grand Prix car race, concerts, and many other civic and institutional programs that have been, and are to this day, very important to the citizens of the city of Detroit. Clearly, the greatly expanded past and present roles of Belle Isle Park and what it means to the community has outweighed Olmsted’s early vision for the park.

However, although the project was not a success in Olmsted’s mind, his preliminary plan played a major role in how Belle Isle physically evolved over the years. Many of his design ideas were incorporated into the plan of the park and although what remains today is anything but a classic example of his work, his influences are clearly visible in the spatial arrangement of major landscape characteristics and features. Most notable of these influences is the differentiation between the east and west ends of the island where the distinction is made between the largely wooded and less densely programmed east region from the west region that is home to most of the island’s many built features.

Although the canal loop on the west side of the island deviated from Olmsted’s intention, a semi-circular canal was constructed east of the kidney-shaped open space by the ferry dock and served as a popular spot for canoeing. Likewise, Central Avenue, the primary feature for promenading, was realized with a few modifications at its eastern terminus, and became a successful circulation route and gathering location. Other broad landscape patterns proposed by Olmsted came to fruition at Belle Isle, including the open space of the “prairie,” or parade ground, in the south-central part of the island and athletic fields along the southwest shore. This is not to minimize the role of the Donaldson plan of 1887: the specifics of the park’s plan as it exists today owe more to the Donaldson plan than to Olmsted’s initial concept.

**Belle Isle as a National Example of Municipal Park Design**

From the earliest days of post-Olmsted park development in the 1880s, park commissioners made design choices at Belle Isle to reflect popular movements in park design and freely made changes to meet the needs of ever-increasing visitation and recreational use. Decision makers at Belle Isle Park were not immune to fashion and many Victorian-influenced features were

\(^{133}\) Beverly and Rocheleau 2007, p. 91
introduced by the 1880s-1890s. Early photographs depict elaborate flower beds at the main bridge approach and in circular traffic islands. The introduction of greenhouses in 1899 and the Conservatory in 1904 fed the scientific interest in botanical displays and provided the capacity to grow tropical and native plants for installation at Belle Isle Park as well as to supply plant material for the entire Detroit city park system.

The canal system, though much modified from both Olmsted’s and Donaldson’s concepts, was built, necessitating the construction of numerous road and foot bridges across the island. Many were initially built in a popular rustic style using wood materials that did not hold up to the climate or the large crowds that Belle Isle experienced from the very beginning of its existence. They were replaced beginning in the 1890s using a wide range of formal and informal styles, finished cut stone, ornamental ironwork, rounded mortared fieldstone, and later brick and concrete. Similar eclectic choices were made in the construction of other site features. Historic photographs document rustic stone (or tufa) drinking fountains with numerous spigots set into arched enclosures, elaborate picnic pavilions, and rough-hewn wood playground equipment. None of these features, except for five late nineteenth-century shelters and comfort stations, remain on the island.

An additional design movement that had significant influences on the evolution of Belle Isle Park was City Beautiful. The City Beautiful Movement grew directly from the success of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago that served as a showcase for grand, Neoclassical Beaux Arts architecture and planning. Although almost twenty years past the Neoclassical fervor generated by the World’s Columbian Exposition, City Beautiful planning was still the preferred choice for civic improvements at the time wealthy Detroit citizen James Scott died in 1910, leaving a large bequest to the city for the improvement of Belle Isle under the condition that a large statue of himself and a fountain be erected in his honor. Newspaper coverage describes the desire to construct a plaza and fountain that would rival installations in great European cities, including works at Versailles. The fountain design commission was awarded to nationally known architect Cass Gilbert of New York City in 1914; his design encompassed the entire western tip of the island, which was actually extended to terminate in a pointed projection of filled land that, bounded by straight, engineered seawalls along the river, would host the Scott Memorial area with its basin-surrounded fountain and adjacent broadly V-shaped lagoon. It was characterized by a grand, elaborately carved fountain with a wide stone plaza that stood on axis with Central Avenue. Axial walkways, a geometrically arranged road system, and evenly spaced street trees in the area east of the fountain and along the new Sunset Drive that encircles the fountain produced a classic City Beautiful improvement project. Gilbert also designed the surrounding lagoon-dominated landscape in a formal manner to complement the marble plaza and fountain, although the rows of formally arranged trees east of the fountain were not completed until the 1940s.

Several young architects and landscape architects, including Dan Kiley, Garret Eckbo, and James Rose, rejected the classical model and promoted a cleaner, more simple approach to design, and became the leaders of the American modernist movement in landscape architecture. Beginning in

134 “Make Scott Fountain Great,” Detroit Free Press, March 10, 1910
the 1940s, modernist design principles gained ascendency and became the preferred style of many practitioners in the post-World War II era.

Dan Kiley, one of the earliest proponents of rejecting the historical precedents and heavy ornamentation of the Beaux Arts style, rose to prominence as one of the nation’s preeminent landscape architects by the mid-twentieth century. He and his firm completed projects throughout the country in a variety of settings, from the urban to the rural vernacular, designing private residences, streetscape improvements, master plans, plazas, parks, and institutional campuses. Kiley’s work was heavily influenced by the simplicity of European agricultural landscapes, including vineyards, irrigation channels, hedgerows, and allees. This translated into his professional work in the form of straightforward formality, clean horizontal circulation lines, gridded tree plantings, repetition of materials and features, and a strong sense of geometry to link landscapes to their surrounding architecture.\textsuperscript{135}

In the 1970s a new period of planning and development began on Belle Isle in response to the park’s physical neglect and a growing belief that automobiles were overrunning the island. Civic leaders, including the Friends of Belle Isle, Junior League of Detroit, and the Junior League of Birmingham, retained landscape designer Dan Kiley’s firm, Kiley, Tyndall and Walker, to prepare a master plan, similar to the city’s actions in the early 1880s to engage Frederick Law Olmsted. Kiley’s goals in the plan were to reinterpret and “provide fresh emphasis to make Belle Isle one of the great urban parks in the world and to enhance the continuity of the riverfront unified park system.” He also noted that “there must be deep commitment to the belief that there is no more valuable use of the site than as open space.”\textsuperscript{136} A major focus included suggested ways to minimize cars and to promote pedestrian uses and other non-automotive transportation modes, similar to other park planning efforts at this time. Kiley’s plan, which followed an extensive body of similar projects for places such as New Hampshire State Parks, botanical gardens, and Chicago regional park systems, was submitted in 1976. The phased implementation plan intended to improve the facilities for outdoor programming at key areas such as the Casino, Band Shell, and Dossin Great Lakes Museum. Kiley called for the creation of a “southern esplanade” to improve the interconnection between the Conservatory, Aquarium, greenhouses, and demonstration gardens and planned for several new plazas and outdoor gathering areas. He also looked at the canal system with a view to restoring boating as a recreational opportunity and improving the pedestrian experience of this area of the park around Lake Takoma.\textsuperscript{137} He made recommendations for most areas of the park, including moving the park administration/maintenance area to the bridge entrance and re-using the complex here as an arts and crafts center, senior citizen center, or children’s village,\textsuperscript{138} removing the giant slide and some of the golf course structures, removing parking lots and screening those that stayed, and adding new signage for the entrance.

\textsuperscript{135} Amidon 1999, p. 92
\textsuperscript{136} Kiley 1976, Plan, p. 7
\textsuperscript{137} Kiley Proposal to the Kresge Foundation, p. 25
\textsuperscript{138} Kiley proposal to the Kresge Foundation, p. 17
Despite the vision provided in the Kiley master plan, little of it was implemented, probably because of the city government’s dire budgetary situation. Of the ten priorities stated in the plan, only the top priority – a promenade on the south side of the island – was partially implemented. A round paddle boat lagoon south of the Casino building, which was connected to a plaza with a large trellis shelter by a promenade, were the only elements that were built by 1981. But this small section represents classic elements of Kiley’s designs. Funds and attention at this time were largely devoted to improvement projects throughout the island, including renovations of the Casino, Nancy Brown Peace Carillon, Scott Fountain, and athletic fields, along with the creation of the Nature Center and routine maintenance on sidewalks, roads, street lighting, and picnic areas. It seems that the budget and political will to undertake large-scale projects were not forthcoming, reminiscent of earlier chapters in Belle Isle’s history.

Architecture

Belle Isle Park’s architecture is one of its greatest assets. The park’s nearly continual physical development and assortment of functions over more than 130 years results in the park’s broad array of building and structure types and architectural styles present.

Architectural Styles and Park Building Types

The oldest extant building on the island is the c. 1850s or 60s White House, also known as Inselruhe, a wooden Gothic Revival building that, built when the island was privately owned, is the island’s only surviving building or structure that predates the park’s establishment. Silas Farmer’s nineteenth-century Detroit history and Ferry’s The Buildings of Detroit illustrate a number of other Gothic Revival houses in the city built from the 1840s through the 1860s, but there is little else left in the city today and no other house that illustrates the rural Gothic style of homes and cottages so popular across the nation in those times. It has been suggested the house was designed by prominent Detroit architect, Gordon W. Lloyd, but no substantiation of this claim has been found.

The park contains several buildings that are likely among the outstanding examples of their type in the nation. (Locating comparative information, and particularly photographs, of historically and architecturally important park buildings and structures across the nation has proven surprisingly difficult, the internet not being the usual helpful tool in this case.)

One outstanding example is the 1894 Stables building, with its additions in matching style constructed prior to 1915. The picturesque roughly 270-foot square complex, its components nearly surrounding a central courtyard, is finished in Elizabethan style, with brick, stucco-and-half-timber, and wood shingle walls pierced by broad entries topped by tall stickwork gables whose eaves come down nearly to ground level; and tall red tile roofs with pointed-roof octagonal turrets and numerous gabled dormers. The 1894 building, at least, was designed by

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139 Kiley Proposal to the Kresge Foundation, p.17
140 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 20
Detroit architect George D. Mason, who (as part of Mason & Rice) also designed the 1893 Belle Isle Police Station and later, on his own, the 1921-23 Detroit Yacht Club clubhouse in the park.

