

**Dallas Landmark Commission  
Landmark Nomination Form**

**1. Name**

historic: White Rock Bath House

and/or common: White Rock Bath House Cultural Center

date: 1930

**2. Location**

address: 521 E. Lawther

location/neighborhood: White Rock Lake

blocks:

survey:

tract size:

**3. Current Zoning**

R-lac

**4. Classification**

**Category**

\_\_\_ district  
 building(s)  
\_\_\_ structure  
\_\_\_ site  
\_\_\_ object

**Ownership**

public  
\_\_\_ private  
\_\_\_ both

**Public**

**Acquisition**  
\_\_\_ in progress  
\_\_\_ being considered

**Status**

occupied  
\_\_\_ unoccupied  
\_\_\_ work in  
progress

**Accessibility**

\_\_\_ yes:restricted  
 yes:unrestricted  
\_\_\_ no

**Present Use**

\_\_\_ agricultural  
\_\_\_ commercial  
\_\_\_ educational  
\_\_\_ entertainment  
\_\_\_ government  
\_\_\_ industrial  
\_\_\_ military

\_\_\_ museum

\_\_\_ park  
\_\_\_ residence  
\_\_\_ religious  
\_\_\_ scientific  
\_\_\_ transportation  
 other, specify  
arts facility

**5. Ownership**

Current Owner: City of Dallas

Contact:

Phone:

Address:

**6. Form Preparation**

Date: April 1996

Name & Title: Kate Singleton

Organization: Planning Department

Contact: Kate Singleton

Phone:

**7. Representation on Existing Surveys**

Alexander Survey (citywide) \_\_\_ local \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ national \_\_\_ National Register

H.P.L. Survey (CBD) \_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D \_\_\_ Recorded TX Historic Ldmk

Oak Cliff \_\_\_ TX Archaeological Ldmk

Victorian Survey \_\_\_

Dallas Historic Resources Survey, Phase \_\_\_ high \_\_\_ medium \_\_\_ low

*For Office Use Only*

Date Rec'd: \_\_\_ Survey Verified: Y N by: \_\_\_ Field Check by: \_\_\_ Petitions Needed: Y N

Nomination: Archaeological Site Structure(s) Structure & Site District

## 8. Historic Ownership

original owner: Dallas Water Utilities

significant later owner(s): Dallas Park And Recreation

## 9. Construction Dates

original: 1930

alterations/additions: 1980

## 10. Architect

original construction: Carsey and Linskie

alterations/additions:

## 11. Site Features

natural: trees, topography

urban design:

## 12. Physical Description

Condition, check one:

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

unaltered

altered

Check one:

original site

moved (date \_\_\_\_\_)

*Describe present and original (if known) physical appearance. Include style(s) of architecture, current condition and relationship to surrounding fabric (structures, objects, etc.) elaborate on pertinent materials used and style(s) of architectural detailing, embellishments and site details.*

The White Rock Bath House, constructed in 1930, is an excellent example of the Art Deco style. Designed by the local firm of Carsey and Linskie, this building is the precursor to large scale Art Deco style projects such as Fair Park. According to his nephew, Carsey worked for Frank Lloyd Wright, which may have influenced the style and materials used in the Bath House. (Gerald Carsey)

Art Deco was the first widely popular style in the United States to break with the revivalist tradition represented by Beaux Arts and period design. Art Deco takes its name from the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs and Industriels Moderne, which organized works of "new inspiration and real originality". (Poppeliers, p.39) The revivalist styles that had been popular before World War I gave way to innovative European styles. It was a style that consciously strove for modernity and an artistic expression to complement the machine age. (Poppeliers, pp.39-40)

Art Deco first came to Dallas on a large scale with the design and construction of the Centennial buildings at Fair Park in 1935-36. The "Art Deco Style" design is characterized by the following elements: smooth faced exterior; simplified, streamlined forms; vertical emphasis, and low relief geometric decoration. The Bath House is an early example of Art Deco in Dallas having been constructed in 1930. The building is symmetrical with vertical emphasis defined by the columns.

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The Bath House, built of cast reinforced concrete, and beach were constructed at a cost of \$121,603. The Bath House had 908 steel lockers, 268 steel dressing rooms and 29 showers. (WPA, p.377) The swimming area had a concrete slab that extended approximately 200 feet into the lake and 500 feet along the shore. Sand was added to create a beach. This area provided the largest "pool" in Dallas.

