

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in 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: Riverview Park

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: Roughly bounded by Woods Run Ave., Mairdale Ave., Perrysville Ave., and Kilbuck St.

City or town: Pittsburgh State: PA County: Allegheny

Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Name of Property Riverview Park

County and State Allegheny, PA

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**

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#### 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

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local

Name of Property Riverview Park

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Allegheny, PA

Public – State

Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing  
5

3

10

18

Noncontributing  
          

1

5

6

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1



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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVE-  
MENTS

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: \_\_\_\_\_

### 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.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Riverview Park is a 250-acre city park laid out over a high ridge and steep hillsides overlooking the Ohio River in the North Side of Pittsburgh. All of the present area of Riverview Park is included within the National Register boundary. The park's landscape is predominantly dense woodland punctuated by a few clearings and meadows, some of which feature rustic picnic shelters or other features. Riverview Park contains a mix of architecturally significant buildings, structures, and landscape features; post-period-of-significance (and therefore non-contributing) buildings and structures; and sites and ruins of buildings that were significant in the park's history. Throughout the park, extensive stonework reinforces the rugged naturalism of the park's landscape. Most of the park's buildings and attractions are located atop one high ridge near the park's main entrance at the terminus of Riverview Avenue. The Riverview Avenue entrance is by far the most formal area of Riverview Park and contains the most designed elements, most of them dating from a short but prolific period of park improvement funded by the WPA in the late 1930s-early 1940s. A wide, winding road, Riverview Drive, loops through the park and connects to neighborhood streets at the park's three main entrance points, but many of Riverview Park's zones and features, especially in its northern sector, are accessible only via an extensive network of foot and bridle trails. Riverview Park retains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

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## Narrative Description

Riverview Park is a 250-acre city park laid out over a high ridge and steep hillsides overlooking the Ohio River in the North Side of Pittsburgh, formerly the independent City of Allegheny. It is surrounded by the residential neighborhoods of Brighton Heights, Perry North, Perry South, and Marshall-Shadeland. These neighborhoods are characterized by modest-to-middle-class single-family houses, row houses, and small apartment buildings constructed between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Riverview Park's landscape is predominantly dense woodland punctuated by a few clearings and meadows, some of which feature picnic shelters or other features. Its topography is that of steep wooded slopes, ravines, and valley floors surrounding one high ridge upon which most of the park's buildings and attractions are located. A wide, winding road, Riverview Drive, loops through the park and connects to neighborhood streets at the park's three main entrance points: Riverview Avenue at the east, Grand Avenue at the south, and Mairdale Street at the west. Mairdale Street does not terminate at the park but extends northward along the park's northwestern boundary. Perrysville Avenue bounds the park on the east and features two WPA-era stone bus shelters at trail heads from the road into the park. Kilbuck Road, which once admitted vehicles into the southeastern section of the park from Grand Avenue, is now pedestrian-only. Another former entrance to the park, via the Davis Avenue Bridge over the Woods Run ravine from Brighton Heights to the west, is closed pending the bridge's rehabilitation. Vehicular access to the interior of the park is limited to Riverview Drive. Many of Riverview Park's zones and features, especially in its northern sector, are accessible only via an extensive network of foot and bridle trails.

Riverview Park contains a mix of architecturally significant buildings, structures, and landscape features; post-period-of-significance (and therefore non-contributing) buildings and structures; and sites and ruins of buildings that were significant in the park's history. Extant buildings and structures include the Chapel Shelter (ca. 1890), Allegheny Observatory (on a separately-owned parcel surrounded by parkland; 1912), Bear Pit (1913), Locust Grove and Valley Refuge shelters (1940), Visitors' Center (1941), Perrysville Avenue bus shelters (1940), Activities Building (1961), pool house (1984), and Centennial Pavilion (1996). The latter three of these post-date the park's period of significance and are therefore non-contributing, while the rest contribute. Watson's Cabin (ca. 1800), an associated rest room building that supported later use of Watson's cabin as a camping site (ca. 1940), Riverview Zoo (1896), and the Wissahickon Nature Center (built as a park shelter in 1913 and converted to a nature center building in 1924) survive only as ruins, but still contribute to the historic character of the park.

Throughout the park, extensive stonework reinforces the rugged naturalism of the park's landscape. Park signage is found at entrances and some trailheads and is generally rustic.

The park also contains miscellaneous uncounted small structures and furnishings, such as simple benches, fencing, stairs, interpretive signage, and trash receptacles.

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Riverview Park generally lacks firm boundaries among its various zones, but is large enough to be described in terms of them:

### Riverview Avenue Entrance and Observatory Hill

The Riverview Avenue entrance is by far the most formal area of Riverview Park and contains the most designed elements, most of them dating from a short but prolific period of park improvement funded by the WPA in the late 1930s-early 1940s. The park entrance experience is a visual sequence beginning with Riverview Avenue, a block-long, boulevard-like, residential street between Perrysville Avenue and the park's eastern edge. Riverview Avenue's planted median presages the designed park landscape ahead. At its western end are three stone gate piers erected in 1940. The outer two piers connect to curved stone walls and related park features, such as the Visitors' Center, described below. The central pier is situated in the median. At this point, residential Riverview Avenue intersects with Riverview Drive, the curving, meandering road through the park, as it hugs the eastern end of Observatory Hill (Photos 1-3).

Ahead, across Riverview Drive, rises a broad, gently sloping hill with the domed Classical Revival Allegheny Observatory (1912) at its highest point (Photo 4). The observatory is not directly on axis with the park entrance at the terminus of Riverview Avenue, but, by its height and isolation at the top of the hill, it is the visual focus of the park's main entrance composition. Most of the hill in front of the observatory is maintained as open lawn so as not to obstruct this view. Trees are clustered on the hill's lower slopes, where they line walking paths and a long drive that follows the northern contour of the hilltop to encircle the observatory. The observatory is surrounded by park land and serves as Riverview Park's most iconic feature and primary point of orientation; however, it occupies a separate legal parcel, owned and managed by the University



**Photo 1.** Riverview Drive, park interior



**Photo 2.** Riverview Entrance and Observatory Hill from Riverview Avenue

of Pittsburgh.

A double set of stone stairs (1940) opposite the Riverview Avenue gate piers gives access to Observatory Hill from Riverview Drive. Its curved staircases embrace a former fountain basin (now a planting bed) and lead to up a small paved plaza before the grassy expanse of the observatory lawn (Photos 5-6). On the hillside behind (west of) the observatory are a pair of terraced tennis courts (Photo 7) and an off-leash exercise area for dogs which is enclosed by a split-rail fence.

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**Photo 3.** Riverview Drive, view west toward Chapel ridge from Riverview entrance



**Photo 4.** Allegheny Observatory

From the hilltop are expansive vistas extending southward to downtown Pittsburgh and westward to the Ohio River (Photo 8).

Opposite Observatory Hill stands a complementary ensemble of stone elements completed in 1941 and including the Riverview Park Visitors' Center (Photos 9-10). Designed by Ralph Griswold and built as a park police office, the Visitors' Center is a one-story, Colonial Revival building of flat-cut random-coursed ashlar with a slate roof. It is T-shaped in plan, three bays wide and two bays deep, with its entrance in the front-gabled eastern bay. There is an oculus in the gable above the entrance doorway and the corners are treated with smooth-faced stone quoins. The building stands at an angle to Riverview Drive amid gardens and flagstone-paved walks, framed by a stone wall and accessed by stone stairs from Riverview Drive. Inside, the building contains an all-purpose gathering room with a rustic stone fireplace in its eastern portion and a hall, re-



**Photo 5.** Double staircase and former fountain basin (now planting bed) at Riverview entrance



**Photo 6.** Terrace atop staircase to Observatory Hill at Riverview entrance

stream, and park ranger's office in its western portion. A basement provides storage. The building was sensitively restored as a park visitors' center and ranger station in 2003.

### Chapel Ridge

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South of Observatory Hill, a comma-shaped ridge is the site of most of Riverview Park's major destinations. Northernmost is a large modern playground. Adjacent to the playground, the Activities Building is a contemporary (1961) one-story building of concrete block with stone and frame accents, including a stone exterior fireplace. Large openings fitted with garage-style rolling doors enclose the simple, concrete interior or open it to the park outside (Photo 11). The Activities Building was designed for the Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Grounds and Buildings, by architect J. Whitley Cavitt of Aliquippa, PA.



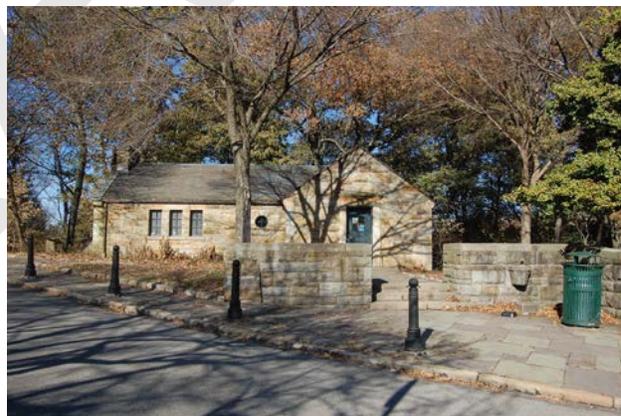
**Photo 7.** Terraced tennis courts behind Allegheny Observatory



**Photo 8.** Off-leash exercise area and view over Ohio River behind Allegheny Observatory



**Photo 9.** Riverview Park Visitors center ensemble



**Photo 10.** Riverview Park Visitors Center

A long lawn connects the Activities Building to the Riverview Pool building (Photo 12). This modern building of striated buff and red concrete block was designed by the Pittsburgh firm The Design Alliance in 1961. It is built on the site of the former frame carousel building, which was demolished ca. 1960. The pool house is built into the hillside with the pool to its southwest.

