ELLIS ISLAND, RECREATION BUILDING
(U.S. Immigration Station)
Statue of Liberty National Monument
New York Harbor
New York
New York County
New York

HABS NY-6086-V
HABS NY-6086-V

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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1849 C Street NW
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ELLIS ISLAND, RECREATION BUILDING

HABS No. NY-6086-V

Location: Ellis Island, New York Harbor, Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey and New York City, New York County, New York

Present Owner: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Present Use: Museum Collections Storage

Significance: The Recreation Building at the Ellis Island U.S. Immigration Station was designed and built between 1933 and 1937 as part of a series of projects made possible through New Deal public works funding. In 1933 the federally-appointed Ellis Island Committee completed a report that recommended widespread improvements to the immigration facilities, among which was the development of adequate accommodations for recreation. The Recreation Building was designed for Ellis Island by consulting architect Chester Aldrich and the Public Buildings Service, along with the New Immigration Building (1934-1936), Ferry Building (1934), and two Recreation Shelters (1936-37).

The construction of these new facilities contributed to a reconfiguration of the island into clearly demarcated spaces for patients, immigrants and deportees, a shift that recognized the changing dynamics of immigration in the United States during the years of the Great Depression. The Recreation Building was intended to contribute to the physical and mental convalescence of patients at the hospital and to the routines of the island's numerous employees. It was placed, with a Recreation Shelter, at the west end of the central hospital court recently created by filling the lagoon between Islands 2 and 3. A garden, playground and recreation area for immigrants was planned around the New Immigration Building (though never executed) and a separate recreation yard and Recreation Shelter were planned for deportees on Island 1.

The United States Public Health Service vacated the hospital facilities on March 1, 1951 and the U.S. Coast Guard Port Security Unit at Ellis Island expanded to occupy additional Island 2 and 3 buildings. The Ellis Island U.S. Immigration Station ceased operation on November 12, 1954 and the complex was largely unoccupied until it was made part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, under the administration of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park

Service.

Historian: Julia A. Sienkewicz, 2010.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date(s) of establishment: 1936-1937

2. Architect: Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, Procurement Division, Public Buildings Branch (Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect)

   Chester H. Aldrich, New York, Consulting Architect[1]

3. Original owner: U. S. Department of Labor, 1936-1942
   Subsequent owners: U. S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1942-1954
   U. S. General Services Administration, 1954-65
   U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1965-Present

4. Builder: Albert Development Corporation, from the Bronx, New York City

5. Original plans and construction: Historical research, original drawings, and field study of the building corroborate a strong correlation between the original design and the extant structure. The first plans for the Recreation Building were prepared by Chester Aldrich in October 1933.[2] Subsequent adaptations were made to these plans in the ensuing months and construction drawings were prepared for the building by architects in the Procurement Division of the Public

[1] Chester H. Aldrich (1871-1940) was trained in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. He was a prolific architect and practiced for most of his career in the firm of Delano & Aldrich, which he founded with William Adams Delano in 1903. Through his role as Consulting Architect for the Public Buildings Branch, he was involved on several commissions at Ellis Island including the Ferry Building, New Immigration Building, Recreation Building and the Recreation Shelters. For an account of Aldrich and his architectural practice see Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Delano & Aldrich* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

[2] Elevation renderings, a section, and floorplans created by Alrich and dated October 11, 1933 have been digitized in the Technical Information Service collection of the Denver Service Center, National Park Service. See http://etic.nps.gov, NPS Drawing No. 462/43,957, Sheet 16 of 21. Correspondence in the records of the Public Buildings Service document that Aldrich continued to consult about the design of the project through 1937, but working drawings and specifications were prepared by the architects of the Public Buildings Service, under the supervision of Louis A. Simon. See correspondence in Entry 31C "General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-1939, 1934-1939, New York, NY Ellis Island Immigration Station, 1937-38," Boxes 5870-5880, RG 121 – Records of the Public Buildings Service, National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II), College Park, MD [Hereafter: Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II].

Buildings Service between January 1934 and October 1935.[3] The contract for the construction of the building was made with the Albert Development Corporation in February 1936 and construction began shortly thereafter. The building was occupied the Red Cross and other social services organizations in April 1937, though final details of the construction and the closing of the contract were not resolved until October 1938.

B. Historical Context:

The unassuming Recreation Building at Ellis Island stands as a testament to a period when the Federal Government of the United States invested in cultural capital in the form of buildings, art, and infrastructure. The "New Deal" program, under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, attempted to redirect the course of a nation that had been seriously derailed by the social and economic trauma of the Great Depression. The Recreation Building at Ellis Island offers only a modest architectural example of the buildings that were constructed under this Federal oversight during the 1930s, but in both its architectural vocabulary and its social function, the structure is consistent with the priorities and paradigms of New Deal architecture. The history of the building is integrally tied to the workings of federal bureaucracy as well as to the core principles of social welfare and cultural capital prevalent in the government during the 1930s.

The design and construction of the recreation facilities was also shaped by the particular needs of the hospital and immigration facilities on Ellis Island. As the nation's premiere immigration station, Ellis Island was a complex place in which social, logistical, and political factors influenced the gradual changes to its built environment. Two of these functions had a particular influence on the form and purpose of the Recreation Building. First, as part of the larger hospital complex, the Recreation Building and contemporaneous shelters were non-clinical hospital facilities providing spaces intended to assist in the physical and mental convalescence of patients with chronic illnesses. Second, the Recreation Building, which was also known in the 1930s as the Welfare or Social Services Building, was designed to accommodate the needs of private social services workers who assisted in the care of and advocacy for immigrants, patients, and deportees at Ellis Island. In its accommodation of social services needs, the appearance of the Recreation Building was strongly influenced by that of its functional predecessor. The first recreation building, generally referred to as the Red Cross Building, was constructed on Ellis Island during World War I to provide assistance to servicemen. The history of the design and construction of the new Recreation Building is inextricably tied to this earlier structure. The Red Cross Building was in use until the new Recreation Building was ready to be occupied, and the plan of the new structure, as well as many of its functional and spatial characteristics were defined by its earlier counterpart.

[3] Many of these drawings survive and are in the collection of the Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, National Park Service.

The appearance of the Recreation Building and Shelters was determined in large part by the pre-existing built environment of Ellis Island. The new Recreation Building needed to fit with prominent older buildings such as the late nineteenth century Immigration Building and, more importantly, with the Georgian Revival hospitals on Islands 2 and 3. As one of a series of new buildings for the site, all designed by Chester Aldrich, the Recreation Building also needed to complement the new Immigration Building, Ferry Building, and the Recreation Shelters. The new recreation structures were built in a simplified modern style that adopted the vocabulary of the adjacent Georgian Revival architecture, while also incorporating features from contemporary building practices. In order to trace the history of the Ellis Island Recreation Building with respect to these central concerns of its design and development, this report provides several brief context sections prior to a narrative history of the design and construction of the building.

Building Recreation into Ellis Island

By 1933, when the Federal Government began plans to build a new Recreation Building on Ellis Island, the site had been in operation as an immigration facility for forty years. Until the late nineteenth-century immigration had been controlled by individual states. The construction of the Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York Harbor coincided with the shift between federal and state administration, and the new facility replaced the earlier state-run buildings known as Castle Garden on Manhattan. Positioned at the mouth of the Hudson River between New York City and the growing industrial centers of Newark and Jersey City, both in New Jersey, the island was strategically located and came to serve as the nation's primary port of entry for aspiring immigrants.

From its earliest iterations, the form of Ellis Island was influenced by a complex combination of pragmatism and symbolism. The immigration facilities opened in 1892, the year in which the United States triumphantly celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the landing of Christopher Columbus. If the United States took the opportunity of the Columbian anniversary to celebrate its international "coming of age," it also began to feel the pressures of intense social and cultural change in the same years, in large part triggered by growing urban populations and rapid industrialization. Across the country, but especially in the congested spaces of the nation's most crowded cities, some social critics began to proclaim the negative impact of high levels of immigration on the nation's population, while others touted the necessity of more wide-spread and effective social services alongside an urban infrastructure that attended to the long-term health and well-being of its residents.

The federal built environment of Ellis Island was developed under the pressures of these conflicting concerns. National pride necessitated the development of a grand-scale immigration building, while concerns about the proper regulation of immigrants dominated much of the functionality of the immigration building and its adjoining structures. Some concern for the enduring welfare of aspiring immigrants, and a larger national push toward public health and urban sanitation, led to the construction of a small

hospital facility, which would rapidly develop into one of the most significant features of the island's landscape.

In order to accommodate its diverse needs on the small island of only two acres, the federal government immediately doubled the size of the island, replacing its organic form with a larger polygonal land mass. By 1897, this island contained a rambling wooden immigration building with a number of outbuildings including a hospital, insane hospital, disinfecting house, and detention building. In June 1897 the original wooden immigration building was destroyed in a fire and the government seized the opportunity to construct new facilities that would fulfill the nationalistic aspirations of the site. A second island (now referred to as Island 2) was constructed and the two land masses joined by a thin isthmus. The New York City architectural firm of Boring and Tilton laid out the grounds in an ornate civic landscape plan and designed elaborate new hospital and immigration facilities on the two islands. The anticipated effect of the new design was such that a commentator in the *New York Times* likened the planned new facilities to the glamorous White City built for the 1892 World's Columbian Exposition:

> The fact that the building stands detached and encircled by water…affords some of the chances for effected presented by the water court and canals at the World's Fair in showing off the buildings of the White City…the effect will be that the country beckons the immigrant into the harbor with the torch brandished by Liberty and then offers him the largest and finest edifice in the panorama of his landing place. … It may be that the immigrant is a cripple or a criminal, a friendless one or a person without the lawful number of dollars in his pocket, and must therefore turn about and bid the new home good-bye before he has really seen it; but while he is speeding up the Narrows he can indulge in the inexpensive pleasure of imagining that in his role of a future American monarch the Republic has placed at his disposal a palace far handsomer than many of those he has seen in the Old World.[4]

While the young architects may have exerted extra effort to insure that their building was visually appealing, they also were careful to consider its functionality. Even in such a unique building type, "every detail of the exacting and confusing service to which its uses are to be dedicated were considered in perfecting the interior plans."[5] Although it was not a primary purpose of the structure, some attention was given to providing recreation facilities: "Iron stairways lead from the private quarters of the immigrants to the roofs on either end of the building, which have been dubbed 'roof gardens' and 'pavilion roofs.'"[6]

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[4] Charles DeKay, "Accepted Design for the New Immigration Building on Ellis Island," *New York Times* 7 August 1898, IMS4. The Worlds Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago, Illinois. Planned for 1892, it did not open until 1893. The fair was a phenomenal popular success and drew visitors from across the country and around the globe. The "White City" was an assemblage of neoclassical temporary fair buildings arranged around a central reflecting pool. The site was designed by an elite group of the nation's leading architects including McKim, Mead & White and Daniel H. Burnham.

[5] "New Immigrant Station," *New York Times,* 2 December 1900, 5.

[6] Ibid.

Although the immigration authorities did not publically indicate any interest in hosting performances or concerts, the space of the reception hall seemed created for such events and newspaper accounts began to speculate on their likelihood.[7]

Boring and Tilton's Immigration Building endowed the island with a striking architectural character and set the tone for the island's many subsequent buildings. In addition to the new Immigration Building, a large Kitchen and Laundry Building, Powerhouse, and other outbuildings were constructed on Island 1. The isthmus between Islands 1 and 2 housed the Ferry House, at which aspiring emigrants would alight after sailing by the grandeur of the Main Immigration Building. On Island 2 a grand-scaled hospital building and surgeon's house were accompanied by smaller hospital outbuildings. Covered walkways offered a connecting spine between the buildings on Island 1 and those on Island 2. Some elements of Boring and Tilton's landscape plan were implemented. The refined landscape combined with the ornate aesthetic of the buildings was intended to offset the institutional feel of the site, though throughout its active history critics would continue to regret that this attempt was unsuccessful. Even as the government invested in these buildings, the need for further facilities became apparent. Accordingly, an additional rectangular island (now known as Island 3) was added to the complex in 1907 and a thin wooden gangway connected it to Island 2.

Structures were added to Ellis Island during the early years of the twentieth century in response to increased levels of immigration and higher expectations for the range and quality of medical care. Island 3 was filled with a new pavilion-style hospital for patients with contagious diseases, and the facilities were strategically disconnected from the buildings on Islands 1 and 2 in order to avoid the unwanted spread of infection. Of particular importance to the history of the Recreation Building was the construction of the American Red Cross Building, which was erected on Island 2 in 1915 "as a temporary structure" during World War I.[8] During the war the hospital at Ellis Island treated injured servicemen who required a new range of social services and entertainments to fill the idle hours of their convalescence. Likewise, rejected immigrants and deportees whose homelands were ravaged by war were detained for long periods of time on the island's facilities. During these extended periods of detention, prisoners and patients alike needed a greater range of outlets to make their stay tolerable and a greater number of social workers and advocates in order to respond to their range of needs and concerns.

Frederic C. Howe, who served as the Commissioner of Ellis Island during World War I wrote explicitly about the pressures that beset the island during the war years, "The war turned Ellis Island into a detention camp. Immigrants could not be deported to Germany, Russia, or Austria-Hungary. They kept coming in, and soon we had hundreds that had to be kept here until the end of the war, or some disposition made for them."[9]

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[7] See Ibid.: "Whether there are to be vaudeville or other entertainments, the authorities so far have failed to state. But it can be said with some degree of authority, that such entertainments as will take place will be given by 'stage folk' and other artists who of necessity will have to pass under the supervision of the department."
[8] Letter, Ralph E. Ogle to W. E. Reynolds, (13 August 1934), Box 5879, Entry 31, RG 121, NARA II.
[9] Frederic C. Howe, "Denies Scandals at Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 20 July 1916, 4.

Within the context of this situation, recreation became an absolute need for the island's inhabitants. While critics objected that Howe's policies allowing detainees (in particular single women accused of questionable professions) to mingle on lawns and open-air verandas, Howe countered:

> Complaint is made that I opened a big playground on the lawn I admit it; also that the warrant cases are permitted to go to the lawn under the supervision of matrons and in company with other aliens. They also walk on a big veranda, but have instructions to bother no one. The only other alternative was to lock these girls in a small room and keep them there for months, and some of them there for years, until the war permits their return. I admit that I have tried to make the terrible conditions of aliens detained at Ellis Island as comfortable as possible[10]

Howe worked with social service aids to establish a program of activities in which patients and detainees could participate. A library was established which attempted, through the inclusion of books in twenty-six different languages, to accommodate the needs of detainees and convalescent servicemen.[11] Howe and his colleagues believed that access to the library and to its rigorously trained librarian could contribute to the convalescence of patients and the acculturation of immigrants. One newspaper commentator enthusiastically summarized the library's benefits:

> In the conditions that must prevail at the Ellis Island hospital this social work of the librarian is particularly valuable. The hospital is not primarily for the treatment of disease, but rather for detention, observation, and diagnosis. The majority of the people there are comparable at worst to convalescents, but, in addition to the usual impatience of convalescents they have a pall of uncertainty hanging over them…reading matter and words of encouragement from the librarian are of even greater worth here than in the ordinary hospital.[12]

If the library helped to cultivate the minds of patients, while also providing knowledge that could lead them toward future employment, other social service functions attempted to address the physical well-being of the island's residents or offer practical instruction in manual trades. Commissioner Howe elaborated on some of these activities:

> Big concerts are given for the detained immigrants on Sunday and during the week there are entertainments. Sewing classes have been organized, for the immigrants have worn out their clothes during the long wait for the

[10] Ibid.
[11] For period discussions of the library at Ellis Island see: "Helen Grannis Dies; Branch Library Head," *New York Times* 19 February 1935), 21; P.L.S., "Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*: Library for Immigrants," *New York Times*, 2 September 1923, XX10.
[12] P. L. S., "Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*: Library for Immigrants."

