

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 48

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

Parks Historic District, based on Criterion A in the areas of Landscape Architecture and Social History. The cherry trees are a major landscape feature of the parks today.

**A Plaque Honoring the Placement of Cherry Trees on Hains Point in 1966-68 (Noncontributing Object)** has been placed on a stone and wood bench along Ohio Drive, SW, on the western side of Hains Point. The text of the plaque reads "These 1,800 flowering cherries and other trees were planted on Hains Point in 1966-68 in honor of President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson by friends in gratitude for their inspiring leadership and efforts to enhance the beauty of America." The Plaque Honoring the Placement of the Cherry Trees on Hains Point in 1966-68 does not contribute to the East and West Potomac Parks Historic District, as it is commemorative in nature, less than 50 years old, and does not exhibit exceptional importance. This feature should be re-evaluated once it is 50 years old.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITIES

A number of buildings in East Potomac Park have been grouped by their use by the National Park Service and the U.S. Park Police for park administration. The **U.S. Engineers' Storehouse (Contributing Building)**, located at 900 Ohio Drive, SW, is just east of the Potomac River bridge embankment. This building was designed in 1912 by the noted Washington, DC, architectural firm of Wood, Donn and Deming, in a simplified version of Mediterranean Renaissance Revival style. Constructed in 1913, the two-story, six-bay, rectangular building is composed of a concrete foundation, wood framing, brick walls covered by pebble-dash stucco painted yellow, and a low, hipped roof covered with red terra-cotta tile. All the six-over-six double-hung sashes are framed by three-panel wooden shutters that are painted green. The door on the west elevation has an arched opening and a brick and concrete entrance stoop with a metal railing. The principal (south) elevation features a door with a small, frame, entrance enclosure, and a frame, shed-roofed porch, which runs nearly the entire length of the elevation. The porch has five frame supports that feature a lattice pattern. Two large concrete bays, original doorways for construction materials and equipment, are visible on the first story of both the south and north elevations. On the south elevation, one of the concrete bays has been filled in with a door, and the other with a window; on the north elevation, both bays have been filled in with a window.

The building's interior, originally open in plan, has been divided into numerous small offices for the staff of the National Capital Parks-Central office of the National Park Service; little if any original fabric remains on the interior of this building. However, the U.S. Engineers' Storehouse contributes to the East and West Potomac Parks Historic District, based on National Register Criterion A in the area of Engineering and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The building served as the base from which much

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 49

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

of the reclamation of the two parks was directed, and it survives as possibly the final commission of the noted Washington, DC architectural firm of Wood, Donn and Deming.

The National Park Service operates a cluster of administrative buildings and maintenance facilities of more recent vintage on the Potomac River side of East Potomac Park. The **National Park Service National Capital Region Headquarters Building (Noncontributing Building)** and the **U.S. Park**

**Police Headquarters Building (Noncontributing Building)**, both located at 1100 Ohio Drive, SW, were constructed from 1962 to 1963 on the former site of the East Potomac Park Tourist Camp (see Section 8). These two Modernist buildings and related site improvements were designed by National Park Service professional staff, and were built contemporaneously by Victor R. Beauchamp Associates, Inc. The two buildings, connected by a covered walkway, have concrete foundations; blond brick walls; regular, fixed fenestration; and flat, metal roofs. The National Capital Region Headquarters Building is three stories with a two-story wing, while the U.S. Park Police Headquarters Building is two stories. In 1969, a training and cafeteria wing was built onto the Park Service Building by L. J. Robinson, Inc. The main entrance lobby of this complex of buildings features a slate patio and a pool with aquatic plants. Parking constructed in conjunction with the original building effort has been expanded several times to accommodate increased numbers of employees working in the two buildings and the adjacent Park Service maintenance yard. The National Park Service National Capital Region Building and the U.S. Park Police Headquarters Building do not contribute to the East and West Potomac Parks Historic District, as they are less than 50 years old and do not exhibit exceptional importance.

The **Tourmobile Headquarters (Noncontributing Building)**, located at 1000 Ohio Drive, SW, was built in 1979 by the Jack Bays Construction Company. The headquarters facility includes offices, a bus garage, and a maintenance shop. The one-story building has a concrete foundation, and steel panel walls and roof. The adjacent **National Capital Parks-Central Maintenance Yard (Noncontributing Building)** is of similar construction, and likely dates to the same period. Neither of these buildings contribute to the East and West Potomac Parks Historic District, as they are less than 50 years old, meant to be temporary in nature, and do not exhibit exceptional importance.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 60

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

number of these features can be attributed to important architects, for example, the Arlington Memorial Bridge (McKim, Mead and White) and the Kutz Bridge (Paul Philippe Cret). Another related feature is the Lockkeeper's House, the oldest constructed feature of the two parks and a remnant of the city's nineteenth-century canal system.