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Slightly downhill and southwest of the pool, the Riverview Chapel Shelter is another landmark of Riverview Park. Built as the Watson Presbyterian Church at Riverview and Perrysville avenues ca. 1890, the frame chapel was moved into the park and converted to a shelter shortly after the park opened in 1894. The Chapel Shelter stands behind a circular driveway off of Riverview Drive. It was sensitively rehabilitated by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy as a pilot project of



**Photo 11.** Activities Building



**Photo 12.** Riverview Pool and pool house

the Pittsburgh Regional Parks Master Plan in 2008 (Photos 13-14).

The so-called Bear Pit is a red brick, Craftsman Style building situated partway down the slope between the Activities Building, the pool, and Riverview Drive on the west side of the ridge. Designed by Thomas Scott and built as a park shelter in 1913, it was enclosed in 1970 to serve as a nature center after the loss of the previous nature center in the Wissahickon Nature Preserve (see below). Its name probably derives from the reuse of stones from the old bear pit in the Riverview Zoo (see below) for its foundation; however, its location lies on the opposite side of the ridge



**Photo 13.** Chapel Shelter and circular drive



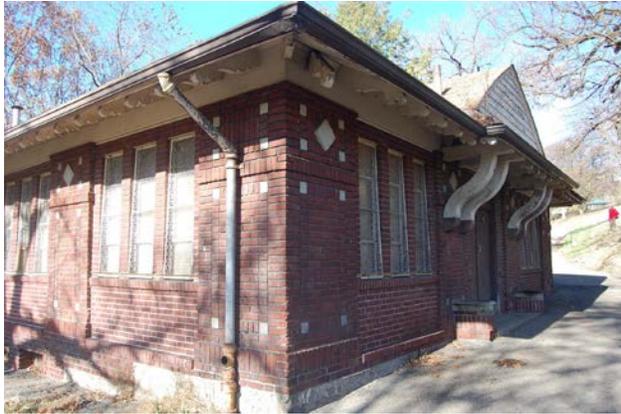
**Photo 14.** Chapel Shelter

from the zoo site. The Bear Pit is now used for storage by the Department of Public Works (Photo 15).

### Grand Avenue Entrance and Valley Refuge

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**Photo 15.** Bear Pit

A network of trails connects Observatory Hill and Chapel Ridge to the Valley Refuge area, located downhill and southeast of the park's main attractions. Because the vehicular road through Valley Refuge, Kilbuck Road, no longer connects to Riverview Drive, Valley Refuge is isolated from the rest of the park except by foot trails. Vehicles must leave the park via Riverview or Mairdale avenues and re-enter at Grand Avenue at the park's southern edge.

Grand Avenue passes through a residential area to a modest park entrance marked by signage and a low stone wall on either side of the road (Photo 16). Beyond this, just inside the park, a Department of Public Works maintenance facility, including a concrete dome for salt storage, intrudes upon the otherwise-idyllic character of Valley Refuge (Photo 17). The Valley Refuge Shelter (1940) is a low-slung, open stone-and-frame structure with stone chimneys rising through each of its end gables (Photo 18). It is set in open parkland lined with trees along Kilbuck Road with a backdrop of wooded slopes rising toward Perrysville Avenue to the east. An adjacent former ball field is too small for regulation play and is now also maintained as open parkland (Photo 19).



**Photo 16.** Entrance to Riverview Park at Grand Avenue



**Photo 17.** Public works facility on Kilbuck Road near Grand Avenue entrance

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**Photo 18.** Valley Refuge Shelter



**Photo 19.** Former ball field along Kilbuck Road, now open parkland, Valley Refuge Shelter in distance

### Riverview Park Zoo

Up Kilbuck Road, now accessible only by foot, the remains of the Riverview Park Zoo are visible along the Old Zoo Trail. This small zoo was established ca. 1896 and included an aviary on a terraced hillside. It was dismantled ca. 1910 when all of the city's zoo animals were consolidated at the Highland Park Zoo. The site, a curved bowl in the hillside below Riverview Avenue, has been reclaimed by vegetation but is marked by a stone retaining wall and a row of brick animal

enclosure foundations set into the ground (Photos 20-21). The Old Zoo Trail rises to connect with the Overlook Trail and the main entrance point of the park at Riverview Avenue and Riverview Drive (Photo 22). A flight of stone stairs leads from Riverview Avenue down to the Overlook Trail leading to the upper edge of the zoo site (Photo 23).



**Photo 20.** Stone retaining wall at Riverview Zoo site



**Photo 21.** Brick animal enclosure foundations at Riverview Zoo site

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**Photo 22.** Intersection of Overlook Trail and Old Kilbuck Road



**Photo 23.** Stone staircase from Riverview Avenue down to Overlook Trail

### Perrysville Avenue

At the park's eastern edge, the woodlands of Valley Refuge rise up to Perrysville Avenue, a major north-south road through Pittsburgh's northern neighborhoods which intersects with Riverview Avenue. Two trailheads into the park off of Perrysville Avenue, the Leaning Ash Trail at Chemung Street (Photos 24-25) and the Kilbuck Trail at Delaware Street (Photos 26-27), are marked by stone bus (originally trolley) shelters with integral flanking stone walls, benches, and gate piers. The shelters themselves are open to Perrysville Avenue and have slate gable roofs. These were built with WPA funds in 1940.



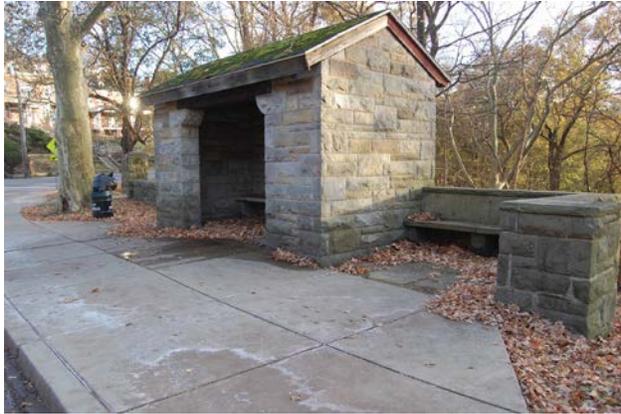
**Photo 24.** Bus (trolley) shelter ensemble at Perrysville Avenue and Chemung Street



**Photo 25.** Bus (trolley) shelter ensemble and Leaning Ash trailhead at Perrysville Avenue and Chemung Street, view from park

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**Photo 26.** Bus (trolley) shelter ensemble at Perrysville Avenue and Delaware Street



**Photo 27.** Kilbuck trailhead at Perrysville Avenue and Delaware Street

### Snyder's Point

Southwest of the Chapel Ridge is Snyder's Point. This is an extension of the same upland plateau which contains the Chapel Shelter, pool, and other destinations, but it is isolated from the Chapel Ridge area by Riverview Drive and remains undeveloped. A foot trail off of Riverview Drive leads westward along the crest of the ridge to a level meadow (Photo 28). From here are expansive views out over Woods Run to the Ohio River (Photo 29). The rest of the Snyder's Point area consists of steeply wooded slopes.

### Wissahickon Nature Preserve



**Photo 28.** Meadow at Snyder's Point



**Photo 29.** View from Snyder's Point

The Wissahickon Nature Preserve is a densely-forested valley north of the observatory and the park's grouping of other attractions (Photo 30). Two small streams run through steep ravines, almost converging at the park's Mairdale entrance (Photos 31-32; see below). Between them, Locust Grove occupies a hilltop clearing. The Locust Grove Shelter was built with WPA funds in 1940. It consists of simple stone walls and piers supporting a shallow gabled wooden roof (Photo 33).

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**Photo 30.** Wissahickon Nature Preserve



**Photo 31.** Footbridge over stream near Watson's Trail



**Photo 32.** Streambed



**Photo 33.** Locust Grove Shelter

Across the ravine north of Locust Grove, along the Old Wissahickon Road (now a foot trail; Photo 34), are the rubble ruins at the site of the Wissahickon Nature Center (Photo 35). This stone building was constructed as a park shelter in 1913 and converted to a nature center in 1924. It burned in 1967.



**Photo 34.** Wissahickon Nature Preserve: Old Wissahickon Road (now footpath) at right



**Photo 35.** Ruins of Wissahickon Nature Museum

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**Photo 36.** Clearing at former Archery Range

Foot trails lead farther east and deeper into the forest to a former archery range, now an open meadow (Photo 36).



**Photo 37.** Watson's Cabin camp site



**Photo 38.** Ruins of Watson's Cabin: stone hearth and kitchen addition

### Watson's Cabin

From Locust Grove, Watson's Trail leads southwest to another clearing containing the remains of two small stone buildings (Photo 37). One, Watson's Cabin, was an early log residence (ca. 1800; estimated dates range from 1790 to 1820) constructed by the original owners of the land, the Watson family, although the Watsons did not reside there. A large stone chimney containing the cabin's original hearth and the walls of the stone kitchen addition are all that survived a fire ca. 2005 (Photo 38). Across the clearing stands the shell of a gabled rest room building built in the 1930s to support overnight camping in Watson's Cabin. The rest room building is faced in stone over a concrete structure. This building also burned. It currently has no roof and is open to the weather (Photo 39).