> ending of the war. Classes in calisthenics have been provided, and as many recreations as possible have been installed.[13]

All these activities required space and specially-allocated resources. Some events (like the Sunday concerts) could be held in the Main Immigration Building. From World War I through the 1920s, concerts of soloists and musical troops filled the building and were duly announced in the *New York Times*. The constant flux of immigrants to and from the island during the week, however, prevented the larger public spaces from being routinely available to patients and servicemen.

In response to this need, the American Red Cross constructed a building on Ellis Island which was variously known as the "Recreation Building," "American Red Cross Building" or "Social Services Building." The building was tucked into the northeast corner of Island 2, adjacent to the Main Hospital Building and connected via the covered walkway to the ferry house and the immigration buildings on Island 1. The small one-story structure was designed to accommodate both entertainment and social services needs. It featured a large open interior space, which could flexibly accommodate a range of activities. A raised stage was located at the southeast end of the room and large windows gave the island's inmates rare unobstructed views out over the Ferry Basin and Main Immigration Building. Two small offices book-ended the stage and two larger offices, which accommodated Protestant and Catholic priests respectively, flanked the main door to the building, which fed into the hospital's covered passageway. Although a low-cost building, the structure was given details that helped it fit aesthetically with adjacent structures. The walls were constructed of structural terra cotta blocks and their exterior faced with pebble-dash stucco.[14] In order to complement the adjacent neo-Georgian hospital structures, prominent red brick quoins were used to trim the exterior corners of the building.

Other features of the structure pointed toward its temporary nature. No men's restroom was included in the building, for example, even though male hospital patients were the primary users of the structure from when it was first occupied. Instead, patients were expected to walk back through the covered passageway to the hospital building in order to use the facilities. Likewise gutters were eliminated, perhaps as an ill-conceived cost-saving measure, and linoleum was substituted for hardwood as the building's interior flooring. These basic structural short-cuts may, ultimately, have contributed to the government's decision to replace the building less than twenty years after its construction. Equally interesting, however, is the fact that in designing its replacement, Chester Aldrich and the architects from the Public Buildings Service, adopted a plan that mimicked many essential characteristics of the original building. Although the new structure was twice as large as its earlier counterpart, and occupied a much more prominent location between Islands 2 and 3, the first American Red Cross Building and the new Recreation Building were nevertheless sibling structures. The form of the new

[13] Howe, "Denies Scandals at Ellis Island."
[14] All descriptions of the building here are based on Ogle's letter of Aug. 13, 1934 to Reynolds, Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

Recreation Building was strongly influenced by that of its older counterpart and the first building was in use, despite its disheveled condition, until its newer replacement was completed.

The activities that took place on Ellis Island during World War I significantly altered many long-term functions of the island. Social services grew in prominence during the war, both on Ellis Island and in the surrounding urban community. This transformation is discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow considering the "New Deal" and the contemporary concept of social services. With regard to the built environment of Ellis Island, however, increased emphasis was placed on creating spaces where immigrants could make the transition into citizens of the United States while also regaining their health through an extended convalescence. These efforts included facilities and landscaped spaces that supported the recovery of a sound mind and body. In addition to the continuation of social services on the island, the detention system was never fully eliminated. In fact, the practice of holding detainees on the island seems to have increased. During the Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover administrations, in particular, many immigrants were apprehended in raids and held for extended periods on Ellis Island awaiting deportation, many of these deportations having to do with suspected ties to socialism.[15] The detention of the "Reds" brought extensive press attention to the island, some of which highlighted the lack of demarcated spaces to separate negative or dangerous individuals (like those accused of socialism) from their more innocuous counterparts. Both of these long-term shifts in use of the site required changes to the architecture and landscape of the island. No immediate changes were made after the war, but by the mid 1920s the need for improvements was clear.

Government officials and immigrants alike complained that the buildings on the island were run-down from a quarter century of heavy use. An increasing inundation of immigrants, combined with a growing population of detained émigrés and deportees, filled the facilities to overflowing. Negative press painted the island as "hell's island," criticizing both how immigrants were treated and the poor condition of the facilities. A key moment for the renovation of the island came in 1923, when Sir Auckland Geddess, the British Ambassador to the United States, published his assessment of its conditions. Two aspects of his report are of particular value to the history of recreation on Ellis Island. Geddess first outlined his concerns about the condition of the buildings, culminating in reflecting on the need for more outdoor recreation space for "inmates":

> My general criticism of the buildings is that they are too small. Further, the immigration laws have been altered since they were built, and, however suitable they may have been at the time of their erection, they do not quite meet the present requirements … I understand that the superintending architect of the United States Government is now considering how they can be better adapted. I have no doubt that further improvement is possible. It is difficult to see, however, how any one can

[15] For a discussion of the impact of the "Red Scare" on Ellis Island see Vincent J. Cannato, *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), esp. 326-331.

> rearrange the buildings and grounds to make them really suitable. The ideal 'Ellis Island' would have, I imagine, ground around it so that those whose sojourn there could not be brief would have space to move about and to get away from what must often be a nauseating contact with their companions in detention.[16]

Further, Geddess also observed that what little entertainment was provided to the deportees and detainees was hardly appropriate to the mental state of those confined to the institution. While he did not suggest alternate forms of entertainment, he strongly admonished that Ellis Island officials, "abandon the quaint custom of delivering lectures on Americanization…this well-meant activity seems to be more annoying to its victims than any other single detail in the life of Ellis Island."[17]

Such high-profile criticism necessitated official response. While actual change was slow to occur, Geddess' comments got public officials to increase dialogue about the island in general. Concerns about access to recreation surfaced frequently in the exchanges that followed.[18] Henry Curran, then Commissioner Ellis Island, vehemently rejected the majority of Geddess' criticisms, but within two months of the ambassador's report he traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with officials and proposed a $1.5 million renovation to the Ellis Island facilities.[19] By December 1923, Curran raised his request to over $2.5 million, and began a popular press campaign to advertise his program for the island, which included a significant emphasis on creating spaces for outdoor recreation.[20]

Commissioner Curran did not receive his multi-million dollar appropriation but funding was gradually allotted in a smaller amount and improvements proceeded in a piecemeal fashion. Workers began to fill in the lagoon between Island 2 and Island 3 in order to create Curran's outdoor promenade, though it took nearly a decade before this infill process was completed.[21] In 1924, alterations were made to the Baggage & Dormitory Building in order to allow immigrants access to a porch on the second story.[22]

When Edward Corsi became Commission of Immigration at Ellis Island in 1931, he initiated a further series of improvements to the buildings and landscape. In his first year as Commissioner, Corsi expanded and fenced the recreation grounds on Island 1. In

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[16] "Geddess Recounts Ellis Island Evils, Suggests Remedies," *New York Times*, 16 August 1923, 1. Also in this article, former Ellis Island Commissioner Frederick Wallis confirmed Geddess' assessment of the property, remarking, "The physical conditions at Ellis Island are anything but desirable. … What we need is a new Ellis Island…We need more adequate housing conditions, more recreation rooms, better air and light and more humane treatment of the immigrant."
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Attack by Geddess, Called Misleading," *New York Times*, 17 August 1923, 1.
[19] "Curran Urges Funds for Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 25 October 1923, 5.
[20] See, among other sources, "Bigger Ellis Island asked by Curran," *New York Times*, 22 December 1923, 7; "Immigrants Outdoors First Time Since July," *New York Times*, 20 January 1924, S6.
[21] See discussion in Chapter 5 of J. Tracy Stakely, *Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument* (Brookline, MA: National Park Service, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2003), 75.
[22] Ibid., 75-77.

the following year he proposed that the government should establish a formal program of recreational and occupational activities at Ellis Island. Ostensibly as a first step toward instituting such a program, Corsi established a system of armed prison guards and fencing to separate and control the "criminal element" on the island. Due to these more controlled conditions, Corsi claimed he could then allow other residents of the Island greater freedom:

> When I wanted to give more freedom I couldn't do it because of the danger and the chances of escape. With this guard they will get more freedom, and where they are now only allowed outside the building an hour a day, they will get more time, and will be happier. [Further, Corsi said] aliens are penned up and kept within doors such long hours that their mental condition is 'shameful,' and they conceive a hatred for those who keep them there.[23]

Corsi then called for the United States Government to establish a committee that would "study conditions on the island and consider a projected occupational and recreational program."[24] Ultimately, it would be the formation of the Ellis Island Committee in 1933 by Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and more specifically the Subcommittee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment, which would finally offer a full assessment of the problems with extant recreational facilities at Ellis Island. After decades of vacillating between concerns about access to recreation, budgetary stresses, and the need to continue regulating immigrant activity, the Federal government and the administration of Ellis Island would finally develop a solution to the problem of recreation on Ellis Island.

The Cultural Context of Recreation

The development of recreation facilities at Ellis Island in the 1930s was spurred by a decade of change within public approaches to social services and recreation. During World War I, socially-motivated organizations, like the Red Cross, gained both support and infrastructure. Following the war, social service institutions worked to maintain their prominence and to develop an influence over wider sectors of society. Of particular relevance to Ellis Island was the widespread period interest in helping immigrants to assimilate into the society and in addressing the problems of urban blight. Private groups such as the New York Community Service Organization, the Red Cross, the YMCA, the Boys Scouts of America, and the Girl Scouts of America employed recreation and leisure activities to help teach the émigré how to be a citizen.

During the Roosevelt Administration, the federal government adopted a social agenda that complemented the programs in place within private organizations. In her position as Secretary of Labor, for example, Frances Perkins sought to work toward the "humanization of the immigration service, re-employment, and improvement of working

[23] "Ellis Island is Put under Armed Guard," *New York Times*, 23 July 23, 1932): 13.
[24] Ibid.

conditions …..[she announced] that every provision of the immigration law would be faithfully carried out with due regard to 'human values,' 'international amenities' and economic conditions 'at home and abroad.'"[25]

Likewise, the construction of recreation and "leisure time" facilities became a particular emphasis of WPA funding, in part because so many more residents of the United States found themselves without the regular routines of paid employment to fill their time. Faced with the juxtaposition of the opposing concepts of desirable "leisure time" versus listless "spare time," which many believed could lead to increased crime and moral laxity, the federal government hoped to convince the nation's unemployed workers that the productive use of leisure time could be healthy, mentally stimulating, and enjoyable.[26]

Given the extended period of convalescence that many patients had at Ellis Island, and the complete lack of outside resources available to them during these months, the need for expanded recreation facilities was painfully evident. The contemporary priorities of social service institutions and the New Deal social welfare policies created an environment in which the investment in such facilities was deemed as important to the administration and maintenance of Ellis Island as the modernization and restructuring of its immigration and medical facilities.

Period medical conventions also supported the development of recreation spaces to assist in the convalescence of patients confined during long-term illnesses. In the contagious disease hospital at Ellis Island, patients were treated for both severely dangerous short-term illnesses (such as measles) and long-term, but equally deadly, diseases like tuberculosis. World War I had put extreme pressure on medical conventions in both the United States and Europe, resulting in new treatment techniques, innovative medicines, and the questioning of some treatment conventions. One of the resulting shifts was that doctors began to place increased emphasis on "a more integrated, and sometimes even holistic approach to the understanding of disease, one in which the relationships between the individual and its environment regained importance."[27] Such concerns led doctors to emphasize that medical cures could be environmental as well as medicinal.

In the treatment of tuberculosis, in particular, the physical environment combined with structured social and recreational activities were deemed as important to recovery as

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[25] Winifred Mallon, "Social Welfare: Reforms Pushed by Interior and Labor Departments," *New York Times*, 4 March 1934, XX6.
[26] See the article "Leisure as a Factor in Architecture," *Architectural Record* 75, no. 3 (March 1934): 191-224.
[27] Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10, no. 2 (April 2005): 186. For further discussion of the therapeutic physical environment see: Annmarie Adams, *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital, 1893-1943* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Abigail A. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), esp. 99.

the program for medical treatment. Following World War I, the ranks of tuberculosis patients in the United States grew rapidly, as large numbers of infected servicemen returned from foreign tours.[28] In the interwar period, the contagious disease hospital at Ellis Island began to treat residents of New York City with tuberculosis as well as arriving immigrants, swelling the ranks of long-term patients in its wards.[29] This new population of patients created increased pressure for facilities, such as Ellis Island, that now needed to respond more fully to the needs of long-term patient-residents. As Jennifer Connor noted in her study of the creation of libraries for tuberculosis care facilities (known as sanatoria) in this period, educational and recreational activities were of particular importance within the medical and community structures of these places, given the young age and lengthy stay for most patients.[30]

Tuberculosis could transform the lives of individuals with careers, families, and established communities in the United States, and it could be even more disruptive for individuals who were diagnosed with the disease during the course of emigration and were faced with a future in a foreign country made more uncertain by the physical and lifestyle constraints of a chronic illness. For these reasons, the development of adequate facilities that could treat both the minds and the bodies of patients were deemed of great importance. An article on hospitals published in *Architectural Record* in 1938 specifically highlighted the new standard of situating tuberculosis patients in urban hospitals that could give patients access to the best specialists and most active medical regimes. Within such urban tuberculosis hospitals, it noted that room should be provided for "Occupational therapy, recreation, etc.," which would provide "space for teaching such arts and crafts as medical condition permits; assembly room with stage and motion-picture facilities; small lending library; roofs and balconies, partially shaded; day camp similar to convalescent day camp."[31] At Ellis Island, then, the construction of a larger and more modern Recreation and Social Services Building, accompanied by landscaped

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[28] Jennifer J. Connor, "Prescribed Reading: Patients' Libraries in North American Tuberculosis Institutions," *Libraries and Culture* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 254. Ellis Island was different from many other modern hospitals in its need to accommodate many different types of specialized hospital types within one complex, and it is likely that the recreation facilities were intended to serve a variety of different types of patients. For example, the tuberculosis and psychiatric wards, which treated radically different types of chronic diseases, were both located within the larger hospital network. Period publications cited the need for educational and occupational therapy for psychiatric patients, just as they did for tubercular patients, as in the 1938 publication, "Hospitals, with time-saver standards data," which noted that in psychiatric hospitals "facilities are provided for both indoor and outdoor play. Roof terraces are protected with insurmountable fences. Areas are also provided for occupational therapy and classrooms for both children and adults." See *Architectural Record* 84, no. 2 (August 1938): 105.

