

THE ALFRED CALDWELL LILY POOL

LINCOLN PARK, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



Proposal for the Chicago Park District

“...planned as a hidden garden of the people of Megalopolis.”

- Alfred Caldwell



The sounds of honking and cursing mixed with the scent of gasoline travel through the traffic on Fullerton Parkway. Urban dwellers hastily make their way towards Lake Shore Drive to get to their jobs, their homes, or other destinations. The sad truth is that each day they missed a National Historical Landmark. Their lives filled with stress and anxiety caused them to overlook what Alfred Caldwell created as his “hidden garden for the people of Megalopolis”, the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool.



Who was Alfred Caldwell?

Alfred Caldwell was the Prairie School architect who designed the Lily Pool. He was mentored by the distinguished Jens Jensen who emphasized appreciation of nature in landscaping. Caldwell was also taught by legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright influenced Caldwell through his design of low entryways leading into vast, stunning spaces. The Lily Pool is his greatest achievement in Prairie School architecture.



Features of the Lily Pool

❖ Fullerton Entryway Gate

Caldwell grasped the concept of a Frank Lloyd Wright home and applied it to the Fullerton Entryway gate. The gate has a low entrance causing visitors to stoop through, welcoming them into a grand space. They lift their heads up to view this gorgeous, picturesque river reflecting the sunlight surrounded by a meandering stone pathway lined with trees and wildflowers. It is as if the gate is a threshold into a whole new world away from the traffic and congestion from the city.



❖ The Lily Pool

To disguise the man-made origins of the Lily Pool, Caldwell replicated the process of rock erosion similar to when the glaciers of Wisconsin rushed south, cutting through and layering the limestone



Just by looking at the picture, it is difficult to determine where the pool begins or ends.

impossible to see the exact “end” of this seemingly river. This illusion allows visitors to gaze endlessly into the pool.

ledges which created the layout of the land. Caldwell produced this emulation by layering limestone rock along the outside of the pool. Without any background information of the pool, it is impossible to see Caldwell’s vision of the natural landscaping, therefore, to draw visitors he shaped the pool to meander (Friends of Lincoln Park). The pool appeared to be a river without end. No matter what side of the pool or angle a visitor stands at, it is

❖ The Pavilion

Located right on the shore of the pool is the Pavilion. Like the Fullerton gate, the Pavilion is designed with a low entry point. Entering the Pavilion creates this striking close-up view of the pool. The Pavilion serves as a passageway to an intimate connection with the pool and its inhabitants.

From this perspective it is possible to see the striking lily flowers as well as a



family of ducks and turtles swimming. It is as if visitors are walking to a completely new room of the Lily Pool, experiencing nature from a closer perspective. Those who seek therapy from the pool could sit on the wooden benches provided and enjoy the magnificence of the landscape.

❖ The Council Ring

The Council Ring was an element Jensen always included in his creation. Caldwell truly admired Jensen and paid homage to him by placing Jensen's signature design by the pool (Hanks 5).

Caldwell created a stone Council Ring upon a hill with a stone table in the middle to represent the fire. Council Rings represented the democratic way of life of the Native Americans who sat in circles around bonfires and shared stories. The purpose of the Council Ring being propped on a hill was to give visitors a spectacular view of the Lily Pond as well as a glimpse of the beautiful Lake Michigan to the east (Hanks 7).



❖ Midwest perennials

Caldwell wanted to travel throughout the Midwest to gather the finest wild perennials to plant around the pool. The more natural the Lily Pool was, the more visitors could become in touch with nature and relax in this environment. In addition, wild perennials specifically cultivated in the Midwest would be able to survive Chicago's harshest weather since that was its ecological environment. However Caldwell faced monetary issues; the Chicago Park District refused to

provide him funds to add wildflowers. Caldwell would not accept no for an answer. He decided to cash his entire life insurance policy for \$300 to head to Wisconsin and purchase the wildlife flowers himself. It was an extremely risky investment. He would not be compensated for it in any way except with the satisfaction of knowing that he did the citizens of Lincoln Park a service. For Caldwell to cash in his insurance policy, during the Great Depression, for merely reproducing beauty shows great strength and passion within a true architect. Flowers were definitely his pride and he wanted to share it with others.