The main entrance of the White Rock Bath House (east facade) is enframed by a three bay portico. The corners of the portico have large stylized columns. The two interior columns project above the decorated parapet which consists of stylized dentils in varying sizes. There are three entry doors, two have stepped transoms and the middle door is a double door with no transom. According to original drawings, this middle door may be where the ticket booth was once located. The rest of the front facade is on the same plane as the entry doors and is symmetrical. On each side of the entry portico are five bays which are defined by stylized columns similar to the ones on the portico. These columns extend above the parapet and have two simple string courses, one at the top of the parapet and one approximately a foot below it. According to original drawings, the top of the columns were more detailed. Each bay has a small rectangular multi-pane metal casement window with a cast stone sill. Some of these were covered over when the building was renovated to house the Cultural Center.

The building steps back on the sides. Again the setback is defined by columns, and a door. The building then projects out one bay. This bay has a small window like the rest on the building. The projection has three bays defined by columns and a small window in each bay. The building steps back again and there is a small window on that facade as well as on the back of the projection. The set back has two bays with windows on either side with the portico for the back facing the lake in between.

The portico extends across the back (west) facade of the building. There is a concrete ramp that leads up to the portico since this area slopes down to the water's edge. It has seven bays, the middle bay is larger than the others. On the wall that is on the same plane with the set back, the bays continue under the portico. There are seven bays with the middle bay being the largest. Each of the bays is defined by columns which go only to the ceiling in this case and the small window. The middle, larger bay has three entry doors which each have a stepped transom. On the ceiling of the portico is a projecting beam which coincides with the placement of the columns for each bay. The building is two story with the columns for the portico extending down to a lower basement story. The middle bay echos the design of the front entrance portico. The railing for this bay is a simple post design. The railing for the other bays and the ramp is a metal stylized railing.

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The first floor housed the ticket booth and other uses. There were rest rooms, changing rooms and storage areas on the first floor. A concession stand and small infirmary or hospital were also located on this floor.

The lower basement which housed the rest rooms, laundry, wading pool and concession stands has seven bays. The three bays on the north end were the entrances into the changing areas. The middle bay, the largest one, is divided into three smaller bays just as the bay above it which is the back entrance into the building. These smaller bays are also openings into the dressing room area. Next to this bay are three others, two of which were used for concession stands. The two bays are bricked part way to provide a counter for the concession stand. The last bay was open at one time but has boards across it now. The other side (south facade) of the building is the same configuration that has been described.

Although the use of the building has changed, the exterior has been left relatively unaltered. The interior was renovated to accommodate a 99 seat performance hall and exhibition space. Several of the small windows have been covered over but not removed. The building is in need of maintenance but otherwise is in good condition. The White Rock Bath House with its elegant styling is an early example of Art Deco architecture in Dallas.

### 13. Historical Significance

*Statement of historical and cultural significance. Include: cultural influences, special events and important personages, influences on neighborhood, on the city, etc.*

The White Rock Bath House and beach were built to provide recreation for the people of Dallas. Constructed in 1930, the building was designed by the local architectural firm of Carsey and Linskie. The Bath House was used from 1930 until 1953-54 when a severe drought dried up the lake.

White Rock Lake was developed in the early 1900's as a water source for the fast growing city. The U.S. Census indicated that the population of Dallas more than doubled in ten years from 42,638 in 1900 to 92,104 in 1910. Obviously, the need for water grew along with those figures.

At the time, water for Dallas was pumped from numerous city wells, the Trinity River, Turtle Creek and the new reservoir completed in 1903 on Bachman Creek now known as Bachman Lake. Summer months often required city water be brought in by wagon from outside areas. A prolonged drought in the area from 1909 to 1912 made the people of Dallas aware that a dependable water supply was requisite for continued growth of the city. Mayor Hays began the process of finding a suitable new water source which would be completed under Mayor Holland.

In 1909, Chester Davis, a hydraulic engineer, recommended the damming of White Rock Creek to the City Council. His recommendations were based on the following:

- 1) A reservoir on White Rock Creek, east of the City, would establish a new water shed separate from the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. (114 square miles)
- 2) Clarification of the White Rock reservoir water could be achieved simply by allowing the water to settle.
- 3) The location required only one lift of the water to enter the City's mains.
- 4) The location provided an excellent base for the dam foundation.
- 5) The sedimentation rate on White Rock would be much less than any location on the Trinity River.

The land survey by J.D. Carter estimated the reservoir would hold 5.5-5.8 billion gallons of water, a quantity of water that would support the city's water needs for two years.

In a bond election held in April 1909, the voters of Dallas appropriated money for the purchase of land along White Rock Creek. White Rock dam and spillway were completed by the City Dallas in 1910 at a cost of \$765,000.