A search for other later nineteenth-century examples of stables buildings in city parks came up with two examples in Chicago, the 1880 (with later additions) Washington Park Stables and Roundhouse and 1895-96 Humboldt Park Receptory Building and Stable. The limestone-wall Washington Park structure, designed by Chicago architects Burnham & Root, has been rehabilitated in recent years and attached to a larger new building as part of a museum. The Humboldt Park building was designed by Chicago architects Frommann & Jebsen and housed horses, wagons, and landscaping equipment, as well as the offices of the park superintendent. It is, like Belle Isle’s stables, a large and highly picturesque structure. Constructed using brick, fieldstone, and stucco and half-timbering and exhibiting complex gable roofs with multiple turrets and dormers, it was designed in what was described as the “old German style of country house architecture.”

Belle Isle’s along with Humboldt Park’s Stables seem to exemplify the best of these large late nineteenth-century public park stables buildings.

A second building of key importance from an architectural standpoint is the 1901-04 Aquarium, built at the same time as and connected to the Conservatory. Detroit architect Albert Kahn’s firm, Nettleton & Kahn, won a design competition hosted by the city’s Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards and the Michigan Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and provided a design which reportedly resembled the Anton Dohrn Zoological Station (Naples Aquarium) in Naples, Italy, in style. The limestone-trim red brick Beaux-Arts building’s front presents a lavishly detailed terra-cotta-trimmed projecting central entry that features an archway displaying seaweed, seashells, spitting fish, and a keystone of Neptune, Roman god of the sea. The entry’s segmental pediment cap features a cartouche containing the city of Detroit seal, topped with a shell, a sign of welcome. The aquarium’s dimly lit interior contains vaulted-ceiling corridors that intersect in a central dome finished in green glass opalite tile that “transports visitors to the seas.” Aquariums in Washington, D.C., and several other U. S. cities were established prior to the Belle Isle aquarium, but the Belle Isle building appears to be the oldest public aquarium building in the nation and retains its historic finishes to a remarkable degree.

Another building in the park of key architectural importance is the 1907 Casino, designed by Detroit architects Van Leyen & Schilling. Belle Isle’s Casino houses a large restaurant space and a ballroom designed for elegant events in a massive two-story building of Italian Renaissance inspiration, with open and enclosed loggias, towers at the two front corners, red tile roofs, and an interior as highly finished as the limestone and terra-cotta-trimmed blond brick exterior (photos 16-19). The word “casino” is borrowed from the Italian for “little house,” but in English was historically used to denote a public room used for dancing and music. The concept of a resort community having a “Casino” building housing a restaurant and other public facilities such as ballroom and performance spaces in which high society could be seen may have been

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popularized by the large and polished Casino building at the popular New England shore summer resort of Newport, Rhode Island, opened in 1880. Broderick states that architect Charles F. McKim came up with the concept “based on the casinos of seaside Normandy, those socially centered places to see and be seen,” for the client, newspaper publisher James Gordon Bennett, Jr. The complex building contained a theater along with other public and also rental commercial spaces. McKim, of the New York architectural firm McKim, Mead & White, also designed a casino for nearby Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, built in 1884-86 (Broderick, 197-98). Many other of these casino buildings appeared in the 1880s and 90s at resort locations in various locations including the New Jersey shore and Cape Cod. Another large example was the Broadmoor Casino, opened in 1891 at Colorado Springs as part of a resort town development at what is now the Broadmoor resort. That large wooden Colonial building soon burned but was replaced by another Casino building. In Michigan the Wenonah Beach resort near Bay City had a large Casino, built around 1890, and the Shiawassee County seat of Corunna had a Casino, built c. 1901, in its Hugh McCurdy Park. The Mettawas Hotel, another resort located near Kingsville, Ontario, about thirty miles from Detroit, also had its own Casino building, built in 1889. The Newport Casino still stands, along with part of the Narragansett one, but the others are gone, and few of these buildings seem to have survived.

The first public park in the United States to have a “casino” building was likely New York’s Central Park. This rambling stone Gothic Casino, or “Ladies Refreshment Saloon,” designed by the park’s early architect, Calvert Vaux, was in place by 1862. Other public parks also had Casino buildings that served social function purposes, but a search located few other surviving large and polished examples like Belle Isle’s. One other fine example is the 1896 Georgian Revival Casino in Providence’s Roger Williams Park.

Belle Isle contains two yacht/boat club buildings that represent the finest in yacht club building design of the early twentieth century. The first yacht clubs were established in Europe in the eighteenth century, and the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, established in Halifax in 1837, is supposed to be the oldest yacht club in North America. Among the boat or rowing clubs, the Detroit Boat Club considers itself the oldest in the United States, tracing its origins to 1839. Another of the early American rowing clubs, Philadelphia’s Bachelors Barge Club, dates back to 1853. Among yacht clubs, the New York Yacht Club, founded in 1844, may be the oldest club in the United States. Several other surviving clubs were founded in the 1860s, including the Detroit Yacht Club, which, founded in 1868, is thus one of the nation’s oldest. These clubs typically began with a single-minded focus on yachting or rowing but just as typically evolved by the late nineteenth century into prestigious social clubs that offered a broad range of social and recreational opportunities as well as the original yachting or rowing club function. The yacht and

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rowing clubs proliferated in number across the country and expanded into the social club realm in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of a nationwide boom in social and recreational clubs of all kinds, including golf and country clubs.

The earliest yacht and boat club buildings seem to have been small buildings designed primarily to store boats and related equipment. The oldest survivor of these early buildings in the United States may be the New York Yacht Club’s original 1845 building, a small but artistic wooden “Carpenter Gothic” structure designed by New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Relocated several times over the years and housed for fifty years at Mystic Seaport museum in Connecticut, the building was moved to the club’s Harbour Court quarters at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1994. Philadelphia’s Boat House Row along the Schuykill River contains a number of post Civil War-era rowing club headquarters buildings, one of them designed by Frank Furness.

At quite the opposite extreme is the 1899-1900 New York Yacht Club clubhouse on 44th Street in New York City, which introduced a new level of opulence in yacht and boat clubhouse design probably never seen before or since. It was built and donated to the club by financier J. Pierpont Morgan and designed by premier hotel architects Warren & Wetmore. The massive building’s exterior and interior both carried out a nautical theme; a 1906 New York Times story stated that “Except for the absence of motion, one might fancy oneself at sea.” But the New York Yacht Club’s large downtown clubhouse seems to be an anomaly; most clubhouses were built by the water.

The 1902 Detroit Boat Club clubhouse and 1921-23 Detroit Yacht Club clubhouse are large-scale, high style, and polished examples of clubhouse design from the early twentieth-century period when it reached its peak of development with fine buildings designed to accommodate a broad range of social and recreational functions. These buildings typically contained large and smaller private dining rooms with kitchen facilities, ballrooms that also served as performance spaces, smoking and/or billiard rooms for the men and parlors for the women, libraries, and some residential quarters. By the early twentieth century, indoor swimming pools and, with the growing popularity of bowling, bowling alleys, also became part of the features commonly provided. Extensive verandahs provided space for relaxation in the shade, dining, and watching the racing events on the water in which club members participated.

The 1902 Boat Club building was built using reinforced concrete and structural clay tile after the two previous clubhouses burned down, the last when only seven years old. The rambling, gleaming white building with its red tile roof, squat towers, arcades, and broad arched windows was said to resemble a “large, elegant Basque country house” but seems very much in an Italian Renaissance or Mediterranean vein. The interior’s primary public rooms on the main floor, above the ground story devoted to the club’s rowing club functions, display highly finished Italian Renaissance architectural elements and nautical theme flourishes including intricately

detailed seahorse balusters and shell motifs. The clubhouse’s main lobby area bears enough of a
general resemblance – though much, much scaled down – to the New York Yacht Club’s
primary two-story space to suggest it may have been modeled after it. The 1921-23 Detroit Yacht
Club clubhouse is larger overall, approximately 400 by 125 feet in ground dimensions, and
equally if not more opulent in its finishes. The towered, two and three-story building is faced in
dark red brick and stucco and capped by red tile roofs and contains large ballroom, dining, and
lounge spaces along with extensive verandas for viewing boating events along the river.

An internet search brought up a long list of yacht and boat/rowing clubs and images and
information on some of the clubhouses. While this kind of search cannot be considered
conclusive, it located no other examples of these early twentieth-century yacht and boat club
buildings that clearly surpassed the Belle Isle clubhouses in apparent size and quality of finishes.
Judging from what was found, the Belle Isle clubhouses appear to be at least the equals of any
others around the country for their outstanding architecture among such buildings.

A sixth of the park’s architectural landmarks that appears to possess significance in a national
context is the 1930-31 Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse. The structure appears to be unique as
one that is both a functioning Coast Guard-operated aid to navigation and a highly ornamental
memorial structure. It is finished with a fluted shaft faced in white marble and displaying Art
Deco relief sculpture panels and ornamental bronze features including the octagonal classical-
column-and-entablature lantern, stylized eagles at the top of the shaft, and an entry door
decorated with bas relief panels. Built as a memorial to William Livingstone, long time president
of the Lake Carriers Association, the lighthouse was designed by Albert Kahn, an architect well
known internationally for his innovative factory work but also very much at home designing in
the vocabularies of the historic styles widely used in the 1910s and 20s.

