

FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

KILBOURN/RESERVOIR PARK

(Written Spring, 1999)

I. NAME

Historic: Kilbourn/Reservoir Park

Common Name: Kilbourn/Reservoir Park

II. LOCATION

Street Address: 626 E. North Avenue
701 E. Garfield Avenue

6th Aldermanic District
Alderwoman Marlene Johnson-Odom

Tax Key No. 321-1166-000

Legal description: J. L. PEIRCE'S SUBD OF LOTS 47-55 INCL IN SW ¼ 16-7-22 v2
p125 BLOCKS 19- 20-37 BLKS 19 & 20 & LOTS 1 TO 12 INCL BLK 37
& THAT PART OF LOTS 84-85 & 86 N OF E GARFIELD AVE OF PART
OF LOTS 2 & 3 IN NW 21-7-22 ADJ

Tax Key No. 354-0433-1111

Legal description: PLAT OF LOTS 2 & 3 OF SECTION 21 TOWN 7 R RANGE 22 (PART
LOTS 85 & 86 SD SUBD & BLKS 1 & 2 & PART RESERVED LOT &
VAC STS & ALLEYS IN KILBOURN'S ADD'N ADJ) BOUNDED BY (E
NORTH AV ON N-N BREMEN ST & E 18.4' VAC E BREMEN ST ON E-
S 25' VAC E RESERVOIR AV IN KILBOURN'S ADD'N & N LI FORMER
RR ROW ON S & E LI E RESERVOIR AV & E LI PARK ADD'N SUBD
ON E) EXC E GARFIELD AV TID # 22

III. CLASSIFICATION

District

IV. OWNER

City of Milwaukee
c/o City Real Estate
Gregory Shelko
809 N. Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

City of Milwaukee
Department of Public Works
James C. Kaminski, Commissioner
841 N. Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

V. YEAR BUILT: Reservoir (1872-1873)
Comfort Station (801 E. Meinecke) (1931)
Comfort Station (701 E. Garfield) (c.1931)
Pumping Station (618 E. North Ave.) (1956)
Service Building (618 E. North Ave.) (1965)
Radio Transmitting Tower (618 E. North Ave.) (1971)

ARCHITECT: Comfort Station (1931) City Department of Bridges & Buildings
Pumping Station (1956) Alvord, Burdick & Howson, Chicago
Service Building (1965) William Hammann, engineer

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Kilbourn/Reservoir Park is located on the city's near north side approximately one and a half miles from the Central Business District. The park is roughly rectangular in shape and is bisected from east to west by East North Avenue. It is bounded to the east by North Bremen Street and to the north by E. Meinecke Avenue. To the west the boundary is formed by the alley between N. Booth and N. Pierce Streets and the east property lines of properties fronting on North Booth Street. To the south the park is bounded by the extension of East Glover Street (formerly E. Reservoir Avenue). The park is approximately 29.28 acres including the roadways, or 26.96 acres excluding those portions of East North Avenue and East Garfield Avenue which extend across the grounds.

The two portions of the park have distinctive physical characteristics. The north portion of the park consists of a large, mostly man-made hill of irregular shape in which is located the reservoir. The dimensions of the reservoir are approximately 515 feet (north-south) by 310 feet (east-west). When filled with water to a depth of 21 feet, the water surface is 150 feet above city datum. Between the reservoir and Meinecke Street, the hill tapers off to relatively flat land. The grounds are planted with trees and a pathway skirts the base of the hill. The south portion of the park features rolling terrain, open meadows and trees and terminates at a bluff overlooking the Milwaukee River.