History of Renovations and Rehabilitation of the Lily Pool

In the 1950's, the Lincoln Park Zoo decided to use the area as a rookery for breeding birds. The great number of birds combined with the non-stop foot traffic continued to place the pool further and further into ruins. Unfortunately, Caldwell's last trip to the pool was during this event. The money and time



The Lily Pool as a Rookery only a decade after its creation, which led to its near demise.

(Bachman 5) as well as other Caldwell original designs. It was as if no one remembered how or why Caldwell originally designed the pool.

he spent working on this place of serenity had become a noisy tourist attraction for those who enjoy bird watching. Invasive trees grew, destroying the under story flowers which he strategically planted. His last words describing the pool were "It's a dead world" (Hanks 11). There was a brief project conducted by the Chicago Park district to renovate the pool, but in the end was kept as a bird sanctuary. The plan called for the removal of the east stone pathway of the pool

It took more than 40 years of misuse and mistreatment of the Lily Pool for anyone to devise a plan of action for the pool. The Friends of Lincoln Park was the grassroots organization who stepped up to propose action (Seeger). Their 1997 proposal consisted of a rehabilitation process for the pool which included reviving Caldwell's original designs, but then shaping the pool to comply with modern needs. For example, the east wing stone pathway was restored, but more specifically was updated to accommodate those who needed handicap accessibility to the pool (Friends of Lincoln Park).

According to Docent Coordinator Norm Raidl, there was a public uproar before reconstruction occurred. Citizens of Lincoln Park argued to keep the pool as it was; they disliked the idea of a landscaping company altering what they considered their "front lawn." Birdwatchers were concerned that renovations would disrupt bird migration, ruining their hobby. The Friends of Lincoln Park solved this by integrating focus groups into the rehabilitation process (Seeger). The focus groups consisted of landscape architects as well as concerned residents of Lincoln Park. It was dually noted that the creation of the volunteer docent

program was essential for the success and acceptance of the pool since the docent program facilitated the pool's origins and reconstruction information between the focus groups and the general public. Once plans were finalized, construction began in the fall of 2001 and ended in 2002 with the pool's grand reopening.

Why does the Lily Pool matter?

Reflection and Contemplation

The pool was completed in the late 1930's during the Great Depression. In an interview, Raidl mentioned stories of families who used the pool as an escape from their financial issues. Families around Lincoln Park were cramped in one-bed room apartments. Marriages were on the verge of collapsing. When couples retreated to the pool, the scenery acted as therapy reducing the tension between partners. Today, couples continue to visit the pool and recall their stories of how a calm, peaceful space contributed to the success of their marriage. If Caldwell knew this he would be satisfied. Reflection and contemplation were exactly the purposes he wanted his Lily Pool to function as; an escape from the pressures of "Megalopolis," or rather the city of Chicago.

Symbolism

The Lily Pool serves as the ultimate symbol of Jensen's and Wright's style merged into one project. Caldwell's Lily Pool is the prime example of a public space that was created from influence, not from imitation. Taking from Jensen's love for nature, he focused on wildflowers, meandering stone pathways, sun openings, and the illusion of the space being naturally created. From Wright, Caldwell took the idea of little entrances which emerged into magnificent, large spaces. He grasped the underlying concepts of his mentors and added his own style and experience to the pool.

Bird Habitat

The Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool is not only a relaxing atmosphere for humans; it has become a crucial resting point for Canadian birds migrating south for the winter. The Lily Pool offers protection in contrast to the harsh, polluted nightmare of the inner city. Birds may bathe in the pool and receive nutrition from the wild berries on the trees.

Honors and Recognition

On November 6, 2002 the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool was designated as a "Chicago Landmark". To be recommended for landmark status by the Chicago Landmarks Commission, a space must meet at least two of the following criteria: "critical part of Chicago's heritage, site of a significant event, association with a significant person, important architecture, important architect, distinctive theme as a district, or unique visual feature" (City of Chicago.org).