### Mairdale Street and Entrance

At the park's western edge, wooded slopes rise steeply from Woods Run Avenue. Mairdale Street branches off of Woods Run to enter the park above Watson's Cabin and runs north to exit the park near its intersection with Perrysville Avenue. The Mairdale entrance to Riverview Park

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is marked by a shallow, stone-edged terrace at the intersection of Mairdale Street and Riverview Drive and a modest, rustic sign (Photo 40). The primary feature along Mairdale Street is a recently-constructed soccer field on a rise above the street near the park's northernmost point (Photo 42).

### Integrity



**Photo 39.** Rest room building at Watson's Cabin camp site



**Photo 40.** Mairdale entrance to Riverview Park



**Photo 41.** Mairdale Street



**Photo 42.** Soccer field at Mairdale Street

Riverview Park retains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. Its location is that originally established in 1894. Subsequent incremental additions during the period of significance have enlarged the boundaries of the Watson farm property which formed the original park land.

The park's integrity of setting is also strong. The mostly-residential neighborhoods surrounding Riverview Park were beginning to be developed when the park was established. The transformation of farm land to park land and urban neighborhoods occurred concurrently during the late 19th through early 20th centuries. The creation of Riverview Park atop the area's highest ridge has preserved public access to vistas of downtown Pittsburgh, Mt. Washington, and the Ohio River.

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The park's integrity of design, workmanship, and materials are evident in the historic treatment of the landscape and in the park's well-preserved historic structures from ca. 1894-1941. These include the Chapel Shelter, Bear Pit, Visitor's Center, and the stone shelters, walls, stairs, and other features built with WPA funds in 1939-1940, all of which have good individual integrity. The strength of these features helps to compensate for the loss of historically important park buildings such as the Wissahickon Nature Museum and Watson's Cabin. Enough original material and documentation of Watson's Cabin survives that reconstruction is possible (and is, in fact, being planned by current park stewards). The ruins of the Wissahickon Nature Museum and of the Riverview Zoo do not have individual integrity, but contribute to the overall integrity of the park by providing material evidence of those former attractions on their original sites. Later additions to the park, such as the 1961 Activities Building and 1984 pool and pool house, do not contribute to the park's historic character, but neither do they detract from as it, as they are compatible with the historic uses and landscape of the park. The landscape itself has integrity to its original intent as a largely naturalistic woodland containing isolated areas of meadow and open parkland.

Riverview Park's urban neighborhood setting, contributing resources, and wilderness character, interspersed with clearings, viewsheds, and recreational facilities, establish its integrity of feeling and association as a large city park designed to provide urban dwellers with an experience of the country in the city.

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## 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

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1894-1942  
1938-1942  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1894  
1907  
1939  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Charles Ehlers  
Thomas Scott  
Ralph E. Griswold  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Riverview Park has local significance under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development and Criterion C for Architecture and Landscape Architecture. Under Criterion A,

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Riverview Park's development follows the evolution of park planning from aspiration to realization, across two city administrations and the professions of engineering and landscape architecture. Initially planned as a public work by city engineers, Riverview Park's development proceeded apace with the professions of landscape architecture and park planning, and grew to exhibit characteristics of a professionally-planned part of a mature city park system. Its period of significance for Criterion A is 1894–1942. The first year is when Riverview Park was established, and 1942 marks the end of its last period of major planning and improvement, which was conducted with WPA funds during the New Deal. Riverview Park's WPA-funded buildings, structures, landscapes, and ensembles are the source of the resource's significance under Criterion C. These features mark it as part of a system of parks linked by a common design vocabulary, one which was emerging locally in Pittsburgh as well as nationally across parks being planned and designed at the municipal, state, and federal levels. In a style becoming known as WPA Rustic, these were designed in Riverview Park by Ralph Esty Griswold (1894-1981), an accomplished landscape architect who served as Pittsburgh's Superintendent of Parks from 1934-1945. Riverview Park's period of intensive WPA-funded activity is bracketed by the years 1938-1942, defining the period of significance for Criterion C.

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

Brief History of Allegheny

Riverview Park is today part of the City of Pittsburgh, but it was established in and by the independent city of Allegheny. Allegheny's history is both unique and intertwined with that of its larger sister city Pittsburgh, to which it was forcibly annexed in 1907. Therefore, a brief history of Allegheny is useful to understanding the context of Riverview Park.

The township of Allegheny was formally platted in 1788 as a grid of 36 square blocks surrounded by 102 acres allocated for grazing. Outside of this plan, farmland stretched over the hilly terrain to the north and westward to the Ohio River. Allegheny grew rapidly in the early- to mid-19th century, soon overflowing the 36 blocks originally allocated to the town. Nearby farms were sold and subdivided into building lots, and after the Civil War, the now-city of Allegheny transformed its public grazing commons into an elegantly landscaped public park.

The Civil War was a strong catalyst for the industrial expansion of both Pittsburgh and Allegheny. Both cities experienced corresponding growth in population and demand for housing and other facilities. North of the Allegheny River, several acts of the Pennsylvania legislature quadrupled Allegheny's geographic size through annexation by 1880. McClure Township, created in 1860 from the southernmost parts of Ross and Reserve Townships, was annexed by Allegheny in 1872 and became the city's 10th and 11th Wards. This established the present northernmost boundaries of Allegheny City/Pittsburgh's North Side.

The character of upper Allegheny remained rural until the end of the 19th century. In the 1880s and '90s, technological advancements led to improved infrastructure, such as the development of steel girder bridges to span deep ravines and the replacement of horse-drawn streetcars with an electric street rail system. These enhanced the convenience and desirability of property farther

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north of downtown Allegheny which had previously been sparsely occupied by farms and country estates. Population growth and economic prosperity spurred many families to move northward. To meet the demand for housing, farmers and large landholders (or their heirs) sold their property for subdivision into housing lots. In this way, upper Allegheny urbanized rapidly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with Riverview Park preserved as a large swath dedicated to open space, nature, and recreation in its midst.

In 1906, by popular vote of the citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, the smaller city (Allegheny) was annexed to the larger (Pittsburgh). All of Allegheny's public functions, including its parks administration, came under the jurisdiction of the City of Pittsburgh in 1907. The North Side (as the former Allegheny City was now known) continued to develop and prosper into the middle of the 20th century.

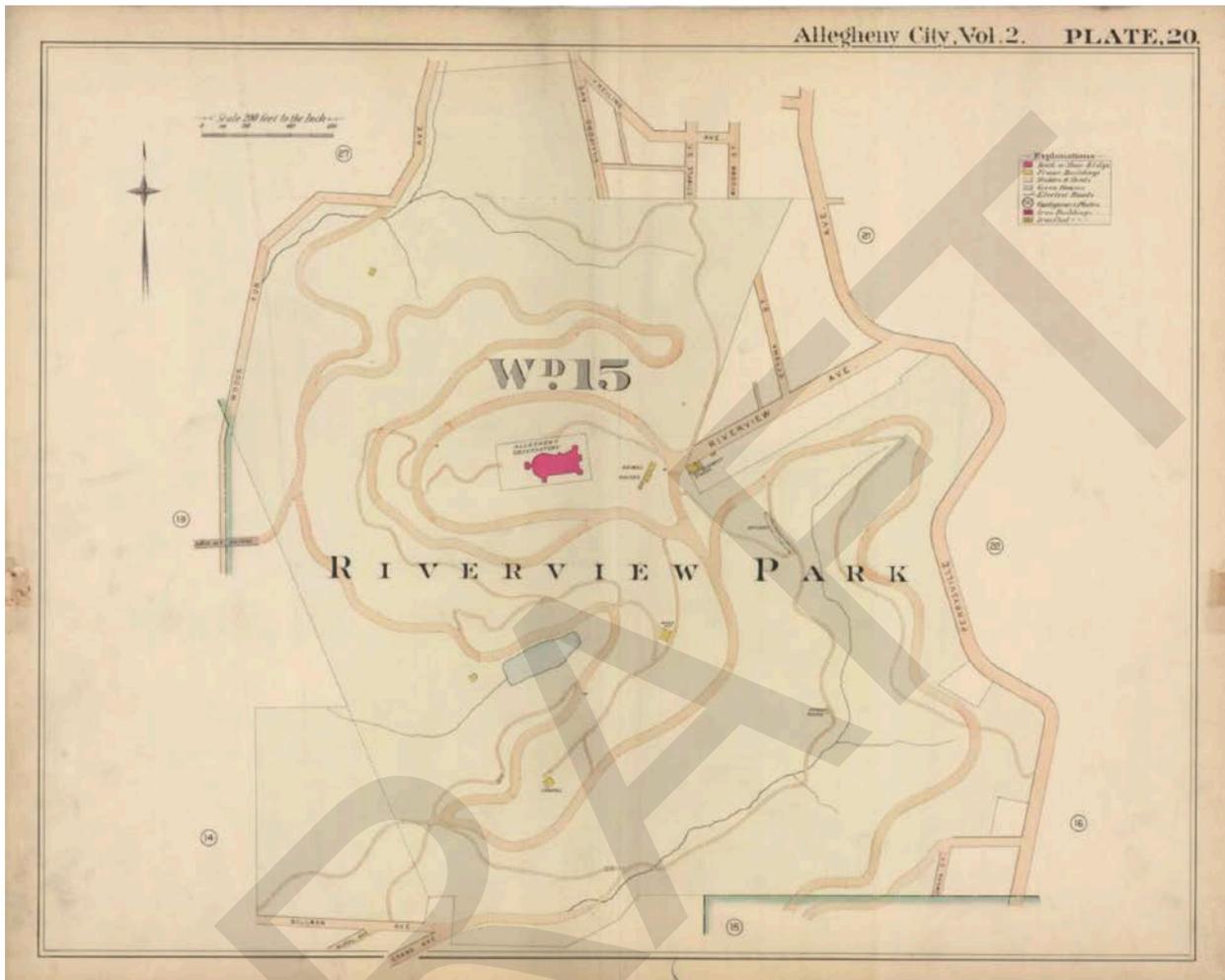
This prosperity reversed after World War II. Pittsburgh's long post-war industrial decline, combined with broad national trends in retail, transportation, and residential preference, caused a dramatic shift in population to the suburbs or to other metropolitan areas with more promising economic forecasts. Businesses in the North Side and throughout the city closed as their customers moved away, and the City suffered steep losses of tax revenue. City officials identified the North Side's old buildings, outdated infrastructure, excessive density, and inefficient traffic patterns as "blight" which needed to be eradicated and remedied. In the early 1960s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh authorized a sweeping urban renewal plan for the heart of the former Allegheny City. 518 buildings were demolished and replaced by offices, apartment buildings, and a shopping mall called Allegheny Center, and a ring road was constructed to divert traffic away from what had been the North Side's historic central shopping district. The project was unsuccessful, and the North Side declined further. The urban renewal project did not extend as far north as the neighborhoods surrounding Riverview Park, but all of the North Side suffered from the destruction of its historic civic and commercial center.