Many other of the park’s buildings and structures are notable in architectural terms, though
perhaps not at the same national level of significance that the six above noted ones appear to
possess. The Belle Isle Police Station, the island’s oldest surviving building built for park
purposes, was designed by key Detroit architects of the time Mason & Rice and built in 1893.
The Police Station is a large two-story Shingle Style building that combines rounded forms with
a tall roof structure suggestive of the architecture of the French chateau. The Shingle Style was
widely used for large recreation and resort-related buildings in the Detroit area at the time – by
Donaldson & Meier in their 1884 Belle Isle Casino, replaced by the present one, and their 1894
Detroit Boat Club, also replaced by the present one, and also in the Lake St. Clair (Old) Club and
Grosse Pointe Club in Michigan, and the Mettawas Club and Hotel buildings nearby in Ontario,
the 1889 Mettawas buildings also designed by Mason & Rice – but none of these now survive.149

The Belle Isle Police Station also utilizes the uncoursed rubble fieldstone masonry (in the lower
story and the central part of the front) that came into popularity by the 1890s. A key influence in
the new acceptance of unshaped rubble fieldstone masonry for important buildings may have
been architect H. H. Richardson’s use of massive, unshaped fieldstone boulders in his 1880-81 F.
L. Ames Gate Lodge, North Easton, MA, and 1884-87 Robert Treat Paine House, Waltham,

149 See W. Hawkins Ferry, The Buildings of Detroit, illustrations 166, 177, 181, 183, 185, 188, 190.
Vincent J. Scully, Jr., says of the Ames Gate Lodge that its “cyclopean rubble” masonry “brought violently to the attention of American architects the expressive possibilities inherent in construction with rough stone, up to boulder size.” His book illustrates other early examples of houses featuring rubble fieldstone—the c. 1883 Hemenway House at Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA, by William Ralph Emerson, and the 1885 James Hopkins Smith House at Falmouth Foreside, ME, by John Calvin Stevens. If Richardson pioneered in the use of fieldstone boulders in the early and mid-1880s, there was broad acceptance of rubble fieldstone construction for important projects by architects across the country by the 1890s. In the Detroit area Mason & Rice, the architects of the Police Station, also used the same kind of stonework in their 1888 Kingsville railroad station and 1889 Mettawas Casino. Their 1894 Belle Isle Police Station may be one of the oldest examples of this uncoursed rubble fieldstone construction in the Detroit area.

The 1939-40 Nancy Brown Peace Carillon Tower is an eighty-five-foot tall limestone-clad structure. Such freestanding carillon towers came into their own in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly on college and university campuses—the 110-foot tall Stanton Memorial Carillon tower at Iowa State University in Ames, built in 1898, is one nineteenth-century example. Many were built in the 1910s and 20s including such prominent examples as the 307-foot Sather Tower Campanile (1914) at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Harkness Tower/Yale Memorial Carillon (1922) at New Haven, and additional ones in the 1930s, 40s, and later. Michigan has several examples of these towers from this time period, including the 1929 Beaumont Tower at Michigan State University and 1936 Burton Memorial Tower/Baird Carillon at the University of Michigan, but new examples are still being built: Grand Valley State University’s Allendale and Grand Rapids campuses both have carillon towers, Allendale’s Cook Carillon Tower built in 1994 and Grand Rapids’ Beckering Family Carillon in 2000.

Detroit architect Clarence E. Day’s source of inspiration for the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon Tower design is stated to have been one of the most outstanding American examples of such structures, the 205-foot tall Mountain Lake Sanctuary Singing Tower in Lake Wales, Florida, designed by Philadelphia architect Milton B. Medary and dedicated early in 1929. Built to a tight budget formed largely from public donations, the Nancy Brown Peace Tower is faced in Indiana limestone rather than the pink and gray marble and tan coquina stone of the Florida tower and lacks its lush decorative finishes. The Belle Isle tower combines Gothic and Art Deco touches in an elegant form that transitions from a square-plan base to an octagonal “belfry” with...
tracery-filled upper balustrades and window openings with three-sided rather than pointed heads, and features Art Deco relief panels and paneled bronze doors.

Belle Isle’s older picnic shelters and comfort stations, sometimes combined into a single building, constitute one of the park’s important features from an architectural standpoint because of their great variety in form and architectural treatment, with no two alike. The thirteen contributing shelter, comfort station, and combination picnic shelter/comfort station buildings date from 1890 to 1928. The oldest is the 1890 Picnic Shelter No. 12, a long and narrow gabled shelter with wooden columns and roof structure and stickwork and ornamental vertical-board-trimmed gables. It is similar in character to other Stick Style wooden park structures built around the country during the second half of the nineteenth century, but is now the only such structure at Belle Isle. Changes made in recent years because of deterioration somewhat diminish the structure’s historic character; restoring the lost elements would be an appropriate treatment. Three other shelters built in the 1895-1900 period are large six or twelve-sided shelters with pointed roofs, the hexagonal one displaying projecting conical-roof turrets, with Moorish arches capping the columns, at the angles.

One of the two oldest comfort station buildings, the 1895 Stone Comfort Station, is a low-to-the-ground picturesque cottage-looking rock-faced coursed ashlar building with a projecting arched entry and slightly concave tall hip roof. The other contributing comfort station buildings, dating from 1895 to 1928, were all built with limestone-trimmed red brick walls, but each exhibits a form distinctive from any other, and several display highly distinctive brickwork as well. The 1895 Shadynook Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter displays an inventive Elizabethan character, with a tall roof extending over broad brick piers, with broad low arches between, that outline a large picnic area. The comfort station part is finished with herringbone brickwork, a massive broad (non-functional, all-for-looks) chimney stack detail, and half-timber-clad bargeboarded gable.

The 1896 Bear Pit Comfort Station has a pair of slightly bowed projections along one side and also displays a unique ornamental brickwork frieze design formed by a band of rowlocks, alternate ones slightly recessed, below a strip of soldier bricks. The c. 1910 Bath Lunch Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter’s central comfort station has an Arts-and-Crafts feel, with ramped brick piers in its semi-octagonal front porch. The broad openings between the piers are spanned by segmental arches. The piers support the broadly projecting bracket-trimmed eaves. The 1928 Woodside Comfort Station also has an Arts and Crafts feel, but here because of the brickwork rather than bracketed roof. Its red brick walls are finished with alternate courses projecting outward slightly from the ones above and below, but also laid in a studied irregularity that, similar to or at least suggestive of the skintled brickwork that was popular in that time period, created strong eye-catching contrasts of light and shadow.

Along with the shelters, Belle Isle’s older bridges form a collection of highly distinctive structures. Primary among them in size and importance is the Belle Isle or Gen. Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge, a 2193-foot long open spandrel concrete arch structure of nineteen spans crossing the Detroit River’s north channel to the park. It was constructed in 1921-23. The bridge reflects an initial design by architect Emil Lorch, head of the University of Michigan School of Architecture in the early part of the 20th century.
Architecture, and engineer Lewis M. Gram, but the final design was by Detroit engineer Horace H. Esselstyn, then of the engineering and architecture firm of Esselstyn & Murphy, with L. Francis Murphy.

Belle Isle’s other historic bridges are short, single-span structures spanning the park’s canals or canal-width parts of lakes. Dating from the early twentieth century, each is unique in design.

- The 1901 Picnic Way/Lake Takoma Bridge is an elegant, City Beautiful structure with limestone-faced arch and classical balustrade railings spanning the narrow lake and limestone-trimmed red brick wingwalls that curve outward slightly and have large ball finials atop the piers at the ends and flanking the arched span.
- The 1901 Oakway Trail/Sylvan Creek Bridge is a simple concrete structure with very slightly arched rise over the very narrow creek. The structure has an Arts-and-Crafts feel because of its rough concrete texture, simplified details, and encrustation of the railing parapets and panels in the piers with small colorful tiles.
- The 1903 Nashua Creek Bridge near the Athletic Fields is another City Beautiful structure, finished mostly in limestone, but with curving red brick wingwalls. It has decorative metal railings formed of panels of open latticework design and tall piers at the ends with stone walls sweeping upward to their round finial-capped tops.
- The 1913 Central Avenue/Sylvan Creek Bridge is also a City Beautiful bridge, this time clearly built and faced in concrete. It has a low arched form over the narrow creek, solid concrete railings finished with simple cap moldings, and curving wingwalls.
- A 1939 sheet metal-roof wood enclosed pedestrian bridge, commonly called the Pullman Bridge because of its arched-roof form and window pattern that are suggestive of an old railroad passenger car, is a unique feature of the park. Spanning a part of Lake Muskoday in the park’s Golf Course, the bridge was built in 1939 with Works Project Administration assistance to provide a connection and serve as shelter during inclement weather.

While some of the park’s historic bridges have been replaced due to deterioration, significant efforts have been made to maintain the historic structures or at least the historic appearance when there was no other feasible alternative to replacing an older bridge. The Central Avenue/Loop Canal Bridge is an example. The present bridge is a new structure that, built in 2009, is much wider than the 1893 bridge it replaced. But the new bridge reuses the older structure’s highly ornamental open metalwork arched panels below the deck and railings on either side, along with the cut stone wingwalls and tall octagonal stone end posts. And the 1999 Inselruhe Avenue/Lake Takoma Bridge is a replica of the 1901 bridge, which had deteriorated beyond feasible repair. The 1999 structure duplicates the herringbone brickwork and limestone trim of the 1901 structure’s solid railings and slightly curving wingwalls.

The 1949-50 William H. Flynn Memorial Skating Pavilion is the prime Modernist building in the park. Constructed for year-round use to provide boat and skate rentals, concessions, and shelter, the broad-fronted low building has a slightly taller central area, fronted by glass walls on both the street and lake facades, and lower random ashlar limestone-clad wings to either side. The building’s architect was J. Robert F. Swanson (1900-81), who founded his own firm, Swanson Associates, in 1947 after working with Eliel and Eero Saarinen in the 1930s and 40s.
Significant Architects and Engineers

The park contains significant examples of work by well-known architects and an important engineer, including architects Cass Gilbert and Albert Kahn and bridge engineer Daniel B. Luten, and important designs by local architectural firms. Several of the leading firms practicing in Detroit in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth-century designed buildings and structures on the island.

Cass Gilbert, the prominent New York-based architect who designed the Scott Memorial Fountain, also produced a design in 1914 for the new Belle Isle Bridge at the request of the City Plan and Improvement Commission. Gilbert also designed the Detroit Public Library that dates to 1921, as part of the Cultural Center envisioned by the City Plan and Improvement Commission. Gilbert’s career was noteworthy for his designs of state capitols (St. Paul, MN, Charleston, WV) and several federal commissions, including the U.S. Custom House in New York City and the U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington D.C. But he is perhaps best known for the 1913 Woolworth Building in New York City, which was the world’s tallest building for over ten years and labeled the “Cathedral of Commerce” for its elegant Gothic-inspired skyscraper design. The Scott Memorial Fountain is his only example of a sculptural fountain, as the one other example, in Ridgefield, CT, is a re-creation.

