

**TOMPKINSVILLE (JOSEPH H. LYONS) POOL BATH HOUSE, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR** consisting of the domed entry foyer and telephone alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, ticket and parcel booth fronts, metal signage, and vents; Victory Boulevard at Murray Hulbert Avenue, Staten Island.

Constructed 1934-1936; Joseph L. Hautman and others, Architect; Aymar Embury II, Consulting Architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 487, Lots 80, 110 and 112 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On January 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior (LP-2235) first floor interior consisting of the domed entry foyer and telephone alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, ticket and parcel booth fronts, metal signage, and vents, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 35). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Eleven witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe and representatives of New York City Councilman Michael McMahon, the Municipal Art Society of New York, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Preservation League of Staten Island. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has also received five letters in support of designation. Several of the speakers and letters also expressed support for the larger designation effort of all the WPA-era pools.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

The Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal agencies created in the 1930s to address the Great Depression. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout New York City's five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities constructed in the country. The pools were completed just two and a half years after the LaGuardia administration took office, and all but one survives relatively intact today.

While each of the 1936 swimming pool complexes is especially notable for its distinctive and unique design, the eleven facilities shared many of the same basic components. The complexes generally employed low-cost building materials, principally brick and cast concrete, and often utilized the streamlined and curvilinear forms of the popular 1930s



Art Moderne style. Each had separate swimming, diving and wading pools, and a large bath house with locker room sections which doubled as gymnasiums in non-swimming months. Rooftop promenades and galleries furnished ample spectator viewing areas. The complexes were also distinguished by innovative mechanical systems required for heating, filtration and water circulation. Sited in existing older parks or built on other city-owned land, the grounds surrounding the pool complexes were executed on a similarly grand scale.

The team of designers, landscape architects and engineers assembled to execute the new pool complexes, in addition to hundreds of other construction and rehabilitation projects undertaken between 1934 and 1936 by New York's newly consolidated Parks Department, was comprised largely of staff members and consultants who had earlier worked for Moses at other governmental agencies, including architect Aymar Embury II, landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Allyn R. Jennings, and civil engineers W. Earle Andrews and William H. Latham. Surviving documents also indicate that Moses, himself a long-time swimming enthusiast, gave detailed attention to the designs for the new pool complexes.

Designed by Joseph L. Hautman, the Tompkinsville Pool is set on a small swath of land on the east shore of Staten Island between the Staten Island Railway track and the waterfront. Uniquely situated on reclaimed waterfront property, the challenges of the small Tompkinsville site influenced the design of the Art-Moderne-style bath house. The long, L-shaped footprint occupies the west and north edges of the site, designed to block the adjacent train traffic while opening up the complex to views of the harbor. Unlike most of the other pools constructed at the same time, the bath house and pool deck occupy almost the entire site and are not surrounded by parkland. Designed to accommodate 2,800 people, the pool officially opened on July 7, 1936 and became the fourth WPA pool to open throughout New York City and the first (and only) one to open on Staten Island.

The streamlined and curvilinear form of the Art Moderne-style bath house met the low-cost material criteria stipulated by the WPA while still presenting an attractive design. Set in a one-and-a-half story rotunda, the pool's bath house lobby is distinguished by a number of unique features. They include the starburst-patterned terrazzo flooring, Flemish bond brick walls with alternating paired, flush header and recessed stretcher courses, a ribbed precast-concrete frieze, the contrasting light-colored walls, projecting pilasters and arched window openings of the clerestory, and the light-colored smooth ceiling of the rotunda dome. The plan of the lobby evokes an ancient rotunda with enclosed porticos, grand entrances and clerestory windows. The sweeping brick curved walls, many windows and double-height interior of the lobby give the space a monumental feel that also invite patrons into the structure.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Site<sup>2</sup>

The Tompkinsville Pool is located on a 2.56-acre waterfront site on the eastern shore of Staten Island, just south of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal at the foot of Victory Boulevard. Currently known as the Joseph H. Lyons Pool, the park and pool were originally named for the surrounding community.

Considered the oldest European village in eastern Staten Island, Tompkinsville was known in colonial times as the Watering Place for a fresh water spring located there. According to *Holden's Staten Island, The History of Richmond County*, Giovanni da Verrazzano, who is credited with "discovering" the island in 1524, was led "to safe anchorage near 'The Watering Place'" by "friendly Leni-Lenapes," the island's pre-contact residents.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of earlier inhabitation by Native Americans during the Woodland period has also been found in the surrounding area, including traces of campsites, Native American artifacts and "triangular points."<sup>4</sup> In 1639, several families sent by Captain David Pietersz De Vries, who was the second patroon to receive a land grant on Staten Island from the Dutch West India Company, settled near the Watering Place.<sup>5</sup> According to research done by former Staten Island Borough Historian Dick Dickenson, there is evidence that these colonists may have owned African slaves, the first living on Staten Island.<sup>6</sup> The colony did not survive past 1641.

The island's relative isolation during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries provided the setting for large institutions such as the Quarantine Station, which opened on the waterfront, just north of the site of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool in 1799.<sup>7</sup> Residential development of this section of Staten Island was first promoted by Daniel D. Tompkins. A governor<sup>8</sup> of New York and later vice president of the United States, Tompkins (1774-1825) spent considerable time on Staten Island during the War of 1812. Impressed by the island's natural beauty and the ease of travel to Manhattan, in October 1816, Tompkins commissioned a survey of a portion of his recently purchased land to be developed as the village of Tompkinsville. Realizing that transportation would significantly aid development, he procured the incorporation of the Richmond Turnpike Company to establish a highway from the New Blazing Star Ferry on the west shore of Staten Island to Tompkinsville along the route of present-day Victory Boulevard. He also acquired an interest in the steamboat monopoly of Fulton and Livingston and the following year established regular ferry service between Staten Island and Whitehall Street in New York City, which operated from a pier at the foot of Victory Boulevard, adjacent to the Lyons pool site. Tompkins borrowed heavily to finance these enterprises expecting to be reimbursed for expenses he had incurred on behalf of the government during the War of 1812. Stalled repayments brought about foreclosure proceedings on the land and following his death in 1825 other creditors brought suit against his estate. Several of his children and his nephew, Caleb T. Ward, some of whom were in part responsible for the early development of the adjacent village of Stapleton, purchased portions of his former holdings at auction in the late 1820s and early 1830s. During the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tompkinsville grew rapidly due to its excellent ports with regular steam ferry service to Manhattan and its proximity to main roads. The village continued to prosper during the Civil War as shipyards in Tompkinsville, as well as Port Richmond and Stapleton, worked busily to meet the demand for military vessels and commercial ships.

By 1870, a portion of Tompkinsville, along with the other East Shore villages of Stapleton and Clifton had been consolidated into the incorporated Village of Edgewater.<sup>9</sup> Stapleton was the political center of Edgewater, its business center, and a major transportation hub, and, as a result, pulled some commercial activity away from Tompkinsville. The area continued to prosper residentially following the integration of ferry and train service, and Staten Island's 1898 consolidation into the City of New York. The neighborhood's close proximity to the newly created Borough Center at St. George, an important road terminus and port for the ferry to Manhattan, helped maintain its status as an important "suburb." Staten Island's waterfront industrial base grew during World War I as industries, particularly the shipyards expanded due to government contracts.

In the 1880s, the Staten Island Rapid Transit Railroad Company had begun purchasing land along the Tompkinsville waterfront for an extended steam service passenger line, as part of an integrated rail and ferry system. The train was running along the east shore of Staten Island (along the current route of the Metropolitan Transit Authority Staten Island Railway) from Tompkinsville to Clifton by July 31, 1884, and shortly after took over an existing line south to Tottenville, and also extended its service west to Arlington and south along a South Beach spur. Originally part of New York Harbor, it appears that some of the land at the site of the pool was filled in as part of a municipal pier construction project along the east shore of Staten Island from Tompkinsville to Clifton during the 1920s. Beginning just south of the former location of Tompkins' ferry service, the new piers were constructed east of the Staten Island Rapid Transit, which had previously run along, and in places just off the shoreline in Tompkinsville and Stapleton. Constructed under the terms of Mayor John Hylan and Dock Commissioner Murray Hulbert, the project was part of an extensive waterfront improvement plan intended to meet the anticipated shipping needs of New York City.<sup>10</sup> The project was later termed "Hylan's Folly" due to the large capital expenditure of funds which were not regenerated as many of the piers sat vacant for a number of years.<sup>11</sup>

Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool was one of only two of the 11 WPA pools opened in 1936 that was not constructed in an established or enlarged park. Moses' announcement of the proposed construction of 23 new pools in the summer of 1934 identified New Brighton as the probable location of the only proposed Staten Island pool. Due to its close proximity to public transportation and an existing Parks project, Staten Island Borough President Joseph A. Palma recommended the Tompkinsville site adjacent to Pier 6, where WPA-funded work had recently begun converting the pier into the George Cromwell Recreation Center. By that August, Parks Department records indicate that Moses and the Department of Docks had approved the location.