[29] "Surgeon General's Annual Report, 1930," as cited in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island Statue of Liberty National Monument New York-New Jersey, Historic Resource Study (Historical Component)* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1981), 290; Diane Elizabeth Williams, HABS No. NY-6086, 17.

[30] Connor, 254.

[31] "Hospitals," *Architectural Record* 84, no. 2 (August 1938): 97.

recreation spaces and open-air Recreation Shelters, was intended to serve a distinct medical purpose in addition to its social and governmental agendas.[32]

The most relevant comparative examples for the Recreation Building on Ellis Island were other recreation and social services spaces designed for contemporary hospital facilities in both Europe and the United States.[33] Several such facilities were constructed in New York City during the 1930s. At the Triboro Hospital for tuberculosis, in Queens, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities were included within a multistory art deco structure. Most interesting is the comparison of the Recreation Building at the Convalescent Day Camps at Welfare Island, New York City (now known as Roosevelt Island, formerly Blackwell's Island), a locally-run public hospital. This federally-funded project was nearly contemporary to the Recreation Building and Shelters at Ellis Island. Both Welfare Island and Ellis Island also combined a medical with a penal function, as much of Welfare Island was dedicated to a large and storied prison building. At Welfare Island Day Camp, out-patients with chronic conditions could spend the day on the island before returning to their homes in the evening. The large recreation building contained an assembly space, with a large stage platform and projection equipment. This space doubled as a dining room and was attached to a kitchen of nearly equal scale. This recreation building was centrally located on a horizontal strip of land and surrounded by eight shelter structures. Each shelter sat on its own landscaped terrace and was given a specifically demarcated section of the landscape such that each individual pavilion could serve a particular classification of patient, and patients could also be divided by "sex or age group," each with its own play area and yard space. Each shelter was had an enclosed store room, waiting area and toilet. A central allée of trees connected all the structures along a single circulation route.

The recurring presence of recreation structures in contemporary hospital complexes emphasizes the connection between such buildings and hospital architecture. Annemarie Adams has demonstrated that despite the consistent selection of historic architectural styles, the early twentieth century hospital responded to modern needs in terms of the types of spaces it created, the materials used in the buildings, and the over-all functionality of the structures.[34] The hospital recreation building was both a component of this larger modern hospital form and a response to many of the same concerns that influence the form of hospital buildings, such as urbanization, changing medical practices, and modern social structures. The history of the Recreation Building reflects this relationship between hospital and social services, and suggests the manner in which

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[32] For a period source on the impact of leisure on architecture see Harold S Buttenheim, "The Economic Significance of Voluntary Leisure," in "Leisure as a Factor in Architecture," *Architectural Record* 75, no. 3 (March 1934): 224.

[33] One of the larger published examples of Recreation Buildings was located in the Tuberculosis Hospital in Harefield, England, built outside London in the 1930s. This complex consisted of large free-standing arched hospital wings, which paid homage on a grand scale to the pavilion-style hospital form. These hospital structures were organized across a fairly large site with open garden area in between. The recreation building was a large rectangular structure connected to the kitchen and to a central store. See "Hospitals, with time-saver standards data," 100-103, esp. the photograph of the Recreation Block on 103.

[34] Annemarie Adams, "Modernism and Medicine: The Hospitals of Stevens and Less, 1916-1932," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 1 (March 1999): 45.

medicine, government and socially-motivated organizations worked together in the interwar period of the United States.

The Ellis Island Recreation Building and the "New Deal"

A significant factor in the conditions that led to the construction of the new Recreation Building at Ellis Island was the Federal Government's development of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) following the catastrophic stock market crash of October 29, 1929 and the subsequent tenacious economic downturn of the Great Depression. These federal programs were developed primarily as a means for creating gainful occupation for the unemployed and stimulating the economy. As Robert D. Leighninger, Jr. has compellingly argued, however, these programs were also the federal government's attempt to shape the cultural infrastructure of the United States in a period during which many were concerned both about widespread immigration and about the disintegration of communities in the wake of the financial collapse.[35] Through the creation of thousands of public buildings, among which hundreds were intended to serve as recreational facilities, the federal government sought to create communities. As Leighninger explained, "One of the things that public space can do is encourage the integration of all aspects of the community. Almost all of the projects that the PWA, WPA, and CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] undertook were places where people of all ages, classes, and races…might come together… National unity, or at least party solidarity, might have been somewhere in his mind."[36] Thus, he concluded that the "ideology of New Deal Civility" was creating the idea that all citizens could learn to "feel safe in the company of others," and gain "recognition of a common humanity."[37] Such ideological concerns had a clear bearing on the immigration work of Ellis Island and it is fitting, therefore, that among the works on Ellis Island that were funded by the WPA were the Recreation Building, Recreation Shelters (on Island 1 and between Islands 2 & 3), as well as the pavement of the promenades for the recreation grounds on Island 3.

The architectural projects of the WPA were funded through emergency governmental funding but were supervised by the preexisting Supervising Architect's Office within the Department of the Treasury (a third government bureau, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, was also generally active in negotiations regarding the buildings on Ellis Island). A reorganization of the bureaucratic structure in 1933 following the establishment of the New Deal programs created the Public Buildings Service within the Procurement Division of the Department of the Treasury and it was this particular office that oversaw the design and construction of the Recreation Building at Ellis Island. The federal mandate for this division was the rapid and efficient

[35] Robert D. Leighninger, Jr. "Cultural Infrastructure: The Legacy of New Deal Public Space," *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 2 (May 1996): 226-236.
[36] Ibid., 231.
[37] Ibid., 236.

construction of buildings, intended to maximize the impact of federal funding for unemployed construction workers.[38]

In order to achieve this goal, the Public Buildings Service expanded rapidly, hiring numerous architects and engineers during the 1930s. Design commissions were often handled by the office, which could produce all required working drawings and would also work with local contractors through a system of long-distance oversight and periodic site visits. In some instances and during some portions of this period, the Public Buildings Service would also work with private "consulting architects" in the design of a commission. The later system was utilized in the design of the Recreation Building and it was one of several structures planned for Ellis Island by the New York City architect Chester Aldrich. Although Aldrich produced the original design for the building, the architects in the Public Buildings Service created the working drawings, drafted the publicized call for bids, and corresponded with contractors and sub-contractors.

The role of the Public Buildings Service was not, however, limited to bureaucracy. The government department was both active and influential in the establishment of aesthetic and structural standards for buildings. The Supervising Architect played a crucial role in this process. During the period in which the Recreation Building project was brought to fruition, Louis A. Simon, a long-time government architect with an architectural degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was in the position of Supervising Architect. Simon was an aesthetic, as well as a logistical, leader for his office, shifting the work produced by the government architects from an "excess of elaboration or non-functional expression" to "an effort toward simplicity and restraint and the attainment of pleasing results, by a studied consideration of mass and proportion."[39] Simon worked closely with Aldrich throughout the commission and the building reflects an aesthetic and functional vision that combined the influences of these two professional architects.

The government oversight of the aesthetic characteristics of the building was coupled with their supervision of its structures and materials. Throughout the process of design and construction the Public Buildings Service would weigh the merits of particular building materials and would test the integrity of all products used in the building process, from concrete to paint to structural steel beams. Intended as a system to control the structural integrity of government buildings and to ensure their long-term stability, this complex system of checks and balances was also often politically motivated. In the design of the Recreation Building, for example, the original call for bids, which had stipulated the use of limestone for all decorative features on the building's exterior was revised to call instead for the use of glazed terra cotta blocks. Politicians urged that this

[38] For detailed a discussion of the shifting permutations of the office and its duties across this period see Chapter 8: "The Public Buildings Program in Eras of Affluence and Depression: 1926-1939" in Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 237-275.

[39] From Louis A. Simon's application to become a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), as quoted in Ibid: 260. The original document is in the AIA Archives, Washington, D.C.

change would be economical beneficial to local terra cotta manufacturers.[40] This politically-motivated decision caused a change in the structure that actually lessened its long-term durability and was the subject of comment by internal architects and engineers on several occasions. In November 1936, for example, the engineer C. T. Holden inspected the progress of the building for the division and reported to his supervisors that "terra cotta trim exhibits the usual terra cotta faults and seems to have been needlessly used on this job, as the contractor proposed to furnish limestone at no extra cost."[41] This example suggests the manner in which decisions within the department were influenced by a complex network of financial, administrative, political and aesthetic concerns.

A final aspect of the WPA program that had a strong influence on the construction of the Recreation Building, as well as other contemporary features at Ellis Island, was the federal system for defining the specifications of a building and selecting a general contractor. Because there was great concern about making the federal building projects as financially sound as possible, the Public Building Service would both prepare detailed working drawings and specifications for each commission. Prospective contractors would place bids based on these exact project descriptions and, except when contractors attempted to substitute materials or made other types of errors in their building proposals, federal law required that the government select the lowest bid. Throughout the subsequent construction process, the government would then supervise the accuracy with which the contractor adhered to these stipulations. Problems frequently arose especially when building conditions varied from those specified on drawings (as in the earlier construction at Ellis Island of the seawall), or when individual products were not available and substitutions needed to be made. This process could also prolong the total time from design to completion of a building, a phenomenon that is evident in the construction history of the Recreation Building, which was prolonged from the beginning of the design process in 1933 until the final closing of the contract in 1938.

Designing a Recreation Building for Ellis Island

The design process of the Ellis Island Recreation Building was begun in 1933, but its conceptual origins can be traced to the reform initiatives begun by Edward Corsi when he became commissioner of the Ellis Island Immigration Station in 1931. Speaking to a conference on Immigration Policy in 1932, Corsi stated that, "the problem of the detention of aliens on Ellis Island is its most serious one and ought eventually to be met by a governmental program of recreational and occupational activities for those held

[40] This change in materials was precipitated by Sen. W. Warren Barbour writing to L. W. Roberts, Jr, then Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, on January 24, 1934. Barbour commented, "There are approximately seven terra cotta plants within fifteen to twenty miles of Ellis Island and it would seem, therefore, that this product should be given preference for the exterior of these buildings rather than limestone, which would have to be shipped from a considerable distance and entirely from without the Metropolitan distance," Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[41] Report, C. T. Holden to the Supervising Engineer, Public Building Branch, Washington, D.C., Box 5873, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

there."[42] As Commissioner, Corsi took steps to improve the opportunities that detainees, patients, and émigrés had while at Ellis Island to gain access to outdoor spaces. Primarily, however, his efforts took the form of raising public and federal awareness of the insufficient recreational and leisure spaces on the island. In 1932, the Commissioner travelled to Washington, D.C. to present his frustrations to members of the Federal Government and also allowed himself to discuss the island's negative conditions both at conferences and in interviews with the *New York Times*.

In June 1933, Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, responded to Corsi's complaints by naming a "non partisan group of men and women to inquire impartially into conditions at Ellis Island and the welfare of immigrants generally and to make recommendations for the guidance of the Department."[43] In an attempt to emphasize the important and upright purpose of the committee, Perkins emphasized that, "the personnel of the committee is such as to give assurance of a competent, careful, and impartial investigation reaching sound and helpful conclusions."[44] The committee appointed consisted of a range of individuals—from wealthy benefactors to career social workers.

Within the "Ellis Island Committee" a special sub-committee on "Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment" (henceforth the "Buildings" subcommittee) was appointed by Carleton H. Palmer, the Head of the Ellis Island Committee.[45] Asserting that the "essential element of the report submitted must be that each and every member of the committee has approached the problem with a completely open mind determined to establish the facts before coming to a conclusion," Palmer announced, among other appointments, that Chester H. Aldrich, a New York City-based architect and principal in the firm Delano & Aldrich, would serve as the chair of the "Buildings" subcommittee. [46] Joining Aldrich on the sub-committee were Harvey Wiley Corbett, who served as vice-chairman, W. B. Poland, and C. D. Wallach.[47] This subcommittee was charged with the task of assessing the built environment of Ellis Island, evaluating its fitness to the

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[42] "Corsi Wants Aliens in his Care to Work: Suggest Federal Program of Recreation and Occupation for Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 18 March 1932, 23.
[43] Carleton H. Palmer, *Report of the Ellis Island Committee,* (New York, 1934), Preface [n.p.].
[44] "Committee Named on Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 23 June 1933, 6.
[45] Palmer was president of the pharmaceutical company E. R. Squibb & Sons.
[46] Given Aldrich's involvement throughout the design of the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelters, it is remarkable that his role on this committee has not been noted elsewhere. Aldrich's position as chair of the sub-committee, and Palmer's discussion of committee member qualifications, were both discussed in the article, "Alien Treatment Investigated Here," *New York Times*, 27 January 1933, 19.
[47] Corbett, like Aldrich, was a prominent architect. He held an engineering degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a degree in architecture from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. By 1933 he had been in private practice for thirty-one years. During the early 1930s Corbett was involved in the design and construction of Rockefeller Center in New York City (1928-1937) and in the planning of the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. For further information about the biography of H. W. Corbett, see Carol Willis, "Harvey Willis Corbett," in *Macmillan Encycopledia of Architects(Volume 1),* Adolf K. Placzek, ed., (New York and London: The Free Press, 1982), 451-52. W. A. Poland was the architect for the Trenton City Board of Education and, like Corbett, was nearing the end of his career in 1933. For what little is known about his work, see the Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased),* (Los Angeles: Hennessy & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 477. Nothing is known about C. D. Wallach, who served as the secretary of the committee.

purposes of the site, and recommending alterations and additions that would help to improve both the functionality and the reputation of the immigration station. Aldrich was a logical choice for the appointment since he was both prominent within the New York City architectural community and a familiar figure to the Washington, D.C. federal architectural community, having recently worked on the design and construction of the new Post Office Department Building in Washington, D.C. (completed in 1933). No records survive documenting the subcommittee's procedures for inspection or data collection.

The Ellis Island Committee would take a year to study the site and to prepare its final report, which it issued in March 1934 as the *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*. In the intervening months, however, Aldrich began to work directly with the Public Buildings Service as a consulting architect in the design of several new buildings for Ellis Island: the Recreation Building, Recreation Shelters, New Immigration Building, and New Ferry Building. The history of the earliest stages of the commission is uncertain, but seems to involve lack of communication and competing interests within different branches of the federal government. Even as the Ellis Island Committee pledged to offer a diligent and disinterested study of the immigration station, the Public Buildings Service sought to expend some of its large pool of "New Deal" funding on the modernization of the island's facilities. By July 1933 (one month after Aldrich was appointed to the "Buildings" subcommittee), the Public Works Administration, under the administration of Harold L. Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, had earmarked $475,000 for work at Ellis Island.[48]

No precise record has been uncovered to establish how the PWA came to have an interest in completing work at Ellis Island, but it seems reasonable to hypothesize that this project was initially conceived as a response to the successive requests first by Commissioner Corran and then by Commissioner Corsi for substantial funding toward renovation work at the island. Final approval for these funds and decisions about their allocation involved a multilayered process, much of which was carried out in a piecemeal fashion over the four years until all the buildings were completed. However, despite Ickes' insistence that the emergency federal monies were not a "grab bag" for the taking, the primary concern of the federal government with regard to these funds was their quick expenditure in order to infuse local economies and stimulate the flagging construction market.[49] Perhaps because of this urgent fiscal agenda, the Public Buildings Service pressed forward in defining a construction and renovation project at Ellis Island before the committee had completed its deliberations or filed its final report.