Belle Isle Park is graced with several masterpieces by one of Detroit’s leading early twentieth-century architects, Albert Kahn. His works on Belle Isle are the only examples of his work with these building types. Born in Germany, he and his family arrived in Detroit in 1880. After working with several Detroit architects, he opened his own firm in 1902. His first work on the island was a collaboration with George D. Mason, who had previously designed the 1893 police station and the 1894 stables on the island. The pair was chosen for the design of the new Aquarium and Conservatory on the south center part of the island, close to the administrative complex on Inselruhe Avenue. Kahn’s next assignment on Belle Isle was the design for the William Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse that dates to 1930. Built to commemorate the memory of Livingstone, who had been the president of the Lake Carriers Association, the lighthouse is unique for its marble finish and Art Deco design among U.S. lighthouses. Kahn also designed the sculptured base for the 1932 Samuel Smith Memorial Flagpole, a modest commission in the light of the Kahn firm’s work on auto plants and other massive projects but reflecting the same attention to detail. By this time, he was an internationally known architect for most of the automobile companies and their executives, designing not only their notable automotive plants, but also their homes and office buildings.

George D. Mason’s long and distinguished architectural career included buildings on Belle Isle from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His career in Detroit began in 1872 working with many of Detroit’s other early architects. Known as a collaborator and a teacher, Mason designed his first Belle Isle building, the Police Station, in 1893, followed shortly after by the 1894 stables building. He teamed with Albert Kahn on the designs for the 1901-04 Aquarium

Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

Wayne Co., MI

County and State

and Conservatory on the island. The 1921 Detroit Yacht Club, a polished example of “Mediterranean” design, was one of his first commissions after the establishment of his new firm, George D. Mason & Co., in 1920. Mason, and his partners in the various firms with which he was partnered, were recognized for their versatility in design commissions, which included churches, residences, municipal buildings, industrial buildings, and the National Historic Landmark 1887 Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan.

The local firm of Van Leyen & Schilling (later Van Leyen, Schilling, Keough & Reynolds) was responsible for the 1898-99 Athletic Pavilion/Field House and the second Casino building that dates to 1908. A biography of Edward Van Schilling in Marquis (1914) states that he designed “park bridges and buildings for Department of Parks and Boulevards” (the article listed the Casino separately) and another bio in Burton (1922) lists him as the designer of “the majority of the bridges on Belle Isle” and also of “miscellaneous park buildings and comfort stations” – but neither source cites specific examples. Edward Van Leyen was a Detroit native who began his architectural career in 1886 and formed an association with Edward Schilling, originally from New York, around 1900. Van Leyen served as one of the Commissioners of the Department of Parks and Boulevards between 1899 and 1901, while Schilling was a vice president of the City Plan Commission as chair of the zoning committee. Together the firm designed city hall and club buildings as well as over 220 school buildings.\(^{155}\)

The 1921-23 Belle Isle or MacArthur Bridge was a product of three principal designers, Emil Lorch, Lewis M. Gram, and Horace H. Esselstyn. Lorch, the first dean of the University of Michigan’s school of architecture, and Gram, structural engineering professor in the university’s School of Engineering, were responsible for the initial design, and H. H. Esselstyn, an engineer then in private practice, prepared the revised plans from which the bridge was built when the original design proved too expensive. Lorch, educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also had a private architectural practice, which provided the Architecture Building for the University and several buildings for the Detroit Edison Company.\(^{156}\) But it was as an educator that Lorch is now critically appreciated; he was an ardent advocate of the Theory of Pure Design in American architectural education, which stressed working with space, color, and shapes rather than learning traditional styles and practices.\(^{157}\)

Lewis M. Gram was born in Menominee in 1876 and graduated from the University of Michigan in 1901, then worked in private practice for bridge-building, engineering, and contracting firms until being appointed to Michigan’s engineering faculty in 1913. *The Michigan Technic*, the U-M Engineering Society’s journal, made this assessment of Gram’s experience as Gram came on board at the school: “Mr. Gram’s experience thus covers bridge work, structural steel design, concrete design; contracting business in both steel and concrete, and private consulting practice.”\(^{158}\)


Information about Horace H. Esselstyn is fragmentary. Esselstyn served as an engineer with Westinghouse, Church, Kerr & Co. for about twelve years until early in 1913, the last two stationed in Detroit “while extending the Delray station, installing the large boilers, etc.,” according to a notice in Electrical World. Perhaps at this time he formed an engineering and architecture firm, Esselstyn, Murphy & Hanford, with L. Francis Murphy and R. Gillmore Hanford, in Detroit. In 1917, apparently, when the federal government established the Emergency Fleet Corporation’s Hog Island shipyard in Philadelphia to build ships for the war effort, Esselstyn became its resident engineer. In mid-1918 he was appointed commissioner of public works for the city of Detroit. He followed George H. Fenkell, the previous commissioner, who served at the time the initial work on designing the Belle Isle Bridge was under way. Esselstyn returned to private practice before long, again working with the Esselstyn, Murphy & Hanford engineering firm by 1920 when the firm was appointing supervising engineers for the Belle Isle Bridge project. By early 1921, when he was charged with revising the bridge design to fit the budget, the firm had become Esselstyn & Murphy. Esselstyn’s subsequent history is unclear, but he did serve briefly during mid-1932 as the city manager for San Diego, California.159

William E. Kapp, the architect for the 1960 Dossin Great Lakes Museum, was a University of Pennsylvania graduate who had worked under Albert Kahn for several years. Kapp joined the Detroit firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls (Kahn’s main competitor) in 1920 (or 1918, depending on the source) and designed many of their most distinctive buildings in the 1920s and 1930s, including the 1925 Players Club and 1931 Collegiate Gothic University Club on Jefferson Avenue; the Music Hall center in downtown Detroit from 1928; and the 1938 Art Deco Rackham Building at the University of Michigan, his last commission with the firm. Kapp established his own firm in the late 1930s and went on to design the Detroit Historical Museum (1951) and 1955 McGrath Planetarium at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. The Dossin Great Lakes Museum was also sponsored by the Detroit Historical Society and was a companion facility to the main museum in the cultural center at Woodward and Kirby avenues.160

J. Robert F. Swanson (1900-1981), who designed the 1950 William J. Flynn Memorial Skating Pavilion of 1950, founded his own firm in 1947 with his wife Pipsan Saarinen, daughter of Eliel Saarinen. Swanson, a University of Michigan graduate, was a partner with Eliel and Eero Saarinen prior to the establishment of his own firm, which was one of the earliest firms to incorporate interior design into their services. The firm designed the Des Moines (IA) Art Gallery (1948); Tuberculosis Hospital in Traverse City (1954); and the University of Michigan Art & Architecture Building (1974).161

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Clarence E. Day was a Detroit architect who designed the 1939 Nancy Brown Peace Carillon. He started his architectural training in 1905 with several area architectural firms and then opened his own practice in 1915. His practice specialized in eclectic revival homes in this period of unparalleled growth and wealth in Detroit. His most famous commission was the 1926-27 Scripps Mansion, built for William E. Scripps, son of the founder of the Detroit News and WWJ radio, and Day’s brother-in-law. He began an architectural collaboration with Detroit architects Harley and Ellington, Inc. and in 1939 merged with them to form Harley, Ellington and Day (now Harley Ellis Devereaux). The firm designed the Rackham Memorial Education Building (1941) in the Cultural Center (with sculpture by Marshall Fredericks) and in 1955, the firm was chosen as the designers of Detroit’s current City-County Building, now known as the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center.

Art

Belle Isle Park and the city’s downtown together display the largest part of Detroit’s historic outdoor public sculpture, and Belle Isle’s monuments and memorial works possess significance under the theme of Art. The Belle Isle works were often wrought by prominent sculptors/designers and, in some cases, were seminal works of art by the artists. The monuments are associated with the recognition and commemoration of several episodes of Detroit’s history, but are also associated with national events and several of the city’s ethnic groups. In all instances, their placement on the island demonstrates Detroit area residents’ and officials’ belief that they were best viewed and appreciated in what they considered to be one of the city’s major public spaces. Many of the monuments are situated along Central Avenue, the major road on the island; the earliest monuments were located on the avenue because of the high visibility a site along it would ensure. In 1928 Detroit’s City Plan Commission prepared a plan which controlled the approval and placement of new monuments along the avenue. Central Avenue is lined by eight monuments, anchored on the east by the Alpheus S. Williams equestrian statue at the intersection of Insleruhe Avenue and Central Avenue. Monuments and statues are also located elsewhere on the island, including the Conservatory’s formal garden and modern sculptures at the extreme west end and on the northeast corner of the island. The earliest extant sculpture is the 1897 Newsboy Fountain. The sculptural quality of the full-size figures, busts, natural features, animals, and abstract ornamentation is very high, befitting their siting in what was regarded as the city’s major public space.