With its close proximity to the waterfront, reclaimed land setting, and small lot size, the site of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool presented interesting challenges for the Parks Department's architects and engineers. Some of the pool's construction drawings on file at the Olmsted Center in Flushing Meadows show large wood pilings used as footings for the bath house and pool foundation. The pool deck is elevated 4 feet above street level, likely to accommodate the access tunnels built around the pools, designed to facilitate access for maintenance and repairs at all of the in-ground WPA play centers. The small size and train-side location of the site also affected the complex's design, influencing the L-shape of the bath house, which marks the west and north edges of the park and provides a screen from the train traffic. The long footprint of the one-story building permitted sufficient space to incorporate the boiler and filter rooms into the bath house building, avoiding the need for additional structures. Facing the harbor, the open south and east sides of the complex give a sense of openness to the small site.

#### Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert Moses and the New Deal<sup>12</sup>

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932 in the middle of the Great Depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929. Roosevelt promised to rebuild confidence in American capitalism and to improve the nation's standard of living by creating the New Deal economic program of unprecedented public spending on social programs and construction projects.

New York City had been especially hard hit by the economic downturn,<sup>13</sup> and its citizens, hoping for change, elected Fiorello H. LaGuardia to the mayoralty of New York City in 1933 as an anti-Tammany Hall reform candidate. A maverick Republican and a five-term congressman from East Harlem, LaGuardia won the mayoral election on the "Fusion" ticket after losing the 1929 mayoral race on the Republican line. The Fusion Conference Committee at first considered running Robert Moses, another Republican, who was appointed Chairman of the New York State Council of Parks in 1924 by his political mentor, Governor Alfred E. Smith, a Tammany Hall Democrat from New York City. However, the committee decided against Moses because of his association with Smith, and chose LaGuardia instead. At the time, Moses was a popular public figure with a reputation as a progressive and as the builder of great parks and parkways like Jones Beach and the Northern State Parkway on Long Island. His endorsement of LaGuardia during the campaign was considered instrumental in securing a victory for LaGuardia. Within a week of the election, LaGuardia chose Moses, a champion of reform politics, as New York City's new Park Commissioner.

Moses accepted the position of Commissioner of Parks in the LaGuardia administration on the condition that the five existing independent Parks Departments (one for each borough) would be consolidated into a single department with himself as the sole Commissioner, with authority extending also over the City's parkways. Moses also demanded to be appointed the Chief Executive Officer of the Triborough Bridge Authority, which was then building the bridge of that name, and that a new agency, the Marine Parkway Authority, which would build a bridge to the Rockaways, be created with himself at the helm. Already in charge of the Long Island State Park Commission, the New York City Council of Parks, the Jones Beach State Park Authority, and the Bethpage State Park Authority, Moses would then be in control of all existing and proposed parks and parkways in New York City and many others in the metropolitan region.

In the 1920s, Moses was at the forefront of the national recreation movement that began in the first decade of the twentieth century, led by such men as President Theodore Roosevelt and the lesser-known George D. Butler of the National Recreation Association. The movement gained momentum under the administration of President Calvin Coolidge with the organization of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation (NCOR) in 1924.<sup>14</sup> The Depression of the 1930s further amplified the need to provide more, or improve existing, outdoor recreational opportunities, especially in urban areas. Fortunately, such goals fit nicely into FDR's New Deal economic programs. Mayor LaGuardia's success in securing a lion's share of monies made available by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), and Moses' management skills and his ability to attract talented designers and engineers to his staff, resulted in profound physical changes to the environment of New York City. The construction and renovation of neighborhood recreation areas, such as pools and playgrounds, were some of the most ambitious and successful programs undertaken by Moses with funds largely provided by the WPA.

Moses began to assess the state of the City's parks and to plan for their future as soon as LaGuardia announced his intention to appoint Moses as Park Commissioner. According to one source: "Immediately after the election he wrote out, on a single piece of paper, a plan for putting 80,000 men to work on 1,700 relief projects."<sup>15</sup> Moses hired a consulting engineer and three assistant engineers to survey every park and parkway in the City. The survey was completed by the time he took office in mid-January 1934.

When Moses took over the Parks Department, it was already employing 69,000 relief workers funded mainly by the federal Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA). However, Moses found the men to be ill-equipped and inadequately supervised, and considered many of the construction projects to have been poorly designed. He immediately began to revamp the entire operation of the Parks Department and established a Division of Design, located at the Arsenal in Central Park. The staff was to be headed up by experienced professionals drawn mainly from his State agencies. Some of his talented staff of young architects, landscape architects and engineers had worked on the designs for Long Island's highly acclaimed parks, including Jones Beach, which his considered one of Moses' greatest accomplishments. His staff also included a number of well-known and accomplished designers, among them architects Aymar Embury II and John M. Hatton, and the landscape architect and civil engineer Gilmore D. Clarke. Other top members of Moses' staff were the landscape architect Allyn R. Jennings, and civil engineers W. Earle Andrews and William H. Latham.

The Parks Department's Division of Design comprised a topographical unit of about 400 surveyors and draftsmen, a landscape architecture unit of about sixty people, an architecture unit of sixty architects and draftsmen, and an engineering unit of about fifty. Smaller units included an Arboreal Department and an Inspection Department. All the work in the Division of Design was under the direct supervision of the Park Engineer, who was aided and advised by a Consulting Architect, a Consulting Landscape Architect, and a Consulting Engineer.<sup>16</sup> All new projects began in the topographical unit, where a complete survey of the land was prepared. It then moved on to the landscaping unit, where the basic concept for the design was developed. Next, landscape, architecture, and engineering units collaborated to produce the final design and all the necessary construction documents. The Park Engineer and his aides had to approve all of the plans. Moses himself sometimes stepped in to revise or overrule a design, especially on the larger, more visible projects.

Moses' superior management ability and political savvy allowed him to move projects along very quickly and to produce concrete results, gaining for him much public admiration. However, Moses' personal demeanor was notoriously stubborn and arrogant, and he was known, at times, to disregard the legitimate authority of other governmental agencies. Once, when the Department of Plant and Structures refused to suspend a ferry service that used a terminal in the path of the proposed Triborough Bridge approach road, Moses had his men demolish the

terminal while the boat was on the other side of the river. He feuded with President Franklin D. Roosevelt for years, even while Washington was pouring millions of dollars into Moses' own Parks Department. His later battles with and subsequent triumphs over community groups opposed to the routing of the Gowanus and the Cross-Bronx Expressways through their neighborhoods are now legendary. Moses was also known to have been insensitive to people of color, and reputedly tried to restrict access to many of his recreational facilities, including the WPA-era pools.<sup>17</sup>

To many, Robert Moses was a master builder who helped modernize New York City's infrastructure; to others his policies led to the destruction of many distinctive neighborhoods. In the summer of 1934, however, Moses was a hero. Hundreds of projects, covering virtually every neighborhood in the city, had been completed. Structures were repainted, tennis courts resurfaced, and lawns reseeded. Hundreds of new construction projects were either already underway in the process of being designed.<sup>18</sup> Among them was the Joseph H. Lyons Pool in Tompkinsville, Staten Island.

### History of Swimming in New York City<sup>19</sup>

The Hudson and East Rivers lining the shores of Manhattan both served as popular bathing spots dating to the Colonial era. Despite extensive contamination resulting from decades of unchecked pollution, the long tradition of swimming in New York City's rivers was still strong at the middle of the nineteenth century. Out of concern for the health and welfare of the people of the city, and particularly of immigrant populations who took the most advantage of the rivers, the city opened its first floating pools in 1870. The floating pools, however, were essentially wood-framed structures suspended on pontoons, filled with the same unfiltered river water. By the turn of the century, there were about two dozen of these floating pools moored at various places along the waterfront, competing directly with industry for the space. Some improvements were eventually made to the floating pool concept, for example by 1914, the pools were required to be watertight and filled with purified water. Nonetheless, as river quality continued to erode, and access to nearby beaches improved, the floating pools gradually disappeared.

