



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North New York NY 10007 TEL: 212-669-7700 FAX: 212-669-7960
www.nyc.gov/landmarks



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 2007
No. 07-12

CONTACT: Lisi de Bourbon
212-669-7938

JACKIE ROBINSON RECREATION CENTER, POOL AND BATH HOUSE INTERIOR IN HARLEM HEIGHTS EARN LANDMARK STATUS

WPA-Funded Recreational Complex Built During Summer of 1936 Under La Guardia and Moses Recalls Medieval Fortress, Renamed for Baseball Legend Jackie Robinson in 1978

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously voted to designate as a landmark the Jackie Robinson Pool and Recreation Center -- including the swimming pool, bath house, diving pool, band shell and dance floor -- and grant landmark protection to the interior of the complex's bath house.



Originally named the Colonial Park Play Center, the complex stretches from 145th to 155th streets along Edgecombe and Bradhurst avenues in Manhattan, and is set within a 1.28-acre, narrow hillside. The exterior of the imposing two-story bath house features Romanesque Revival-inspired details, and incorporates elements of the Art Moderne style, the hallmark of the 11 sprawling recreational centers and pools that opened across the City in the summer of 1936. Built under former Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, the facilities were constructed with funding from the

Works Progress Administration, one of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs that were created to lift the nation out of the Great Depression.

"The design of this unique complex was heavily influenced by the topography of the park, and its imposing façade is matched in its grandeur only by the cathedral-like vaulted interior lobby," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "Named for one of baseball's greatest players and trailblazers, the complex was built in the tradition of great civic architecture in New York City that continues to this day. Now with this designation, future generations of children from the neighborhood will be able to enjoy this unique New York City treasure."

"Jackie Robinson Pool and Recreation Center is one of 11 massive public pools built during the WPA era that opened in the summer of 1936," said Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe. "Built in the style of a medieval castle and nestled into the majestic cliffs of Harlem Heights, it is an enduring, living landmark that is now formally designated. With care it will continue to serve tens of thousands of Harlem residents for decades to come."

More

The Jackie Robinson Recreation Center was designed by Aymar Embury II, the Parks Department's consulting architect who oversaw such projects as the New York City building at the 1939 World's Fair, the Lincoln Tunnel and the Central Park and Prospect Park zoos. Gilmore D. Clarke, the department's consulting landscape architect, was responsible for the landscape design of the complex.

The exterior of the bath house features a series of recessed bays, a parapet embellished with a cast-stone balustrade, and several large round towers that rise above the roof line of the building. The pool, which measures 82 feet by 236 feet and owes its unusual shape to the narrow site, is located above the grade of Bradhurst Avenue.

The lobby includes two cascading stairways that lead in opposite directions to the men's and women's locker room, bas-relief panels of water-related activities, floral limestone corbels supporting the concrete Gothic arches, an original flagged bluestone floor and a ticket booth that resembles the prow of a ship.

Colonial Park Play Center officially opened on Aug. 8, 1936, the 10th of 11 pools and recreational complexes that opened that summer. In 1978, the complex was renamed for Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to play major league baseball. Robinson made his debut on opening day at Ebbets Field, on April 15, 1947, when he and the Brooklyn Dodgers beat the Boston Braves, 5-3. A bronze bust of Robinson by artist Inge Hardison was installed beneath the pointed arch of the bath house's rear wall in 1981.



The Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 23,000 buildings, including 1,159 individual landmarks, 108 interior landmarks, nine scenic landmarks and 85 historic districts in all five boroughs. Under the law, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough. There are 11 commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the Mayor for staggered three- year terms.