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDcQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ci.birmingham.mi.us%2FModules%2FShowDocument.aspx%3Fdocumentid%3D1717&ei=xN20Uey6Avf64AOanYDQDg&usg=AFQjCNKKeGCIhb2xQKHMDvZ-bFoXA5V7Q&sig2=22ccVFr95VoQs5cPSKg.
162http://www.historicbostonedison.org/history/people_eng.shtml;
http://www.orionhistoricalsociety.org/Scripps%20Brief%20History.htm
The most significant of these memorial works of art on the island is the Scott Memorial Fountain complex, with its large lagoon and marble fountain that, completed in 1925, were designed by Cass Gilbert (1859-1934), and its accompanying bronze statue of James Scott, who provided funds for the fountain in his will. The fountain complex was the subject of a national competition in 1914 overseen by judges who were themselves nationally prominent figures in their disciplines – Robert S. Peabody, the Boston-based architect; Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., landscape architect; and Daniel Chester French, sculptor. Architectural firms specifically invited to submit designs were also among the leaders in their field in the nation: McKim, Mead and White; Carrere and Hastings; and Cass Gilbert. The fountain complex, one of the largest such complexes in the nation, is certainly one of the nation’s outstanding examples of such fountains with their attendant lagoons – perhaps only exceeded for size and pure spectacle by Chicago’s Clarence F. Buckingham Memorial Fountain in Grant Park, designed by Chicago architect Edward H. Bennett and dedicated in 1927. The Scott Fountain complex represents a particularly fine example of City Beautiful design and planning in the country. The fountain structure itself, with its basins, displays extraordinary detail – bronze turtle figures in the lowest basin and carved marble figures of lions, Neptune, and dolphins and panels of bas relief sculpture, including a series of panels depicting man’s labors to overcome land and sea. The marble panels and sculptures were carved by the John Donnelly Company, who collaborated with Gilbert on the U. S. Supreme Court Building and New York’s Woolworth Building. Prior to the 2010 rehabilitation work on the fountain, its largest basin contained the only example of Mary Chase Perry Stratton’s Pewabic Pottery tiles on the island. The tiles featured lively and colorful depictions of sea life, including dolphins, lobsters, seahorses and crabs, consistent with the fountain’s decorative themes. The fountain is only one of two designed by Gilbert in his wide oeuvre and is the only extant example. His other known fountain was a much smaller and less sophisticated piece in Ridgefield, CT (where Gilbert had a summer home), which was built in 1915. The CT fountain, which has a contemporary design date of 1914-16, displayed a strikingly similar bowl and double pools below, although the ornamentation is much less ornate (that fountain was completely destroyed in an automobile accident in 2004, but has since been recreated).

The fountain complex includes a seated bronze figure of the donor, James Scott, the work of sculptor Herbert Adams, and Adams, whose first important work was his 1888 Boys and Turtles Fountain in his then home town of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, may have also been tapped by Gilbert to create the Scott Fountain’s turtles and other details. Adams (1858-1945), in his more than forty-year career as a sculptor, was known primarily for his memorial structures and sculptures – freestanding sculptural monuments such as the Scott Monument, busts, and reliefs. His work includes, among other pieces, two bronze doors featuring relief figures depicting “Truth” and “Research” at the Library of Congress (1896-98), memorial tablets in the

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164 The Pewabic Pottery was the leading Arts and Crafts pottery studio in Detroit, founded in 1903 by Mary Chase Perry (later Stratton) and her partner, Horace Caulkins. The studio, located a short distance east of Belle Isle on Jefferson Avenue, is a National Historic Landmark and still produces tiles and other pottery items. The tiles on the Scott Fountain were removed in 2010 during repairs to the basin that held the tiles, but a fundraising campaign sponsored by the Belle Isle Conservancy seeks to replace them with new Pewabic tiles that replicate the ones removed.
Massachusetts State House in Boston (1898), the Vanderbilt Memorial bronze doors in St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church, New York (1898-1905), a standing figure of William Ellery Channing for the Channing Monument (1902) in the Boston Public Garden, and the McMillan Fountain (1912) in Washington, D.C. Other important works of his are located in Philadelphia and displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of the City of New York in New York and at the National Gallery of Art. Adams was clearly an important figure and his work at Belle Isle was highly significant within his overall body of work.

Like Herbert Adams’ Scott Monument, sculptor Henry Merwin Shrady’s equestrian bronze figure of Michigan Civil War hero Alpheus S. Williams, commissioned in 1913 and dedicated in 1921, is another of the park’s sculptures that is an important work created by an artist of national significance. Henry M. Shrady (1871-1922) was self-educated both as a painter and then as a sculptor, first specializing in modeling small bronze statuettes, mostly of animals. But in 1903 he and architect Edward Pearce Casey won the competition to design and build a Ulysses S. Grant Memorial to stand in front of the U.S. Capitol. Shrady devoted much of his attention to the huge and complex project, with its total of thirteen horses sculpted in the round and depicting Grant’s equestrian figure in the center surrounded by “cavalry, infantry, and artillerymen rushing headlong into battle,” over the next twenty years until his death in 1922 shortly before the memorial’s dedication. In preparing for the Grant Memorial commission, Shrady studied biology at the American Museum of Natural History and dissected horses to get a better understanding of animal anatomy, according to his obituary in the April 13, 1922, New York Times. Along with the Grant Memorial, Shrady’s most important commission, the artist created three other large equestrian figure memorials. They are “George Washington at Valley Forge” (1901-06) in Continental Army Plaza, Brooklyn, New York, and Robert E. Lee (1917-24; completed by Leo Lentelli) at Lee Park, Charlottesville, Virginia, in addition to the 1913-21 Williams Memorial in Belle Isle.

The 1936 Levi L. Barbour Memorial, also called the Leaping Gazelle, set in the center of the Conservatory’s formal garden, is another major example of memorial sculpture on the island. The memorial, funded with a bequest by Levi L. Barbour, the local attorney instrumental in the purchase of the island as a park, was also the subject of a national design competition. The winning design was by Marshall M. Fredericks (1908-1998), who, the unanimous choice from twenty-six entries, was a modeling instructor at the world-renowned Cranbrook Academy of Art. The work, which was his first paid commission, resulted in national and international recognition of his abilities in public sculpture. Many castings of the gazelle, captured in a wheeling motion and surrounded by other animals native to Michigan, are seen in the United States and Europe. Fredericks spent much of his youth in Cleveland, Ohio, graduating from the Cleveland School of

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Art in 1930, and then “journeyed to Sweden on a fellowship to study with sculptor Carl Milles,” who brought him to Cranbrook in 1932 shortly after his own appointment as head of the school. His work, fountains, memorials, free-standing sculptures, reliefs, and portraits in bronze and other materials, can be found in many American states plus the Scandinavian countries, England, the Bahamas, and Japan, according to the Marshall M. Fredericks Museum. Among his many commissions in his home state of Michigan is the monumental 1955-58 Spirit of Detroit, a sixteen-foot tall bronze seated figure, “representing the spirit of humanity,” that, set into a semicircular recess planned as a backdrop for it in the Woodward Avenue façade of architects Harley, Ellington & Day’s City-County Building/now Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (built at the same time) in downtown Detroit, has become the symbol of the city.168

The park also contains a monument honoring the German dramatist, philosopher, poet, and historian Johann Friedrich von Schiller, erected in 1907 at the behest of the city’s citizens of German descent. The seated bronze figure of Schiller, book in hand, atop a granite base, was the work of Herman N. Matzen. Matzen (1861-1938) was born in Denmark but came to America and to Detroit before permanently settling in Cleveland, Ohio. Matzen’s entry in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* states that “he was educated in Detroit, Mich., before returning to Europe for art studies. After graduation from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin, he returned to begin teaching design and sculpture at the Cleveland School of Art in 1885.”169 Matzen became an important sculptor in the Midwest. His Schiller Monument in Detroit was followed in 1911 by a statue of German composer Richard Wagner, financed by the Goethe-Schiller Society, made up of German immigrants and German Americans in the Cleveland area, located in Cleveland’s Edgewater Park.170 Matzen’s other Cleveland work includes a monument (1911-16) to then recently deceased Cleveland mayor Tom L. Johnson, a bronze seated figure that “portrays the mayor’s affable, straightforward personality,”171 and marble statues of Moses and Gregory the Great on the 1905-13 Cuyahoga County Courthouse in Cleveland, two of ten figures along the building’s main façade cornices that “trace the evolution of the English and American legal systems” (the others were by such leading sculptors as Karl Bitter, Daniel Chester French, and Herbert Adams).172

Another of the park’s monuments, the 1928 James J. Brady Memorial, involved a collaboration between Detroitors, architect Frederick O’Dell and sculptor Samuel Adolph Cashwan. Cashwan’s bronze figure of Brady, founder of the Old Newsboys’ Goodfellow Fund of Detroit that provided assistance to needy area children, shows Brady with a newspaper and pouch and a

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large cloak shielding a small child. Two low-relief bronze plaques were also presumably Cashwan’s work. Samuel A. Cashwan (1899 or 1900-88) was an important Michigan-based sculptor who was born in Ukraine and emigrated with his family to New York in 1906 and came to Detroit in 1916. Cashwan taught and served as head of the Sculpture Department at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts in 1926-42 and, while there, served in the 1936-42 period as Michigan’s state supervisor for sculpture, ceramics, and applied arts for the Works Progress Administration, Federal Arts Project. His work over the years down almost to his death included smaller-scale wood, metal, and stone sculptures as well as public monuments and relief sculpture for buildings. His early monuments and examples of architectural sculpture, located in Michigan’s southern Lower Peninsula from Detroit on the east to the Kalamazoo area on the west to Clare on the north, were created between the late 1920s, when he came back to Michigan from study in Paris, and the late 1940s, after he was hired as a designer by General Motors. The Brady Memorial, along with two angels for the façade of Detroit’s St. Aloysius’ Church, constitute two of the earliest of his monument/architectural sculpture works. Key examples of this body of work also include the 1938-39 “Aquarius,” a thirty-two-foot tall sculpture ornamenting the front of Lansing’s Board of Water and Light Water Conditioning Plant; the 1938-39 Abbott Road Entrance Marker to the Michigan State University campus, East Lansing; and 1948 “Prometheus” relief sculpture over the arched entry to the south wing addition to the MSU Union.  

Entertainment/Recreation

Belle Isle has hosted an enormous variety of recreational activities over its lifetime as a park. Even before the City of Detroit purchased the privately owned island in 1879, it was extensively used by area residents for such activities as fishing, boating, and picnicking. Over the years as a public park, Belle Isle has offered at least the following recreational opportunities, with many continuing into recent years or down to the present:

- Hiking, biking, horseback/carriage/auto riding, canoeing/boating, sleighing, swimming, ice skating, ice hockey, and fishing
- Baseball/softball, tennis, track and field, football, soccer, and golfing
- Yachting/rowing
- Horse and auto racing
- Attending outdoor events such as festivals and carnivals, musical concerts, sporting events, beauty contests, and boat races
- Attending elegant indoor events in the Casino’s ballroom
- Public attractions including the Aquarium and Conservatory, zoos, Dossin Great Lakes Museum, and the Nature Center

The number and variety of recreational uses on the island far exceeds those found in most city parks in the country, and many uses were of long endurance in the park.