In 1891, New York City's first public bath was opened on the Lower East Side of Manhattan by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, one of several charitable organizations operating bath houses for a small fee. Following passage of an 1895 state law requiring cities with populations of 50,000 or more to construct free public baths, the City of New York opened the Rivington Street Bath in 1901. By 1914, thirteen City-operated bath houses had been constructed in Manhattan, mostly sited within immigrant neighborhoods where overcrowded tenements lacked indoor plumbing. These shower and bathtub facilities, however, were never very popular with the working class, and swimming pools and gymnasias eventually were added to some public baths in hopes of attracting more patrons (most bath houses erected after 1905 included these features in their original designs). The indoor pools at the bath houses never quite replaced the need or demand for outdoor swimming facilities in the city, and by the 1930s, it was clear that they had not aged well.

When Robert Moses became Park Commissioner in 1934, only two City-owned public outdoor pools existed, one at Betsy Head in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and the other at Faber Park on Staten Island. Moses, however, considered the Betsy Head pool "unsanitary" and often lamented its "unattractive, inadequate, and impractical bath houses."<sup>20</sup> Moses, a strong believer in the need for safe bathing in the city, consulted with the heads of the New York City Health and Sanitation Department in July 1934. Finding that only an increase in the number of swimming pools could ease the existing burden, Moses wrote the following in a press release picked up by the *New York Times*:

It is no exaggeration to say that the health, happiness, efficiency and orderliness of a large number of the city's residents, especially in the summer months, are tremendously affected by the presence or absence of adequate swimming and bathing facilities. We are providing additional wading pools for children as fast as we can...This, however, does not meet the problem of any but small children...It is one of the tragedies of New York life, and a monument to past indifference, waste, selfishness and stupid planning, that the magnificent natural boundary waters of the city have been in large measure destroyed for recreational purposes by haphazard industrial and commercial developments, and by pollution through sewage, trade and other waste...We must frankly recognize the conditions as they are and make our plans accordingly...<sup>21</sup>

To Moses, a forerunner in the national recreation movement and an avid swimmer since his university days, a change was desperately needed, and by October 1934, excavations had already begun for the first of eleven state-of-the-art swimming pools. The pools were to be sited near inner-city neighborhoods in order to provide swimming for those who could not easily reach places like Orchard Beach or the beaches of Long Island. In addition to swimming pools, the new centers would incorporate elaborate bath houses, and also provide active adult sport areas, children's playgrounds, and other amenities. The eleven pools opened in the summer of 1936 and quickly gained recognition as being among the most exceptional public facilities constructed in the country.<sup>22</sup> All of the pools featured new bath houses, with the exception of Hamilton Fish and Betsy Head.<sup>23</sup> After the completion of the WPA-era pool complexes, no new public swimming pools were constructed in New York City until the 1970s. Over 1.65 million bathers are thought to have used the new swimming pools in their first summer.

#### The Swimming Pools, Moses, and Segregation in New York City<sup>24</sup>

Institutionalized racism was still an established way of life in the United States during the inter-war years, even on the federal level. For example, as a result of federal guidelines articulated in the 1935 Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual, it was impossible for non-segregated developments to attain mortgage insurance, meaning ethnic and even religious minorities could only secure mortgages in certain areas. The result was a substantial increase in both racial segregation and urban disinvestment in cities across the country, New York included. At its peak, estimates of segregation in public housing nationwide ran as high as 90 percent due in large part to both federal and local government policies.<sup>25</sup> Even as late as 1943, the City of New York gave its approval for Metropolitan Life's all-white, middle income projects – Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village.

Similar to many people of his era, Robert Moses was also known to have been insensitive to people of color, an attitude which may have impacted both the siting and administration of the WPA-era pools. LaGuardia and Moses often went to great lengths to show the media that they did care about minorities, holding, for example, a celebration for 25,000 people upon the opening of the Colonial Park pool, at which the mayor offered the facility as proof that his administration was in fact "building and doing things for Harlem."<sup>26</sup> Although LaGuardia and Moses claimed they were siting pools in the most congested areas of the city, Colonial Park in Harlem remained the only one sited in a predominantly "non-white" neighborhood. Moreover, the Thomas Jefferson Park pool, located in East Harlem (LaGuardia's old congressional district) was close to Spanish Harlem where the city's growing Puerto Rican population was settling. To discourage minority use at this facility, Moses reputedly kept the water heating system turned off, believing that the cold water would not bother Caucasian swimmers, but would somehow deter non-whites.<sup>27</sup>

It has been alleged that the Parks Department at the time had an active policy of hiring only white lifeguards and attendants in hopes of deterring minority patrons. Whether or not such directives came from Moses himself, the fact remains that the pools were largely segregated at the time of their opening. In the Pulitzer Prize winning biography, *The Power Broker*, Robert Caro writes that "one could go to the [Thomas Jefferson] pool on the hottest summer days, when the slums of Negro and Spanish Harlem a few blocks away sweltered in the heat, and not see a single non-Caucasian face."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, oral histories relating to Betsy Head Pool tell of an unwritten rule that "African-Americans could swim in the Brooklyn pool only in the late afternoon, after white residents had vacated the premises."<sup>29</sup> Such claims are supported by photographs and video footage from the era, showing that largely, white and black New Yorkers swam in different pools.<sup>30</sup> For a handful of sites, however, including the Highbridge and Colonial Park Play Centers in Manhattan, as well as McCarren Play Center in Brooklyn, photographs and video footage seem to indicate that, on occasion, the populations did mix.<sup>31</sup>

#### The Design and Construction of the Tompkinsville Pool<sup>32</sup>

The Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool is one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools opened in the summer of 1936 in a series of grand ceremonies presided over by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Park Commissioner Robert Moses. All of the pools were constructed largely with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal agencies created in the 1930s to address the Great Depression. Designed to accommodate a total of 49,000 users simultaneously at locations scattered throughout New York City's five boroughs, the new pool complexes quickly gained recognition as being among the most remarkable public facilities ever constructed in the country. The city's pool construction program was reported to have been the most expensive in terms of total cost. Robert Moses, an avid swimmer who

had a home near the ocean in Babylon, Long Island, was known to have taken a special interest in the design and construction of bathing and swimming facilities, such as Jones Beach, Orchard Beach and Riis Park, as well as the neighborhood swimming pools.<sup>33</sup> As a result of his special attention, along with that of Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, the design and execution of New York City's aquatic facilities in the 1930s were a cut above most other park projects at the time.

At the start, the Parks Department adopted a list of shared guidelines for the entire pool project in order to enhance the efficiency of the design effort, to unify the operations of each complex, and to meet the various local and federal requirements of the relief programs. For example, each pool complex was to have separate swimming, diving and wading pools, and a large bath house, the locker room sections of which doubled as gymnasiums during non-swimming months. The bath houses, which would serve as the centerpieces of each complex, would be distinctive pavilions that would establish the design motif of each facility. Concrete bleachers at the perimeter of the pools would furnish spectator viewing areas to be augmented at some sites with rooftop promenades and galleries. There would be a minimum width for the decks to provide enough room for sunbathing and circulation, and at least one dimension of each swimming pool would have to be a multiple of fifty-five yards to allow swimming competitions to be held at standard distances in either English or metric systems. There had to be underwater lighting for night swimming, and heating for the pools. Plus, the complexes had to share low-cost building materials, principally brick and cast concrete, as required by the federal government as per the terms of the WPA funding.

To satisfy federal stipulation on low-cost materials, it appears that the design team for the pools determined that the streamlined and curvilinear forms of the Art Moderne and Modern Classical styles would best meet the low-cost needs and still permit pleasing aesthetics. As a group, the pools were also distinguished by the innovative mechanical systems required to heat, filter, and circulate the vast amounts of water they used. Many of these innovations set new standards for swimming pool construction, such as scum gutters that allowed in enough sunlight to naturally kill off bacteria and a series of footbaths filled with foot cleaning solution through which bathers were forced to pass upon entering the pool areas from the locker rooms. Despite the fact that the basic components were essentially the same and that the WPA required that only inexpensive materials be used, each of these swimming pool complexes is especially notable for its distinctive and unique setting, appearance, and character.

In October 1934, the Parks Department announced the start of excavations and site work for several of the new pools. Plans for Tompkinsville Pool, as the Joseph H. Lyons Pool was formerly known, were filed at the New York City Department of Buildings in March 1935. At that time, WPA workers had already broken ground at the site, which would include a large swimming pool, adjacent diving and wading pools and a one-story, L-shaped brick bath house (with a one-and-a-half story centrally located rotunda) that could accommodate 2,800 bathers. The year 1936 was known as "the swimming pool year," since ten of the eleven pools were opened that summer, one per week for ten weeks.<sup>34</sup> Each opening day was a memorable event for its neighborhood; the day-long events featured parades, blessings of the waters, swimming races, diving competitions, appearances by Olympic stars, and performances by swimming clowns. Mayor LaGuardia attended every opening to perform the ribbon cutting. Festivities continued well after dusk with LaGuardia pulling the switch to turn on each pool's spectacular underwater lighting to the "oooohs" of the crowds. An emergency crew worked over the holiday weekend, on Saturday and Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, to add the finishing touches to the pool complex in time for the dedication ceremony. The opening of the Tompkinsville Pool on July 7, 1936 marked the first and only WPA pool to open in Staten Island and the fourth overall to open throughout New York City; an estimated 7,500 people "jammed every inch of available space"<sup>35</sup> to attend the ceremony during a heat wave that plagued New York City. Speakers Mayor LaGuardia, Borough President Joseph Palma and Robert Moses, hailed the merits of the Tompkinsville pool and other WPA projects. The Mayor, who stated that "the policy of this administration is to give Staten Island and even break with the other boroughs,"<sup>36</sup> turned on the pool's lights. The ceremony was concluded with a program of water sports and games by Park Department employees.

