



**PENNSYLVANIA HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM — DATA SHEET**  
 Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation

**89B**

**IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION**

Survey Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tax Parcel/Other No.: 82-H-1

County: 1. Allegheny 0 0 3 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Municipality: 1. Pittsburgh 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Address: Roughly bounded by Bunkerhill Street, Heth's and Negley Runs

Historic Name: Highland Park

Other Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner Name/Address: City of Pittsburgh, Dept. of Parks & Recreation

Owner Category:  Private  Public-local  Public-state  Public-federal

Resource Category:  Building  District  Site  Structure  Object

Number/Approximate Number of Resources Covered by This Form: 15

USGS Quad: 1. Pittsburgh East 2. \_\_\_\_\_

UTM A. 17 591 720 4482 385 C. 17 592 425 4481 055

References: B. 17 592 520 4482 105 D. 17 591 005 4481 700

**HISTORIC AND CURRENT FUNCTIONS**

Historic Function Category:	Subcategory:	Code:
A. <u>Landscape</u>	<u>park</u>	<u>1 5 B</u>
B. <u>Government</u>	<u>public works</u>	<u>0 4 I</u>
C. <u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>work of art</u>	<u>0 8 I</u>
D. <u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>outdoor recreation</u>	<u>0 8 F</u>
Particular Type:		
A. <u>Recreation and Culture / park</u>		
B. <u>Government / reservoir</u>		
C. <u>Recreation and Culture / statue</u>		
D. <u>Recreation and Culture / zoological garden</u>		
Current Function Category:	Subcategory:	Code:
A. <u>Landscape</u>	<u>park</u>	<u>1 5 B</u>
B. <u>Government</u>	<u>public works</u>	<u>0 4 I</u>
C. <u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>work of art</u>	<u>0 8 I</u>
D. <u>Recreation and Culture</u>	<u>outdoor recreation</u>	<u>0 8 F</u>

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

Architectural Classification: A. Beaux Arts Classicism 5 6

B. \_\_\_\_\_ C. \_\_\_\_\_

D. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Exterior Materials: Foundation \_\_\_\_\_ Roof Asphalt 6 3

Walls Brick 3 0 Walls \_\_\_\_\_

Other Granite 4 1 Other Bronze 5 3

Structural System: 1. Brick 2 1 2. Stone 2 2

Wid: \_\_\_\_\_ Depth: \_\_\_\_\_ Stories/Height: \_\_\_\_\_

### HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Year Built: C. 1889 to C. 1903 Additions/Alterations Dates: C. 1932; C. 2000

Basis for Dating:  Documentary  Physical

Explain: Annual reports of the Department of Public Works, City of Pittsburgh

Cultural/Ethnic Affiliation: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Associated Individuals: 1. Edward M. Bigelow 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Associated Events: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Architects/Engineers: 1. William Falconer 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Builders: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

### MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

City of Pittsburgh. Annual Report of the Dept. of Public Works. 1889-1909.

Stewart, Howard B., compiler. Historical Data: Pittsburgh's Public Parks (Pittsburgh: Greater Pittsburgh Parks Assoc., 1943)

### PREVIOUS SURVEY, DETERMINATIONS

Allegheny County Survey, 1980-1984

### EVALUATION (Survey Director/Consultants Only)

Individual NR Potential:  Yes  No Context(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Contributes to Potential District  Yes  No District Name/Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Explain:

### THREATS

Threats: 1 1. None 2. Public Development 3. Private Development 4. Neglect 5. Other

Explain:

### SURVEYOR INFORMATION

Surveyor Name/Title: Michael Eversmeyer, AIA Date: 5/01

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: 412-456-0900

Street and No.: 1124 N. Euclid Avenue

City, State: Pittsburgh, PA Zip Code: 15206

Additional Survey Documentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Associated Survey Codes: \_\_\_\_\_

**PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL RESOURCE SURVEY FORM — NARRATIVE SHEET**  
**Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation**

89C

Survey Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tax Parcel/Other No.: 82-H-1  
County: Allegheny Municipality: Pittsburgh  
Address: Bounded by Bunkerhill Street, Heth's and Negley Runs  
Historic/Other Name: Highland Park

