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DISSTON RECREATION CENTER  
Tacony  
Southwest corner of Disston & Glenloch streets  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6692-I

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### Tacony DISSTON RECREATION CENTER

HABS No. PA-6692-I

**NOTE:** Tacony's street grid does not lie true to the compass. For the purpose of locating buildings in this report, the roads running NE to SW (ex. Keystone Street and Torresdale Avenue) will be the N-S axes and those running SE to NW (ex. Longshore Avenue and Disston Street) will be E-W axes.

**Location:** Southwest corner of Disston and Glenloch streets, Tacony neighborhood, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Significance:** Constructed in 1931, the Disston Recreation Center is at least the second structure of that function on the public grounds bounded by Disston, Gillespie, and Glenloch streets, and Longshore Avenue. It is an appropriate monument to the Disston family and what, in retrospect, was a careful interest in their workers health and living environment.

#### Description:

The Disston Recreation Center was designed using both inventive Colonial Revival vocabulary as well as a form taking advantage of a high-profile corner site along what was a major east-west thoroughfare. The building was constructed of brick with stone accents throughout. A gabled entrance façade that references classical temple fronts is angled toward the intersection of Disston and Glenloch streets. This two-story section is raised over a basement and dominated by an elaborate carved stone door surround consisting of an elaborate denticulated segmental cornice resting on decorative impost blocks which are supported by a pair of Ionic columns. While not as elaborate, the building's secondary faces are similarly articulated with both brick and stone. The portion extending along Disston Street is connected to the main section by means of an angled hyphen.

The building remains in fair condition with graffiti and window air conditioning units adding to its somewhat worn state. It still functions as a recreation center at the edge of community playing fields and parkland.

#### History:

See the historical report for Tacony, HABS No. PA-6692 for more detailed information about Tacony's general development.

From early on, Henry Disston's conception of Tacony included open space for his workers' enjoyment and health, as indicated by the parkland along Keystone Street.<sup>1</sup> While having a

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<sup>1</sup>An 1888 map of Tacony depicts two blocks of formal gardens along Keystone Street and the railroad. This early park has been significantly expanded to the east and west and is now known as

formal park laid-out adjacent to the railroad tracks surely impressed visitors and perhaps made Tacony more attractive to potential residents, Disston need not have worried about unhealthy urban conditions. Well into the twentieth century, many blocks to the north, south, and west of Tacony proper remained undeveloped. Residents had no want of open space for leisure and sport. By the 1920s, however, more of this land was being built up and some open blocks were dedicated as parkland by the Disstons—still major landholders in the area. The Disston Recreation Center of 1931 was partially located on the site of an earlier “Recreation House” which more directly faced Disston Street.<sup>2</sup> This earlier recreation building was in turn constructed on the site of Henry Disston’s original water tanks which provided a gravity feed for a water main along Longshore Avenue.<sup>3</sup>

**Historian:** James A. Jacobs

**Sources:**

Baist’s Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume. Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888.

Iatarola, Louis M., and Siobhán Gephart. Images of America: Tacony. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000.

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“Disston Park.” *Baist’s Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888).

<sup>2</sup>Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,* vol. 27 (New York, 1928), 2655; Louis M. Iatarola and Siobhán Gephart, *Images of America: Tacony* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 128, for construction date.

<sup>3</sup>*Take a Trip through Time: Northeast Philadelphia Revisited,* ed. Lillian M. Lake and Harry C. Silcox (Holland, PA: Brighton Press, Inc., 1996), 183.