Working more rapidly than the larger committee, and probably in response to the promise of WPA funding, the Buildings Sub-Committee submitted its internal report on September 13, 1933, two days after Chester Aldrich received an offer from the Public

[48] See "Work Lists Sent Back by Roosevelt," *New York Times*, 18 July 1933, 11.
[49] Ickes was quoted in Ibid.

Buildings Service to serve as the consulting architect for the work at Ellis Island.[50] Not surprisingly, the work that Aldrich proposed to complete for the federal government aligned with the needs and recommendations set forth by his sub-committee. Aldrich received the commission despite the fact that he drafted a proposal that far exceeded the realistic available funds, itemizing expenses totaling $1,151,800.00 to be completed at Ellis Island under the auspices of the Public Works Program.[51] Included within this total was a line item for a "new building, including furnishing and equipment for…Social Service work (and quarters for workers) in connection with hospitals," and mention of the construction of "shelters" though neither case did Aldrich offer specific construction estimates for the structures.[52]

The Report of the Sub-Committee prepared in September 1933 was equally vague in its stipulations for these projects. With regard to the Recreation Building, it noted merely that "the old A. R. C. [American Red Cross] building for hospital recreation and social service now on Island 2—and a fire hazard—should be removed and in place of this a new building provided in the space between the two hospitals." It equally vaguely stipulated the need for "new shelters with comfort stations in all out-door recreation spaces."[53] More specific attention was given to the designation of portions of the island that could be transformed into outdoor recreation spaces, probably in direct response to the concerns expressed by Corsi. Most relevant to the Recreation Building was the subcommittee's recommendation that the "space between the two hospitals …be regraded and planted and used for hospital recreation" (Figure 1). Several other outdoor recreation spaces were discussed in general terms, including a "Recreation Space for Deportees" on Island 1, in which a second Recreation Shelter would eventually be constructed.[54]

In the final *Report of the Ellis Island Committee* the "Buildings" subcommittee offered greater detail in its analysis of the site, perhaps reflecting a more detailed vision developed by Aldrich during the months spent executing his designs for the Recreation Building. After discussing the shifting administrative and functional needs of the site,

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[50] Several archival documents confirm this chronology, but the most explicit is the "Memorandum" of January 17, 1934 prepared by W. E. Reynolds for the Assistant Secretary of Labor, explaining that "Mr. Aldrich of New York, was selected as consulting architect September 11, 1933. Sketches were submitted by him on October 21 and October 31. Working drawings partially completed were sent to him from this office on December 14th and December 20th. Working drawings will be completed by January 31, 1934. These drawings must then be checked and specifications written, which will place the calling for bids about March 1st." (Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II). The committee's report was completed as "Report of the Sub-Committee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment for Ellis Island," (13 September 1933), FF 330 – WPA Projects 1933-37, Box 16, RG 79 – Records of the National Park Service, National Archives and Records Administration – Northeast Region, New York, NY [hereafter RG 79, NARA – NE Region].

[51] See Delano & Aldrich, "Work to be Done at Ellis Island Included in Public Works Program Under National Recovery Act," (8 September 1933), in FF 330 - WPA Projects 1933-1937, Box 16, RG 79, NARA – NE Region.

[52] The document stipulates a total of $456,000.00 for new buildings, but these include the new immigrant building and ferry house, and additions to the covered passages, alongside the proposed social service building and shelters.

[53] "Report of the Sub-Committee on Buildings, Grounds and Physical Equipment," 3.

[54] Ibid. See also the "Layout of Ellis Island" prepared by the committee.

which would require both new structures for accommodating immigration, and a significant number of alterations to existing support structures, the report then turned to the suitability of Ellis Island as a place for the healthy convalescence of patients and for welcoming new émigrés to the landscape of the United States. Although Ellis Island had always exuded an institutional feel, the subcommittee hoped that its positive features could be put to greater advantage:

> Ellis Island is beautifully located in upper New York Bay and enjoys an abundance of sunlight and fresh air. The view of lower New York with its amazing skyline is without parallel. The harbor has a never ending procession of water craft—giant ocean liners, tugs, freighters, ferries, excursion boats. These furnish variety and interest all day long, if the alien were free to enjoy them.[55]

In order to "lessen apprehension and to promote a healthy state of mind and body on the part of the detained alien," therefore, the subcommittee proposed to take advantage of these natural attributes and recommended, "That more adequate facilities be provided for recreation and occupational work on the Island; that to provide more adequately for out-door recreation a new sea-wall be built as shown on the accompanying plan, this new sea-wall to be carried up three feet above grade to afford protection from salt water, for planting."[56]

The subcommittee's stipulations for the recreation space between Islands 2 and 3, connecting the two Hospital complexes, emphasized that much work remained to be done to prepare this area for use. Although work had begun in the 1920s to fill in the lagoon between the Contagious Disease Hospital and the Main Hospital building, the U-shaped space was still just a mass of debris when the committee conducted its investigation. Accordingly, the sub-committee recommended that, "the space between the hospital buildings on Islands No. 2 and No. 3, now covered with cinders, be regraded, surfaced, planted, landscaped and used for hospital recreation for all classes of patients including a separate enclosure between pavilions for illegal entrants under hospital care."[57] By creating a large lawn space with plantings, pathways, and a shelter in this space, the committee members hoped to transform what must have been a dismal area into a useful and aesthetically pleasing portion of the island.

The subcommittee completed its report with the comment that:

> Fortunately, shortly after the appointment of the Ellis Island Committee, the Public Works Administration was considering what public works deserved and needed appropriations. Ellis Island seemed an eminently proper place to receive Federal help and a generous grant was made available. A sea-wall to preserve the Island and, through refill, to add the

[55] *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*, 16.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 15.

> new land necessary for recreational purposes, was first undertaken. The Committee's recommendations in regard to buildings and grounds are thus already in the process of being carried out.[58]

The Committee's observation did not reflect the intertwined involvement between Aldrich and the Public Buildings Service, nor the recent scandals and funding requests. Although the report suggested that all of the Building Subcommittee's recommendations would soon be completed at the site, they did acknowledge that only certain elements were already being pursued. In fact, it would be several years before funding would actually be allocated for the completion of the new Recreation Building at Ellis Island.

As the work of the Committee moved forward in preparing the *Report*, the Public Buildings Service progressed along a separate, but parallel, course toward the planned work on Ellis Island. The histories of the new Ferry Building, new Immigration Building, Seawall, Recreation Building, and Recreation Shelters are intertwined at the earliest stages of this work, though they developed distinct chronologies by the first months of 1934.[59] At the end of August 1933, the Public Works Administration released the funding for the Ellis Island projects to the Department of the Treasury and less than two weeks later Chester Aldrich was officially contracted to develop "sketches to show what the Department of Labor desired."[60] Under a system for private "consulting architects" that was in operation for only a brief period, Aldrich was paid a set fee of $5000.00 for his initial preparation of the drawings and consultation and then compensated further for his time on an as-needed basis for the duration of the project.[61]

The federal allocation of funds for the Ellis Island projects came at the very beginning of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's public relief program, in a moment when the federal structure of public building projects, their standards, and their supervision were all being reconfigured. Most relevant to the construction history of the Recreation Building was the restructuring of the Supervising Architect's office which was carried out in June 1933 under Executive Order 6166. This stipulation created the "Procurement Division" within the Treasury Department and placed the Supervising Architect as a

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[58] Ibid., 17.

[59] For a history of the New Immigration Building see Diane E. Williams, HABS No. NY-6086-O: Ellis Island, New Immigration Building. For histories of the New Immigration Building and Recreation Buildings alongside other period alterations at Ellis Island see: Beyer Blinder Belle/Anderson Notter Finegold, *Ellis Island Statue of Liberty National Monument New York-New Jersey. Historic Structures Report,* (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986); J. Tracy Stakely, *Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island Statue of Liberty National Monument Site History, Existing Conditions, Analysis* (Brookline, MA: National Park Service, Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation, 2003); and Unrau, *Historic Resource Study*.

[60] See the memorandum of January 15, 1934 prepared by Louis A. Simon (Supervising Architect) for W. E. Reynolds (Assistant Director of the Procurement Division), Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[61] See correspondence between Aldrich and government officials in Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II. The use of private architects for work on federal commissions went in and out of favor during the 1930s. Some correspondence from the Public Buildings Service archival material, for example, demonstrates subsequent inquiries within the government about the legality of Aldrich's role in the project, based on the changes in legislation enacted by 1936 when the buildings were being completed. For a summary history of these contentious and complex shifts see Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, esp. 248-253, and 255-256.

subordinate department within the Procurement Division.[62] The restructuring had a direct impact on the design and construction of the Recreation Building by adding layers of administrative oversight, which pushed and pulled the project in different directions over the four-year-long construction project.

Further, federal regulations governing the design and construction of buildings with public funds also created a "moving target" for federal employees and contracted workers alike throughout this period. Finally, because of the initial speed with which the projects were proposed and the ongoing restructuring of the Supervising Architect's office, which meant that employee's roles and responsibilities were indeterminate, the scope of the appropriation for Ellis Island was poorly defined and the allocation of funds insufficient for the range of projects proposed. The initial appropriation for the work at Ellis Island severely underestimated the cost of construction, requiring a series of initial cuts (during which the Recreation Building and Shelters projects were first reconsidered and then set aside for several years) and eventually allocating additional funds in a piecemeal fashion.

Aldrich prepared initial designs for the work at Ellis Island and submitted them to the Public Buildings Service on October 21, 1933, with a second set of "more detailed" drawings submitted ten days later.[63] These initial sketches have not been located, nor do the first working drawings prepared by the Public Buildings Service and given to Aldrich on December 14, 1933, survive. The drawings prepared in 1934 and 1935 by the Public Buildings Service, however, correspond closely to the details discussed during the correspondence between Aldrich and federal architects in 1933 and 1934. Aldrich worked closely with the Public Buildings Service during the development and revisions of these drawings, even visiting the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the service to review the drawings and recommend revisions.[64] The close correspondence between the extant structures and the 1934-1935 drawings supports the conclusion that the Recreation Building and accompanying Recreation Shelters remain substantially true to Aldrich's original designs.

Aldrich was asked to prepare drawings for a Recreation Building of 7,066 square feet, on a footprint of 116 feet by 74 feet, and 40 feet high. The construction drawings of 1934 indicate a building within a few inches of these dimensions. Little else is known about the other specific requests given to the architect with regard to the commission. The building as represented in the working drawings of 1934, and as subsequently constructed, offered a modernized interpretation of the traditional Georgian Revival style in use in the surrounding hospital buildings (Figure 2). The interior plan of the space echoed on a larger scale the spaces and massing of the extant Red Cross Building, with the addition of conveniences such as a canteen and restrooms (Figure 3). Larger office

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[62] For a detailed history of this restructuring see Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 253-254.
[63] Memorandum, Simon to Reynolds, (15 January 1934).
[64] On January 19, 1934, Aldrich wrote to L. W. Robert, requesting the payment of his contracting fee and also requesting compensation for two days of work in Washington that month. He waived the travel fees because he was "already in Washington on other Government Architectural business," Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

and storage spaces were also allocated on the west and north ends of the building to accommodate the increased social service presence on the island. Most of the square footage of the building was dedicated to a large open room, which was designed to be a multifunctional "auditorium" space in which chairs could be set up for an audience to watch performances on the stage, social services organizations could run vocational training events, movies could be viewed, and tables could be set up for dining or other activities.[65] A stage at the south end of the building, and a projection booth on the north end, offered the requisite minimum facilities for the building's entertainment function. Although limestone details were specified on the original drawings, the Public Buildings Service soon responded to the wishes of Senator W. Warren Barbour, requesting that the specifications for the building allow for the substitution of terra cotta for limestone in order to support New York City's local terra cotta industry.[66] This change was the single significant alteration between the structure as originally designed and as eventually constructed.

Throughout the building, Aldrich balanced a modern design aesthetic with traditional architectural vocabulary. This fusion of traditional and modern aesthetic elements was employed consistently in both the exterior and interior features. Aldrich designed the east façade to be the building's primary face. Positioned at the head of the grounds formed from the in-filled lagoon between Islands 2 and 3, the east façade was designed with stream-lined elegance in order to offer a decorative but unobtrusive visual apex to the flanking hospital buildings. The Flemish bond brickwork and terra cotta string courses offered a decorative cadence of red and white to the building's façade, which complemented the more elaborate iterations of the same colors and materials throughout the adjacent older hospital buildings. Aldrich designed the east façade around a large chimney rising above the roofline of the building and made to stand out further from the mass of the brick building by ornamented terra cotta brackets. These scrolling brackets mirror one another in S-shaped curves flanking the central chimney stack. Both display an open flower blossom growing from the "S" curve and training vine fronds against the side of the central chimney shaft. These terra cotta brackets contribute a traditional decorative element to a façade that otherwise reduces the textures and coloration of the neo-Georgian exterior to the simplest possible modern interpretation. In their emphasis on a large expanse of glass and steel, the four large twenty-four light windows, set directly into the brick wall without decorative sills, contributed to the modern tone of the façade.

The fusion of the modern and traditional aesthetics was also evident in the design of the auditorium space. The tone of the interior space was set by a barrel vaulted ceiling of hung plaster, specially designed hanging ceiling lights and wall sconces, and a dramatic limestone hearth set into a brick chimney. This later detail was designed to have the appearance of large blocks of stone, with a prominent keystone protruding at an

[65] No correspondence directly addresses the multipurpose nature of this room, but newspaper announcements discussing events at Ellis Island, and comparisons with other contemporary Recreation Buildings, support the idea that this space could have been used for this range of activities.
[66] Letter, W. Warren Barbour to L. W. Roberts, Jr, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, (29 January 1934), Box 5880, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

angle from the face of the chimney, and voussoirs around the hearth. On the interior as on the exterior, Aldrich emphasized the modern nature of the interior space through the large twenty-four light casement windows. These windows define the north, south, and west walls of the space, bathing the auditorium in light. The pure geometry of their metal sashes and their large expanses of glass emphasized the contemporary embrace of glass and metal in modern urban and industrial architecture.

Though the Public Buildings Service had not yet defined the design principles toward which all of their structures would adhere, these essential characteristics of the Recreation Building's design fit well with the regulations that were defined between 1935 and 1939. These included the stipulations that government-funded buildings be "of simple governmental character in consonance with the region in which they are located," constructed of durable materials, and of sufficient size to accommodate anticipated federal needs for at least ten years. Further, it was ultimately stipulated that "in the larger centers of population, design tends toward monumental structures, expressing the strength and dignity of the Federal Government rather than local color," but that such features could be created in consonance with regional design traditions and materials.[67] In its simple massing, elegant ornaments, and fusion of modern and traditional features, the Recreation Building was designed in a style that would eventually become representative of the federal modern style.