The year after the opening of the pool, the Board of Alderman voted to rename the pool in memory of World War I veteran Joseph H. Lyons<sup>37</sup> (1892-1934), although the name was not officially changed until several years later. Over Memorial Day weekend in 1938, the pool was renamed and dedicated with a bronze plaque. Lyons, who was born on the lower west side of Manhattan but later moved to Staten Island, first served as a volunteer in the French ambulance corps, and was transferred to the American ambulance corps when the



United States entered the war. He received the War Cross for his service on the Vosges front. Upon his return to Staten Island after the war, Lyons formed the Staten Island Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and was a founding member of the Slosson Post of the American Legion. His efforts are credited as being instrumental in the naming of the ferryboat *American Legion* and the renaming of Victory Boulevard from Richmond Turnpike. Lyons died of pneumonia in 1934. A bronze plaque, donated by the Slosson Post, was unveiled by his widow, Mrs. Agnes Morrill Lyons, at the dedication ceremony. The plaque remains affixed to the Victory Boulevard façade of the pool, adjacent to the main entry.

Long after its opening, the Tompkinsville Pool (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool continued to be a popular social center for the residents of Staten Island. Intended to be used throughout the year, plans to convert the main pool for winter use were also made: the pool was drained, temporary wood stairs were installed, benches were placed along the inside perimeter, and handball, paddle tennis, basketball, volleyball and shuffleboard courts were added. Together with the remaining WPA-era pools, the Joseph H. Lyons Pool is one of the major achievements of the New Deal in New York City.

### The Designers Behind the Planning of Tompkinsville Pool<sup>38</sup>

The eleven WPA-era pool facilities shared many common features and specifications that could be repeated at each site, and contained other elements that were similar from complex to complex. As a result, junior designers, having different areas of expertise, appear to have moved quickly among the various pool projects. The department produced designs and construction documents simultaneously with great speed so that eleven pools and hundreds of other park projects, including some massive undertakings like Orchard Beach, were completed within a few years. Aymar Embury II and Gilmore D. Clarke, respectively the Parks Department's Consulting Architect and Consulting Landscape Architect, were employed by the City on a part-time basis to oversee designs for park projects under Robert Moses. William H. Latham, the head of the Division of Design at the time, was the Park Engineer, responsible for the preparation of all plans and specifications within the department. Major design problems were discussed by Embury and Clarke before the preliminary sketches were made under Latham's direction. Completed sketches were subject to approval by the Park Engineer, the General Superintendent, and Commissioner Moses. The consultants would give regular criticism during the preparations of the plans.

Aymar Embury II (1880-1966) was born in New York City and studied engineering at Princeton University, where he received a Master of Science degree in 1901. He acquired his architectural training through apprenticeships with three New York firms: George B. Post, Howells and Stokes, and Palmer and Hornbostel. He also worked for Cass Gilbert. In 1905, Embury won both first and second prize in a contest held by the Garden City Company for a modest country house to be built in Garden City, Long Island. This gained for him a reputation as a talented designer, and led to many commissions for country houses in the New York metropolitan area. He subsequently published seven books and several pamphlets, mainly on early American architecture, establishing him as an authority on that subject. By the start of the Great Depression, he was well-known and had received a wide range of commissions all over the East Coast of the United States, including college buildings and social clubs, in addition to residences. In addition to the Tompkinsville Pool, he designed the Players and Nassau Clubs in Princeton, New Jersey, the Princeton Club in New York City, and the University Club in Washington, D.C. Embury was said to have supervised the design of over six hundred public projects, including Orchard Beach, Bryant Park, the New York City Building at the 1939 World's Fair, the Donnell Branch of the New York Public Library, the Hofstra University Campus, the Central Park and Prospect Park Zoos, Jacob Riis Park, four of the other ten neighborhood pool and play centers,<sup>39</sup> and played a major role in the design of the Lincoln Tunnel, the Triborough Bridge, and many more.

The lead architect for each pool project generally designed the bath house, which was unique to each site, establishing the motif that guided the design and detailing of the rest of the complex. Although each pool complex has been credited to a particular architect, the designs appear to actually have been collaborative efforts among the army of architects, draftsmen, engineers, and landscape architects employed by the Parks Department in the 1930s.

Although working with a number of draftsmen, Joseph L. Hautman prepared the majority of the architectural plans and construction drawings of the Tompkinsville Pool on file at the Olmsted Center Archives in Queens. Hautman was born in Cincinnati in 1903, attended the University of Cincinnati from 1922 to 1923, received his degree in architecture from MIT in 1926, and later studied at the Atelier Gromort Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris from 1927 to 1928. Between 1933 and 1936, Hautman was "Chief of Architecture" for the Park Department, and served as assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Designs for the New York World's Fair of

1939. Hautman joined the already established firm of Voorhees, Smith, Smith & Haines in 1942, where he remained an architect at least through the 1960s.

Many of the bath house drawings, including façade elevations, plans and details, were drawn by S. Baum<sup>40</sup> and J. Weisberg and signed by Hautman. Moses' 1936 article in the *American Architect and Architecture* magazine lists Baum and Weisberg as the pool's designers, but little information could be found to determine if these men were architects or draftsmen.<sup>41</sup>

### Subsequent History<sup>42</sup>

The Tompkinsville Pool was completed in time for its July 1936 opening; however drawings were revised later in the year detailing the off-season conversion of the pool to play space. There were very few alterations in the years immediately following the completion of the pool complex. Drawings were filed in 1944 detailing the reconstruction of a portion of the parapet wall and other brickwork, resetting bluestone coping, installing new wood entrance doors with transom windows, minor gutter and electrical work, as well as the installation of new chain link fencing at the stairs. Other maintenance work, detailed on drawings dated January 18, 1967, included repairing or replacing damaged face brick and repointing, replacing the built-up dome roof, installing new concrete at the roof deck, repairing coping and sills, replacing broken glass, repainting steel elements and installing new flashing and leaders.

By the late 1970s, many of the WPA-era pools, Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool included, had become badly run down, partially as a result of the fiscal crisis of the 1970s which hit the Parks Department particularly hard. By March 1981, the Parks Department workforce had dwindled to a record low of 2,900 employees, mostly unskilled and temporary, as compared to the 30,000 parks employees on staff during the Moses administration. The strain on Parks Department resources was evident in the deplorable conditions of many of its facilities. To address the rapid deterioration of its recreational facilities, in 1977 the Parks Department began a major capital construction program involving more than 500 projects, expected to total more than \$180 million, partly in Federal funds – the first such projects undertaken by the parks system since the fiscal crisis halted such work in 1975, and arguably the most ambitious program to improve the parks since the 1940s. Among the projects planned was a \$10 million plan to preserve Prospect Park, a \$1 million renovation of the Coney Island Boardwalk, and restorations of several WPA-era pools, such as Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) in Harlem and Betsy Head in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

A major, \$6.7 million restoration of the Joseph H. Lyons Pool was under taken beginning in 1982. Over the next few years, the pool complex was closed to the public as the swimming, diving and wading pools were reconstructed, new plumbing, filtration and electrical systems were installed and new locker room facilities were built. On August 21, 1986, a dedication ceremony was held to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, to mark the completion of restoration efforts, and to re-open the pool to the public. The Parks Department called the renovations of the WPA-era pools “an essential part of the revitalization [of] the entire public recreational infrastructure of the city,” helping transform the aging pools into modern recreational facilities.<sup>43</sup> Additional work undertaken during the restoration included replacing steel windows with new aluminum windows, spot repointing and repairing areas of damaged brickwork and coping, restoring the exterior steel railing, replacing the flat and dome roofs, installing new security gates, installing new aluminum signage, installing a new ladders and a stainless steel gutter system at the pools, installing a new ramp for accessibility, repaving the pool deck, installing new lifeguard chairs and a new diving platform, as well as interior alterations and mechanical upgrades. Subsequently, the wading pool was filled in and replaced with a series of tall sprinklers and the diving pool was removed from use and surrounded with a chain link fence.