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

The Highland Park Historic District covers approximately 365 acres adjacent to the Highland Park residential neighborhood in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh's East End. The park dates from 1889, when the Pittsburgh City Councils dedicated City property around the Highland Reservoir as a public park at the behest of Edward M. Bigelow, then Chief of the Department of Public Works. It is located on a hill that falls steeply to the Allegheny River, with its principal landscape features and buildings situated on the hilltop and on narrow terraces and ledges on the hillsides. The northern boundary of the district lies along Washington Boulevard, a major road that clings to the south bank of the river. The eastern and western boundaries are the ravines cut by the former Negley Run and Heth's Run, respectively. The southern boundary of the district is the edge of the adjacent residential area, much of which lies along Bunker Hill Street. Within the historic district are fifteen (15) individual contributing elements, including two reservoirs (and three service buildings on their perimeters); one lake and the casting cabin on its shore; three stone arch bridges; the Farmhouse and the Rhododendron Shelter; and three sculptural groupings. In addition, there are a number of stonework and landscaping elements that add to the overall romantic landscape of the park. There are also twenty (20) non-contributing buildings and structures in the park, particularly 14 recently-constructed buildings that are part of the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium, the swimming pool and bathhouse, a pumping station and microfiltration plant for the water system, and two maintenance buildings near the Farmhouse.

The model of the romantic landscape parks of Frederick Law Olmsted, the nineteenth century's most famous park planner — as adapted to Pittsburgh's rugged terrain — influenced the design of Highland Park. The design is characterized by terrain that appears to be "natural", but is actually the result of extensive manipulation of the contours of the land and the plants found in the park. This manipulation of land and vegetation was designed for romantic effect, and included curvilinear roads, dramatic stonework, overlooks and vistas, open fields alternating with woods and groves of trees, fountains, and lakes — all features that can be found in Highland Park.

One major road (the Hill Road) traverses Highland Park, climbing the hill from Washington Boulevard at the north past the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium to Bunker Hill Street at the south. Two other picturesque roads encircle Reservoir Number One: the Reservoir Road, just below the flanks of the reservoir, and the Lake Road, approximately halfway down the hill. Woodland footpaths and a bridle path connect the major features of the park. The clearing at the top of the hill, known as Mt. Bigelow, and the walkway around Reservoir Number One provide dramatic vistas up and down the Allegheny River. The reservoirs, Lake Carnegie, and the landscaped plaza at the Highland Avenue entrance form the other focal points in the park. The mature trees and the isolated terraces and ledges create a sense of separation from the adjacent city, which is enhanced by the major sculptural groupings that act as gateways at the principal entrances to the park.

At the top of the hill, north of the plaza at the Highland Avenue entrance, lies the two-lobed Reservoir Number One (1871-1879), the principal landscape feature in the park. This reservoir lies at the elevation of 1066 feet above sea level, and contains 117 million gallons of water. To the west, and partway down the hill, is Reservoir Number Two (1897-1903, elevation 972 feet, capacity 125 million gallons); below it is located the Zoo and Aquarium. Besides the Highland Avenue entrance, there are three substantial flat sections in the park, where most of the major landscape features in the park are located. The first is Mt. Bigelow, an open, grassy hillside north of Reservoir Number One

## Description (page 2)

that slopes down from a ring of trees at the hill's summit. The second is a terrace halfway down the hill to the east of the reservoir, where Lake Carnegie is found next to a public swimming pool and picnic groves and shelters. The third is a playing field next to the Farmhouse, which is located in the southeastern corner of the park, immediately adjacent to the residential section along Heberton Avenue. The rest of the park's acreage is occupied by wooded hillsides.

There are only a handful of significant buildings in Highland Park, the most important of which is the Farmhouse, the former late-nineteenth-century residence of Mary Negley. The Farmhouse, which is adjacent to the residential neighborhood in the southeastern section of the park, is currently vacant, but served in the past as the headquarters of the park superintendent. Another contributing building is the Rhododendron Shelter, a brick picnic shelter from 1902 that is located near Lake Carnegie. A major building that dominated the western part of the park in the past, the original Pittsburgh Zoo building of 1898, was demolished in the early 1980s as part of the recent and ongoing modernization and expansion of the Zoo.

Spanning some of the ravines in the park were three stone arch bridges that were built in the first years of the park's development out of stone quarried on the site. The largest of these bridges, a sixty-foot-diameter arch, was located on Lake Road south of Lake Carnegie, but was buried in the 1970s by City engineers to avert a threat to the bridge's structural stability. The second of the bridges spans fifty feet and carries the Hill Road over a pedestrian underpass in the Zoo. The third bridge is much smaller (a twelve-foot arch) and supports Reservoir Drive above a pedestrian passageway to the west of Reservoir Number One.