**SIGNIFICANCE DESCRIPTION<sup>96</sup>**

The Reclamation of the Potomac Flats and Early Park Development

By the second half of the nineteenth century a marshland, referred to as the Potomac Flats, had been formed along the Potomac River by deposits of silt. The reclamation of the area was necessary both to improve navigation on the Potomac River, which frequently silted up and was often unnavigable, and to improve public health. The flats, which filled with sewage from the city of Washington, had become a breeding ground for diseases like malaria.<sup>97</sup>

The first funding for the reclamation was appropriated by Congress in 1882, in the amount of \$400,000, and Army Major Peter C. Hains was assigned to direct the reclamation.<sup>98</sup> The reclamation work, performed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was divided into three sections: 135 acres in what is now West Potomac Park, 277 acres consisting of the Tidal Basin and its immediate surroundings, and 327 acres in East Potomac Park.<sup>99</sup> The reclamation of the Potomac Flats was carried out in phases from 1882

---

<sup>96</sup>For a better understanding of the two parks' history and development, please refer to the current and historic photos, maps, and site plans that have been submitted with this nomination.

<sup>97</sup>Historic American Engineering Record, Tidal Reservoir, HAER No. DC-9, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup>U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Executive Documents, *Appendix I to "Report of the Chief of Engineers," comprising Report of Major Peter C. Hains, July 31, 1883*, Document Number 1, Part 2, Volume 3, 48th Congress, 1st Session, 1883, p. 780; as referenced in Gordon Chappell, East and West Potomac Parks: A History, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, June 1973, p. 32.

<sup>99</sup>*Development of East Potomac Park, House Document Number 1038, 64th Congress, First Session* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 11. During the reclamation of what is now West Potomac Park, the park was known simply as "Potomac Park." In the early twentieth century, once reclamation east of the Potomac Railroad Bridge had begun, the resulting new land was called "East Potomac Park." East Potomac Park first appears in the annual Report of the Chief of Engineers as a separate park in 1907.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 61

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

until 1913, and, in general, was conducted from west to east. While the land was being reclaimed, mainly by hydraulic dredging, the Tidal Basin (Contributing Site) was dredged and the Tidal Reservoir Inlet Bridge (Contributing Structure) and the Tidal Reservoir Outlet Bridge (Contributing Structure) were constructed. The Stone Seawalls (Contributing Structure) that line the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park and rim the perimeter of the peninsula that is East Potomac Park were constructed to retain the earthen fill as the reclamation progressed. Although portions of the seawalls have been rebuilt during several construction projects since, the overall configuration of the Tidal Basin and the shape of the peninsula remain intact to this day.

The idea of creating a park on the reclaimed land, with lakes holding a reserve of water that would be both a recreational element and a means to flush out the Washington Channel, was originally conceived by U.S. Army Major William Twining in 1879. Twining's plan was modified by Hains in 1882, who substituted the 110-acre Tidal Basin with two gates for the flushing lakes.<sup>100</sup> In Hains' revised plan, water from the Potomac River, which entered into the Tidal Basin through the tidal gates in the Inlet Bridge, was expelled via the Outlet Bridge's tidal gates into the Washington Channel, creating a natural flushing action that kept the channel clear and free of debris.

As the land was reclaimed from the Potomac River, plans could then be made for the improvement of the parks, including grading, sodding, planting, and road and seawall construction. In West Potomac Park, as sections of the reclamation work were completed, the resulting land was transferred to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds for further improvement; the first land in this park was transferred in 1901. East Potomac Park was transferred in its entirety to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1912. The transferred land could hardly be called parkland, however, as the fertile, reclaimed soil was covered in a thick growth of wild grasses, bushes, and trees. This dense growth had to be removed so that the land could be sodded.

---

<sup>100</sup>Historic American Engineering Record, Tidal Reservoir, HAER No. DC-9, p. 1. In 1917, at the suggestion of Army Corp of Engineers Colonel William W. Harts, the tip of East Potomac Park was renamed "Hains Point," in honor of Hains' role in creating the parkland. Although only the tip of the island was renamed, most people today think that Hains Point refers to the entire island. At this same time, Harts also suggested renaming the Tidal Basin "Twining's Lake," after the man who originally conceived the idea of a flushing body of water; this name never caught on as did Hains Point.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 62