The WPA-era pools faced a new set of challenges beginning in the mid-1980s, with pools like the Crotona Play Center in the Bronx becoming infamous for vandalism and walkways littered with broken glass. In 1991, Mayor David Dinkins proposed closing the pools as part of a package of budget cuts. Only a donation of \$2 million from a private donor, real estate magnate Sol Goldman, guaranteed the pools would be kept open for at least a portion of that summer; an additional \$1.8 million was still needed to cover the entire nine-week long swimming season. In the mid-1990s, a menacing ritual known as “whirlpooling” had become common throughout the pool system, a practice characterized by groups of teenage boys locking arms and shoulders, churning the water and disrupting the activities of other swimmers, particularly women who often found themselves unwillingly fondled. Several more serious complaints of sexual assault were recorded throughout the pool system in the summer of 1994. With improvements in security staffing and increased vigilance on the

part of patrons, many of the problems of the 1990s did eventually dissipate, and by 2003, the pools were once again touted as both extremely safe, and a welcome alternative on a hot summer day.

### The Architecture and Site of the Tompkinsville Pool<sup>44</sup>

The New Deal construction projects within New York City, such as the Tompkinsville Pool, were a part of a national trend that included similar projects undertaken by various governmental agencies, ranging from the vast Tennessee Valley Authority to small cities and towns. Urban projects built with WPA funding often possessed similar qualities from region to region, partly because the difficult economic climate dictated the use of inexpensive building materials, but also because the programs provided employment opportunities for a generation of young architects and engineers, many of whom were committed to modernism. For example, the bath house and waterfront facilities at Aquatic Park in San Francisco are similar in plan and appearance to the public pool and beachfront projects being built at about the same time in New York City. The California facility, with its streamlined, concrete facade and steel-framed windows, bears a striking resemblance to the facade added in 1936 with WPA funds to the bath house at Jacob Riis Park in Queens. The original and creative use made of these modest materials by Moses' talented design teams and the careful siting of each project makes every one of them a distinguished, individual design, as much related to their specific environment and needs as to one another.

The implementation of a modern aesthetic in the design of the WPA pools stands as a testament to the influence of the young designers on Moses' team; Aymar Embury II, who oversaw the design of the eleven neighborhood pools, was generally a traditionalist with little patience for modernism. In a 1938 interview, Embury was quoted as having said:

If an architect has any function, it is to coordinate units so that they do a required job and at the same time create a pleasant emotion. Modernists believe that the essence of their work is to do something that has never been done before. They leave off all ornamentation because, they say, the ornaments do not aid the structure to do its job. I suppose some of these architects do not use neckties or buttons when they dress.<sup>45</sup>

Considering the adopted guidelines of the entire pool project and the WPA stipulation that low cost materials be used, it is fitting that the design of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool employs a modern vocabulary. The streamlined and curvilinear form of the Art Moderne-style bath house met the low-cost material need while still presenting an attractive design. The long, low design of the L-shaped building emphasizes the characteristic horizontality of the style, accentuated by the banding created by flushed and recessed brickwork, horizontal window bands, the contrasting bluestone coping and long, cast-concrete window sills. The ribbon-like steel railing at the rooftop observation deck also emphasizes the horizontality of the structure. The prominent domed entry rotunda, curved end walls, rounded brick columns, glass block clerestory, arched window and door openings and curved, light-colored concrete canopy are other building features that are characteristic of the Art Moderne style. From the pool deck, the tall smokestack is a focal point of the complex, rising well above the building's west wing. With its cast-concrete coursing and rounded edges, the smokestack serves as an integral element of the design, as well as a functional chimney.

This modern aesthetic carries over into the bath house interior, which features a number of details characteristic of the Art Moderne style. Distinguished by its location in the one-and-a-half story rotunda, the pool's bath house lobby has starburst-patterned terrazzo flooring, Flemish bond brick walls with alternating paired, flush header and recessed stretcher courses, a ribbed precast-concrete frieze, and the contrasting light-colored walls. The original building drawings detail glass block infill, a material commonly found in Art-Moderne style buildings, in the arched window openings of the clerestory. The plans also indicate that a mural was painted on the smooth ceiling of the rotunda dome, and stenciling was done on the projecting columns and around the windows of the upper lobby. Additionally, the font of the interior signage denoting the parcel check and ticket booths is characteristic of the style.

### Description

#### *Plan and Circulation*

The Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool is located at Murray Hulbert Avenue and the eastern spur of Victory Boulevard (formerly Arietta Street), which is separated from the main part of the road by

the Staten Island Railway train tracks. The pool entrance, located in the one-and-a-half-story rotunda of the main, north-facing façade on Victory Boulevard, is accessible via an elevated foot bridge from Bay Street. The somewhat isolated waterfront pool is also served by a parking lot, located south of the complex; it is shared with the Cromwell Recreation Center and can be reached by the Hannah Street vehicular bridge. Unlike the others constructed at the same time, the bath house and pool deck cover virtually all of the land in this park. The bath house frames the north and west edges of the park, while a tall chain link fence set on a four-foot-high brick retaining wall with cast stone coping marks the south and east edges. The pool deck is elevated from street level, at grade with the top of the perimeter wall. A lower, cast iron fence set on a brick cheek wall with brick piers surrounds the pool deck and is separated from the park boundary by an allée of oak trees in a continuous planting bed.

Upon entering the bath house lobby through the double doors at the northwest corner of the building, patrons pass through a turnstile before walking towards either the men's or women's locker rooms. Although adjacent to each other in the rotunda lobby, the halls to men's and women's lockers rooms lead into the west or north wings of the building, respectively. At the time of designation, the use of the pool is free to the public so the ticket booths are no longer in use, although turnstiles now count the number of visitors. After passing through their respective locker rooms, patrons enter the pool deck through doors in the showers rooms. In the north wing of the building, the pool deck can also be accessed through doors in the office and first aid room, although these entrances are generally used only by staff. After patrons are finished using the pool, they re-enter the shower rooms and pass through locker rooms before exiting through the lobby.

#### *The Bath House Lobby*

The lobby of the Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool is located in the rotunda at the northwest corner of the bath house. Serving as the building's entrance, the round room is reached from Victory Boulevard by two sets of paired doors. Around the edges of the room are two ticket counters, a telephone alcove, a parcel-check room and hallways leading to the north and west wings of the building. Two doors in the telephone alcove lead to staff areas and storage and mechanical service rooms, also located in the northwest corner of the building. The clerestory of the rotunda, gives the room a tall, one-and-a-half-story height under its smooth, domed ceiling.

The lower walls of the lobby feature Flemish bond brick<sup>46</sup> with four, double, recessed stretcher courses, alternating with double flush header courses as the base. A ribbed cast-concrete frieze, painted off-white, runs around the room below the clerestory, except above the entrance. The smooth, walls of the clerestory are broken into recessed bays, each with paired window openings, created by projecting columns and a double-tiered upper frieze. The original drawings detail stencil-painted trim around the windows, and on the columns and the frieze of the clerestory, as well as a mural on the domed ceiling. No evidence of these decorative finishes is visible. The smooth walls are all currently painted off-white, with white paint on the ceiling and uppermost portion of the frieze. A starburst-patterned terrazzo design decorates the floor.

At the entrance, non-historic double doors, made of red-painted metal bars and plexi-glass with matching sidelights and transoms, fill the two, segmentally-arched brick openings, which are separated and flanked by projecting brick columns and topped with a cast-concrete coping. Working clockwise around the room at the lower level from the entry, there is a large, red-painted metal louver, ticket window and hallway to the women's locker and showers rooms, office and first aid station. The ticket window retains its historic marble counter and wood framing, as well as the historic steel and copper signage, "TICKETS," suspended from a solid band with a red-painted finish. Red-painted, paired metal and safety glass doors with a clear transom and silver handles are located in a recessed doorway marked by the historic "WOMEN" sign, also suspended from a solid metal band and painted red (band) and yellow (letters). Continuing clockwise around the room is the entry to the west wing of the building and men's locker room. The entrance is the same as that to the north wing (women's locker room), with the exception of the historic signage, "MEN." The historic parcel-check window has a marble counter and its ribbed cast-concrete base and wood framing have a red-painted finish. The historic metal signage, "PARCELS" remains behind a painted wood panel and the counter window is covered by a painted foam core panel. The next bay is the historic telephone alcove, clad in Ozark grey marble panels. The historic signage, "TELEPHONE" suspended from a solid metal bar, is painted red and identifies the area's historic function. The terrazzo floor covers a portion of this area, but no phone booths remain. The original entry to the staff area remains with black painted signage, "EMPLOYEES ONLY," at the

south end of the alcove, while non-historic doorways lead to storage (the adjacent former ticket booth) and mechanical areas. Both doorways have red-painted, metal doors. The next two bays contain another historic ticket counter and a large, red painted metal louver. Like the parcel-check counter, this ticket window has a painted foam core panel applied to the glass and a red-panted wood panel over the “TICKETS” sign. There are lighted “EXIT” signs with spotlights above each door and various signs, alarms and speakers attached to the brick at the lower level. Additionally, there are two turnstiles, attached to the terrazzo floor, near the lobby entrance. At the upper portion, spot lights are located in the recess behind the lower, ribbed concrete frieze. Obscured glass windows with applied grills replace the historic glass block infill in the segmentally arch-headed opening in the clerestory.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The site was previously heard on April 3, 1990 (LP-1779).