In addition to the reservoir itself, other man-made structures are located within the park. A softball diamond is located at the northwest corner of the grounds along Meinecke Street. A playground and playground equipment are located at the northeast corner. A Tudor Revival style comfort station opposite N. Fratney Street was built in 1931 by the city's department of Bridges and Buildings. The cross-gabled structure features windows on each wall and an entrance on its east elevation. Stucco and half timbering adorn the gable ends. Other structures, which specifically service the reservoir, include the 1956 Pumping Station, a flat roofed yellow brick building to the west of the reservoir, and a concrete block service building constructed in 1965. These two post- World War II buildings and the radio transmitting tower are considered non-contributing buildings to the district. The long-familiar planting bed on the east slope of the reservoir, consisting of a star within a circle, was first planted in honor of the American Legion in 1941 when the group held its national convention here in

that year. A granite monument is located at the southeast slope of the reservoir near E. North Avenue. It was installed in 1920 by the residents of the 6th and 13th wards and commemorates those who died in World War I. The south portion of the park features a surface parking lot near the N. Bremen corner of the grounds as well as a comfort station and a concrete wall that skirts the top of the bluff overlooking the Milwaukee River. There is also a grassy area set aside for soccer games. The brick comfort station is of Chateausque design, with a towered entry trimmed in stone and half timbering adorning the flanking sidewalls. The reinforced concrete wall along the bluff top features upright paneled piers between which are paneled spandrels that sport a diamond design.

Alterations to the grounds have consisted in the construction and removal of various structures within the park, the addition and removal of various walkways and fencing throughout the park. The reservoir itself was once open and visitors were able to stroll along the circumference beginning in the 1870's. To keep people from swimming in the structure, decorative iron fencing was later installed in 1907. To address concerns of security and water contamination, a concrete cover was installed over the top of the reservoir in 1978-1979. Tennis courts and a jogging track were built atop the cover and in use until the early 1990's when vandalism became a problem. The entire reservoir is now enclosed by a chain link fence and not accessible to the public.

Around 1905, a wood pavilion and chalet style comfort station were constructed in the park. Somewhat later a small octagonal bandstand was also built and once stood near the pavilion. The last of these structures was removed by 1980. Reservoir Avenue, now E. Glover Avenue, once extended into the park and connected up with E. North Avenue but the roadway was removed sometime after the mid-1970s.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

Kilbourn/Reservoir Park is significant as one of the city's earliest and most important public works projects. The Reservoir has been in continual use since its completion in 1873. It still serves to equalize pressure in the water system. Located at what was then the highest point in the city, the reservoir remains a visual landmark, particularly along E. North Avenue where the roadway jogs to accommodate the large earthworks. At the time it was completed, the Kilbourn Reservoir was the largest storage reservoir on the Great Lakes. Kilbourn/Reservoir Park is also significant as one of the earlier public green spaces in the city. Byron Kilbourn donated to the city land he owned at this high point in the city for use as a public park with the provision it be called Kilbourn Park. This donation preceded the creation of the Park Board and the city park system. Due to its location and the panoramic vista afforded from its grounds Kilbourn Park quickly became one of the most popular of the smaller parks in the city from the 1870's through the early part of the twentieth century.

VIII. HISTORY

One of Milwaukee's most distinctive green spaces is also now one of the city's lesser-known gems. Like Water Tower Park, Kilbourn Park was created as part of the city's first water system. It is located on the high ground just west of the Milwaukee River along North Avenue. This spot was the highest point in the city at that time, some 150 feet above city datum, and was an ideal site for the location of the reservoir that was needed for the city's first gravity-fed public water system.

Milwaukee's need for a municipal water works system was discussed as early as the 1850's. The city's growing population necessitated a reliable water source for adequate fire

protection and to protect public health. Land was acquired for a water works at today's northwest corner of Lake Drive and East North Avenue but the large municipal debt prevented the project from moving forward. When the economy recovered after the Civil War Milwaukee officials turned once again to the issue of a municipal water works, a matter made urgent by the continued expansion of the city and the more frequent outbreaks of water borne diseases. Chicago's city engineer, E. S. Chesborough was hired as a consultant to work on the project in 1868. Among Chesborough's several recommendations, that of obtaining water from Lake Michigan was deemed best and ultimately adopted. State legislation on March 24, 1871 allowed Milwaukee to adjust its debt, construct a water works system and establish a Board of Water Commissioners to oversee its operations. Components of the system included an intake pipe set out in Lake Michigan, a pumping station at the foot of East North Avenue below the bluff along the lakeshore, a standpipe or water tower, a reservoir and various mains and hydrants throughout the city.