Although Aldrich and the staff of the Public Buildings Service moved quickly forward with the plans for the new buildings, the months of planning led to concern among other federal administrators that the appropriated funding was not being spent rapidly enough. Since these stimulus funds were intended specifically to employ large numbers of workers quickly, any delay was deemed to have a negative impact on the government's program. Accordingly, in mid-January 1934, D. W. MacCormack, the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS] wrote to Lawrence W. Roberts, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, hoping to speed up the process. Enclosing a letter that Ickes had written to the Secretary of the INS threatening that federal funds appropriated for building projects would be redistributed if not used quickly, MacCormack queried:

> Will you be good enough to take up with the Office of the Supervising Architect the necessity for expediting this work? The suggestion has been made to us that if an adequate force is not available in the Office of the Supervising Architect part of the work might be transferred to one of the large architects' offices in New York who would be in a position to obtain and put to work the number of men necessary to press the completion of the plans to an early conclusion. Personally, I am averse to this procedure in view of the highly satisfactory work done up to the present by the Office of the Supervising Architect in connection with the design of these structures and trust that the means may be found to complete this work in

[67] See longer excerpts from various archival documents cited in Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 262-263.

> the Office of the Supervising Architect within the time limit permitted us.[68]

MacCormack was not alone in his concerns. W. E. Reynolds, Assistant Director of the Public Works Branch, had written a few days earlier to the Assistant Director of the Department of Labor, discussing the accelerated timeline proposed for the completion of the drawings for the Ellis Island buildings. Reynolds, however, was also familiar with the physical constraints governing work at the site and he cautioned that, "the seawall and fill forms the foundation for nearly all of the three buildings and it is very doubtful that this portion of the seawall contract will be completed and ready for the superstructure to go above it until early in April."[69]

For his part, Reynolds had pressured Louis Simon, the Supervising Architect, to move the projects forward more quickly, and Simon cooperatively proposed ways to complete the preparatory work more rapidly:

> By reducing the checking period to one week for the three divisions concerned, it would be possible to send the drawings to the Architectural-Engineering Division for specification in one week from January 31, 1934, that is, on February 7. And if the specifications were started now, while the drawings are being brought to completion, it should save considerable time in the Department for placing the work on the market.[70]

Although Aldrich was still working over details of the designs in May with Louis Simon, contractors were asked to submit proposals for building the foundations for the new Ellis Island projects in mid-April. On April 26, 1934 the Procurement Division began accepting proposals for the construction of the new buildings, but it rapidly became evident that the scope of the improvements was beyond the funding available.

As the situation developed, Reynolds was right to caution his peers to remember the extensive work necessary to complete the seawall prior to building foundations for any of these structures. Within a few months the seawall construction project had run into numerous problems, was both behind and over-budget, and the allocated public funds were running dry. As C. J. People summarized the situation in September:

> the low bid received was in amount $498,288. This proposal was in excess of the amount available, and all proposals were rejected. The

[68] Letter, D. W. MacCormack to L. W. Roberts, (20 January 1934), Box 5580, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[69] Letter, W. E. Reynolds to Assistant Secretary of Labor Battle, (17 January 1934), Box 5580, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[70] Letter, Louis Simon to W. E. Reynolds, (15 January 1934), Box 5580, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

> drawings and specifications are now being revised and it is expected this work will again go on the market within a short time.[71]

As the federal government returned to the drawing board after rejecting the proposals, the entire Recreation Building project was reconsidered.[72] Frances Perkins and the INS worked together to itemize aspects of Federal Project 62 (FP 62: the Ellis Island allocation fund) which could be cut in order to recuperate a deficit of $176,000.00. Faced with the choice of compromising aspects of the urgently-needed new Ferry Building and Immigration Buildings, or of eliminating other "optional" projects, they began to consider the wholesale elimination of the new Recreation Building. Finally, on June 26, Perkins authorized the elimination of the $11,000.00 allocated for the two Recreation Shelters and the $45,000.00 set aside for the construction of the Recreation Building. In making this decision, she stipulated that, "with reference to the elimination of the building for social service workers, it is understood that $10,000 will be set up out of available funds for remodeling of the present building."[73]

Ralph E. Ogle, an architect employed by the Public Buildings Service who had completed many of the drawings for the new Recreation Building, was assigned the task of travelling to Ellis Island to assess the condition of the Red Cross building and to propose the plan for its renovation. While the walls and foundation were solid, Ogle found many other problems with the building. It needed a new roof, new window frames, new wood flooring to replace shoddy linoleum, a gutter system, new plaster walls and ceiling and electrical work. Further, several aspects of the building needed to be corrected, such as its lack of a men's restroom and of a canteen. Finally, the building was fundamentally too small for the purposes of its users, and Ogle presented the social service workers' hopes that a modest addition could be made to the structure, noting:

> The social workers in charge of the Recreation Building ask that the south east side of the building be squared off (see attached sketch) to provide one additional room on each side of the stage. The crowded condition of the present rooms would indicate that some extension is desirable but on account of expense of foundations for such extension, I do not believe this should be attempted unless there are sufficient funds available after items one to ten inclusive have been cared for.[74]

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[71] Letter, C. J. Peoples (Director of Procurement) to The Administrator, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Washington, D.C., and copied to W. H. Wagner, Bureau of Naturalization and Immigration, (11 September 1934), Box 5878, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[72] On May 1, 1934, Aldrich sent Simon a letter noting that he had made changes to detail sheet No. 4-202, "changing the shape of the consoles at the chimney to the Recreation Building." Since all the chimney details on 4-202 as completed on 2/15/34 correspond to the building as completed, it seems that Aldrich's later revisions to the designs may not have been taken up by the Public Buildings Service, possibly because of these changes were not made before the project was jettisoned in June (Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II).

[73] Memorandum, Frances Perkins authorizing cuts to F.P. 62, (26 June 1934), Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[74] Letter, Ralph Ogle to W. E. Reynolds, (13 August 1934), Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

Although Ogle did not include an estimation of what it would cost to alter the extant Red Cross Building, his long list of problems combined with the fact that even these revisions would not solve the functional challenges of the building without more extensive work to expand the foundations and enlarge the building, may have deterred the INS from pursuing this solution. On August 27, Louis Simon replied to a letter from the Assistant Commissioner of the INS confirming that, "Your request that the contemplated repairs to the present recreation building be held in abeyance until the immigrants building is completed, is noted. Will hold until further notice."[75]

Then, in December, W. H. Wagner, Assistant Director of the INS wrote to the Public Works Branch of the Procurement Division, ranking the desirability of various projects at Ellis Island and asserting:

> No money should be spent in remodeling the present social service building. If funds are available, a new recreation building should be constructed at the location indicated on drawing 1-1.
> The two yard shelters would be desirable if all other work specified under 62 is taken care of ...[76]

Wagner's decision must have ended progress on the renovation work since no additional work was done on the project until a year later when additional funds became available. Finally, in July 1935, Louis Simon redistributed the $10,000.00 allocated for the renovation of the Social Service Building.[77]

Constructing a Recreation Building for Ellis Island

In August 1935, Wagner applied to the WPA for further funds for work on Ellis Island, which he described in an internal office memo as a request for "an allotment of $84,340.00 for renovation of station buildings and equipment and for landscaping grounds."[78] It may have been partially these funds that allowed for the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelter project to be taken up again in the following months. With this infusion of additional funds, the Procurement Division resumed its plans for constructing a new Recreation Building & Recreation Shelters on Ellis Island. In defining the new work to be completed, the Procurement Division grouped the construction of the new Recreation Building and Shelters with extensive work laying on

[75] Letter, Louis L. Simon to the Assistant Commissioner of the INS, (27 August 1934), Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[76] Letter of December 26, 1934 from W. H. Wagner to the Procurement Division, Public Works Branch, Box 5878, E31C, RG 121.
[77] Office memo of July 23, 1935 from Louis L. Simon to Melnick, a Supervising Engineer in the Procurement Division, noting: "You are advised that the reservation set up for Social Service Building repairs in the amount of $10,000 on Federal Project #62 should be cancelled and that amount made available for the consideration of pending proposals and claims."
[78] W. H. Wagner to District Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, (27 August 1935), Folder 330, Box 16, RG 79, NARA – NE Region.

pavement and concrete in the open "recreation" area between Islands 1 and 2 and the adjacent hospital wards.[79]

On December 9, 1935 the Division authorized an advertisement soliciting bids for the completion of this work to be circulated in newspapers throughout New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston.[80] Nine bids were received and the Albert Development Corp. of Brooklyn, New York offered the lowest construction bid of $127,245.00.[81] Given the federal government's strict policy of accepting the lowest bid, the Albert Development Corporation was eventually awarded the contract, but not without a challenge from the second lowest bidder, John Milnes Co. Inc., whose bid had totaled $128,000.00. The issue centered around the government's alternate indication of limestone string courses and details in the drawings, but terra cotta work in the specifications.

Unaware of the political motivations behind the government's switch from limestone to terra cotta, John Milnes Co. Inc. wrote to the Procurement Division after receiving the list of bids, reminding the officials that they had submitted an alternate bid in which limestone could be used at a significant savings:

> …we submitted an alternate proposition in which we could make a reduction in our price of $2000.00 if Indiana limestone was used in lieu of Terra Cotta as specified.
>
> Inasmuch as this would make a saving to the Government of $1245.00 if limestone were used—and the plans were originally drawn for the use of limestone—we would be glad to know if it is likely that this will be taken into consideration in the award of this contract. It is generally conceded that the use of limestone is a much better and more expensive material to use than Terra Cotta, and, no doubt, this latter material was specified in order to keep the cost within the appropriation.
>
> As it is evident from the figures quoted, and which you have in hand, that the acceptance of our bid on Limestone will not only make a saving on this job of $1245.00, but will also give a better job, we hope that due consideration will be given this matter in the award of the contract.[82]

Despite the inconsistency between the written specifications and the drawings, the government rebuffed John Milnes Co. Inc.'s request on the basis that their alternate

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[79] A copy of the written specifications for the job is available "Folder FF175: Recreation Building: Construction, 1935," Box 9, RG 79, NARA – NE Region.
[80] Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[81] Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[82] Letter, John Milnes Co., Inc. to Assistant Director of Procurement, PWB, (22 January 1936), Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121.

proposal did not correspond precisely to the materials specified in the written guidelines.[83]

On February 11, 1936, the Procurement Division offered the contract to Albert Development Corp., and the contractor immediately began the process of preparing construction drawings for the work. Ironically, shortly thereafter the Albert Development Corp. also tried to persuade the Procurement Division to substitute limestone for terra cotta. On March 5, 1936 the company wrote to Clyde C. Key, the construction engineer assigned to the project, with their request, persuasively outlining the benefits of concrete over terra cotta:

> Since award of the above contract was made to us, we have investigated the possibility of the use of Limestone throughout instead of using Architectural Terra Cotta above the water table. Since the specification calls for the Terra Cotta to be finished similar in texture to the Limestone of the water table, the use of Limestone throughout will achieve the wall appearance required.
>
> Furthermore, solid Limestone blocks would probably be preferable structurally to hollow Terra Cotta.
>
> The cost of natural stone is more than that of cast Terra Cotta but we propose to furnish natural Limestone as called for in the specifications and shown on plans above the water table at no addition to the contract price.
>
> Our experience in using Terra Cotta leads us to believe that avoidance of the difficulties in construction arising from use of this material will compensate us for the additional cost.[84]

In an internal office memo, Keys proposed that the Procurement Division accept the substitution, noting: "It is the recommendation of the Construction Engineer that this proposal be accepted as a minor modification with no change in contract price. Early action should be taken on this proposal as the contractor is holding the awards of his subcontracts awaiting this action."[85] However, the proposal was again rebuffed, with an explicit reiteration of the local politics of terra cotta in place of limestone, "As this bldg. is in the TC district & the other bldgs recently constructed on the Island use TC, the spec require TC in place of stone where shown on the drawings, above the water table, this

[83] On January 27, 1936 Balch at the Procurement Division answered John Milnes Co. Inc. with the response that: "It is noted that you submitted with your proposal a proposition offering to make a reduction in your price of $2,000 if Indiana limestone is used in lieu of terra cotta as specified. Consideration cannot be given to your offer as it is a requirement that proposals submitted must be in strict conformity with specification requirements and an award, if circumstances permit, must be based thereon," Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[84] Letter, Albert Development Corp. to Clyde C. Key, (5 March 1936), Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

[85] Letter, Clyde C. Key to an unspecified official, (n.d.), Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG121, NARA II.

material is architecturally satisfactory—Rec. no change."[86] This exchange ended any further discussion of substituting limestone for terra cotta, but the issue would arise again in an interim inspection of the building when the inspecting engineer C. T. Holden, who had looked over the building on-site with Key, pointedly reported that, "terra cotta trim exhibits the usual terra cotta faults, and seems to have been needlessly used on this job, as the contractor proposed to furnish limestone at no extra cost."[87]

The Albert Development Corp. began construction of the Recreation Building on March 17, 1936 and the building was occupied on April 1, 1937. The construction process consisted of numerous layers of approval and oversight. Key was reassigned to New York City to offer on-site supervision of the construction of the buildings. In addition to his presence, each material used on the building was sent for approval to Washington, D.C., where it was inspected for general characteristics, such as the exact shade of its color matching the stipulations of the specification, and also examined in a laboratory setting for the quality of its materials. Even small details, such as the exact granulation of sand used in the cement, were examined and approved by federal officials. Decisions with regard to substitutions or alterations to the specifications, no matter how small, also involved the approval of officials in Washington. The end result was a construction process that was thoroughly documented and highly supervised but which, at times, was driven by bureaucracy rather than pragmatism or aesthetic oversight.

Once begun, the construction of the Recreation Building and Shelters was both rapid and unremarkable. Periodic inspection reports filed by government engineers document the expected and actual progress of the building and show that, with a few relatively small issues along the way (such as the delayed delivery of several building materials), the Albert Development Corporation succeeded in meeting expectations. At the end of May 1936, the inspection engineer John J. England found that the foundations of the Recreation Building were finished, much of the underground plumbing was in place, and that the contractor had begun to lay the supporting form for the concrete foundation. He reported, "The quality of workmanship and materials and concrete work now in place is very satisfactory."[88] The contractor worked on the Recreation Building and the Shelters side-by-side, so the same progress report noted that the concrete foundation of Shelter 1 and the preparatory work for pouring the foundation of Shelter 2 were completed. Ultimately, England concluded that "the work as a whole is proceeding in a satisfactory manner and is under good direction and supervision both by Contractor and Government."[89]

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[86] Hand written notes of a reply written to Key on the verso of his letter. Final rejection of Albert Development Corp. was not made to the contractor until March 26, 1936 by C.R. Roberts, who also advised the contractor to "follow contract requirements." See Box 5874, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[87] Letter, C. T. Holden to the Supervising Engineer, Public Buildings Branch, (25 November 1936), Box 5873, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[88] Report, John England, Jr., Supervising Engineer for the Public Works Branch, (26 May 1936), Box 5874, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[89] Ibid.