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The Lake began to be used for recreational purposes the moment it was filled with water. Swimming was not allowed since this was a primary water source. However, it was not a city park and the only action the City Park Board took regarding the lake was the establishment of a nursery to supply shrubs and trees for the park system. (Jebsen, pp. 324-325)

The Dallas park system was begun in 1876 when the city acquired 10 acres, now Old City Park, to be utilized as a public park. Twenty years later, the city finally hired a park superintendent, W.R. Tietze. He worked for the city in that position from 1896 to 1933. The City Charter was amended in 1905 to provide for a Park Board with five commissioners. (Reeves, pp. 9,13,25,72)

George Kessler was hired by the city to develop a comprehensive plan which included future park sites. The Kessler Plan, completed in 1911, laid the foundation many of the parks we see today. Kessler recommended that all property surrounding White Rock Reservoir be retained as public lands and used for parks. He foresaw a time when Dallas would grow out to White Rock and this park would be necessary. He stated that one day Dallas would outgrow the lake as a water source. (Jebsen, pp. 267-68)

Kessler continued to work as a consultant to the Park Board until 1925. In 1918, he revised his earlier plan. His primary recommendations reiterated the idea of using White Rock Lake for recreational purposes. (Jebsen, p. 353)

In the late 1920's, other water sources for Dallas were being developed. As Kessler had predicted, White Rock would no longer serve as a water source. A fight arose on how to best develop the land around the lake. One idea was to "Coney Island" White Rock. The people who had built large homes around the lake voiced strong opposition to this plan. Hugh January, one of the Park Commissioners resigned over the plan. (Jebsen, pp. 401-403) Waddy Tate who was mayor at the time arranged for transfer of the city property around the lake to the Park Board. The transfer took place on December 19, 1929. In early 1930, Council action gave the Park Board authority to develop five lakes as recreational areas, subject to prior rights of the water department.

On July 2, 1930, the Treatment Plant at Bachman Lake was put into service for the first time. Four weeks later on July 30, White Rock Pump Station was shut down. Now that the lake was no longer being used as a water source, swimming could be initiated. By this time, a boat house, fish hatchery, the Dixon Branch Shelter and several picnic areas were in operation.

The City of Dallas Park Board contracted with the local architectural firm Carsey and Linskie to design the bath house and C.L. Moore Company to construct it.

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Jon D. Carsey, one of seven sons, was born in 1896 in Oak Cliff. His father was Frank Carsey, an Oak Cliff pioneer, banker and developer. The family owned a farm that covered from Beckley and Polk, the south side of Jefferson to Clarendon. Jon Carsey attended Oak Cliff High School, now Adamson, which had an excellent architecture department. Local architects George Dahl, Terrell Harper, Harwood K. Smith and Herschel Fisher all went to school there. After high school, Carsey went to California to work and ended up working for Frank Lloyd Wright.

He learned to fly and enlisted as a pilot in World War I. He flew in the Army Air Corps over France and was shot down four times. After the war, he went back to work for Wright. According to his nephew, Carsey worked on Falling Water as a carpenter and other projects in Japan and New York. He was eventually fired and came back to Dallas.

Carsey began his own practice first as a contractor, working from his home in Oak Cliff. He also bought property along Inwood Road north of Lovers Lane and began to develop that area. His love of planes and gliders persisted during this time and he would often land his plane on Inwood Road near his house.

Carsey and Bob Linskie meet when they were both working for the Lacy Company, a large contracting and engineering firm. They not only had an architectural firm together but also developed property together. The two men developed an area on Fondren near Preston Road that had once been a farm.

Throughout his life, Carsey enjoyed flying, especially gliders. He started both the Texas and National Soaring Associations. Although too old to fly during World War II, he contributed to the war effort by designing the gliders used to drop troops into Europe.

The Bath House and beach were constructed at a cost of \$121,603. The bath house had 908 steel lockers, 268 steel dressing rooms and 29 showers. (WPA, p.377) It immediately became the premier swimming location in Dallas. Its opening was heralded in the August 1930 Dallas magazine. "Dallas folks do not have to go to the seashore any more for their beach lounging. The Dallas Park Board has provided a perfectly good beach at White Rock where swimmers may imagine themselves at a famous resort." (Dallas Magazine, August, 1930 p.1)

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During the 1930's approximately 5,000 people a day paid 35 cents a piece to swim and use the lockers and dressing rooms. The swimming area had a concrete slab that extended 200 feet into the lake and 500 feet along the shore. Sand was added to create a beach. This area provided the largest swimming "pool" in Dallas. (Dallas, p.1, Jebesen, p.642) Sanitation was questionable at best. Chlorinating the area was done by pouring chlorine from a motor boat and then by a pipe and nozzle system on the concrete slab. Chlorine reading was taken immediately and would register sufficient. However, both these methods were dubious at best. (Jebesen, p.642)

Oral histories state that the beach and bath house were a favorite meeting place for families and friends. A great deal of "courting" went on there. There was a picnic area as well as a snack bar. Families came and spent the whole day at the bath house and beach. Swimming lessons were provided for the children. The pool had a diving board and three lifeguards.