About 1868 a little over 4 ½ acres were set-aside on the highest point in the city by founding father Byron Kilbourn for public purposes. It is said that the land was originally intended by Kilbourn to be used as a site for a new college to be named Kilbourn College. The school never materialized, but between 1872 and 1875 as the water works system was under construction, the city acquired additional acreage to provide for pleasure grounds around the reservoir.

The contract for work on the reservoir was awarded on April 9, 1872 and construction started shortly thereafter on April 19, 1872. The stone-lined reservoir was completed in 1873 at a cost of \$117, 920 and was the first facility of the Milwaukee Water Works to be finished. Water was temporarily pumped from the Milwaukee River beginning on October 24th that year and by November 3, 1873 water was flowing from the reservoir into the large feeder mains and later into the small distribution mains throughout the City. When the North Point Pumping Station became operational on September 14, 1874, the temporary pump at the Milwaukee River was discontinued and lake water was pumped into the reservoir as had been originally intended. The earth-embanked reservoir is of irregular shape, roughly 310 feet wide (east-west) by 515 feet long (north-south) and holds 20 million gallons of water with a surface area of 3 ½ acres. The original contractors were Messrs. Gilbert and Charles Peterson.

The reservoir was an instant hit among city residents and the Sentinel reported that hundreds of persons visited the site on weekends. A watchman was on duty to keep people from swimming in the facility but an ornamental iron fence was installed in 1907 to prevent persons and animals from falling into the water. This fence, or its successor, is visible in a Milwaukee Journal photo from 1941.

Over the decades the reservoir has been periodically drained to address problems with sedimentation, leaking, to address complaints of bad tasting water and complaints of small fish making their way into the faucets of city residents. In 1929 the original stone-lined interior, which had experienced chronic joint and mortar failure, was given a new concrete Guniting and concrete lined the interior of the reservoir today. The most significant change to the reservoir has been the installation of a concrete cap necessitated by Federal regulations against bird droppings in an open-air reservoir. Work on the cap took place in 1978 and 1979 by the Becker Construction Co. The cap is supported by concrete pillars which have reduced the capacity of the reservoir from about 22 million gallons to its current

20 million-gallon capacity. A jogging track and tennis courts were installed on the top of the reservoir cap and were well used by local residents until vandalism forced their closing in the early 1990's. Today, the public is no longer allowed to stroll up to the top of the reservoir and the area is cordoned off by a chain link fence.

As of 1896, the reservoir no longer served as a distribution reservoir as it had since its construction. Rather it was used to equalized pressure in the low-service district, a function it still serves today.

As the city acquired additional acres adjacent to the reservoir in the 1870's, efforts were made to beautify the grounds and local landscape architect William Brotherhood was retained to lay out the grounds. Newspaper accounts also mention that City Engineer Hilbert's artists were working on the design of the grounds. By the 1890's the park could boast pretty walks, fountains, an artificial waterfall, iron benches and "romantic corners". A park watchman was heard to complain that the "young German folks like to make love in such poetic places" and that the park "swarms with people every warm night." At that time a park patron suggested removing the shanties between the park and the St. Paul Railway tracks below which ran alongside the Milwaukee River. He also suggested extending "the park by means of viaducts over these tracks [St. Paul Railway] to the river, and you will have as fine and nice a park as Milwaukee may wish for."

Additional work was done on the park after the turn of the century. The original main drive through the park, built of cedar blocks, was replaced with macadam in 1904. Aerial views show the location of these roadways, which have now for the most part been removed. Additional trees and shrubs were planted in 1905 and a chalet style comfort station was built in the north end of the park that same year. A pavilion was constructed in the south half of the park at the same time. A separate bandstand was built in 1914 and there were tennis courts and playground equipment as well. A horse stable and wagon barn were located in the northwesterly part of the park for use by Water Department employees. A wading pool was later added at the northeast corner of the grounds.