In November, C. T. Holden travelled to conduct a second inspection of the work. Although the contractor was "delayed originally 70 days" due to the tardy delivery of structural steel, Holden assessed that the contract was 91.5% completed and that the contractor would still have "an excellent chance of making up this time," in order to meet the contractual completion date of December 27, 1936 with a concession of some additional days for time lost.[90] The engineer offered an over-all assessment of the success of the building and its current state. The structural work was complete and interior plastering over half completed. Other interior details such as finished floor and trim were not yet installed. The Recreation Shelters were completed, except for finishing the floors and the sidewalk work was fully finished.

With regard to the appearance of the building, though, Holden had very specific criticisms. In addition to objecting to the use of terra cotta in place of limestone, as cited above, Holden criticized aspects of both the appearance and the integrity of the bricks. Although the brick had been approved by the government, Holden noted that "the exterior brick work is a Hudson River product and has previously been criticized for its lack of quality for face work."[91] Also as the building had progressed an "efflorescence has developed to a considerable degree" on the exterior of the structure. Given that this material was submitted to, and approved by, the government, the contractor was not at fault, but a subsequent contract would have to be written following the completion of the building for the removal of this surface build-up and the subsequent waterproofing of the walls. Holden further pointed out that sufficient attention was not given to the aesthetic quality of the brickwork. In his evaluation:

> The work is a fairly good mechanical job except for some unbalanced patterns. … Your attention is called to the unnecessary expense in laying up a special bond when the brick are so uniform in color that the bond cannot be casually distinguished. This job was laid in Flemish bond and for lack of contrast might for appearances just as well have been common bond.[92]

This basic aesthetic fault was certainly the result of the manner in which the building was planned and overseen. The loose contractual relationship between Aldrich and the Public Buildings Service meant that the architect who had designed and envisioned the structure was not supervising its construction. Further, the supervision of most construction decisions from Washington, D.C. instead of on Ellis Island itself, meant that no single individual was ultimately responsible for considering "big picture" issues for the structure and that it was particularly challenging for government architects to assess the appearance and quality of the building as its individual elements arrived piecemeal in the office for approval. Finally, Holden assessed the overall skills and merits of the contractors, observing, "while it cannot be said that these contractors are especially skillful or resourceful, they have turned out a fairly respectable job. They have been

[90] C. T. Holden, (25 November 1936).
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

cooperative, and, I believe, performed the best work they could within the limits of their knowledge and experience."[93]

Several delays in early January pushed the project further behind schedule. The radiators that had been specified and ordered did not fit underneath the bull's eye windows on the mezzanine floor. In order to allow the windows to open, shorter radiators needed to be acquired. Extended negotiations about the asphalt floor tiling, the color of which was rejected several times by the federal architects, and about the selection of material for the plinths beneath the door frame, prolonged the delays, as did problems with the structural glass for the partitions in the men's and women's bathrooms [no longer extant].

By March 1937, the completion of the contract was dependent on a few additions in the Recreation Building and the demolition of the Red Cross building. On March 13, 1937 the demolition was complete, the Recreation Building was in use and the Albert Development Corporation wrote to the Public Buildings Service requesting a final payment, noting:

> We have substantially completed our contract for construction of Shelters, Recreation Building, etc. The sidewalks and pavements have been in use for many months, the Shelters have been available for occupancy for several months, the Recreation Building has been used for storage of furniture for several weeks and is now fully occupied.[94]

Final settlement of the contract, however, would not occur for another year and a half, delayed in part by the contractor taking on an additional unrelated contract at Ellis Island and, in part by protracted government inspections, including an inspection of all its "mechanical" components in November 1937 which required the replacement of a number of radiators and other features that did not exactly match the requisite specifications.

In December 1937, Albert McCulloch performed a general inspection of the building and made a final itemized list of all remaining defects and omissions:

> 1. Complete minor items of painting, touching up, etc., as directed by the Construction Engineer.
> 2. Plaster painting shows streaks, unevenness in tone, etc.
> 3. Plaster surfaces are out of true in sundry places.
> 4. Brackets on metal ladder to roof are about 8 ft. apart—should be not over 6 feet apart.
> 6. Complete cleaning and pointing of miscellaneous brick and terra cotta as directed by the Construction Engineer.

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Letter, D. Thyme at the Albert Development Corporation to Key, (13 April 1937), Box 5872, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

> 7. Interior walls of passageways are still to be sand-blasted.
> 8. All alien paint, mortar, concrete, cement, stains, dirt, etc. not caused by occupancy of the buildings, to be removed from various surfaces throughout and the latter restored to proper condition. Particular attention should be given to cleaning the brickwork over fireplace, removing alien paint from woodwork in sundry locations, and removing alien concrete, etc., from surface of sidewalks.
> 9. On completion of building operations all dirt and debris resulting therefrom, unused materials, etc., be removed from the site.[95]

A month later, the contractors had corrected all the general and mechanical defects or omissions, with the exception of "five items four of which were later accepted as satisfactory."[96] The "fifth" unsatisfactory item was the completion of the secondary sand-blasting contract, which the contractor worked on until August 9, 1938, delaying the closure of their original contract even further. In the interim, they conducted protracted negotiations with federal officials in order to gain approval for the delay in the completion of the building. Initially, the office manager intended to deny the contractor's request, but in an internal memo Melick, one of the job engineers, itemized the numerous delays and errors caused by the federal oversight of this contract and firmly asserted, "the Office is not in a position to deny the contractor's request for further consideration."[97] Finally, in November 1938, W. E. Reynolds reviewed the status of the work and the original requirements of the contract and recommended that the government drop any further claims against the contractor and close the account by paying the Albert Development Corporation $4,257.50.[98] The check was written the next week and the final letters exchanged with regard to the work on November 13, 1938.

Photographs taken upon the completion of construction reveal that the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelter originally stood in an open area devoid of foliage or substantial ground cover (Figure 4). Concrete sidewalks crisscrossed the flat expanse of ground created between Islands 2 and 3 but otherwise the outdoor recreation area offered few amenities to its potential users. Patients could certainly sit in the shade of the Recreation Shelter, from which they may have been able to glimpse views out over the water or to study the simply decorated southeast façade of the Recreation Building, but those strolling along the wide sidewalks would have been fully exposed to the elements. In 1939 a planting plan was developed to increase the utility of these spaces and some of the extant rich foliage dates from this project.[99] Not all of the outdoor recreation spaces planned by the Ellis Island Committee were brought to fruition, but a new open air recreation space was created for detainees on Island 1, and a baseball field was added

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[95] Albert McCulloch, General Inspection Report, (14 December 1937), Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[96] Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[97] Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[98] Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[99] Box 5870, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II. See Folder 6 for the Report of Brian Uhl to LeRoy Barton about the proposed planting plan at Ellis Island. For further discussion of the landscape plan see Stakely, 95.

near the new Immigration Building. Additional small fenced yards were created attached to the wards on Island 3 to allow restricted fresh air access for patients who were also detainees.[100]

In the year that the Department of the Treasury was finalizing the structural aspects of the building, the Department of Labor was charged with preparing it for use. Few documents related to this work on the building's interior have been located, except for materials related to a contract with John Wanamaker for the window and stage curtains.[101] Neither historic photos nor documentation provide evidence of the other furnishings that were in use in the building in the 1930s (Figure 5). The specific ways in which the building was used were not documented however it is likely that the structure continued to be used for many of the same activities as the earlier American Red Cross Building. Immigrants and detainees were taught how to make clothing from donated materials, musicians traveling through the city would stop to give a concert, holiday meals were served and special events celebrated. One of the most regular activities in the building was viewing films, for which the building was equipped with a special projection booth at its north end.

During World War II, immigration was severely reduced at Ellis Island and the facilities were used primarily for detainees, including a large number of German war prisoners. The island also was used as a base by the United States Coast Guard. Following the war the U. S. Public Health Service again resumed management of the buildings. The stage was expanded at some point between 1946 and 1951. The north end of the original stage had run flush with the south wall of the building. In the alteration several feet were added so that the raised lip of the stage jutted out into the auditorium space. The stage remains as it was altered in this period. When the health service facilities closed, the Coast Guard again occupied the buildings from 1951 to 1954. At some point during these years, the Coast Guard made several small changes to the Recreation Building. A wall was removed in the north connecting wing so that two small offices were combined into one larger room. On the mezzanine floor, large radio machinery was installed in the northwest office. Although the Recreation Building may have continued to be used for entertainment, this later fact suggests that it was also repurposed for the daily needs of the Coast Guard, including communicating with ships that were out at sea. In 1954, Ellis Island was closed completely. The buildings lay fallow and the islands became over-grown in foliage. When Ellis Island became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, conditions on the islands had deteriorated so significantly that a number of years passed before an attempt was made to even clear out the overgrowth from Islands 2 and 3.[102] The Recreation Building remains in deteriorating condition, but its auditorium space is being utilized as a storage area for large furniture items from the museum collections. Temporary scaffolding has been used to create an open shelving unit, and fills most of the space.

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[100] For a more extensive summary of the landscape work completed on Ellis Island during the 1930s see Stakely, 87-90.
[101] Box 5872, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[102] For a detailed assessment of the conditions of the island in this period, see Stakely, *Cultural Landscape Report*; and Unrau, *Historic Structure Report (multiple volumes).*

The Recreation Building at Ellis Island stands as a relatively intact representative of the type of buildings constructed by the Works Progress Administration in the mid-1930s. Its well-documented design and construction history links the building to a social and historical moment in the United States when public and private organizations placed an increasing emphasis on the value of leisure and recreation for both individual and social health. As part of a larger hospital complex, the Recreation Building and other period recreation facilities at Ellis Island, contributed to the medical regime at the island for long-term convalescent care. Patients suffering from tuberculosis and other semi-chronic conditions, could learn to sew in the building, watch movies, eat lunch, and participate in calisthenics. These activities contributed to a period medical regime that emphasized the long-term physical and mental well-being of the patient. Likewise, they were consistent with a social service agenda that sought to help immigrants and patients learn practical skills while also assimilating constructively into the "mainstream" culture of the United States.

Although the Recreation Building contributed to the work of the Ellis Island Immigration Station, it was a supporting structure built as an after-thought following widespread criticism of the abysmal living conditions for long-term patients and detainees on the island. Expanding on the form and purpose of the earlier Red Cross Building, this structure represented the federal government's attempt to respond to humanitarian concerns about a federal facility that was prioritizing the punitive and bureaucratic aspects of immigration without sufficiently supporting the public health and social service needs of prospective citizens. Ironically, after nearly a decade of negative press about the island's facilities and four years between its design and construction, the building was completed toward the end of the site's active history. Nevertheless, the history and appearance of the Recreation Building is integrally related to its position within the nation's premiere immigration station. As a New Deal building with a public and social purpose, the Recreation Building at Ellis Island was one element in the federal government's response to the shifting dynamics of immigration in the interwar period.

PART II. PHYSICAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Recreation Building is a single-story structure executed in red brick with white glazed terra cotta details. The main rectangular gable roof section in the center is flanked by lower flat roofed wings stepped slightly inward at the gable ends (roughly north and south). Another, even lower flat roof connecting ell is located at the center of the west façade, linking the building to the covered passageway at the west. The building adopts a modernized interpretation of Georgian Revival architecture and in doing so complements both the more traditional Georgian Revival of the surrounding hospital buildings. The building was carefully integrated with its architectural surroundings, such that its decorative courses of architectural terra cotta run parallel to those along the roofline of the Recreation Shelter (to

the east) and the covered passageway now designated C8 (to the west), suggesting a careful choreography of multiple structures to arrive at cohesive views and vistas across the complex.[103]

2. Condition of fabric: Fair. The building is vacant and has been in disuse since approximately 1954. The main room of the structure is now used by the National Park Service as a storage area and has been filled with semi-permanent metal and wood scaffolding and a large quantity of objects. Other spaces within the structure are filled with varying quantities of stored or discarded items. The roof has been recently replaced but the windows and exterior doors are enclosed in plywood and a number of window panes have been broken. Many original details of the building remain, though their condition is deteriorating. The floor has lost nearly all of its asphalt tiles. In all rooms the plaster ceiling has damage, and in several it has been removed. The metal covers of radiators are rusting and metal window sashes corroding.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The north/south section of the building is approximately 116 feet by 46 feet; the rectangular connecting ell at Passageway C8 is 46 feet by 29 feet.

2. Foundations: The building sits on load-bearing brick wall and concrete piers with dressed limestone block exterior foundation walls approximately three feet high. The large rectangular limestone blocks have flush mortar joints. The foundation projects slightly from the brick walls and has a carved ogee curve water table on its top edge. Small rectangular openings near each corner of the foundation provide some ventilation to the crawl space. The connecting ell does not have exterior limestone foundation walls.

3. Walls: The walls consist of a Flemish bond red brick over structural clay tile. Buff glazed terra cotta blocks form a flat string course around the main block and immediately abutting the top of the structure's large windows. The walls project slightly at the center third of the east and west façades.

4. Structural System: The building rests on a system of wood pilings and reinforced concrete spread footings and beams, with load bearing masonry walls. The flat roof areas are concrete slab and beam, while the gable roof over the main recreation auditorium utilizes a system of steel trusses resting on I-beams embedded in the walls. The bottom chord of the truss is curved, forming a barrel vaulted ceiling below. There is an I-beam supporting the proscenium arch over the stage.

[103] The principal façade of the Recreation Building is oriented to the east/southeast, but to simplify the description here it is considered to be facing due east.

5. Stoops: Both exterior east-facing doors have a single low concrete step. There is no indication that these unornamented stoops ever had railings.

6. Chimneys: The Recreation Building features a single prominent exterior chimney that bisects the east façade of the building, rising nearly four feet above the top of the building's gabled roofline. This chimney offers the primary decorative element to the exterior of the building. The central shaft of the chimney measures 10 feet in width and interrupts the terra cotta string course running across the rest of the façade. The chimney has a terra cotta cap and it is flanked by gently recessed brick piers. The most distinctive feature of the chimney is the two scrolling buff glazed terra cotta consoles supported by the chimney piers and framing the stack above the cornice. Both consist of an elongated S-shaped curve, reminiscent of the traditional *strigil* motif in classicized architectural ornament. Further, both consoles show an open flower blossom ostensibly growing from the swollen flourish of the "S," and trailing modest curving vine fronds against the side of the central chimney shaft.

7. Openings:
    a. Doorways and doors: The building has no exterior doorways on the north and south façades. Building patrons would most likely enter via the west doorway inside Passageway C8 into the connecting ell lobby. The west opening has a two leaf wood door set into a large surround with sidelights and transom. Each leaf has one recessed panel in the bottom half and glazing in the top half with six rectangular lights. There is a vertical slide bolt lock at the center bottom of the doors. The transom has seven lights divided into three sections by wide flat mullions – one over each side light and five over the doors. The center section is hinged at the bottom to tilt open on a chain. The transom still contains sheer curtains gathered on top and bottom rods. Each sidelight has three rectangular lights over a solid wood recessed panel. The entire doorway has wood trim of ovolo molding framing a flat section with a wide bead on the inner edge. There are hinges on the interior edges for another set of doors, perhaps screened.