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

Congress annually appropriated money for the improvement of the two parks, beginning with a sum of \$70,000 in 1902. This initial appropriation was designated for a 33-acre tract of land in West Potomac Park between the Tidal Basin and the Washington Monument Grounds, extending from Seventeenth Street and Virginia Avenue to Fourteenth Street and Maryland Avenue. The Corps of Engineers used this money to construct a new road along the north side of the Tidal Basin, which connected Fifteenth and Seventeenth Streets, and passed around to the south and west of the Washington Monument Grounds. This road was officially opened on October 16, 1903, and was reserved for "speeding purposes" from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays.<sup>101</sup>

The only structure in either park that predated the parks' creation was the Lockkeeper's House (Contributing Building), which was constructed in 1832-33 as the home of the Keeper of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal extension. The building was likely abandoned by the canal company in the early 1870s, when the canal was filled in as part of Alexander "Boss" Shepherd's ambitious campaign to improve the physical condition of the District of Columbia. In August 1902, a family of squatters was evicted from the building, and in 1903 the building was renovated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers so it could be used as a toolhouse and lodge for the Potomac Park watchmen.<sup>102</sup> The building was moved a short distance to its present site in 1915 in order to accommodate Seventeenth Street as it was extended through West Potomac Park. In the early twentieth century, the building served as a headquarters for the Park Police, and as a temporary holding cell for prisoners arrested in Potomac Park. It is now used by the National Park Service as a toolhouse.

In 1909, during the construction of the two parks, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moved their wharf and storage facility from Easby's Point in West Potomac Park to a two-acre site in East Potomac Park located just east of the railroad embankment. At one point, as many as a dozen buildings were clustered around this new site, from which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers directed other reclamation and navigation-improvement projects. Today, the only extant historic building at the former Engineers' wharf is the U.S. Engineers' Storehouse (Contributing Building), which was designed in 1912 for office and storage space. Designed to be fireproof, and intended to replace several earlier frame structures on the site, the building was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' labor force at a cost of approximately \$10,000. Originally, the building had two concrete bays on the first story of both the north and south elevations, and each bay contained a pair of large metal, sliding doors. These sliding doors,

---

<sup>101</sup>Chappell, "East and West Potomac Parks: A History," pp. 96-97.

<sup>102</sup>Chappell, "East and West Potomac Parks: A History," p. 98.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 63

East and West Potomac Parks Historic District  
Washington, DC

---

designed to allow large pieces of machinery and construction materials to be stored inside, were removed circa 1940; three of the openings were filled in with a window, and one with a door. The building was mostly open in plan, except for a freight elevator, a stair, and a single, small office on each floor.

The building was designed by the prominent local architectural firm of Wood, Donn and Deming, who practiced together from 1902 until 1912, and it appears to be one of their final commissions. These men were comfortable using the vocabulary of the Mediterranean Renaissance Revival style; in 1906 they designed the Carnegie Institution of Washington Geophysical Laboratory at 2801 Upton Street, NW, in a similar style. Although the latter is a more elaborate building than the Engineers' Storehouse, both buildings share features such as pebble-dash stucco walls, low, hipped roofs covered with terra-cotta tile, and symmetrical fenestration. This style has an almost residential appearance, and worked equally well for high-style as well as more mundane buildings.

Like other buildings in East and West Potomac Parks, the U.S. Engineers' Storehouse has accommodated numerous functions since its construction. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers used the building for an undetermined number of years, and its interior was first remodeled in 1932 for an unspecified use. In 1936, the building was renovated to serve as the base for the Girl Mariners and the Sea Scouts, branches of the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts respectively. These programs, which began in the early 1920s, were intended for advanced Scouts of high-school age. Since these programs focused on maritime activities, it is logical that they would want a base for their meetings near the water, and a building near the U.S. Engineers' Wharf would have been an ideal location for such a purpose. The elevator was removed at this time, and other minor repairs were undertaken. By 1940, the decision had been made to renovate the building for use as a bicycle-rental facility. This concession had earlier been operated from a site along the Tidal Basin, but increasing automobile traffic, coupled with concerns about appropriate uses of the land surrounding the basin, necessitated its removal. It is likely that the sliding steel doors were removed, the shutters added to the windows, and the front and rear porches constructed for the building's new use. The bicycle rental concession, which peaked during the gasoline rationing of World War II, ceased operation in 1955. The building was then used by the National Park Service as a studio for workmen who built museum displays. In 1965, it was remodeled to serve as the headquarters for the National Capital Parks-Central office of the National Park Service. The first floor housed the Chief of Interpretation and his staff, and the second floor housed the Superintendent and his staff. In 1976, the building was leased as offices for the Tourmobile concession. In 1977, the building once again became the headquarters for the National Capital Parks-Central office, in which capacity it still serves to this day.