The chalet style comfort station was replaced by new brick structures in 1931. These two structures feature half-timbering and are still in good condition. Other early buildings in the park have been removed over time. The early I-shaped pavilion was razed in 1942 and the band stand taken down in the late 1970's. The last concerts were held in 1968 and discontinued due to violence. Structures connected with the operation of the reservoir include the plain yellow brick pumping station built in 1956 and designed by Alvord, Burdick and Howson of Chicago, and a simple service building constructed in 1965. These structures are non-contributing to the historic district. There is also a small structure located atop the reservoir itself. A radio-transmitting tower was constructed west of the reservoir in 1971, for use by the police department.

The distinctive star-in-a-circle floral design on the east face of the reservoir, which can be seen from E. North Avenue, has long been a visual landmark. The flowerbed was first planted in 1941 to honor the American Legion, which held one of its largest conventions in Milwaukee that year, and has been replanted most years since.

Despite the removal of many of the old-time turn of the century structures on the grounds of Kilbourn/Reservoir Park, the park is still favored by children making use of the playground

equipment in the north part of the grounds. The lower portion of the park is used for soccer games and still provides a dramatic overlook of the Milwaukee River Valley and one of the best panoramic views of downtown Milwaukee, which is especially dramatic at night. The landscaping of the grounds and old park buildings, however, are not the basis for the nomination. The significant features of the park which are the basis for the nomination and which have not changed significantly over time, are the massive earthworks of the reservoir itself which represent a major 19th century public works accomplishment and the rolling grassy terrain of the south portion of the park.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Kilbourn/Reservoir Park at 626 E. North Avenue and 701 E. Garfield Avenue be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e- 1, and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-1. Its exemplification of the development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or of the United States.
- e-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city of Milwaukee.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

Guidelines for Historically Significant Structures Within Kilbourn/Reservoir Park

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape. Skylights or dormers are discouraged but may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street or public right of way. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roofing as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural terra cotta or stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.

- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting limestone, terra cotta, or brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that do not duplicate the appearance of the original materials. Covering wood trim with aluminum or vinyl is not permitted.

C. Windows and Doors

- 1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
- 2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design and material of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block, concrete block or wood. Avoid using modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. Vinyl or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block or wood infill windows are not permitted, except on elevations where they will not be visible from the street.

3. Steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance.

E. Additions

Any additions to the two comfort stations/pavilions or other structures within the park require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color, and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right of way.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light with the historic and architectural character of the buildings and grounds. Plastic internally illuminated box signs are not permitted.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, paving, fencing, or accessory structures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the site visible from the public right of way.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the existing structures and the major landscape features of the park.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the existing buildings. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the existing buildings from the street as freestanding structures.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the existing buildings.

3. Form

The massing of the new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the buildings as freestanding structures. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and receded from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in close proximity to it.

4. Materials

The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the historic buildings should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on the building. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

Guidelines for Natural and Man-Made Features Within Kilbourn/Reservoir Park

In addition to its current stock of 20th century buildings Kilbourn/Reservoir Park contains the monumental earth works of the reservoir itself and the rolling terrain of the lower park which provides unparalleled panoramic views of the downtown Milwaukee skyline. While the structures, roadways, pedestrian walkways, play areas and planting areas have all been modified over the course of the last 126 years, the reservoir itself and the open green space of the lower park have remained constant features and constitute the significant features of the district. The reservoir is a visible reminder and symbol of Milwaukee's first great public works project, the public water system, and is a highly visible landmark to the scores of residents on the near north side and to the motorists driving along East North Avenue. It is one instance where the road is made to accommodate a built feature instead of the usual practice of making the landscape and structure conform to the dictates of a straight roadway. All efforts should be made to retain the current configuration of the reservoir and East North Avenue as it rounds the earthworks hill. Likewise, all efforts should be made to retain the open rolling character of the lower park. Intended as passive green space when purchased for park use in the 1870's, the park would be an inappropriate location for development of housing or commercial recreational facilities or other such construction. Structures built for the use of park patrons such as benches or band stands or pavilions would be considered appropriate depending on their design and scale. Likewise, structures required by the Water Works in the operation of the reservoir would be considered appropriate as long as they did not negatively impact upon the form or appearance of the reservoir itself and were designed to complement the grounds.