Highland Park is the site of a number of significant sculptures and memorials, the most prominent of which is the grouping known as "Welcome", which comprises two tall stone piers, flanked by columns and topped by bronze statues of women and children. These piers flank the Highland Avenue entrance to the Park and were completed in 1896. The Stanton Avenue entrance, finished in 1900, is marked by a pair of stone pedestals surmounted by bronze sculptures of wild horses being tamed by men. There is also a simple stone marker (set up in 1912) in a clearing between Reservoir Number One and the Zoo that memorializes the gravesites of the early settlers in the area.

Highland Park has been maintained and altered by the City of Pittsburgh throughout its history. Alterations to the water system have included the construction of the second reservoir in 1903 and the current construction of a new micro-filtration plant adjacent to Reservoir Number One. Over the years, other structures have disappeared, including a band shell and conservatory in the upper park, a boathouse on Lake Carnegie, and the original zoo building. Playground facilities were added in the early twentieth century, and a swimming pool supplanted a part of the lake in 1932. However, the overall landscape of Highland Park remains intact and still invokes the late nineteenth-century era of park construction in Pittsburgh.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

Highland Park has local significance under Criterion A as one of the best examples in Pittsburgh of a late nineteenth century landscape park. Public Works Chief Edward M. Bigelow developed Highland Park after 1889 as one of the crowning successes of his program to establish a network of parks and connecting boulevards in the East End of the city. Designed in the romantic landscape tradition – strongly associated with the famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Central Park in New York City – Highland Park displays a very carefully cultivated “natural” appearance. Bigelow and his assistants and successors changed a barren patch of ground around a hilltop reservoir by grading the land, planting trees, shrubs, and flowers, and adding statues and rustic stonework. They enhanced the rugged and hilly character of the park land, with its rough topography and fine vistas, and created an oasis of open space and fresh air in the midst of the industrial city – one of the great progressive goals at the turn of the twentieth century. City Controller Henry Gourley articulated these ideals in 1895 as: “Give the people attractive parks; show them beautiful things and give them innocent amusements to entice them away from degrading things ... Let us open all the doors which lead to pure influence and to the better side of human nature”. Today, Highland Park stands as a reminder of that era of civic idealism, with its awareness of the living conditions of the urban population and its determination to provide amenities that would have an ameliorative effect on the problems of the populace. It also stands as a reminder of the great housing boom in the East End of Pittsburgh at the end of the nineteenth century, a boom that the development of the park helped to spur on.

The genesis of Highland Park was actually in 1871, when the City of Pittsburgh purchased twenty-five acres of land on a hilltop overlooking the Allegheny River from Caspar Negley in order to construct a reservoir for its fledgling water system. This reservoir, now the Highland Reservoir Number One (or the “upper reservoir”), was completed in 1879. The City-owned land around the Highland Reservoir and the contemporary Herron Hill Reservoir, located atop high points in the East End of Pittsburgh, was thus available for improvement when Edward M. Bigelow was appointed Chief of the Department of Public Works. One of Bigelow’s dreams was to create a park system for Pittsburgh, which had only one small public park at Second Avenue and Grant Street – in contrast to the extensive parks in the neighboring City of Allegheny. Bigelow set out at once to bring his dream of natural open spaces, available to the general populace of Pittsburgh – “breathing spots for the people”, as he called them – to fruition. In September 1889, he persuaded the City Councils of Pittsburgh to set aside the reservoir lands for Highland and Herron Hill Parks, and to authorize the Department of Public Works to add to and improve them. Two months later, Bigelow was able to persuade the heiress Mary Schenley to donate a sizable portion of her holdings in the Oakland neighborhood to the City to create Schenley Park. Thus, at the end of 1889, Bigelow was able to lay the foundations for Pittsburgh’s present extensive system of public parks. His basic concept was to create a scenic boulevard (now known as Bigelow Boulevard) from Downtown to the East End, running through Schenley Park and then turning north and east as Beechwood Boulevard and Washington Boulevard to Highland Park. Bigelow noted in 1897 that “Pittsburgh will then have a great arterial driveway beginning in the heart of the city and extending to its furthest park, and offering to the eye at every turn scenes of unsurpassed beauty.”