    The other two exterior doorways are located at the east façade of the two main block wings. These openings lead to secondary spaces - the stage storage room in the south wing and an office on the north. Although the east-facing doors are mostly covered by plywood, certain features of the doors are visible, and others can be inferred from historic drawings and photographs. Extant screen doors with metal frames, screens and hardware protect the exterior of the doors. These, like the main doors behind, are thin two-leaf metal doors. The original French doors have a metal frame and three square lights in each leaf. Each opening is topped by a two light movable bottom-hinged transom. The center handle is connected to a vertical bolt rod.

b. Windows: The exterior elevations of the Recreation Building are dominated by large window openings filled with industrial steel sash set directly into the brick wall. Like the doors, these windows have been covered with plywood and are only partially visible. Four of the largest openings appear on the east elevation and two on the west, filling the space between the limestone foundation and the terra cotta string course. Each has a metal sash divided into twenty-four rectangular lights. Thicker mullions emphasize the vertical line between the two side registers of lights and the horizontal top row. The bottom eight lights form four two-light casement windows with side hinges. These sash included metal insect screens.

Variations of this same window sash appear on other areas of the building. On the south façade, a slightly smaller twenty-light variation maintains a similar visual vocabulary to the larger model, except that it sits on a glazed terra cotta lug sill. The lower section of this window is composed of four vertical two-light casements, the two middle registers of lights are fixed, and the upper row of is a series of awning sashes. A lever handle on the wall near the bottom of the window operates a single rod connecting the awning sashes.

The connecting ell has a twelve-light variation of these metal sash windows with terra cotta lug sills. These windows are divided into four three-light vertical casements each hinged on the same side. Two evenly spaced examples are located on the south elevation. One bay of the north elevation has this same window, while the other has two small closely-spaced six-light metal sash casements with terra cotta sills. These small windows correspond to the interior location of the bathrooms. Four of these six light windows are located on the north elevation of north gable end wing. They are evenly spaced, with the limestone water table creating a sill. Here the two casement sashes with three vertical lights are hinged on opposite sides of the frame. Two more identical windows are located on the west façade – one in the center of each gable end wing.

The west façade also has three large rectangular window openings just below the cornice of the main block, above the connecting ell. These horizontal clerestory openings have a fixed eight light metal sash.

Eight circular, or oculus, window openings are located on the upper façades of the flat roof gable end wings. Six are located above the rectangular openings on the north (four) and west (two) façades; the remaining two are located over the doorways on the east. These windows are echoed by the oculus windows on the Recreation Shelter, unifying the two structures. The circular steel sashes are set directly into the brick wall. Each opening is outlined by flush brick headers. These metal sash

windows are roughly 3.5 feet and unequally divided into nine smaller lights by a grid of perpendicular metal muntins. One original sash has been replaced by a wood vent.

These oculus windows were custom designed for the Ellis Island project by Chester Aldrich and subsequent revisions were made to their hardware and sash materials by the windows sub-contractor Crittall Manufacturing Company, Inc. and approved by the Public Buildings Service. The oculus windows pivot from side center hinges.

Both the north and south gable ends of the main block contain a lunette-shaped opening, which accommodates a semi-circular louvered metal vent. The vent openings are set off by header bricks and the vents, like the window sash, are set directly into the brick wall. Levers handles located in the north and south end walls of the main recreation room operated these lunette windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, Covering: The main section of the Recreation Building has a close-eaved gable roof. All original roofing material on the gable has been replaced with modern composite shingles. The original roofing material was flat terra cotta shingles. The north and south gable end wings and west connecting ell of the building have flat roofs. These roofs are covered in composition roofing, bounded by brick parapet walls topped by buff glazed terra cotta coping, and trimmed with copper flashing.

b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice consists of a close terra cotta cornice with returns at the gable ends. Originally designed to be carved from limestone, the terra cotta was substituted as the material of choice in the specifications issued by the Public Buildings Service in 1936.

c. Dormers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See measured drawings HABS No. NY-6086-V for complete plans for this building. Original construction drawings for the building are still extant and the plans, as prepared by the Public Buildings Service in 1935, remain substantially accurate with minor subsequent alterations.

The interior space of the building is dominated by a large multi-purpose room which served both as an auditorium for performances held on the proscenium stage at the south end of the building and as a space for other recreational activities and vocational training. At the south end of the building in the gable end wing, the stage is flanked by two small storage/office spaces, which were also the “wings” of the theater during performances. On the east wall of the building a large hearth defined an east-west axis for the interior plan as a counterpoint for its

predominant north-south organization. The north wing was divided into four spaces: two offices, one toward the west and one toward the east, and a central area divided between the canteen and stair hall/storage room. The west connecting ell of the building contained men and women's restrooms, as well as an office on the south side of a central lobby, and two offices and a utility closet on the north side.

The mezzanine floor of the building is located above the offices, canteen, and stair hall in the north wing. The plan of this space was divided among a projection booth, located directly above the canteen, two offices, one toward the west and one toward the east, and a landing that doubled as a circulation corridor between the two offices.

Subsequent alterations have only minimally changed the original plans. The stage was extended to the north and given a curved lip in place of its original angled corners. In the west wing, the wall dividing the two offices north of the corridor was removed to create a single office space.

2. Stairways: The Recreation Building contains one major stairway providing access to the mezzanine level at the north end of the building. The mezzanine stair has a cast iron stair carriage, treads, and risers, a cast iron newel post and balustrade with a wood hand rail. These posts are unadorned except for squat, slightly rounded, caps. This stair rises three steps (the bottom step has a rounded end) to a quarter-turn landing, and then continues to the right up to the mezzanine level. The stairway is accessed from a corridor that connects the offices on the corners of the north wing of the building. Remnants of an under-stair closet remain on the first floor. The cast iron balustrade continues around the edge of the stair opening at the second floor stair hall.

Four minor stairs allow access to the stage from the storage rooms and recreation room. A straight run of four stairs with a cement carriage and risers and soapstone treads is located at each downstage corner into the large recreation room. These stairs have a metal pipe railing probably added during the 1940s when the stage was extended, partially surrounding these stairs.

Two additional stairs with cement carriages, risers, and treads are located in the storage rooms flanking the stage. In the southwest corner storage room a short straight run of three closed cement stairs rises to a quarter turn landing at stage level. A cast iron balustrade with thin metal balusters is located at the edge of the landing. A baseboard of tinted concrete adds a decorative feature and conceals the transition between concrete stair and plaster wall. In the southeast corner storage room the stair is arranged parallel to the south wall and rises directly to the stage landing. A cast iron balustrade is located on its north edge.

3. Flooring: Only traces of the original flooring remain throughout the building. The exposed sub-flooring is reinforced concrete slabs. The mezzanine floor

structure consists of concrete beams, which also form the ceiling of the first floor offices. Segments of original square asphalt tile survive in the northwest corner of the main recreation room and underneath the stage. The stage is covered in a red linoleum tile, possibly added during the 1940s alterations.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Plaster walls and ceilings throughout the building are badly deteriorated, in many places exposing the internal structural supports, especially the north office spaces which fully reveal the supporting structural clay tile of the walls and supporting concrete beams of the ceilings. All walls were originally covered in plaster applied over structural terra cotta tile. The hung plaster barrel vaulted ceiling of the main recreation room is largely intact. Several holes in the plaster reveal the structural steel trusses.

Extant wall treatment in the men's and women's restrooms features an approximately five foot high wainscot of four inch square beige ceramic tile. Plaster completes the upper wall surfaces. Original construction included structural glass barriers in both the men's and women's restrooms, only small sections of these opaque white stall dividers remain.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Doorways are finished throughout the building with wood trim. These door surrounds have a simple, classicized architrave and are finished in a dark walnut stain. They feature black rubber plinth blocks. The doors throughout the interior are in various states of disintegration and disrepair. These wood doors have a flat plain wood veneer.

On the mezzanine floor, the projection booth door surround differs from other door openings. It features a metal door frame on a simple metal plinth. The projection booth door is sheathed with plain metal. The projection room also has distinctive openings created for projecting movies, slides, or other visual materials onto the stage at the opposite end of the building. These six rectangular openings of varying sizes and shapes are cut out of the brick and plaster wall and lined with metal. No trim or decorative features were added. These openings have thin metal doors that slide vertically to seal off the opening when not in use.

Three metal scuttles, complete with metal chains and built-in metal ladders, give access to the flat roofs of the building. One is located in the southeast room adjacent to the stage (there is a rough wood platform here), the second in a closet on the south side of the west entrance lobby, and the third is located in the ceiling above the mezzanine landing.

b. Windows: See exterior description of windows for materials, size and shape. On the interior as on the exterior, steel window sashes are set

directly into the wall without frames or trim. Bronze lever handles and exposed vertical bolt locks are original hardware here.

6. Decorative features and trim: Some of the decorative features installed during the construction of the building remain; others (notably the wall sconces and hung ceiling lanterns) have been removed.

Decorative metal radiator covers were installed beneath the six twenty-four light windows in the auditorium, and also beneath the twenty-light window on the stage. These metal covers feature a starburst pattern on the front and a simple grid of square punctures on the top. Clerestory windows on the west wall have decorative grill underneath, featuring the same starburst pattern. Archival correspondence confirms that these decorative radiator cases were made by Philip Carey Manufacturing Company. Three large round metal grilles also with a decorative starburst pattern are located along the center of the main recreation room barrel-vaulted ceiling.

The east wall is dominated by the limestone fireplace surround framed by the exposed red brick chimney breast, which projects a few inches into the main recreation room. The limestone decorative surround includes stylized Classical details such as a prominent keystone protruding at an angle from the face of the chimney and surrounded by voussoirs. The keystone of the fireplace also serves as the central supporting bracket for a neoclassical mantel shelf, which doubles as a crowning cornice to the fireplace design. A rectangular limestone panel was set into the chimney breast above the fireplace. The hearth features red brick laid in a herringbone pattern and large yellow fire bricks line the firebox.

7. Hardware: Original bronze door and window hardware remains, including round knobs and locks on doors, as well as hinges and hand cranks on casement windows. Several features are of particular note. The projection room door is secured by pronounced brass hinges. The hardware for the oculus windows is also of note. These windows opened horizontally along a central pivot hinge. Bronze hand cranks remain on several of these windows. In the east mezzanine office, the east-facing window maintains a portion of an original hinged and folding metal screen. Wall-mounted metal hooks remain in the three closets on the ground floor.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, Ventilation: Original Kohler Co. Tube and Wall radiators are in position in both the first and mezzanine floors.

Original pulley operating systems are in place for opening the lunette vents in the north and south façades. These vents functioned by using a brass lever to pull a chain (running within the wall). A brass lever is still located on the southeast wall

of the stage, with indicators that read "open" and "closed," a second brass lever is on the northwest wall, adjacent to the canteen.

b. Lighting: Remnants of original light fixtures remain, including most notably the bronze bases from wall sconces and hanging lantern ceiling lights. In the southeast office abutting the stage a hanging fixture is still in position, though the glass shade has been replaced. Simple bronze or brass ceiling fixtures with opaque closed glass shades remain in many office spaces.

There is the row of recessed footlights in the stage, which may have been added or altered in the 1940s stage addition. A row of bronze spotlights, probably original, also hangs in position above the stage.

c. Plumbing: Plumbing fixtures are original and were supplied by Kohler Co. with Grade A Brass Water Pipes by Wolverine Tube Co. Wall mounted porcelain sinks with metal faucets were installed in both the toilet rooms. The men's bathroom contains in addition a large utility sink and two porcelain urinals. Men's and women's bathrooms both contain a single, wall-mounted toilet with porcelain bowl and black wood seat. The upstairs offices, projection room, and office on the south side of the connecting wing each have a porcelain wall mounted sink with a mixer faucet, perhaps added while the Coast Guard used this building in the 1940s. The one in the projection room has the stamp "RVB" inscribed in a shield on the outside of the bowl.

d. Other: The metal riggings for the stage curtains and sets remain in position.

9. Other interior features: The Recreation Building's canteen was a signature original feature of the building which is largely still intact. It features wood paneling built into the north wall of the main recreation space, opposite the stage. The bottom half of the canteen opening is a wood counter, faced with three sections of paneling, each with three recessed squares. Above this counter a paneled arched opening parallels the line of the barrel vaulted ceiling above. Two square columns divide the counter window opening into three sections. The spaces between the columns were filled in with heavy gauge metal screens, shown on an August 15, 1944 drawing by Bellis Wire Works, Inc..[104] Between the two central columns, this metal screen contains a small hinged door of the same heavy gauge metal wire, which would have allowed items to be passed from the interior of the canteen to waiting customers in the main recreation room. The interior of the canteen is partially intact. Built-in cabinets run along the north and south walls of the space, each with a single interior shelf. The ones on the north have sliding wood doors. Original drawings specify that both counters were to have a green, resinous counter top – it is difficult to determine if the current counters are original. The north wall of the room retains traces of the built-in cabinets that used to occupy the entire upper half of the wall

[104] As cited in Unrau, *Historic Structure Report* (volume 4, part 3), 423. A scan of this drawing is also located in the Technical Information Center collections at the Denver Service Center, National Park Service. See http://etic.nps.gov, NPS Drawing No. 462/43,957, sheet 20 of 21.

space. Original architectural drawings indicate that these cabinets were wood with hinged glass doors and wood shelving on the interior. A metal bottle opener is screwed onto the south cabinet face near the center of the service counter.

D. Site: The Recreation Building is located on the space between Islands 2 and 3 of Ellis Island, which was created during the 1920s by filling in a U-shaped lagoon. Its position is equidistant from the original hospital and psychopathic ward buildings on Island 2 and the pavilion-style contagious disease hospital wards on Island 3. The Recreation Building is attached on the west to Passageway C8, which was rebuilt in brick from an original wooden structure using New Deal funding. The east side of the Recreation Building faces Recreation Shelter 1 and a large open area, which was developed in the mid-1930s into a recreation yard with a network of pedestrian walkways and open grassy areas. A more extensive landscape plan was developed in 1939, which involved planting trees throughout this Recreation Yard. Many of these trees are now mature and provide extensive cover to the area.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: A computerized Drawings Index System for all types of Ellis Island architectural and engineering drawings is located at the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center (TIC). Many historic drawings are digitized and available at http://etic.nps.gov. The drawings most useful in preparing this report were a full set prepared by the Public Works Branch, Procurement Division, Treasury Department of "New Recreation Building, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, NY." Specific sheets are listed below:

- Floor Plans, Drawing No. 4-1, (15 February 1934).
- Elevations, Drawing No. 4-100, (18 February 1934).
- Interior Details and Sections, Drawing No. 4-101, (16 February 1934).
- Exterior Details, Drawing No. 4-201, (18 February 1934).
- Exterior and Interior Details, Drawing No. 4-202, (15 February 1934).
- Interior and Exterior Finishes with Sections, Drawing No. 4-203, (17 October 1935).
- Roof Framing Plan, Drawing No. 4-401, (27 January 1934).
- Miscellaneous, Drawing No. 7-1, (15 February 1934).
- Plumbing, Heating and Lighting, Drawing No. PHL-4-450, (27 January 1936).