In 1953, Dallas suffered a severe drought. White Rock Lake was again pressed into service. The park board understood the need to close the beach. However, Public Health Director Dr. J.W. Bass had to write a letter to the City to stop swimming in the lake. After the drought passed, the swimming area was never reopened by the board. Other issues such as the polio epidemic and desegregation played a role in keeping the swimming area closed.

The building remained closed and unused until 1981. Richard Huff authored a study on neighborhood or satellite cultural centers in 1978. Then in 1979 a group of citizens began to work with the East Dallas Chamber of Commerce and the Office of Cultural Affairs to find a use for the building. The study for the Park and Recreation Board outlined the use of satellite cultural centers around the city. The White Rock Bath House was the first of four proposed neighborhood centers. In 1985, bond money was voted to rehab and update the building. The interior building is currently being updated with that bond money.

The purpose of the Bath House Cultural Center is to foster growth, development and quality of multi-cultural arts within the city of Dallas. As a cultural center, the Bath House has hosted local and national artists. Many of the city's arts organizations have offered programs through the Center including the Dallas Theater Center, Dallas Opera, Dallas Ballet, S.T.A.G.E, and the Dallas Children's Theater. The building is a multi-cultural facility with a theater, exhibition spaces, studio/classroom space and a photo lab. The facilities can be leased by artists and arts organizations. The building can accommodate theater, music, literature, visual arts and dance. This building, once the center for recreational use by the people of Dallas, has now found a new and vibrant use and continues to serve the city.

## 14. Bibliography

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Cohen, Judith. **Cowtown Moderne**. Texas: Texas A & M Press, 1988.

Holmes, Maxine and Saxon, Gerald. **The WPA Dallas Guide and History**. Dallas: Dallas Public Library and UNT Press, 1992.

Jebsen, Jr., Henry, Newton, Robert, Hogan, Patricia. **Centennial History of the Dallas, Texas Park System, 1876-1976**. Texas: Texas Tech University, 1976.

Poppeliers, John. **What Style Is It?** Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1977.

Reeves, Douglas Homer. **A History of Expansion, Department of Park and Recreation Dallas, Texas from 1876-1942**. Texas: East Texas State University Master's Thesis, June 1973.

City Directories 1915-1940

Reports

City of Dallas Designation Report. **The White Rock Pump Station**. 1986.

Cultural Center Advisory Council. **Memories 1930-1984, an Oral History of the Bath House and Its Neighborhood**. 1984.

Huff, Richard. **Neighborhood and/or Satellite Cultural Centers, A Position Paper Prepared for the Dallas Park and Recreation Board**. August 1, 1978.

Magazines

Dallas Chamber of Commerce Magazine, August 1930.

Interview

Gerald Carsey January 3, 1996

Original Architectural Drawings-Dallas Parks Department

## Designation Merit

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| A. Character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, State of Texas or the United States. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | H. Embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                    |
| B. Location as the site of a significant historical event. <input type="checkbox"/>  | I. Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on historic, cultural or architectural motif. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural and development of the city. <input type="checkbox"/>   | J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood, community or the city. <input type="checkbox"/>                         |
| D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historical heritage of the city. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | K. Archaeological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories or historic or prehistoric value. <input type="checkbox"/>                                    |
| E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. <input type="checkbox"/>   | L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment of public pride. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |
| F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or specimen. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |   |
| G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                            |   |

## Recommendation

The Designation Task Force requests the Landmark Commission to deem this nominated landmark meritorious of designation as outlined in Chapter 51 and Chapter 51A, Dallas Development Code.

Further, the Designation Task Force endorses the Preservation Criteria, policy recommendations and landmark boundary as presented by the Department of Planning and Development.

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair  
Neighborhood Designation Task Force

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Anderson, Urban Planner  
Historic Preservation

OFFICIAL ACTION OF THE DALLAS CITY COUNCIL

September 11, 1996

96-2915

Item 45: Zoning Case Z956-250/10096/NE(JA)

Zoning Case Z956-250/10096/NE(JA), a Landmark Commission authorized hearing to consider the granting of an Historic Overlay District for the White Rock Bath House on property presently zoned an R-1Ac(A) Single Family District located on the east side of White Rock Lake, west of Lawther Drive in the vicinity of the intersection of Lake Highlands Drive and Tiffany Way, and an ordinance implementing the proposed Historic Overlay District.

(The city plan commission recommended approval of an Historic Overlay District, subject to preservation criteria.)

Approved as part of the consent zoning docket.

Assigned ORDINANCE NO. 22879.