Bigelow set his considerable energies to the development of the new parks, personally supervising their planning and layout prior to the hiring of James McKnight as Superintendent of Parks in 1892. Generally he followed the model of the romantic landscape parks of Frederick Law Olmsted, the nineteenth century’s most famous park planner, but adapted to the rugged topography of Pittsburgh. The first years were devoted to acquiring additional land for Highland Park (which grew from its initial 46 acres to 210 acres in 1891 and 303 acres in 1892), laying out roads and preparing plans. Five and one-half miles of roads were built between 1891 and 1896, spanning ravines and pedestrian paths on three rough-cut stone bridges ranging from twelve to sixty feet in diameter of arch. A partially-completed basin, originally planned as part of the reservoir system, was expanded and converted into Lake Carnegie in 1892. The Negley farmhouse at Grafton and Heberton Streets was converted into park offices that same year. The creation of an imposing formal entrance to Highland Park at the top of Highland Avenue was begun in 1894 and completed two years later with the construction of a fountain and ornamental flower beds and the erection of the “Welcome” piers and statue groups by the sculptor Giuseppe Moretti.

## Historical Narrative (page 2)

A bridle path was cut through the rock of the hillside between the reservoir and the lake in 1895. The excavated stone was utilized in other projects, including the rustic stone retaining walls found throughout the park. The Stanton Avenue entrance to Highland Park was ornamented by the installation on both sides of the street of statues of horse tamers, also by Moretti, in 1900.

The principal adornment of the northwest section of Highland Park was the zoo building, which was donated by political boss Christopher Magee and his fellow directors of the Fort Pitt Traction Company in 1895. Magee believed that the \$100,000 gift would create an attraction that would induce large numbers of people to ride to the end of the line on his company's streetcars. The zoo building was begun in 1896, and opened in June 1898. The zoo menagerie was housed in a large brick structure under a shallow hipped roof, with curved side wings of cages and exhibits, and by 1904 housed 665 animals.

Finally, a second reservoir, below the original reservoir west of Mellon Street, was begun in 1897 and put into operation in 1903.

One of the striking features of the park in its early years was the barrenness of its hillsides. While allowing for panoramic views of the Allegheny River Valley, this barrenness did not accord with Bigelow's plans for the park, so he and Park Superintendent (and landscape architect) William Falconer (1896-1903) started a large-scale planting program. Eight hundred trees were planted in 1896; 3500 trees and 4000 shrubs in 1897; 6000 trees and shrubs in 1898; another 900 trees and 1200 shrubs the next year; and 6000 more in 1900. The progress was such that Bigelow could report that "the work of transforming what were for the most part stretches of vacant ground, broken here and there with old buildings, into slightly pleasure grounds, traversed by shady drives and walks, connected by convenient bridges, has now advanced so toward completion that nature works hand in hand with us in adding to their beauty year by year."

Highland Park became a favorite spot for Pittsburghers long before it was completed. Regular weekly concerts began in 1892, and Lake Carnegie was used for boating, swimming, and ice skating (in season) as soon as it was completed in 1894. The park was noted for its scenic vistas. Bigelow reported that "one of the most beautiful and panoramic views perhaps to be had in Allegheny County, is to be observed from Mt. Bigelow located in this park, from which point the surrounding country for many miles in all directions can be seen." It became the site of annual Sunday School picnics, Fourth of July celebrations, field days, concerts, and other popular events. One of the most popular was the annual Spring flower show at the park entrance at Highland Avenue, which was a regular event by 1898. In 1900, a total of 50,000 bulbs were planted by the park's staff; by 1914, over 100,000 tulips alone were used. Old photographs show decorative flowerbeds and flower clocks on the front slope of the reservoir.

The creation of Highland Park had an impact on the development of the residential area just to its south. The Park was one of a number of major infrastructural improvements made by the City in the 1880s and 1890s that spurred on the construction of houses in the area. These improvements included the installation of the electric streetcar lines in the 1890s, which enabled the population of Pittsburgh to disperse from the center of town; the construction of the park, which provided a great amenity for those who moved to the adjoining neighborhood; and the construction of the Fulton School, in anticipation of the influx of school-age children into the neighborhood.

Change came to Highland Park with the passage of time and the development of a new philosophy of active recreation (the "playground movement"). A running track next to Lake Carnegie, built in 1913, was the harbinger of other facilities: tennis courts in 1914, a playground at Flinn Parklet after 1915, a swimming platform in the lake in 1915, etc. In 1932, the northern end of the lake was filled in for the construction of a swimming pool and bathhouse.