<sup>2</sup> Portions of this section adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *St. Paul's Avenue – Stapleton Heights Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2147) prepared by Gale Harris (New York: City of New York, 2004), 8-20. Information in this section is based on the following sources: *Insurance Maps of Richmond Borough of, New York* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885, 1898, 1917, 1938-51); NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation, “WPA Pools” hanging file (located at the Parks Library at the Arsenal, Manhattan, New York); “Swimming Pools,” *New York Times*, 2 (September 2, 1935), 16; Federal Writers’ Project in New York City, *New York City Guide* (New York: Random House, 1939), 1970 reprint (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 563-564; “7,500 See LaGuardia Open Pool,” *Staten Island Advance* (July 8, 1936), 1; “23 Bathing Pools Planned by Moses,” *New York Times* (July 23, 1934), 17; “Seafarers Spread in ‘Hylan’s Folly,’” *New York Times* (May 13, 1952), 49; “Letters,” *New York Times* (December 31, 1944), SM19; “Piers for Staten Island,” *New York Times* (May 9, 1919), 12; “City Faces Big Loss on Richmond Piers,” *New York Times* (November 24, 1922); Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds, *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 135-156; New York City, Department of Parks, plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York; Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, *Staten Island and Its People, A History 1609-1929*,” (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1930), v. II, 715; and Richard Dickenson (editor), *Holden’s Staten Island, The History of Richmond County, Revised Resource Manual Sketched for the Year Two Thousand Two*, (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Dickenson, *Holden’s Staten Island, The History of Richmond County*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Four Native American sites in the area surrounding Tompkinsville are listed in Eugene J. Boesch, “Archaeological Evaluation & Sensitivity Assessment of Staten Island, New York,” 1994, submitted to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

<sup>5</sup> Dickenson, *Holden’s Staten Island, The History of Richmond County*, 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> In his article entitled “Extracts: Slavery in Wills, 1679-1786, Richmond County/Staten Island, New York,” Dickenson asserts, “The origins of colonial slavery on Staten Island can be traced to the 1621 charter granted by the Netherlands governing body, ‘The Staaten-General, to the Dutch West India Company seeking possession of territory and “negro slaves.”’ The company seized the slaves aboard captured Spanish or Portuguese ships, sent them to New Netherlands, agreeing to furnish each Patroon (farm owner) with twelve Black men and women. Theses terms were no doubt in effect when the first Staten Island settlement, that of David Peiterszoon Devries’ in 1639, began at the ‘Watering Place,’ now better known as Tompkinsville.” (Richard Dickenson, “Extracts: Slavery in Wills, 1679-1786, Richmond County/Staten Island, New York,” in Patricia M. Salmon (ed.), *Proceedings of the*

<sup>7</sup> The need for a quarantine station was first established by Colonial Legislation in 1758 entitled, “An Act to prevent the bringing in and spreading of infectious distempers in the Colony.” The law provided Bedloe’s Island (now Liberty Island) as the quarantine place for ships carrying yellow fever, small pox, or other infectious diseases into New York Harbor. A physician was appointed to inspect “suspected vessels” and the heavy penalties assessed for non-compliance were appropriated to the lighthouse at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. In 1796, another act was passed appropriating funds for the construction of quarantine on Nutten Island (now Governor’s Island) or other eligible land. The act was amended and re-enacted several times, including in 1799, when it was revised to establish the Quarantine on Staten Island. Thirty acres of land on the eastern shore, previously willed to the Church of St. Andrews, were taken and hospitals and other related buildings were constructed despite the opposition of the Staten Island residents. Just as they had feared, the establishment of the quarantine brought yellow fever, cholera and small pox to the island. As the population of Tompkinsville increased, so did the number of deaths due to infectious disease. Finally in 1849, an appointed Legislative committee “unhesitatingly recommended the removal of the quarantine.” When no progress had been made to relocate the quarantine by September 1, 1858, the Board of Health of Castleton declared the hospital a “nuisance” and passed a resolution calling “the citizens of the county to abate it without delay.” That evening a group of residents (including many prominent citizens) assembled, broke down a portion of the wall surrounding the Quarantine, removed any sick patients and burned many of the institution’s buildings. After rumors circulated the following day that the quarantine would be rebuilt, the mob returned on the night of September 2<sup>nd</sup> and burned the remaining buildings. Following the destruction of the Tompkinsville complex, a floating hospital served as the quarantine until two new institutions were constructed on man-made islands in the bay, Swinburne (1870) and Hoffman (1873) islands. Although two men were tried for arson as the “ringleaders of the incendiaries,” they were acquitted of the charges. The county, however, was charged over \$130,000, to cover the costs of public and private damages. (Leng & Davis, v. I, 262-267).

<sup>8</sup> Known as an opponent to slavery, in 1817, the last year he served as governor of New York State, Tompkins signed the “Final Abolition Act” that would free all slaves in New York State by 1827. (Dickenson, *Holden’s Staten Island, The History of Richmond County*, 52 and Richard Dickenson, “Extracts: Slavery in Wills, 1679-1786, Richmond County/Staten Island, New York,” in Patricia Salmon (editor), *Proceedings of the Staten Island Museum, Staten Island Institute of Arts & Science 2005-2006*, v. 37, 1.)

<sup>9</sup> The portion of Tompkinsville located north of Richmond Turnpike (Victory Boulevard) was incorporated in New Brighton.

<sup>10</sup> As a Congressman from New York City, prior to his appointment as Commissioner of the Department of Docks, Murray Hulbert was strong advocate for the allocation of federal funding for improvements and maintenance of New York Harbor. As part of a larger project to foster trade, the Staten Island pier construction project was the first step approved “to meet the great needs of the port.” Built adjacent to the existing train service, the undertaking was connected to a proposed tunnel between Staten Island and Brooklyn, which was intended to link the island by rail to the other boroughs of New York City, facilitating both passenger travel and the shipment of goods.

<sup>11</sup> Richmond County Office of the Register Liber 654 pages 359-366. The exact date when the site of the Tompkinsville Pool became City property is unclear. The deeds on these pages refer to agreements between the Departments of Docks and the Sinking Fund and court ordered appropriation of the land to the City of New York “for public use.” By the same court order, the Staten Island Rapid Transit Company was compensated for damages associated with certain land parcels, which may have covered property lost to the municipal pier project.

<sup>12</sup> This section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2196) prepared by Donald Presa (New York: City of New York, 2006); and LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2232) prepared by Jennifer Most (New York: City of New York, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> More than 10,000 of the City’s 29,000 manufacturing firms had shut down, and the unemployment rate skyrocketed to over thirty percent. An estimated 1,600,000 people in New York City were receiving public assistance. Robert Caro, *Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), 323.

<sup>14</sup> By the 1920s, the recreational needs of people were changing with the increase in leisure time afforded by the advent of shorter work weeks, paid vacations, and greater mobility due to inventions such as the car. The addition of

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active recreation to city parks was in direct keeping with popular theories on the importance of providing the public with outlets for active recreation over passive recreation in these changing times. The Great Depression of the 1930s further amplified such needs.

<sup>15</sup> Cleveland Rodgers, *Robert Moses: Builder for Democracy*, 1st ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952), 82, as cited in LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>16</sup> A staff of 1,893 architects, engineers, landscape architects, and technicians was employed at the peak of the work. See Rodgers, p. 84. Moses later came under fire by a number of city aldermen for hiring people for the Parks Department's technical staff who did not meet the guidelines for relief work. Moses vigorously defended this practice, calling the investigation "Tammany-controlled." *New York Times* (April 10, 1935), 1; (April 20, 1935), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Work is ongoing as to whether Robert Moses did actively discourage minorities from using Parks Department facilities such as the WPA-era swimming pools. Also see: Caro, and Ballon and Jackson.