One positive consequence of the North Side's urban renewal was the rise of a counter-movement focused on historic preservation and the establishment of historic districts. Over subsequent decades, this has grown into a strong movement to preserve and appreciate the historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes that remain on the North Side.

#### 1894-1906: Establishment and Early Development of Riverview Park

Riverview Park was established in 1894 when the City of Allegheny, having raised \$110,000 by popular subscription, purchased 202 acres of farmland from the heirs of Samuel Watson. Allegheny Mayor William M. Kennedy led the drive to purchase land for a large public park. By all

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accounts, Kennedy was motivated by his city's rivalry with Pittsburgh, which had established Highland and Schenley parks five years before in 1889.



**Figure 1.** Riverview Park ca. 1901. Hopkins, G. M. *Real Estate Plat Book of Allegheny, Vol. 2.* Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Company, 1902

The Watson farm was located west of Woods Run Avenue in a part of upper Allegheny known as the Douglas District. Perrysville Avenue, with its streetcar line, formed the property's eastern boundary and assured that the park, though in the remotest northern section of the city, would be easily accessible to Allegheny's citizens. Descriptions of the Watson property recount that most of the farm was used for raising and grazing dairy cattle, so it is likely that most of it consisted of pasture.<sup>1</sup> City property maps show only a few small, frame buildings on that land in 1890. One of these was Watson's Cabin, built ca. 1800 by a French charcoal peddler. When Samuel Watson

<sup>1</sup> Barry Hannegan, "Historical Summary: Riverview Park," in "Pittsburgh's Regional Parks Master Plan" (Prepared by LaQuatra Bonci, et. al., for City of Pittsburgh & Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, 2002), 80.

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acquired the land, he maintained the cabin and rented it to dairy farmers. With the establishment of Riverview Park in 1894, the cabin was converted to a picnic pavilion (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Watson's cabin, undated (Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy)



**Figure 3.** Chapel Shelter, 1937 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)

The city dedicated the former Watson farm as Riverview Park on July 4, 1894, only a few days after its acquisition on June 30. Thomas M. Marshall, a neighboring landowner who had contributed to the park fund, presented the deed for the property to Mayor Kennedy before an audience of 25,000.

Despite this level of interest, early park development proceeded in an ad hoc fashion due to lack of public funds. The first city budget appropriation for Riverview Park was \$5000 in 1896.<sup>2</sup> Park roads were laid out by Allegheny City engineer Charles Ehlers. Extensive tree planting is not recorded until the early 20th century, and early views of the park show an open, pastoral landscape consistent with the understanding of the land's previous use.

The earliest park shelters, like Watson's Cabin, were adapted from structures originally built for other purposes. One, a small frame chapel, was moved to the ridge near the park's highest point from its original site at Riverview and Perrysville avenues, where it had been constructed ca. 1890 as the Watson Presbyterian Church. It appears to have been relocated and repurposed as a park shelter soon after Riverview Park opened. (Figure 3)

Another shelter, known as Log Cabin No. 1, was a facsimile of the first Marshall and Kennedy Flouring Mill built of telephone poles for the Pittsburgh Exposition of 1895. When the Exposition closed, the Marshall and Kennedy Company presented the building to the City of Allegheny for Riverview Park. The City installed it in a valley south of Observatory Hill near the present Centennial Pavilion. Nearby in this natural bowl were baseball and lawn tennis fields. These

<sup>2</sup> "Riverview Park Zoo," [full citation needed], 5.

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were flooded for ice skating in winter, and Log Cabin No. 1 was used as a warming shelter.<sup>3</sup>  
(Watson's Cabin was then known as Log Cabin No. 2. Log Cabin No. 1 was removed at an unknown date after the construction of the Centennial Pavilion ca. 1996.)

In 1895, city officials expanded the park by 12 acres along Marshall Road, enabling an entrance off of Perrysville Avenue at the southeast of the park. To the west at Grand Avenue, another four acres purchased from the Highwood Cemetery Company in 1896 allowed an entrance to be created leading into the Kilbuck valley. Here, Kilbuck Road provided park access to immigrant worker families residing in the neighborhoods to the park's south. Near this entrance, the Kilbuck Hollow Pavilion was the first purpose-built park shelter in Riverview Park. It was constructed in the location of the present Valley Refuge Shelter in 1904. A substantial structure with two two-



**Figure 4.** Undated postcard of Riverview Zoo in its second location (Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy)

story, hipped-roof brick wings joined by an open pavilion, it also contained cabins and a chapel. The Riverview Zoo, "a very presentable small zoo," opened in 1896 with a small collection of animals formerly kept by a private citizen, August Overbeck, at his personal property in Spring Hill.<sup>4</sup> Overbeck's animals were native species including elk, raccoons, wild cats, foxes, rabbits, and various birds. The zoo's original location was at the foot of Observatory Hill (as depicted on the 1902 property atlas in Figure 1), but in the first decade of the 20th century, the animal enclosures were moved downhill to a terraced hillside location off the Overlook Trail and a variety of large and exotic animals and reptiles were added, including a lioness cub, bears, wolves, zebras, and snakes. Here the zoo was combined with an aviary which housed owls, parrots, bald eagles, storks, and 12 kinds of pheasants, along with smaller birds such as finches, which were trained to sing on cue.<sup>5</sup> (Figure 4)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Stewart, "Historical Data: Pittsburgh Public Parks" (Pittsburgh: Greater Pittsburgh Parks Association, 1943), 29; "Short History of Riverview Park."

<sup>5</sup> "Riverview Park Zoo," 51.

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1907-1938: Early 20th Century Improvements in the Pittsburgh Park System

Along with Allegheny Commons, Riverview Park became part of the Pittsburgh park system when Allegheny was annexed to Pittsburgh in 1907. To avoid maintaining two zoos, Pittsburgh city officials moved the animals from the Riverview Zoo to the Highland Park Zoo between

1908 and 1910. By 1911, the Riverview Zoo had been emptied and closed.



**Figure 5.** Undated (before 1940) view of Allegheny Observatory with original staircase (Allegheny Observatory Records)

The Allegheny Observatory (NHL 1988) was constructed on a hilltop parcel owned separately from, but surrounded by, Riverview Park between 1910-1912 (Figure 5). The parcel was reserved for the observatory by the City of Allegheny at the time of the park's dedication, but construction of the building was delayed while funds were being raised.<sup>6</sup> Although not technically on park land, the observatory immediately

became the park's most visible and distinctive landmark. It is the successor to the original Allegheny Observatory, established by William Shaw in 1860 and directed by William Pierpont Langley, later Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and a pioneer of early flight. In 1894, the observatory's original building near Perrysville Avenue in Perry South was deemed obsolete, and John Brashear, a millworker turned lensmaker and astronomer, became chairman of a committee to build a new observatory. Brashear's efforts secured the site in then-new Riverview Park. The architect for the new observatory was Thorsten Billquist, and the domed, Classical Revival style building was completed in 1912. Curiously, the observatory appears on the Hopkins property atlas of Allegheny in 1902 (Figure 1). Perhaps its construction was expected imminently.