Several site plans were also useful:

- Plan of the Island, Drawing No. 1-1A, (17 October 1935).
- Revisions – Plan of the Island, Drawing No. 1-2, (c. August 1934).
- A site plan of Ellis Island was prepared by the Sub-Committee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment. This plan is reproduced below and can also be found in front matter of the *Report of the Ellis Island Committee* (March 1934).

B. Early Views: Several construction photographs of the Recreation Building are located in the collections of the Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. They are found in Record Group 121-BCP, Records

of the Public Buildings Service, Prints: Photographs of the Construction of Federal Buildings, 1995-1954. Selected useful views include:

- 121-BCP-38B-3 - Recreation Building & Shelter No. 1, (26 February 1937).
- 121-BCP-38B-7 – Recreation Building & Shelter No. 1 looking West, (25 September 1936).
- 121-BCP-38B-16 - Interior, Recreation Building, (26 March 1937).
- 121-BCP-38B-18 – Recreation & Shelter No. 1 looking West, (28 August 1936). 121-BCP-38B-26 – Recreation Building & Shelter No. 1 looking West, (25 June 1936). [foundation]
- 121-BCP-38B-27 – Recreation Building & Shelter No. 1 looking West, (26 April 1936). [site preparation]

C. Bibliography:
Nota Bene: Archival materials related to Ellis Island in the 1930s were examined in two U. S. National Archives & Records Administration record groups: Record Group 121 – Records of the Public Buildings Service, located at Archives II in College Park, Maryland, and Record Group 79 – Records of the National Park Service, located at the Northeast Regional Archives in New York City. Footnotes throughout the Historical Information section of this report offer specific information about documents and holdings.

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IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Recreation Building and other selected structures on Ellis Island (Phase II) was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), within the Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) of the National Park Service (Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief, HABS; Richard O'Connor, Chief, HDP) during 2010. The project was sponsored by Statue of Liberty National Monument, David Luchsinger, Superintendent. Field recording and measured drawings were completed by Paul Davidson, HABS Architect and Project Supervisor; and HABS Architects Daniel De Sousa, Alexander Matsov, and Anne E. Kidd. HAER Architect Dana Lockett and HABS Architect Robert Arzola served as Project Leaders. Julia Sienkewicz (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) and HABS Historian Lisa Pfueller Davidson served as project historians. HABS Photographer James Rosenthal completed large-format photographs during fall 2010. Assistance was provided by the staff of Statue of Liberty National Monument, particularly Diana Pardue (Chief, Museum Services Division), Richard Holmes (Archaeologist), Don Fiorino (Historical Architect), and Kathleen Sullivan (Project Manager).

V. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL – ILLUSTRATIONS

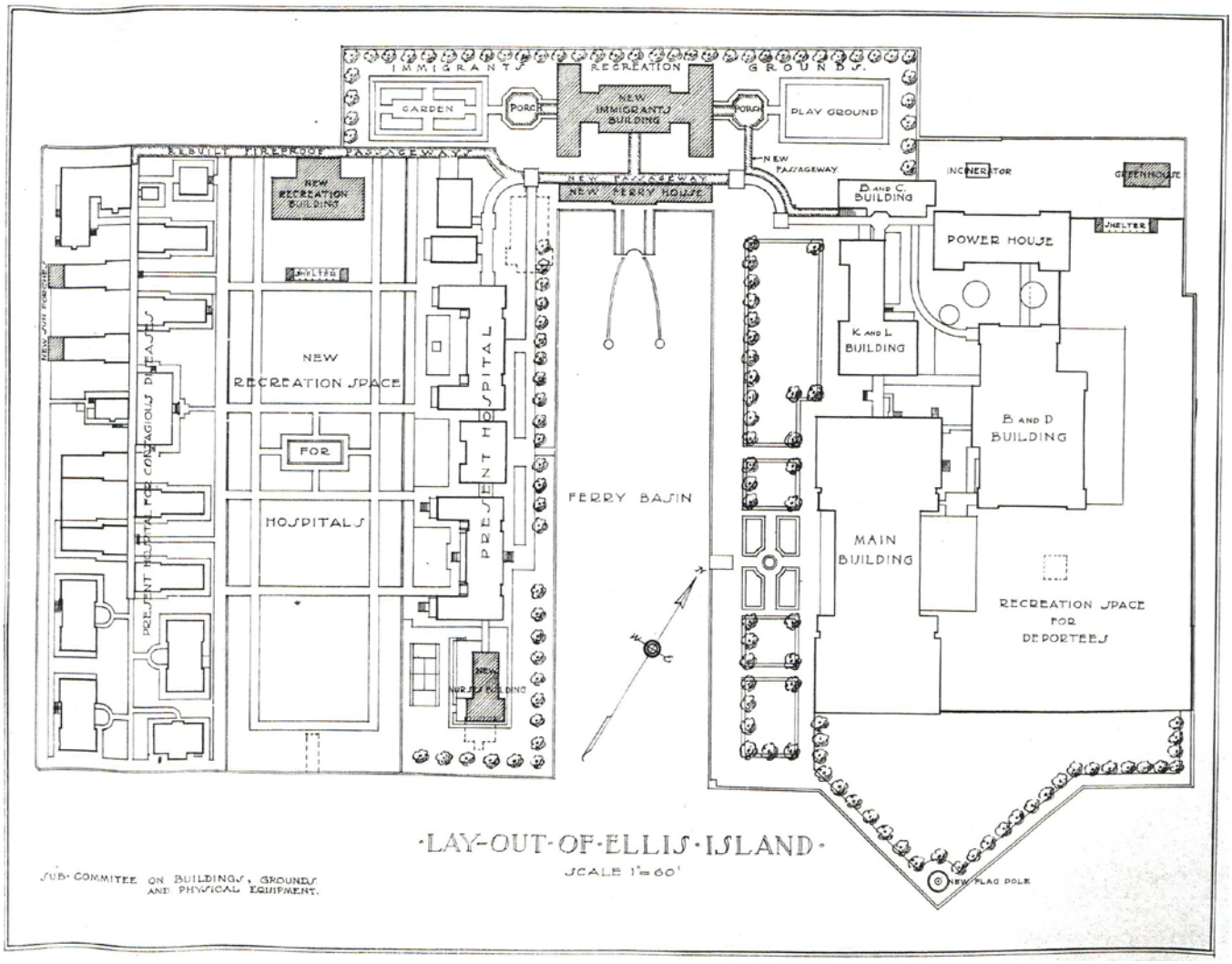

Figure 1: "Lay-Out of Ellis Island," 1934
Source: *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*

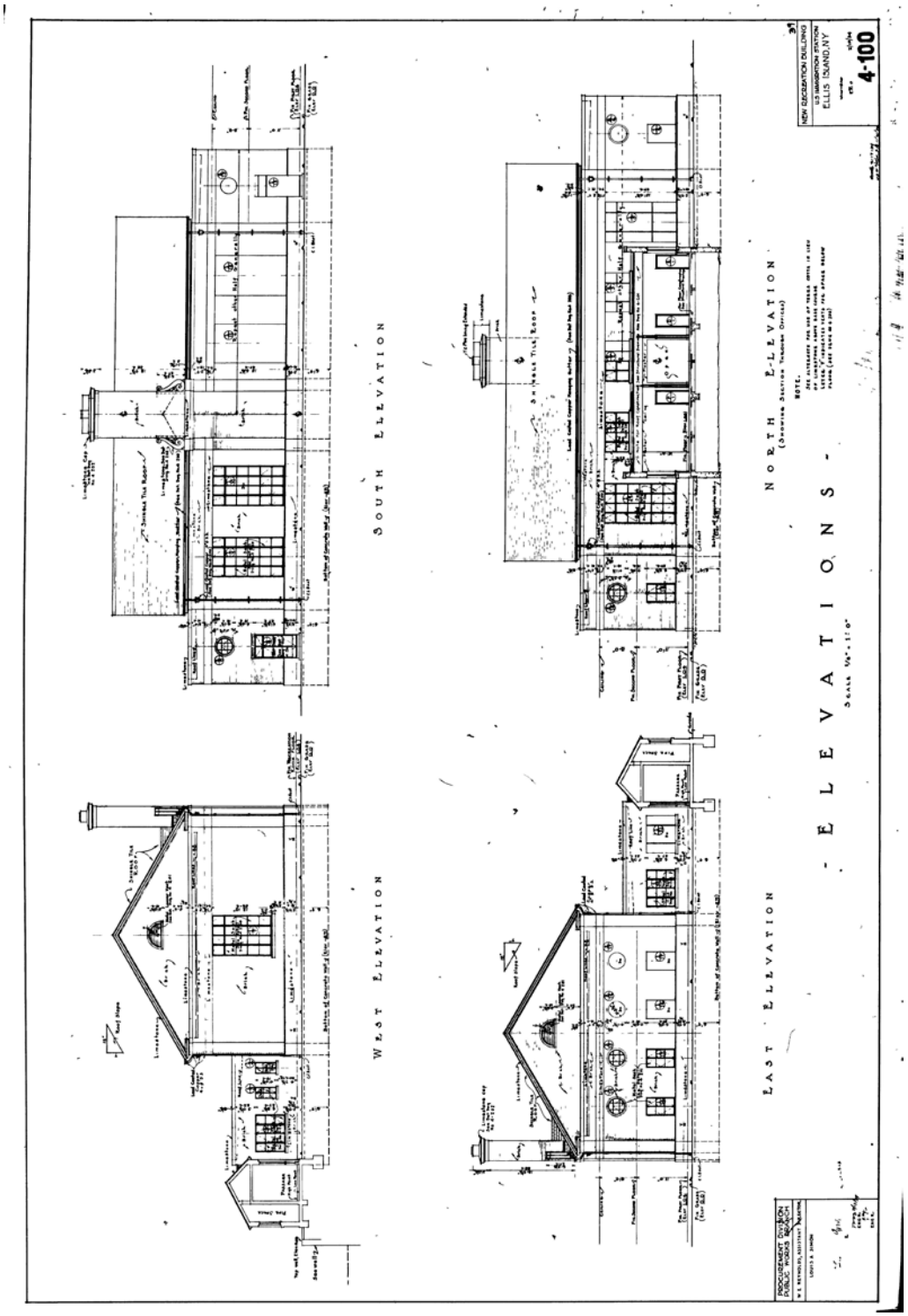

Figure 2 – Elevations, New Recreation Building, Drawing No. 4-100, 18 February 1934.
Source: Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, National Park Service

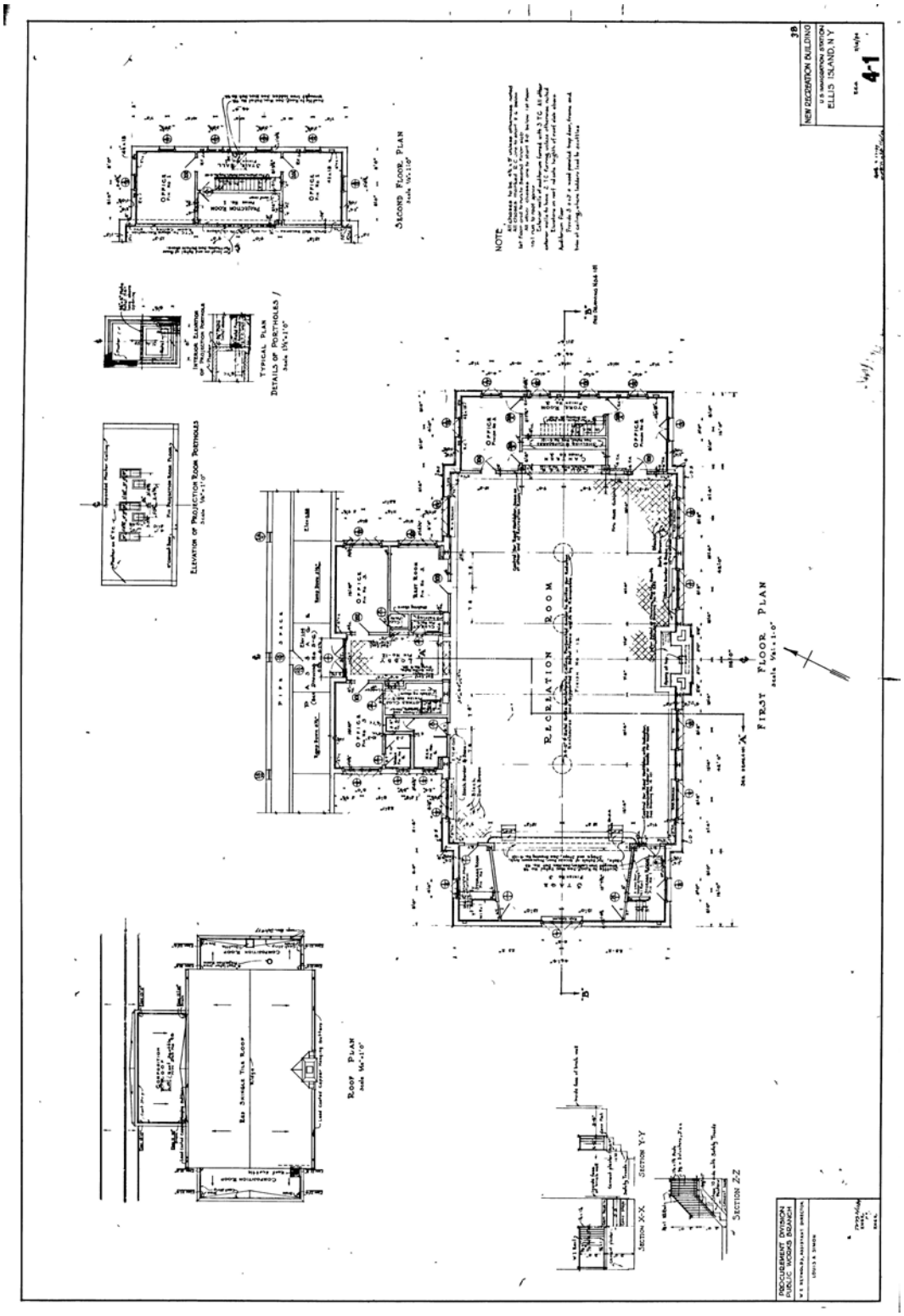

Figure 3 – Floor Plans, New Recreation Building, Drawing No. 4-1, 15 February 1934.
Source: Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, National Park Service

Figure 4: Recreation Building & Shelter No. 1, 26 February 1937
[Photo No. 121-BCP-38B-3]
Source: Record Group 121-BCP – Records of the Public Building Service,
Photographs of the Construction of Federal Buildings, 1885-1954,
Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration,
College Park, Maryland

Figure 5: Interior of Recreation Building, 26 March 1937
[Photo No. 121-BCP-38B-16]
Source: Record Group 121-BCP – Records of the Public Building Service,
Photographs of the Construction of Federal Buildings, 1885-1954,
Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration,
College Park, Maryland