<sup>18</sup> During Moses' first year as Parks Commissioner, the Department spent over \$90,000,000 (\$1.2 billion in 2005 dollars) for work relief projects, most of which was provided by the Federal government. New York City was the largest single recipient of Federal largesse during the course of the New Deal. It has been estimated that the city received one-seventh of the total national outlay. See Rodgers, 84-85.

<sup>19</sup> This section adapted from LPC *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*; LPC, *Betsy Head Pool Designation Report* (LP-2240), prepared by Amanda Davis (New York: City of New York, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Moses, "Parks and Recreation in New York," transcript of the proceedings of the National Recreation Association (1947), 20-21 as cited in LPC *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>21</sup> See "23 Bathing Pools..." 17; Robert Moses "Press Release: Public Swimming Facilities in New York City," (7/23/1934) as cited in LPC *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>22</sup> In the order of their inauguration, the eleven WPA-era pools included: Hamilton Fish Play Center (Manhattan), Thomas Jefferson Play Center (Manhattan), Astoria Play Center (Queens), Joseph Lyons (Tompkinsville) Pool (Staten Island), Highbridge Play Center (Manhattan), Sunset Play Center (Brooklyn), Crotona Play Center (Bronx), McCarren Play Center (Brooklyn), Betsy Head Play Center (Brooklyn), Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center (Manhattan), and Red Hook Play Center (Brooklyn).

<sup>23</sup> The Hamilton Fish Play Center bath house, designed by Carrère & Hastings in 1898, was designated a New York City Landmark in 1982. The original 1915 bath house structure at Betsy Head was destroyed by fire shortly after the 1936 opening of the pool, and was rebuilt in 1939.

<sup>24</sup> This section adapted from LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*. Architectural Historian Marta Gutman has studied the issue of race at the swimming pools and believes that the issue of segregation and racial mixing was more complex than Caro states. Her work is due to come out in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. See Marta Gutman, "Race, Place, and Play: Robert Moses and the WPA Swimming Pools in New York City," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67 (December 2008): in press.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Thabit, *How East New York Became a Ghetto*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 39 as cited in LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>26</sup> "25,000 at Opening of Harlem Pool," *New York Times* (August 6, 1934), N6 as cited in LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>27</sup> See Caro, 514; Ballon and Jackson, 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> Caro, 514 as cited in LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>29</sup> Ballon and Jackson, 81 as cited in LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Research currently being conducted indicates that the racial composition of pool users may have actually been more complex, and dependent on a variety of factors, including the entrance fee structure, which varied depending on the age of the swimmer as well as the time of day. Also see: Caro, and Ballon and Jackson.

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<sup>32</sup> This section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report*; and LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*. Sources for this section include New York City, Department of Parks, Tompkinsville Pool plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York; “Mayor to Dedicate Swim Pool Tuesday,” *New York Times* (July 5, 1936), N2; “7,500 See LaGuardia Open Pool,” *Staten Island Advance* (July 8, 1936), 1; “Emergency Crew Works on Holiday at New Pool,” *Staten Island Advance* (July 6, 1936), 1; “East Shore Pool Will Close at 10,” *Staten Island Advance* (July 9, 1936), 1; “City Plans to Build New Pool,” *Staten Island Advance* (7/23/1934), 3; “Swimmer’s Jam City’s New Pool,” *Staten Island Advance* (July 18, 1932), 5; “Staten Island Pool is Opened by Mayor,” *New York Times* (July 8, 1936), 21; and Ballon and Jackson.

<sup>33</sup> Moses encourages his engineers to innovate more efficient heating and filtering plants, and underwater lighting that were revolutionary developments in pool technology. Caro, 456 as cited in LPC *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “7,500 See LaGuardia Open Pool,” 1.

<sup>36</sup> “Staten Island Pool is opened by Mayor,” *New York Times*, (July 8, 1936), 21.

<sup>37</sup> Information on Joseph H. Lyons is from the following sources: “Joseph H. Lyons,” *New York Times* (December 13, 1934), 23; “Receives War Cross,” *New York Times* (November 20, 1917), 3; “J.H. Lyons is Dead of Pneumonia,” *Staten Island Advance* (December 12, 1934), 1; “Tompkinsville Pool Dedicated As Lyons Memorial Playground,” *Staten Island Advance* (May 31, 1938), 12; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, “Joseph H. Lyons Pool,” available on-line (April 2, 2007) at: [www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park /historical\\_signs/hs\\_historica\\_sign.php?id=112](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park /historical_signs/hs_historica_sign.php?id=112).

<sup>38</sup> This section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report*; and LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>39</sup> Besides the Tompkinsville Pool, they are the Colonial Park Pool and Play Center in Manhattan, the Crotona Park Pool and Play Center in the Bronx, and the McCarren Park and the Red Hook Pools and Play Centers in Brooklyn.

<sup>40</sup> Several sources, including Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications), 1987 and Ballon and Jackson, have attributed the design of the pool to architect Dwight James Baum; however, no Parks Department records or primary source documentation could be found to substantiate this claim. Additionally, at the time of the pools’ design and construction, the Parks Department employed a large number of relatively unknown architects and engineers working collaboratively under Moses, Embury and Latham. It seems unlikely that D.J. Baum, who was already established and well-known in the field for working in traditional styles, would have designed an Art Moderne-style bath house, working for the Parks Department as a team architect.

<sup>41</sup> The 1962 American Architects Directory lists a New York architect Solomon Baum, who was educated at the College of the City of New York, but would have been only 16 or 17 years old at the time the drawings were prepared.

<sup>42</sup> Portions of this section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report*; LPC, *Crotona Play Center Designation Report*; and LPC *Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2238), prepared by Jennifer Most, (New York: City of New York, 2006). Sources for this section include “Joseph H. Lyons Pool,” New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, “Advisory No. 213,” (July 21, 1986); “7,500 See LaGuardia Open Pool,” 1; and Tompkinsville Pool, plans and blueprints on file at the Olmsted Center, Flushing, New York.

<sup>43</sup> New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, 1986 as cited in LPC *Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Designation Report*.

<sup>44</sup> Portions of this section adapted from LPC, *Astoria Park Pool and Play Center Designation Report*; and LPC *McCarren Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2244), prepared by Kathryn E. Horak, (New York: City of New York, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> “Aymar Embury, Architect, Dead” *New York Times* (November 15, 1966), 47 as cited in LPC *McCarren Play Center Designation Report*.



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<sup>46</sup> The brick coursing, composed of paired stretchers alternating with single headers, is more technically known as the Monk bond variation of Flemish bond brickwork. Flemish bond describes brickwork with alternating headers and stretchers within each course. As the ratio of stretchers to headers changes, the bond is sub-categorized into different names, however, Flemish bond remains the more commonly known term.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Tompkinsville Pool Bath House, First Floor Interior, consisting of the domed entry foyer and telephone alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, ticket booths, parcel check, metal signage and vents, has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City; and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the first floor interior of the Bath House forms the grand entrance to the former Tompkinsville Pool, one of a group of eleven immense outdoor swimming pools which were opened in the summer of 1936 by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses; that it was constructed with funding provided by the Works Progress Administration; that it is distinguished by a number of unique, Art Moderne-style features, including the starburst-patterned terrazzo flooring, Flemish bond brick walls with alternating paired, flush header and recessed stretcher courses, a ribbed precast-concrete frieze, the contrasting light-colored walls, projecting pilasters and arched window openings of the clerestory, and the light-colored smooth ceiling of the rotunda dome; that simple geometric forms are evident in the cast stone frieze and brick coursing; that the plan of the lobby evokes an ancient rotunda with enclosed porticos, grand entrances and clerestory windows; that the clerestory level and the sweeping brick curved walls of the central portion of the lobby give the space a monumental feel that also invite patrons into the structure; that the original and creative use made of modest materials and forms make it a distinguished, individual design; and that it, along with the other WPA-era play centers, was a major accomplishment of engineering and architecture, and is recognized as being among the most remarkable public recreational facilities ever constructed in the United States.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Tompkinsville Pool Bath House, First Floor Interior, consisting of the domed entry foyer and telephone alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, ticket booths, parcel check, metal signage and vents; Victory Boulevard and Murray Hulbert Avenue, Staten Island, and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 487, Lots 80, 110 and 112 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair  
Fred Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner,  
Roberta Gratz, Christopher Moore, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior: Entrance and Ticket Booth**  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior: Terrazzo Floor, Lobby**  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House**  
**Interior: Telephone Alcove**  
*Photo: Tara Harrison, 2008*



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House**  
**Interior: Ticket Booth**  
*Photo: Tara Harrison, 2008*



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior: Men's and Women's Locker Room Entrances**  
*Photo: Tara Harrison, 2008*