In 1911, over 4000 trees were planted in Riverview Park, and city records indicate that "engineers were at work defining the park lines, made necessary by poor descriptions of the park in deeds." In 1913, 3000 locust trees were planted.<sup>7</sup>

The City of Pittsburgh increased the number of attractions in the park with several building projects beginning in 1913. In this year, Riverview Park received one of three carousels commissioned by the City for its parks (the others were installed in Schenley and West View parks; none survives). A frame carousel building was designed by Thomas Scott, who worked on a number of structures for the Pittsburgh parks in the 1910s. Scott also designed the red-brick, Craftsman

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>7</sup> Annual Reports of Bureau of Parks (City of Pittsburgh: 1911, 1913)

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Style picnic shelter known as the Bear Pit, presumably because it reused stones from the foundation of the Riverview Zoo's bear enclosure, in 1913 (Figure 6). Another, stone park shelter was constructed the same year in the northern sector of the park known as the Wissahickon Valley.<sup>8</sup> Nearby was a picnic area with benches, tables, swings, and a spring house. Because this shelter was inaccessible to visitors via streetcar, in 1924 it was converted into the Wissahickon Nature Museum (Figure 7). A forerunner of the nature education facilities and programs that would later be headquartered in Frick Park, here naturalists led learning programs, cared for live mammal, bird, and reptile exhibits, and tended sick and injured park wildlife with the help of volunteers.



**Figure 6.** Bear Pit Shelter, 1913 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)



**Figure 7.** Wissahickon Nature Museum, 1937 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)

An archery range was created in a small meadow north of the nature museum ca. 1940.<sup>9</sup> Another early recreational use of Riverview Park was horseback riding. By 1915, city reports indicate that there were 35 miles of bridle paths “that needed regular cleaning, scraping, smoothing, and leveling.”<sup>10</sup> The reports also mention the repair of the roofs of the “old park stables,” but

<sup>8</sup> Stewart recounts that the name derives from a city worker's comparison of the area to Wissahickon Park in Philadelphia (Stewart, 30).

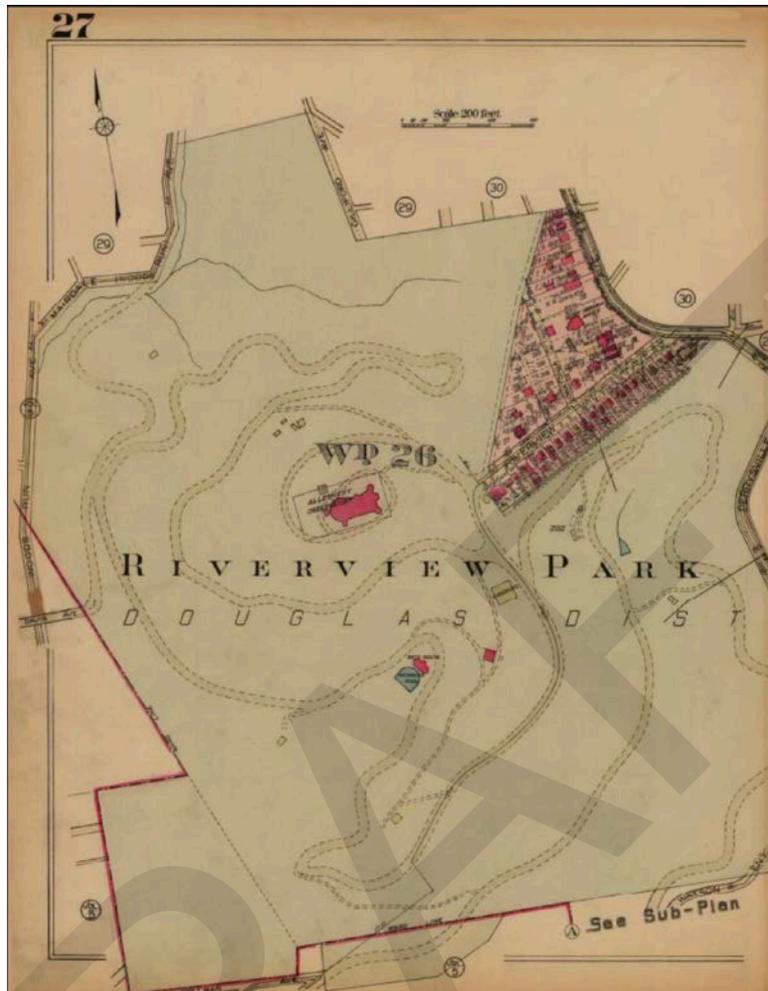
<sup>9</sup> Illustrated in Stewart, 31, and described as “the new archery range which has developed into a very popular sport in the park” (Stewart, 29).

<sup>10</sup> Annual Report of Bureau of Parks (City of Pittsburgh: 1915)

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**Figure 8.** Riverview Park ca. 1923. Hopkins, G. M. *Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh*. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Company, 1924

their location is not known. In later years, horses were stabled and rented from the private Riverview Valley Stables located just outside the park on Grand Avenue. This facility was run by the Himmelstein family, whose members also helped lay out and construct the park's equestrian trails. The site is now used to stable the horses of the Pittsburgh Police. Horses were also historically kept and ridden in the park by African American families who lived in "the Hollows," a small neighborhood north of Riverview Park and west of Mairdale Street.

A frame barn located north and downhill of the observatory site first appears on the Hopkins map of 1924 (Figure 8) and can be seen in photographs of the chapel ridge from the early 20th century. Its presence is recalled in the name of the Old Barn Trail. Also referred to as the "Observatory garage," this structure housed work horses, and later tractors and other power equipment used in maintaining the park.<sup>11</sup> It was demolished after 1967.

<sup>11</sup> David D. Erskine, "A City Boy Grows Up in the Country: Riverview Park, My Back Yard (1950-1967)." Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy: <https://www.pittsburghparks.org/blog/2012/06/22/a-city-boy-grows-up-in-the-country-riverview-park-my-back-yard-1950-1967/>. Retrieved Jan. 15, 2020.

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In the early decades of the 20th century, swimming became an increasingly popular sport and leisure activity. In response, the City constructed swimming pools in parks as a safer, more sanitary alternative to the natural ponds that attracted bathers. Riverview Park's first swimming pool and pool house were located in the hollow currently occupied by Centennial Pavilion. Their date of construction is uncertain. According to a history of Pittsburgh parks prepared in 1943, these facilities date to 1935.<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with the decade of construction of pools in Pittsburgh's other parks. However, the distinctively lunette-shaped pool and pool house (Figure 9) appear on a Hopkins property atlas of 1924, and the Riverview Park Pool is included in a list of Pittsburgh pools published by the Pittsburgh Bureau of Recreation in that same year.<sup>13</sup>

In 1920 and 1930, the City purchased several private lots adjacent to the park's edges, expanding it to its existing boundaries and acreage.



**Figure 9.** Riverview Pool and pool house in original location, 1937 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)

In 1938, Riverview Park's carousel machinery became too old to be serviced, and the carousel closed permanently. The building remained for some years after the carousel was removed, converted to an activities shelter with space for large gatherings and family reunions. Also demolished in 1938 was the Kilbuck Hollow Shelter. This would soon be replaced with a new shelter characteristic of a new era in Pittsburgh park planning and design. (Figure 10)

### 1939-1942: WPA Improvements

Although short, the period from 1939-1942 was a fruitful period of Riverview Park's development. The availability of labor and money through federal economic recovery programs enabled Pittsburgh Parks Superintendent Ralph Griswold to make a number of significant, permanent park improvements. Griswold served as superintendent of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Parks from

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, 30.

<sup>13</sup> "Report of the Bureau of Recreation. Recording the Work of the Years 1922 and 1923." City of Pittsburgh: 1924

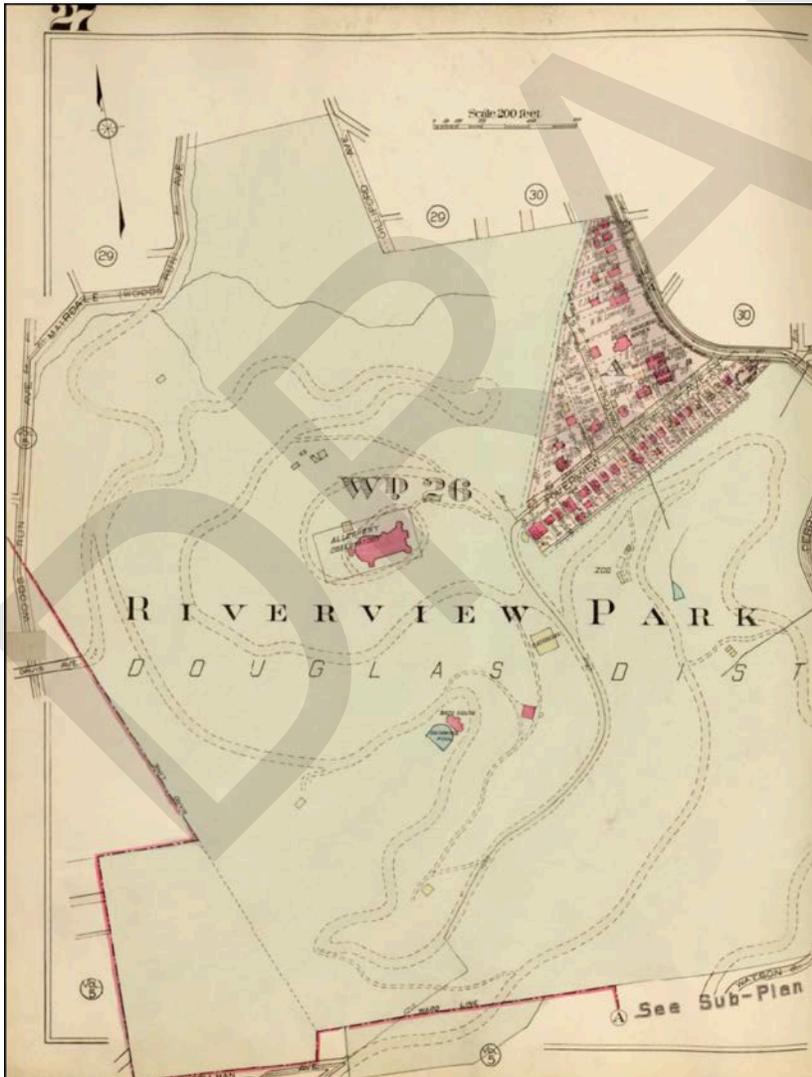
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**Figure 10.** Undated (before 1938) aerial view of Observatory Hill showing Old Barn (lower left), Carousel Shelter (right-center above observatory dome), and Kilbuck Pavilion (in distance, upper right-center) (Pittsburgh Department of Public Works)