Establishment of the ferry service in 1884 opened the park to rapidly growing visitation. From the park’s beginnings in the 1880s the grounds were developed with areas of open space and  

paths and roadways planned for passive recreation including picnicking, promenading/hiking, and carriage and horseback riding. Numerous picnic shelter structures were built in the park in the late nineteenth century, and several remain today. The present Stables complex was built in stages beginning in 1894 and housed horses and carriages used for transporting visitors onto and around the island and also a pony concession.

The first Casino, offering both fine dining for visitors and a ballroom to accommodate elegant events, was built in 1886. The present Casino building replaced the first, which burned, in 1908.

A Boat House or Canoe Shelter, offering canoe and boat rentals, was built near the ferry dock in 1887, and canoeing and boating became especially popular activities as the network of canals and lakes took shape in the 1880s and 90s and well into the twentieth century. Numerous photographs and post card views testify to the crowds of pedestrians and the popularity of boating in the park. In 1891 a small bandstand or music pavilion was built spanning the Loop Canal near the park entrance. It hosted concerts during the warm weather months, witnessed by listeners both lounging along the canal banks and riding in their canoes on the canal, well into the twentieth century.

Development in the park for athletic activities and sporting events took began by the later 1880s, and the 1895 Farmer map shows the present Athletic Fields area containing a half-mile “Speeding Track” for horse racing. The existing Athletic Pavilion at the north edge of the Athletic Fields was built in 1899 and baseball and tennis grounds, located to the west at the site of the future Conservatory and Aquarium in 1895, were probably re-established in the Athletic Fields area about that time.

The park has offered a bathing beach with bathhouse nearly continuously since the first beach and bathhouse were opened near the bridge in 1893. The beach location was moved farther east and a larger bathhouse, containing 800 dressing rooms, opened in 1909. The present bathhouse dates from the 1980s.

In 1894 the first skating pavilion for ice skaters was built fronting on Lake Takoma. Offering skate rentals, food, and a place to warm up, it was used until the present Flynn Ice Skating Pavilion replaced it in 1950.

The rapid rise in recreational activities and development of associated facilities on the island in the span of less than twenty years signals the park’s rapidly growing importance as a destination for these pursuits. Additional recreational activities in the late nineteenth century included the city’s first major zoo in 1895, and the establishment of the Detroit Yacht Club in 1887 and the Detroit Boat Club in 1890 on the island.

The addition of an Aquarium and Conservatory, opened in 1904, provided new sources of recreation and also satisfied the era’s desires for scientific research. More picnic shelters, and the new bathhouse and beach further east of their original location in 1909 strengthened the array of recreational offerings. Competitive sporting events, including races, ice skating, baseball, and other sports that were mainly for school children, kept the park busy during all seasons.

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Belle Isle Park

Name of Property                           Wayne Co., MI

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NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

throughout the twentieth century. Although not associated with the park, an extensive
amusement park spanning both sides of the Belle Isle Bridge’s approach from 1906 until 1928
augmented the island’s recreational activities. In 1906 the famous magician, Harry Houdini,
chose the original 1889 Belle Isle Bridge as his stage from which he jumped in manacles that he
quickly shed under the Detroit River, one of his most touted exploits. The stunt’s location clearly
demonstrates the symbolic centrality of Belle Isle Park.

Among Belle Isle Park’s significant associations with recreation history are the activities of the
Detroit Yacht Club and Detroit Boat Club. In the 1920s the Detroit River was said to be the host
to more aquatic events than anywhere but the New York region. The Detroit Yacht Club hosted
the Gold Cup powerboat races starting in 1916 and established an international presence in
sailing with its first entrant into the Bermuda Yacht Race. The Detroit Yacht Club, established
in 1868, is the twelfth oldest yacht club in the country; it built its current clubhouse on an
artificial island connected to Belle Isle in 1921-23. The club’s national reputation is partly based
on its role in the sport of powerboat racing through its frequent hosting of American Power Boat
Association Challenge Cup races, more familiarly known as the Gold Cup. Each year’s races
were hosted by the yacht club which sponsored the previous year’s winning boat. In 1915 the
Yacht Club’s Miss Detroit won the competition, which meant that in 1916, for the first time, a
Gold Cup race was held on the Detroit River. In 1917 Gar Wood (1880-1971), commodore of the
Yacht Club when the present clubhouse was built, won the Gold Cup race again with his Miss
Detroit II victory. From 1917 to 1933 his victories dominated the Gold Cup races, and
additionally he won the British International Trophy in England in 1920 and then continued to
win it on the Detroit River in 1921, 1926, 1928 and 1929. His victories garnered Detroit’s new
position as the boat racing capital of North America, and also raised the Detroit Yacht Club from
being a major force on the Great Lakes to world recognition. Since 1990 the Gold Cup Race has
been hosted every year by the club on the Detroit River in front of its clubhouse, an event that is
viewed from Belle Isle as well as other vantage points along the Detroit River. The Detroit
Boat Club, founded in 1839 and the oldest rowing club in the country, built swimming pools in
1926 within their 1902 Belle Isle club facility. In 1928 one of the pools was used for the Men’s
Olympics swimming trials, which were won here by Johnny Weissmuller, who would become
famous for his role as Tarzan in movies from the 1930s and 1940s, and later on television. The
Detroit Boat Club’s rowing crews have successfully competed on the local, regional, national,
international, and Olympic levels.

In the same decade, the park became the site of the city’s first public golf course. Built in 1922,
the nine-hole golf course was immediately popular and attracted over 57,000 players during its
first year of operation. The late 1920s also saw the beginning of a long sporting tradition on
the island with the annual Metro Detroit Model Yacht Regatta, first held in 1929 in the Scott

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174 Anderson 2001, p. 62
175 Christensen et al, National Register nomination of Detroit Yacht Club, 2010
176 Detroit Boat Club, working files, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office
178 Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 16
Memorial Fountain lagoon. A permanent basin was built in 1934 by Federal Emergency Relief Administration laborers, one of many New Deal construction projects on the island. The construction of model yacht basins throughout the country was one of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s favorite New Deal programs during the Great Depression. The activity was regarded as both recreational and instructional; the races were popular with high school manual arts teachers (and students) at the time, and the Detroit Public Schools reportedly boasted the longest-lived high school model yacht program in the country. In 1927 Detroit Public School manual arts instructors Earl Phillips and Charles Pozzini (a nationally-known carver of wooden decoys) were inspired by the races held on Belle Isle to start a model yacht club in their school. Model yacht regattas, sponsored by the Detroit News, were held at the basin until the late 1990s.

The park saw frequent use in the twentieth century for athletic activities and competitions and other special events, such as May Day festivals, for the Detroit and metropolitan area public school systems, and included skating, track and field, and other competitions. Photographs in Detroit’s Belle Isle: Island Park Gem illustrate a variety of events: a Senior Girls Race ice skating event from the 1934 Wayne Championships, a 1942 men’s finals ice skating race, and track and field competitions.

The original 1895 Detroit Zoo on Belle Isle expanded in the early twentieth century, with more and varied animal exhibits. Although the island’s zoo lost its regional dominance with the establishment of a new Detroit Zoo in 1928 in suburban Royal Oak, the island’s zoo was retained and rebuilt in different form twice in the later twentieth century – first as a children’s zoo featuring small animals associated with various fairytales and then in the 1980 Safariland Zoo. The latter still remains on the island, although closed and becoming overgrown.

Belle Isle Park also features the Dossin Great Lakes Museum on the south shore of the island. Its development on the island in the 1950s, which started with the J. T. Wing, a Great Lakes schooner, was partly due to the availability of a free location and ready audience, but it was considered an eminently suitable site due to its Detroit River location. The museum, housed in a Modernist building whose first section opened in 1960, features many aspects of shipping and marine history and holds collections that include material from the Edmund Fitzgerald, cannons related to Perry’s victory on Lake Erie in the War of 1812, the pilot house of the S.S. William Clay Ford, a Great Lakes iron ore shipping vessel, and other interactive exhibits. One of the last cultural and recreational complexes built on the island is the Nature Center that was completed in the late 1970s, which remains open to the public.

Current recreational offerings on Belle Isle include two fishing piers that date to the 1970s and 1980s, cycling and walking trails, a putting range, golf practice center, the immensely popular family and organization picnics that were one of the earliest pastimes on the island, and one of the best seats in the house to view the annual International Freedom Festival joint (Detroit and Windsor, Ontario) fireworks display over the Detroit River.

179 Anderson 2001, p. 71
Social History

Belle Isle’s significance in the area of social history dates back to the park’s earliest years. The island early became a civic gathering place used for important events, many held annually. Its river location drew two of Detroit’s oldest social clubs to establish clubhouses here. Events in Detroit, and country-wide, were mirrored in activities and resources on the island, due mainly to its popularity and widespread use by the greater Detroit community.

Although some initial claims were expressed that the park would only be for the well-to-do, by 1892 the park’s superintendent commented that “no public resort offers equal inducements and facilities for its occupation and use by all classes. No restraints, except such as proper regard for decorum and the protection of the property require, are imposed upon any, and the crowds of visitors attest their appreciation of its benefits.”\(^{181}\) The number of visitors to the park, growing year after year, certainly attested to its constant use. One telling set of numbers was in 1916, when on a typical summer Sunday: 23,000 people arrived on foot, buses brought 5100 people, while 7,000 came in private cars and an additional 850 in sightseeing cars.\(^ {182}\)

People traveled to the park for more than just passive or active recreational activities, however. The island quickly became the city’s unofficial civic center and it served as the location of the city’s largest celebrations and gatherings for many decades. One of the earliest events was a picnic commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of the Civil War by Union Army veterans, which attracted over 150,000 people to the island. The annual Children’s Day event on the island, which began in 1900, had over 30,000 attendees in June 1901; the event featured a parade, flag presentation, the release of 150 pigeons, and dance lessons. Annual pageants at Belle Isle were the culmination of summer playground programs held throughout the city. The park also hosted circuses, which drew tremendous crowds, on an annual basis.\(^ {183}\)

Family and organization picnics are an enduring and important social element of the park and figure in many Detroiter’s memories of their Belle Isle experience. The number and type of park shelters from various periods illustrate the importance of this activity.