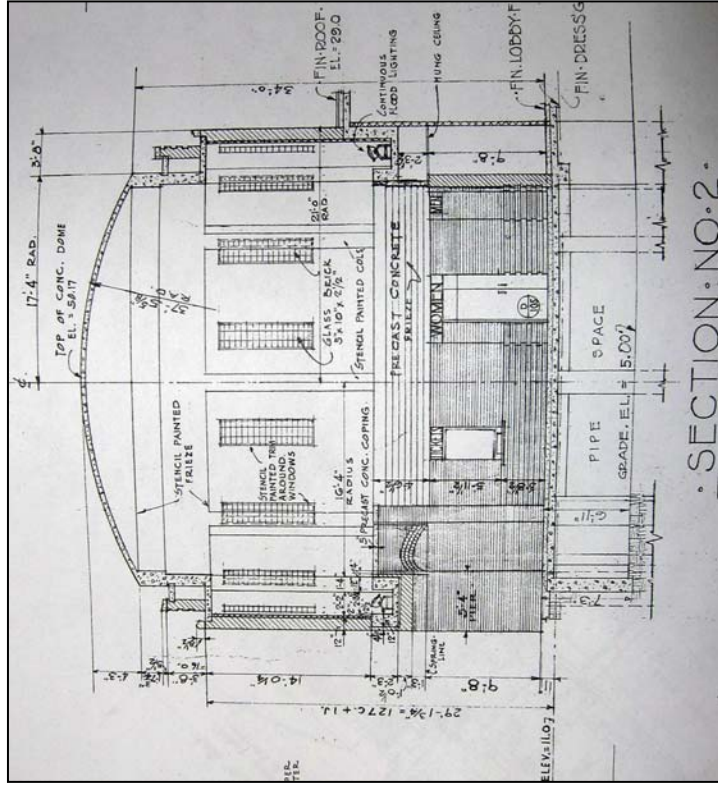




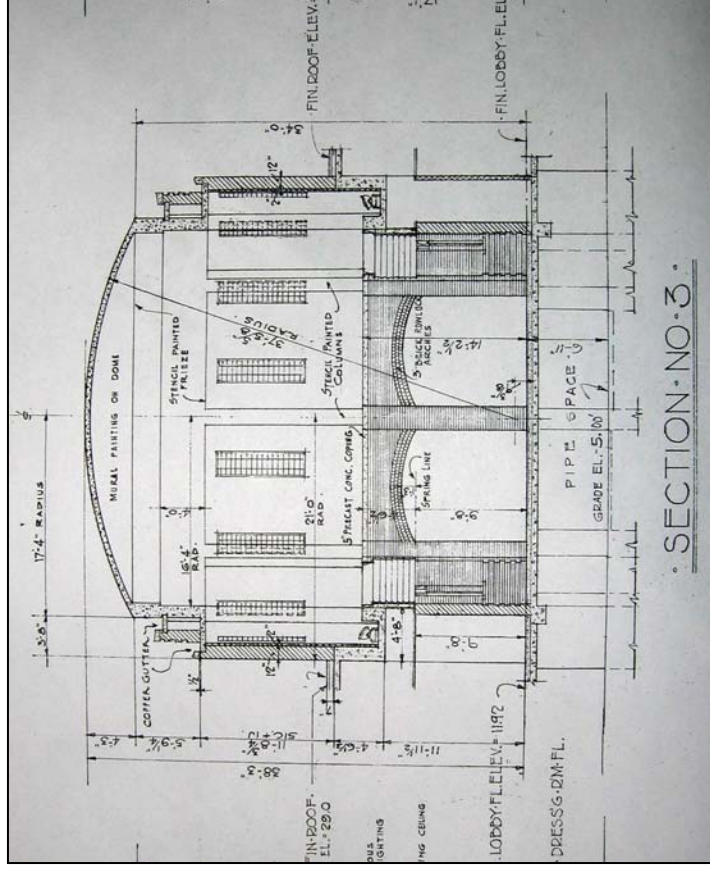
**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior:  
Ticket Booth**  
*Photo: Tara Harrison, 2008*



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House Interior:  
Parcel Check**  
*Photo: Tara Harrison, 2008*



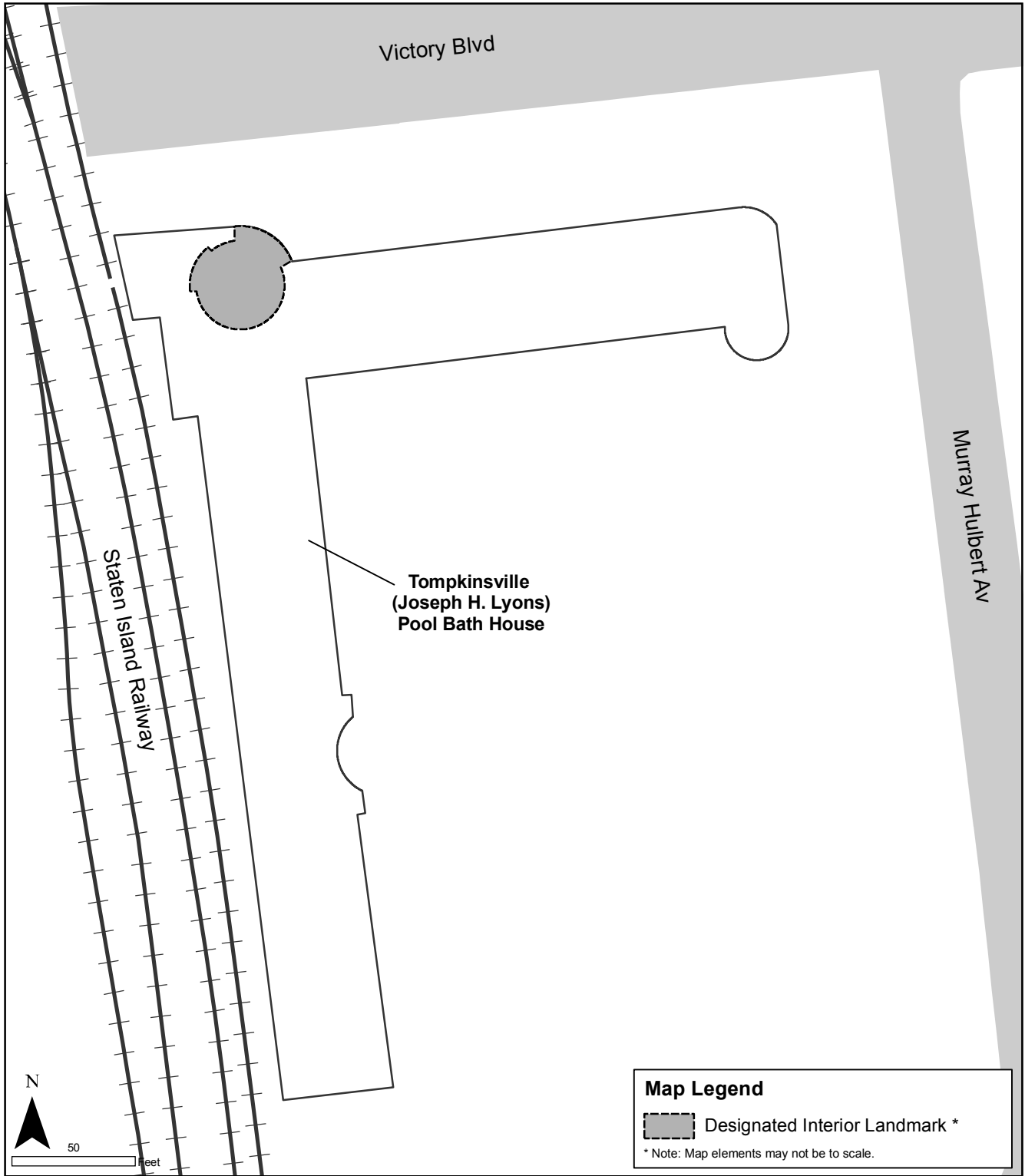
**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House**  
**Section Looking East, Lobby**  
 Prepared by Joseph L. Hautman, May 1936  
 (Portion of Drawing No. RA 45-311)  
 Courtesy of Parks Department Archives, Flushing, Queens



**Tompkinsville (Joseph H. Lyons) Pool Bath House**  
**Section Looking Northwest, Lobby**  
 Prepared by Joseph L. Hautman, May 1936  
 (Portion of Drawing No. RA 45-311)  
 Courtesy of Parks Department Archives, Flushing, Queens







**TOMPKINSVILLE (JOSEPH H. LYONS) POOL BATH HOUSE FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR [LP-2235],** consisting of the domed entry foyer and telephone alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, ticket and parcel booth fronts, metal signage and vents, Victory Boulevard. Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 487, Lots 80 in part, 110 in part, and 112 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

Designated: September 16, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.