**Figure 11.** Riverview Park ca. 1938. Hopkins, G. M. *Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh*. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Company, 1939

1934-1945. His contributions to Riverview Park during the brief period he had access to WPA

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funds created an elegant ensemble to mark and unify the park's main entrance at Riverview Avenue (Figures 12-13) and touch almost every area of the park (see below). In 1942, Griswold's access to WPA funding ended and Pittsburgh's city parks were once again maintained out of the



**Figure 12.** Riverview Avenue entrance under construction, 1940 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)



**Figure 13.** Riverview Avenue entrance completed, 1941 (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection)

City's Public Works reserve, closing this prolific era of park improvement.

#### 1943-Present: Decline and Preservation

After the end of WPA funding, the straitened circumstances of war allowed for minimal expenditures in Riverview Park. Post-World War II, a different set of issues affected Riverview and

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other urban parks. Pittsburgh's economic downturn and population loss meant decreased city tax revenues, and correspondingly the use, maintenance, and stewardship of Riverview and other city parks all declined. At the same time, natural erosion and invasive species changed the landscape in ways that would never entirely be reversed.

Some historic park resources were lost or compromised during this period. The archery range was abandoned at an unknown date. The Department of Public Works site on lower Kilbuck Road, just beyond the Grand Avenue entrance to the park, appears to have been present since the 1950s. An arsonist set fire to the Wissahickon Nature Museum in 1967, reducing it to a pile of rubble in the woods. Pressed into service as a new nature museum, the Bear Pit shelter was enclosed in 1970. Later, the museum moved out in a consolidation with the nature education facilities in Frick Park, and the Bear Pit was converted to storage for the Department of Public Works. The former carousel building was demolished in the 1950s, and a new Activities Building was constructed on the site in 1961. The original pool in the valley below the observatory was replaced with the current pool and pool house atop the chapel ridge in 1984. In the valley, Log Cabin No. 1 disappeared and the gazebo-like Centennial Pavilion was constructed in the mid-1990s. The fountain basin at the Observatory Hill entrance complex was converted to a planting bed. Watson's Cabin and the rest room building in Watson's Grove burned in 2005, though their masonry shells still stand. The Davis Avenue Bridge was closed to vehicles in 2001 and demolished in 2009, truncating the entrance to the park from Brighton Heights across the Woods Run ravine to the west.

In recent years, preservation has also made its mark on the park. The Chapel Shelter and its surrounding landscape were sensitively rehabilitated in 2008 as a pilot implementation project of the Pittsburgh Regional Parks Master Plan, led by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and the park office building was restored as a park ranger office in 2015.

Significance:

Riverview Park is recommended eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development and Criterion C for Architecture and Landscape Architecture. Its period of significance for Criterion A is 1894–1942. 1894 is the year Riverview Park was established and 1942 marks the end of the last period of major park planning, which was conducted with WPA funds during the New Deal by Superintendent of Pittsburgh Parks Ralph Griswold. This period of intensive WPA-funded activity is bracketed by the years 1938-1942, defining the period of significance for Criterion C.

*Community Planning and Development:* Riverview Park's development tells the story of park planning from aspiration to realization, across two city administrations and the professions of engineering and landscape architecture.

Allegheny City was a pioneer of urban park planning west of the Allegheny Mountains. By the mid-19th century, the common grazing land (the Commons) that surrounded the original town was no longer needed for that purpose. The Commons was cross-cut by a railroad and had a state penitentiary built on it. The parts which remained undeveloped were degraded and used largely as a dumping ground. Citizens demanded its improvement. In 1867, the City of Allegheny authorized the conversion of the Commons into a public park, established a Park Commission headed by City Engineer Charles Davis, and hired the New York firm of Mitchell and Grant to

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produce a landscape design. Allegheny was likely inspired by the cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore, all of which had recently created professionally-designed public parks in the mid-19th century; Boston's was also on public land formerly designated as a grazing commons. The result was Allegheny Commons Park, the first major urban park west of the Allegheny mountains. Allegheny Commons Park was a passive, picturesque park full of ornamental flower beds, formal promenades, and memorial sculpture. Today, Allegheny Commons Park (NRHP 2013) is Pittsburgh's oldest park and continues to display a Victorian ideal of a pastoral, picturesque landscape.

Across the river, the City of Pittsburgh was slower to adopt public parks planning. Pittsburgh had only one small downtown park until 1889. In this year, Public Works Director Edward Manning Bigelow secured two large tracts in the city's east end and commenced the design and development of Highland and Schenley parks. At several hundred acres each and laid out over steep hills and ravines, these parks could not be treated as formal, ornamental landscapes, although Bigelow gave Highland Park a formal entrance plaza. Instead, Highland and Schenley were designed as naturalistic woodlands dotted with pastoral meadows and ornamental lakes, to be enjoyed from carriage drives or walking trails, and graced with wholesome amusements such as carousels, zoos, and conservatories. Later, when the early 20th century Playground Movement brought an emphasis on healthful outdoor sport, both parks added swimming pools, boat houses, ball fields, and other athletic and recreational facilities.

As Allegheny—like Pittsburgh—expanded to accommodate rapid growth and urbanization in the 1890s, its government and citizens wished to provide a public park to rival Pittsburgh's new Highland and Schenley parks in scale and amenities. Allegheny Mayor William M. Kennedy, an amateur botanist, backed the efforts of a citizens' committee to raise funds to purchase the Samuel Watson Farm for the creation of Allegheny's second park, Riverview Park.

Dedicated five years after Pittsburgh's Highland and Schenley parks, Riverview seems to have been inspired by their models. In all three instances, city park planners seized the opportunity to acquire large tracts of land in areas that were far from the city centers, but rapidly developing into urban neighborhoods. The size and rugged terrain of all of the tracts called for not only landscape design, but civil engineering solutions to render them attractive and useful to visitors with navigable systems of roads, trails, water features, and buildable sites for attractions. For the same reasons, all received less formal, more naturalistic landscape treatments than had been applied to Allegheny Commons. As all of these parks were accessible by streetcar, the disembarkation points became natural foci for more elaborate landscape compositions befitting park entrances.

Other than the general ambition to develop a park along these lines, no early plans for Riverview Park are documented. The city's approach appears to have been to raise the money to buy the land and to develop it as it was able. The design of its circulation was tasked to city engineers; its early features were ad hoc. This is not to say there was no planning for Riverview Park, but that it proceeded as resources were available using the expertise that the city already had on its staff.

Riverview's development proceeded apace with park planning as a profession. In the 1890s, though many cities had begun to allocate land for parks, few had established parks departments or hired landscape architects or dedicated parks staff. Parks administration and development fell under most cities' Public Works departments. The profession of landscape architecture itself was

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still fairly new. In the 1860s, Allegheny had been a leader in hiring landscape architects to plan and design Allegheny Commons Park, but a generation later, neither the institutional capacity nor, more likely, the funds were in place. The assignment of Riverview Park's development to Allegheny's Public Works staff was, in fact, more typical of park planning of this era. Pittsburgh's early parks were developed in the same way; the difference was that Pittsburgh had a parks crusader and self-taught parks planner, Edward Manning Bigelow, at the helm of its Department of Public Works.

Bigelow was gone by 1907, when Allegheny was annexed to Pittsburgh and its parks fell under Pittsburgh's governmental umbrella. But he had left some administrative structure and expertise in place. In 1902, the city had set up a Bureau of Parks within its Department of Public Works, a predecessor to the separate city parks agency which would come later. George Burke served as Superintendent of Pittsburgh Parks from 1903 to 1926, a "difficult period of growth"<sup>14</sup> for the parks agency during which the City acquired many new neighborhood parks, both through Allegheny's annexation and through new purchase and dedication, and made substantial improvements to them and to existing parks. This period of growth may have been challenging, but it ushered in a more professional approach to the planning of individual parks and an urban park system.

This is evident in the improvements to Riverview Park during this period: two park shelters of high material and architectural quality; acquisition of property to strategically increase park boundaries; consolidation of the zoo to Highland Park; one of three carousels, distributed geographically among the city's parks; and ongoing work on planting, pruning, and the construction of walkways, drives, sewer and drainage systems, and other infrastructure. Park planning for Pittsburgh's three major parks—Schenley, Highland, and Riverview—during this period reflected the City Beautiful ideal of providing opportunities for wholesome outdoor recreation, amusement, and education in a morally uplifting, physically healthful natural setting. The establishment of facilities such as ball fields, tennis courts, bridle paths, a swimming pool and an archery range in Riverview Park during the early 20th century demonstrated the city's commitment to developing it as a country club of the people, another contemporary ideal that guided planning for large urban parks nationwide. The country club model of park planning reflected the perspective of educated, professional, middle- and upper-class city officials that parks should be a "civilizing influence" on immigrants, less-educated workers, and others outside of their elite class.