In the 1930s the local peace movement culminated in an annual Easter sunrise prayer service on the island, which began in 1934. The event, led by Nancy Brown, a columnist with the Detroit News, attracted over 50,000 people annually. In 1940 a peace carillon tower was constructed on the island east of the Orchestra Shell (now the location of the Remick Music Shell) on the southern shore close to where the earliest events had been held. The carillon tower was named for Nancy Brown and her peace efforts, and was designed by local architect, Clarence Day.

Detroit’s social history is also represented in the monuments that reflect the city’s ethnic heritage. Monuments erected by the German (the Schiller monument) and Italian (the Dante

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\(^{181}\) Anderson 2001, p. 35
\(^{182}\) Wilbeck Ross 1973, p. 25
\(^{183}\) Anderson 2001, p. 65
monument) communities in the early twentieth century reveal these communities’ pride and their efforts to demonstrate it on the island.\textsuperscript{184}

The island hosts two private social clubs, which have been located here since the late nineteenth century, albeit in early twentieth-century complexes. The park’s river setting drew both the Detroit Boat and Yacht Clubs, which both had clubhouses on the Detroit side of the river previously. The clubs, founded in 1839 and 1868, respectively, were among numerous social groups in the city, many of which built new, more sumptuous clubhouses in the 1910s and 1920s, as a result of increased membership and Detroit’s phenomenal growth and resulting prosperous situation at this time. The Detroit Boat Club, the oldest boat club in North America and one of the oldest continuously operating rowing clubs in the world, is also recognized as the oldest social organization in Michigan.\textsuperscript{185} The club’s members included many of Detroit’s elite. The club built their fourth clubhouse, the third on Belle Isle, in 1902. Their clubhouse is now leased from the city of Detroit, but members of the Friends of Detroit Rowing pay their lease by in-kind repairs to the building. The Detroit Yacht Club grew from 2,000 members in 1920 to 3,000 four years later, soon after its new clubhouse opened in 1923. The club’s members included many of the giants of Detroit’s automotive industry, including Henry and Edsel Ford, Horace Dodge, and Lawrence, Charles, and Fred Fisher.\textsuperscript{186} The Detroit Garden Center, which occupied the White House for many years, was another important social club on the island. During WWII the group led the citywide Victory Garden campaign from its office in the White House, coordinating an estimated 16,000 such gardens through the city. In the 1940s they hosted forty neighborhood garden clubs each year on Belle Isle.\textsuperscript{187} The Michigan Horticultural Society also had their offices here.

And, finally, the park is significant in terms of Detroit’s Social History in one additional way: in relation to the city’s two large-scale incidents of civil disturbance in 1943 and 1967. In 1943 a fight in the park between African Americans and whites, and what proved to be untrue stories of violence to both an African American and a white woman on the island, are seen as the initial factors in the ensuing rioting that involved substantial parts of the city and resulted in thirty-four deaths. And in the 1967 rioting/insurrection, the Belle Isle bathhouse was used as one of various detention centers for those arrested during that year’s large-scale rioting. (The bathhouse was then seen as a symbol of this defining moment in Detroit’s history and was never used again; it was demolished in the early 1970s).

**Maritime History**

As an island at the juncture of the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair in an international shipping channel, Belle Isle Park has served as a location for important navigation and maritime functions.
Belle Isle Park  
Name of Property  
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for more than a century, a characteristic that distinguishes it from the other late nineteenth-century urban parks.

The U.S. Coast Guard and its antecedent agencies have had a station on the island for most of its history as a Detroit city park. Soon after the city’s purchase of the island, the predecessor agency to the U.S. Coast Guard purchased one quarter acre on the southeast corner of the island for a lighthouse. It is unknown if any earlier navigational functions were on the island prior to 1881. This lighthouse served until 1930, when the new Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse was erected on filled land at what was the new southeast corner of the island; this lighthouse continues to serve its original purpose. The U.S. Coast Guard, which was established in 1915, built a new facility on their quarter acre of land in 1941-42. The facility has been remodeled but still serves its original purpose, along with surveillance activities due to the international border with Canada to the south.

Although no physical evidence remains, the Michigan Fish Commission, a state agency established in 1873 to combat dwindling whitefish supplies, also had operations on the island, even before it became a park.188 Their fish ponds were sited mostly along the south shore of the island, close to Inselruhe Avenue.189 The island hosted a municipal harbormaster facility as early as 1895, a function which continues today in a c. 1920 brick building complex on the northwest corner of the island.

**Comparison of Belle Isle with other late nineteenth-century urban parks**

Belle Isle was one of many urban parks established by prosperous industrialized U.S. cities in the late nineteenth century, largely influenced by the overwhelming popularity and physical design of Central Park in New York City in the late 1850s (the park’s design competition was held in 1858, now 840 acres – originally 770 acres). Belle Isle was the first major park in the city of Detroit, similar to other cities, which previously either only had small formal squares or commons. Cities that established large parks in the mid-to- late nineteenth century included Hartford (Bushnell Park, considered the country’s first municipal park, developed 1854-61, 37 acres, listed in NRHP); Cincinnati, Ohio (Eden Hill Park, 1859, 186 acres); Baltimore, Maryland (Druid Hill Park, 1860, 600 acres, listed in NRHP); Brooklyn, New York (Prospect Park, 1865, 526 acres, listed in NRHP); Chicago, Illinois (lakeshore park system was established in 1871, encompassing 15 miles along Lake Michigan, NRHP); Buffalo, New York (Delaware Park-Front Park system dates from 1868-1876, 800 acres total in its system, listed in NRHP); San Francisco, California (Golden Gate Park, 1871, 1,017 acres, National Register #04001137); St. Louis, Missouri (Forest Park, 1876, 1371 acres, two individual buildings listed in NRHP); Boston, Massachusetts (Olmsted park system, known as the Emerald Necklace, first started in 1877, Franklin Park, 1885, 500 acres, listed in NRHP); Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Schenley Park, 1889, 500 acres); New Orleans, Louisiana (City Park, land acquired 1854, but not developed until 1891, 1,300 acres, one building listed in NRHP); San Diego, California (Balboa Park, land first

189 Robinson, Topographic Atlas, c.1882
Belle Isle Park  
Wayne Co., MI

set aside in 1868, first developed in 1892, 1,200 acres, NHL). Philadelphia’s official date of establishment of Fairmount Park system is 1867, although a park of five acres was set aside in 1812 when their famous waterworks were built. The park system now contains over 8,300 acres.

Although the acreage of the various late nineteenth-century parks varies, and changed over time due to either additions or reductions for other non-park related purposes, most are under 1,000 acres, ranging from roughly 200 acres to just over 1,000 acres. Unlike most of them, Belle Isle grew in size from roughly 660 acres to nearly 985 acres as a result of significant land-filling episodes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Belle Isle Park also bears many similarities to the other late nineteenth-century parks with regard to Frederick Law Olmsted’s influence on its original design, which at Belle Isle includes the layout of Central Avenue, the initial concept for canals, and retention of the native Forest Area. And like many of the parks, these designs have been altered from Olmsted’s layouts and functional intent. All of the parks have experienced significant changes from their original appearance and the activities envisioned for them. Most of the parks originally featured more passive recreation, which gradually was supplemented or replaced with more active pursuits. Franklin Park in Boston, for example, was originally designed as a passive country park, but now contains a zoo, golf course, tennis courts, and baseball grounds. Delaware Park in Buffalo also had its meadow area converted to a golf course, and facilities for other recreational pursuits were also later installed. Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, although not designed by Olmsted, similarly has seen an aggregation of early twentieth-century and more recent additions, including new art and science museums.

What differentiates Belle Isle Park from these parks is the sheer number and variety of uses that the park hosted, due in large degree to its island location in a major international river and its enduring popularity as a civic gathering center. Other so-called “showcase parks” hosted many uses that highlighted their importance and provided architecturally significant buildings and structures to enclose them. But few can compare to Belle Isle’s lengthy list of uses and associated buildings and structures, many of which remain on the island from many different periods of construction.

The park’s island location, the only one of the major nineteenth-century parks in the country to be established in such a location, is significant. Olmsted noted that “among American parks, Belle Isle will be unique in its means of methods of access,” further stating that besides Stockholm’s most popular park, also on an island, nothing “corresponding can be found.”190 Many of the other parks were barren land, industrial sites, or were former country estates; Belle Isle was already a popular recreational location before its purchase in 1879, undoubtly an important reason for this choice as other inland locations were concurrently considered. Belle Isle Park’s distance from the city center was not unusual, as many of the parks were likewise in large, either relatively undeveloped, including some that were previously country estates, or totally undeveloped areas, that had not yet been the target of real estate development. Many of the other parks were in close proximity or adjacent to lakes or rivers, but only Belle Isle is

190 Olmsted 1882, p. 43
situated within a river, and one that also shares an international border. The island location of the park within an international shipping channel (which it already was by the time it was purchased) has resulted in its singular quality of unparalleled views of recreational boat and shipping activities, as well as more prosaic uses, including the harbormaster office and waterworks. Beginning with the Coast Guard’s purchase in 1881 of land and erection of a lighthouse next to this international shipping channel, and the choice of both the Detroit Yacht Club and the Detroit Boat Club to establish their clubhouses on the island in the late nineteenth century, the park continued to be the chosen location for many other water-related activities – the 1930 Albert Kahn-designed lighthouse, the only known marble and Art Deco lighthouse in the country; the harbormaster office in the 1920s; a Great Lakes museum in the 1950s; and internationally known races hosted by the Detroit Yacht Club.