### Historical Narrative (page 3)

Some elements, such as the fountain at the entry and the greenhouse alongside the upper reservoir, were lost due to lack of maintenance. Other elements were added in Works Progress Administration projects during the Thirties. These included the double flights of stone steps at the Highland Avenue entrance to the upper reservoir, the stone steps west of that reservoir, and the steps and walls at the Mellon and Negley entrances to the lower reservoir. In spite of these changes, though, the basic character of Highland Park, the fulfillment of Edward Bigelow's vision, remained unchanged.

A principal feature of Highland Park since 1898 has been the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium. In the early 1980s, the City government decided to upgrade the quality of the zoo, which had been left behind by new trends in animal management and display, and started to construct naturalistic settings for the animals. This "new zoo", which dominates the western third of the park, was devolved to private management by the City in the late 1980s. The obsolete main building was demolished and has been replaced by modern buildings for the animals and human visitors.

Besides the zoo buildings, there are a number of other structures in Highland Park, but only a couple that are historically significant. The Farmhouse, near the corner of Grafton and Heberton Streets, is the former home of Mary Negley. A large brick structure with a gabled roof, it was built in the decades after the end of the Civil War, and displays the brackets under the roof eaves that are typical of that period. It served as the park offices for most of the Twentieth Century. The Rhododendron Shelter, an open yellow brick picnic pavilion, was constructed in 1902 in the Classical manner popular at that time. There are also a few small structures at the edges of the reservoirs that were built out of red brick and roofing slates in a kind of simple traditional vernacular style, and serve as restrooms and mechanical rooms for the reservoirs. A large new building is currently under construction at the rear of Reservoir Number One, its brick and slate in response to the smaller reservoir buildings; this new building will house a microfiltration plant for the drinking water in the reservoir.

While he was never able to create a formal entrance to Schenley Park, Bigelow succeeded in crafting just such a formal entrance to Highland Park by 1896. Located at the top of Highland Avenue, the park entry road is flanked by a statuary group sculpted by the Italian Giuseppe Moretti and known as "Welcome". "Welcome" is a Classical gateway consisting of a pair of granite shafts, each formed by four Ionic columns and surmounted by heroic bronze figural groups gesturing welcome. At the base of each shaft is a curved ornamental balustrade, on the end of which is a bronze eagle with its wings spread. Four years later, an additional ornamental gateway at the Stanton Avenue entrance to the park was completed with the erection of sculptural groups on two granite bases flanking the street. The sculptures, also by Moretti, were modeled after ancient and French precedents. They depict men taming horses, and are symbolic of man's control over the beauty and strength of Nature.

A simple granite memorial marker was erected in 1912 by Sarah Jane Negley Mellon in a clearing that contains the graves of about fifty of the early settlers of the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh. The memorial commemorates those pioneers, and especially Ms. Mellon's great-great-grandfather, Alexander Negley, who settled in the area of the park around 1750. In addition, the Stephen Foster statue that currently stands in Schenley Plaza was commissioned in 1900 at the Highland Avenue entrance to Highland Park (and moved to Forbes Avenue in 1944).

In the course of the zoo renovation, the large (fifty-foot-diameter stone arch) bridge on the Hill Road was repaired and kept in service. Unfortunately, the longest stone bridge in the park (with a sixty-foot arch), along Lake Drive, was lost when a lack of maintenance rendered it structurally unsound. The bridge and the ravine it spanned were buried – today earth fill supports the roadway. Similarly, the small stone arch for pedestrians is endangered by trees growing between the stones. The stone steps at Bunker Hill Street and North St. Clair Avenue had been in disrepair



Historical Narrative (page 4)

for many years until they were repaired around 1990, and some of the stone retaining walls in the park are collapsing. Other, less obvious problems also exist: roads are crumbling in places, hillsides are eroding because of broken drainage systems, footpaths are disappearing because of the erosion, and trees are dying.

Highland Park today is a combination of assets inherited from its past, elements lost to time and neglect, and great opportunities for the future. The hillsides are green and wooded, the monuments intact and welcoming, the reservoir a magnet for walking and jogging, and the swimming pool a busy spot during hot weather. However, large- and small-scale problems exist and persist, and can distract the visitor's attention away from the park's fine features, which remain essentially the same as they were one hundred years ago.

HIGHLAND PARK  
HISTORIC DISTRICT

591 55° 00" 417 500 METERS 594 595