If Riverview Park's earliest features—such as Watson's Cabin and the Chapel Shelter—link Riverview Park with specificity to the community in which it is located, those which came later marked it as part of the interrelated parks of the Pittsburgh system. In particular, the architectural designs of Thomas Scott brought strong architectural character to Riverview and other Pittsburgh parks (the Rhododendron Shelter in Highland Park and Veterans' Pavilion in Schenley Park are other examples of his work), and the city's provision of carousels to three parks in geographically-distributed locations illustrated its planning for its parks as a system. Yet, though the parks were planned to have much in common so that outdoor amenities were available in each sector of the city, the City also maintained unique features in each. Closing the Riverview Park zoo to consolidate this function in Highland Park was both efficient from an administrative perspective

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart, iii.

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and good for the distinctive identities of both parks. Riverview Park, in turn, was the only one of Pittsburgh's parks which included planning for equestrian facilities.

The WPA-funded period of Ralph Griswold's tenure as Superintendent of Parks was the most intensive era of planning for Riverview Park. The Griswold era epitomized the professionalization of park planning in Pittsburgh. In many ways, the civic idealism of Griswold's New Deal era echoed that of the earlier City Beautiful: parks were seen as essential public works. During the Great Depression, the economic relief policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt emphasized the improvement of public infrastructure, making funds and labor available. Griswold linked national goals to strengthen public infrastructure to local efforts to improve and sustain the previous century's investment in Pittsburgh's parks. From 1938 to 1942, he planned and executed distinctive and durable improvements for Riverview Park which would enhance and refine its character.

*Architecture and Landscape Architecture:* Riverview Park's WPA-funded buildings, structures, and ensembles mark it as part of a system of parks linked by a common design vocabulary, one which was emerging locally in Pittsburgh as well as nationally across parks being planned and designed at the municipal, state, and federal levels. In a style becoming known as WPA Rustic, these were designed in Riverview Park by Ralph Esty Griswold (1894-1981), an accomplished landscape architect who served as superintendent of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Parks from 1934-1945. Griswold was the first professional landscape architect hired by the city as an agency director and the first landscape architect to be associated with Riverview Park, which had previously been the domain of city engineers. Griswold had studied landscape architecture at Cornell and, under Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., for three years in Rome. He moved to Pittsburgh to establish his own private landscape architecture practice in 1927.

In his tenure in public service, Griswold was a strong advocate for the city park system—which by this time included the elegant Victorian Allegheny Commons Park; three very large parks combining wilderness, passive parkland, and recreational amenities (Highland, Schenley, and Riverview); newly-opened Frick Park; and numerous neighborhood parks and playgrounds—and energetically pursued federal funds to improve them in both functional and aesthetic ways.

During the brief period 1938-1942, Riverview Park gained a suite of features that provided internal continuity throughout the park and, externally, related it to the other parks in Pittsburgh's system that also received Griswold-designed, WPA-funded walls, stairs, shelters, and landscapes. These show the influence of the WPA Rustic style, a style of design promoted for parks by the National Park Service and characterized by the use of local materials, low silhouettes, and minimal demarcation between built and natural features.

The most significant concentration of these in Riverview Park is found at the park's main entrance opposite Riverview Avenue. Here Griswold designed an ensemble of stonework features which are suitably rustic to a park in character, yet finely-detailed. Their construction of quarry-faced, random-coursed ashlar was typical of the WPA Rustic style. The choice of material and construction linked these modern-era features with the Riverview Park's particular history of naturalistic landscape design while adhering to a national movement to furnish parks with structures that fit harmoniously amid their natural beauty.

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At the foot of Observatory Hill, Griswold replaced a single run of stone steps with a curved double staircase embracing a raised stone trough of water, fed by small spouts issuing from the low retaining wall behind it. This provided an alternative focal point to the observatory at the main entrance to the park, one that was on axis with the concurrently-designed Riverview Avenue median and gate piers. Though asymmetrical with regard to the observatory, the double staircase gives the impression of collecting visitors from disparate parts of the park and funneling them to the curving path that ascends the hilltop. The terrace atop this feature provides visitors with another vantage point from which to view the observatory or the park.

Across the street, Griswold designed a planted median for Riverview Avenue which, though not part of the park, relates visually and conceptually to the park landscape ahead. At the terminus of Riverview Avenue, he installed stone piers flanking the roadway and in the median to mark the park entrance and provide mooring for hewn timber gates (now gone) that once closed the park at night. To the left, the median continues along the park drive to the Chapel Ridge. To the right, linked by a stone retaining wall with an integral drinking fountain, Griswold designed an entry garden and a small stone building to serve as a park office. Opposite Riverview Avenue, another stone retaining wall encloses a small terrace with integral stone benches at the upper landing of stairs leading down to the Overlook Trail. An architectural inventory conducted in 1980 noted of these features, "Their flowing lines seem almost baroque."<sup>15</sup> Begun in 1939, this ensemble was completed in 1941 and is intact today. Though the fountain no longer functions and its basin is now used as a planter, the park office and the entry garden around it have been handsomely restored as the Riverview Visitors' Center.

Other contributing features provided with WPA funds secured by Griswold are the Valley Refuge Shelter, constructed on the former site of the Kilbuck Hollow Pavilion by the National Youth Association in 1940; Locust Grove Shelter (1940); two stone bus (originally trolley) shelters, also with integral walls and benches, at trailheads on Perrysville Avenue; and a planting plan and rest room building to support the use of Watson's Cabin as an overnight camp site in the park. "All of these structures, including the entrance complex, exhibit the best design and construction qualities associated with WPA projects."<sup>16</sup> The low-slung Valley Refuge Shelter combines the solidity of stone walls with the openness of a pavilion supported by the contrasting material of heavy timber posts, brackets, and beams. Integral stairs and terraces extend the structure into the landscape, encouraging social events to spill out from under the shelter's gabled roof. The Locust Grove Shelter is open and airy but anchored to the hillside meadow in which it stands by stone walls and piers. The Perrysville Avenue bus shelters are elegant in their small simplicity. Their integral wing walls, incorporating benches for passengers and gate piers for trailheads, provide gracious points of transition from city street to park landscape in a material native to that landscape. And the rest room building at Watson's Grove complemented the cabin in scale and materials. Like Griswold's other designs, even this small structure is extended into the landscape by integral stone walls and steps.

Griswold's WPA-funded improvements to Riverview Park shaped, organized, and enhanced its landscape. Along with the park office near the Riverview Drive entrance, Griswold designed an

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<sup>15</sup> Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, "Riverview Park Entrance" (Historic Resource Survey Form produced for Allegheny County Historic Sites Survey: 1980)

<sup>16</sup> Barry Hannegan, "Historical Summary: Riverview Park," Pittsburgh Regional Parks Master Plan Stage Two Report (Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, 1999), np.

Name of Property Riverview Park

County and State

Allegheny, PA

entry garden. These small-scale features near the park entrance contrast with the remote visage of the majestic, domed observatory on the hilltop, far away across the sloping lawn. And at Watson's Cabin, Griswold provided a planting plan for the conversion of the site into an overnight campground for families and small groups. This landscape plan, drawn by Griswold's office in 1941, shows Norway maples, honey locusts, sycamore maple, red maple, and paved paths into the site. Sensitive to the histories of the parks he inherited, Griswold incorporated the humble but historic cabin into his contemporary program for camping in Riverview Park. The Watson's Cabin landscape, shaded but not wooded, remains largely intact today around the ruins of the cabin and restroom structure.

*Comparisons.* Riverview's peer parks in the City of Pittsburgh, Highland and Schenley parks, are its closest and most obvious comparisons. The three parks are different in their particulars, but have broad similarities as a result of sharing the same context. All were developed in the late 19th century in response to the nationwide movement by cities to provide extensive public parklands to bring natural beauty, health, and moral uplift to their citizens. Cities who could hire the father of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, himself to design their parks did so; others, including Pittsburgh and Allegheny, imitated Olmsted's romantic, picturesque approach to landscape design in their parks. Highland, Schenley, and Riverview parks each provided facilities for wholesome entertainment and recreation in settings designed to look like unspoiled nature itself. In fact, all three of these parklands were extensively graded, designed, and planted, at first by city engineers and public works directors who assumed city park development among their responsibilities. In the 1930s and early 1940s, landscape architect and Pittsburgh Parks Superintendent Ralph Griswold added significant features to all three parks, funded by the WPA.