Municipal uses also characterized Belle Isle Park from an early date, and it has had more municipal functions combined than all of the other parks. The greenhouses established on Belle Isle beginning in 1899 provided the plant materials for floral displays for all of the city’s parks. Tree removal and pruning operations in all of the city’s parks and other public places throughout the city had their last stop at the Belle Isle 1890s sawmill, which is extant, but now no longer in use. A Detroit police station was established here soon after the island’s purchase, but now operates out of the 1894 station, which also served as the location of the first city police radio station in the country in 1928. The park was also the site of the first public golf course in the city in 1922, and the city’s zoo operated here from 1895 until 1928, followed by other innovative zoos later in the twentieth century. The only municipal aquarium, conservatory, and casino in Detroit are in the park, as are the oldest park buildings and the only beach. Components of the city’s waterworks systems have been located on the island since 1930. Eden Park, Fairmount Park, Druid Park, and Schenley Park all had waterworks systems from their earliest years. Other municipal functions found in the other parks include zoos (Delaware Park, Druid Hill Park, Prospect Park, Central Park, Forest Park, Balboa Park); conservatories (Druid Hill Park, Prospect Park; aquarium (Fairmount Park, Golden Gate Park, Chicago parks); museums (all except Druid Hill Park and Franklin Park); golf courses (Franklin Park, City Park, Schenley Park, Forest Park), and other sporting facilities, including tennis courts, gymnasiums, pools, etc. (all parks).

Belle Isle Park’s importance is also exemplified as the site of important ceremonial and civic events and memorials. This trait is shared with many of the other parks, which served this role due to their available open space, popularity, and increasingly more proximate location to residents. In fact, several hosted national expositions, including Jackson Park, part of the Chicago lakeshore park system (1893 World’s Columbian Exposition), Delaware Park (1901 Pan-American Exposition), Balboa Park (1915 Panama-California Exposition and 1935 California-Pacific Exposition), St. Louis 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park (1876 Centennial International Exhibition). Belle Isle’s role as the symbolic center of Detroit is demonstrated by the memorials that are seen throughout the island, most significantly the Scott Memorial Fountain designed by Cass Gilbert; the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse by Albert Kahn; the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon by Clarence Day, and the smaller statuary that are associated with many of the city’s ethnic groups or commemorate organizations and war heroes, both individual and symbolic. The many community and civic...
events held on Belle Isle Park, while they may not rise to the level of national expositions, are significantly associated with many of the existing buildings, structures, and sites on the island.

9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)
See continuation sheet (Section 9, pages 1-19)

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- **X** 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 # **HAER-MI-102** (Inselruhe Bridge over Nashua Canal – reconstructed in 1999)
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- **X** Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government (City of Detroit)
- University
- **X** Other

  Name of repository: **Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library and Detroit Recreation Department files**

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):**

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10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property**

- **985 acres**
Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**
Datum if other than WGS84: __________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: __________ Longitude: __________
2. Latitude: __________ Longitude: __________
3. Latitude: __________ Longitude: __________
4. Latitude: __________ Longitude: __________

Or

**UTM References**
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

- [ ] NAD 1927 or [ ] NAD 1983

1. Zone: __________ Easting: __________ Northing: __________
2. Zone: __________ Easting: __________ Northing: __________
3. Zone: __________ Easting: __________ Northing: __________
4. Zone: __________ Easting: __________ Northing: __________

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the district when originally listed in 1974 were not clearly defined, but included the entire park on the island Belle Isle. That nomination describes and discusses the MacArthur Bridge, so it is clear that was included. It is not clear whether the Detroit Boat Club and Detroit Yacht Club properties were included, since neither was mentioned in the nomination and both held their property separate from the park under leases from the city. Nor is it clear what part of the Detroit Waterworks property was included.
The district nominated here and now includes the whole of Belle Isle, bounded by the shoreline. It also includes the entire area in the Detroit River encompassed by the Detroit Boat Club grounds and docks; the entire area in the Detroit River encompassed by the Detroit Yacht Club grounds and docks, and the harbor or channel between the club’s island and Belle Isle’s north shore; the Detroit Waterworks complex island, channel separating their island from Belle Isle, water intake lagoon, and offshore Crib House; and all bodies of water within the island, including canals/creeks, lakes, Blue Heron Lagoon, and Scott Fountain Lagoon. The district also includes the entire MacArthur Bridge and the East Grand Boulevard approach southeast from the southeast right-of-way of E. Jefferson Avenue. The area on the “mainland” side southeast of E. Jefferson is bounded as follows: West-southwest of E. Grand Boulevard between E. Jefferson and the Detroit River the boundary is the fence line that, separating the edge of the former Uniroyal Tire plant site from the landscaped grounds along the boulevard, is located approximately 200 feet west-southwest of the boulevard, but curves more westerly as it approaches E. Jefferson so that the curving access drive from east-bound Jefferson to south-bound Grand Boulevard is within the nominated property. East-northeast of E. Grand Boulevard between E. Jefferson and the Detroit River the southeast boundary runs northeast along the river bank from the northeast edge of the MacArthur Bridge/E. Grand Boulevard 200 feet. The northwest boundary runs along the southeast E. Jefferson Avenue edge from the centerline of the greenspace between north and south-bound E. Grand Boulevard northeast 500 feet. The east edge of this nominated area (northeast of E. Grand Blvd. between E. Jefferson and the Detroit River) is a straight line connecting the northeast end of the southeast boundary and northeast end of the northwest boundary.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The revised boundaries of the Belle Isle Park Historic District encompass the entirety of the island, including the entire Detroit Boat Club and Detroit Yacht Club complexes, the Gen. Douglas A. MacArthur Bridge, the landscaped boulevard approach to the island from E. Jefferson Avenue, and the Belle Isle portions of the Detroit Waterworks complex, which all relate directly and historically to Belle Isle Park. The “mainland” boundary east-northeast of the E. Grand Boulevard approach is arbitrarily drawn to include enough property to encompass the entire part of the landscaped road/sidewalks approach that relates to the boulevard but may also include an edge of the adjacent Gabriel Richard Park – there is no visual transition between the two; the landscaped Belle Isle approach blends seamlessly with the park.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: __Rita Walsh, Nicole Benjamin-Ma, Lisa Nowak, Dale Abbott____
Revised by: R. O. Christensen, National Register Coordinator, MI SHPO July 2015
organization: __Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.__

street & number: 101 Walnut

Sections 8- page 143
Belle Isle Park
Name of Property

city or town: Watertown state: MA

code: 02472

e-mail_rwalsh@vhb.com

telephone: 617-607-2967

date: June 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property’s location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Belle Isle Park

City or Vicinity: Detroit
Belle Isle Park

Name of Property

County: Wayne State: Michigan

Photographer: Rita Walsh, except views 95-100

Date Photographed: Various

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

I will send along a CD of the selected streetscapes and individual building photos.

1 of 100: Approach, looking S from Jefferson Avenue 4/17/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0001
2 of 100: Approach, N sidewalk E of Jefferson Avenue looking S toward bridge to park
   3/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0002
3 of 100: Belle Isle/MacArthur Bridge W side looking N 3/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0003
4 of 100: Floral Clock looking S 7/2/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0004
5 of 100: Scott Fountain and its lagoon looking NE (Casino far right) 9/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0005
6 of 100: Scott Fountain looking N along Fountain Dr. 7/2/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0006
7 of 100: Scott Fountain looking W (Renaissance Center/downtown Detroit right) 7/2/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0007
8 of 100: James Scott Monument looking NW 7/2/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0008
9 of 100: Downtown Detroit (center), Windsor, Ontario (left) from island’s western tip
   9/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0009
10 of 100: Looking W along S edge of Scott Fountain lagoon 9/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0010
11 of 100: Casino/Loop Canal Bridge (right) and Lake Takoma W end, Casino at left,
   Looking N 4/1/2014
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0011
12 of 100: Casino/Loop Canal Bridge (left) and Kiley Trellis/Plaza (right) looking NE
   9/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0012
13 of 100: Kiley Trellis/Plaza looking ENE 9/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0013
14 of 100: Casino (left) and Picnic Shelter #1 (right) looking SW 3/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0014
15 of 100: Picnic Shelter #1 looking N 1/2012
   MI_Wayne County_Belle Isle Park_0015

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<td>Casino ground story interior 6/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Casino, 2nd story ballroom 6/2012</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Shadynook Comfort Station/Picnic Shelter #2 looking E 1/2012</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Lake Takoma looking E, Flynn Skating Pavilion left center, Nancy Brown Peace Carillon Tower right center 4/1/2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Flynn Skating Pavilion N façade looking NE 1/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Flynn Skating Pavilion W and S facades 4/1/2014</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Remick Music Shell looking NW 7/2/2012</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Nancy Brown Peace Carillon Tower looking SE 7/2/2012</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>E end of Lake Takoma looking SE, Picnic Way Bridge right, Dossin Great Lakes Museum left 3/2012</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Barbour Memorial Fountain looking WSW 9/2012</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Conservatory looking ENE, Kolk Sundial and Barbour Fountain foreground 9/2012</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Conservatory looking SE 7/2/2012</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Conservatory interior 6/2012</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Garden between Conservatory (right) and Aquarium (left) looking SSE 6/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Aquarium front (NNW) and WSW facades 3/2012</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Aquarium ENE façade 3/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Aquarium interior looking SSE 6/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>White House center, Greenhouses right, Garage left looking SE 3/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Greenhouse complex looking E 7/2/2012</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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91 of 100: Detroit Boat Club looking SW from N. Channel of river 8/24/2012  
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99 of 100: Safariland Zoo open habitat area with elevated walkways and Tree House complex, looking ENE, R. O. Christensen 4/2015  
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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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan
Belle Isle Park
National Register Nomination

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Contributing & Non-contributing Resources

- **C** = Contributing
- **NC** = Non-contributing

Photograph Locations (#’s 55-61, 82-84 Shown)