Pittsburgh's Highland and Schenley parks preceded Riverview Park by five years and their designs, conceptualized by Public Works director and parks booster Edward Manning Bigelow, served as Riverview's template. The early involvement of city engineers resulted in the construction of winding, picturesque park drives connecting the various use areas in these three large parklands. Yet none of these parks could be a copy of any other. The rugged topography of Pittsburgh and Allegheny provided unique challenges in each of the three park locations, along with opportunities to showcase natural views and built elements, such as Highland Park's reservoir and Riverview Park's observatory. As recreational features were added to and lost from each of the parks over the decades, there was some duplication: for example, swimming pools were built in Highland, Schenley, and Riverview parks in the 1920s-30s, and Schenley and Riverview received two of the three carousels the City placed in parks in 1913. Riverview and Highland park's duplication of zoos ended in 1910 when the City chose to consolidate this attraction in Highland Park. Highland and Schenley parks both had small lakes with boathouses, and all of the parks contained picnic shelters. Other uses marked each park as unique: Highland Park's reservoir walk, Schenley's public conservatory and golf course, and Riverview's bridle paths and archery range.

Adaptation to local circumstances also resulted in unique entrance experiences at each of these three parks. Highland, Schenley, and Riverview parks were all located at city outskirts where large tracts of rural land could still be acquired in the 1880s and '90s. Early on, streetcar lines provided access from lower-, working-, and middle-class neighborhoods and dictated the locations of designed entrance points. At Highland Park, beginning in 1896, this was the Highland

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entrance plaza with its formal flower gardens, fountain, and staircase up to the reservoir. But Bigelow began to envision a parkway system to link his park creations in the very early 1900s, and later designs for major park entrances accordingly spoke to the automobile. Schenley Park's formal entrance was designed in the 1920s on the site of a filled ravine and buried bridge which had originally carried visitors from Forbes Avenue past the Carnegie Institute into the park. Known as Schenley Plaza, it incorporated broad swaths of paving for cars to drive and park. (It eventually became all parking lot, and received a modern redesign as parkland in the early 2000s.)

Riverview Park, being originally a part of the separate city of Allegheny, was not part of Bigelow's parkway plan. Riverview waited until the late 1930s for grace notes to its main entrance. At Riverview Avenue, Ralph Griswold's design welcomed both automobiles and pedestrians with an elegant transition from neighborhood street to park drive and footpaths while setting off what was, by this time, Riverview Park's most prominent feature: the Allegheny Observatory. Griswold also showed cognizance of Riverview Park's original intention to be accessible by streetcar, enhancing stops at trailheads along Perrysville Avenue with handsome stone shelters, walls, benches, and gate piers.

Griswold also made contributions to Highland and Schenley parks (as well as other parks in Pittsburgh's system) in the 1930s and early 1940s. These have a recognizable character, strongly influenced by the WPA Rustic Style, that illustrates a comprehensive yet individualized approach to park improvement during the Griswold administration. In Highland Park, Griswold revised the layout of planting beds and paths at the park's formal Highland entrance; added a double flight of stone steps at the approach to one of the park's two reservoirs; and designed a small plaza at the north end of Negley Avenue including a stepped stone plinth, retaining walls, stairs, and walks. These features remain intact and important to the landscape of Highland Park. Most of Griswold's designs for Schenley Park, including an amphitheater and new swimming pool, remained on paper. Two that still exist in some form are a perennial garden on the slope north of Phipps Conservatory, which has been altered from his original design, and an azalea garden across Schenley Drive from the Conservatory. This has all but disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Barry Hannegan, "Historical Summary: Schenley Park," Pittsburgh Regional Parks Master Plan Stage Two Report (Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, 1999), np.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 250

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitode 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: 17 | Easting: 582199 | Northing: 4482695 |
| 2. Zone: 17 | Easting: 583868 | Northing: 4482743 |
| 3. Zone: 17 | Easting: 583875 | Northing: 4480762 |
| 4. Zone: 17 | Easting: 582232 | Northing: 4480762 |

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

Riverview Park consists of City of Pittsburgh tax parcel 76-D-1-02, available from the Office of Property Assessments, 542 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. The boundary is shown on the enclosed map.

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

The boundaries correspond to the historic boundaries of Riverview Park during the period of significance.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

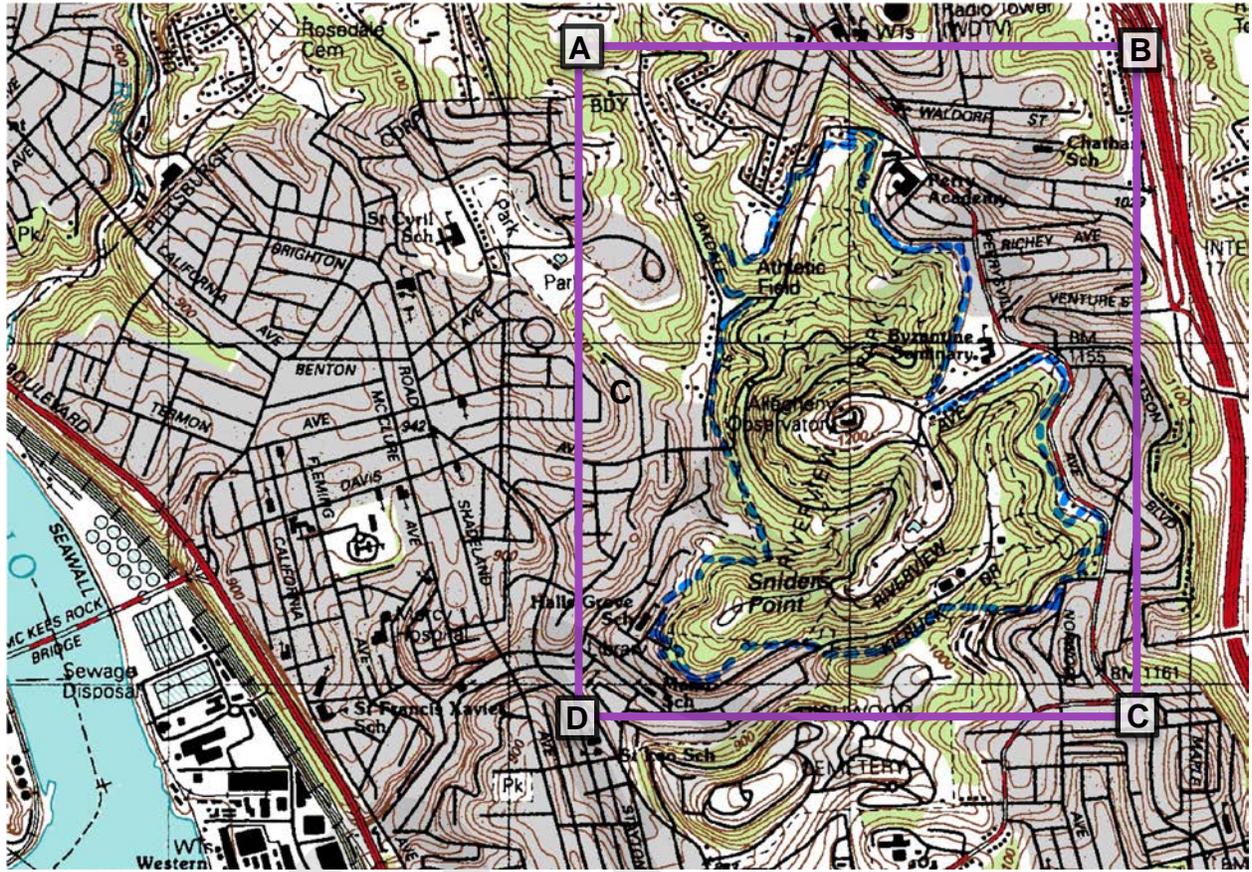
name/title: Angelique Bamberg  
organization: Clio Consulting  
street & number: \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town: Pittsburgh state: PA zip code: 15206  
e-mail clioconsulting@me.com  
telephone: 412-956-5517  
date: June 1, 2020

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**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.)



Excerpt: USGS Pittsburgh West

UTM References

----- Riverview Park  
National Register  
boundary

- A 17/582199/4482695
- B 17/583868/4482743
- C 17/583875/4480762
- D 17/582232/4480762

# RIVERVIEW PARK



----- Riverview Park National Register boundary

## 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: Riverview Park  
City or Vicinity: Pittsburgh  
County: Allegheny  
State: PA  
Photographer: Angelique Bamberg  
Date Photographed: Nov. 17-26, 2019

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

Photo 1 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0001)  
Riverview Drive, park interior, view to W

Photo 2 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0002)  
Riverview Entrance and Observatory Hill from Riverview Avenue, view to SW

Photo 3 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0003)  
Riverview Drive, view west toward Chapel ridge from Riverview entrance, view to S

Photo 4 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0004)  
Allegheny Observatory, view to W

Photo 5 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0005)  
Double staircase and former fountain basin at Riverview entrance, view to SW

Photo 6 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0006)  
Terrace atop staircase to Observatory Hill at Riverview entrance, view to SE

Photo 7 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0007)  
Terraced tennis courts behind Allegheny Observatory, view to W

Photo 8 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0008)  
Off-leash exercise area and view over Ohio River behind observatory, view to W

Photo 9 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0009)  
Riverview Park Visitors' Center ensemble, view to NW

Photo 10 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0010)  
Riverview Park Visitors' Center, view to N

Photo 11 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0011)  
Activities Building, view to E

Photo 12 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0012)  
Riverview Pool and pool house, view to NE

Photo 13 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0013)  
Chapel Shelter and circular drive, view to SW

Photo 14 (PA\_AlleghenyCounty\_RiverviewPark\_0014)  
Chapel Shelter, view to W

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Bear Pit, view to NE

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Entrance to Riverview Park at Grand Avenue, view to E

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Public Works facility on Kilbuck Road near Grand Avenue entrance, view to SW

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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