In February of 2006, the Lily Pool received status as a "National Historic Landmark". National Historic Landmarks is a prestigious honor because they are "nationally significant historic places

designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States” (NPS.gov).

Current Problems and Proposed Course of Action

Although the landscaping aspects and docent program of the 1997 proposal were accomplished, there are remaining key elements that were not enacted. This proposed course of action not only includes the key elements of the 1997 proposal were forgotten, but also include minor adjustments and extensions. For location issues such as the placement of trash receptacles, the Lincoln Park Conservancy would be in charge of the design and location of the new additions. Below is a thorough explanation of the importance of the proposed extensions of the 1997 proposal and a possibility of how to achieve them.

- **“Brochures for self guided tours will be provided...”**

Money should be invested in the creation of these brochures, which would include the historical significance of the pool as well as its purpose and usage. It is impossible for docents to be available during every open hour of the Lily Pool. Therefore self guided brochures would ease the need for docents and educate the first time visitors. These brochures would also be strategically placed in other public spaces.

Addition: The website should provide

downloadable audio tours similar to that of Millennium Park. This reduces the need for

docents on weekdays since self-guided audio tours would be available to visitors who can only come during non-docent hours.



A visitor enjoys an audio tour of Millennium Park

- **“...schools will be offered the opportunity to bring...classes through for tours”**

There should be an aggressive campaign to publicize to schools to bring their classes to this wonderful public space, especially those who bring classes to the Lincoln Park Zoo. This further emphasizes the need for brochures because they are crucial in introducing



Yoga classes at Toledo Botanical Gardens take advantage of the negative ions

the Lily Pool to classes.

Addition: Schools should not be the only

organizations sought to explore the Lily Pool. The Lily Pool is an excellent environment for meditation such as yoga or Tai Chi. Hospitals should be asked if they would like to bring patients for a day at the Lily Pool for therapy with nature. Research shows

that being outdoors stimulates negative ions. Negative ions fight against allergens and also maintain high levels of serotonin in the body which prevent depression (Voight).

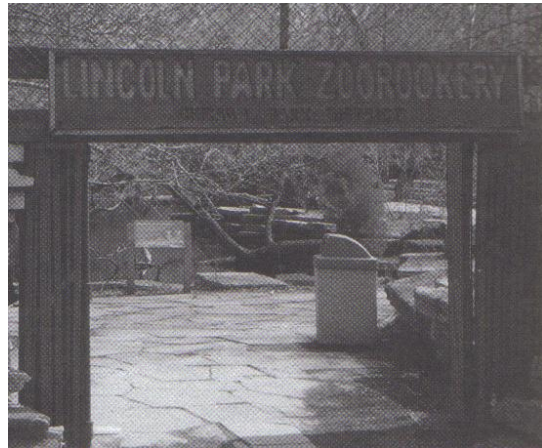
- **“Hours when the site is open will be posted, consistent, and clear”**

Although it is argued that signage conflicts with the theme of a seemingly natural public space, it is still essential for the space’s success to have clear and consistent postings of the open hours. The information is only listed on the website, which is not accessible when people aren’t at a computer with internet access. Signage would serve as a beacon to draw people who are returning from a surrounding public place or who are passing by.

Addition: The site should also post the schedule for docent tours. This way residents as well as first time visitors will always know what times they should come so that docent volunteers can quench their thirst for knowledge. This will also increase the attendance for the tours so that docents are not wasting their time.

“...trash receptacles and signs”

As of today there are zero trash receptacles at the Lily Pool. This is a huge concern since the Lily Pool, specifically the Council Ring, tends to be used as a picnic area. On a tour with Docent Goldberg, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish crackers were found scattered across the Council Ring table. Immediately birds flocked to the cracker site and began devouring the food. Docent Goldberg pointed out that human food disrupts the ecological cycles humans rather than searching for their



The presence of a typical park trash receptacle destroys the beauty of an entire natural area to become ill leading to death. The presence of trash receptacles would encourage patrons to maintain cleanliness of the area.

The problem with everyday park trash receptacles is that they are an “eyesore” in an area meant to create a garden within a city. Therefore trash receptacles that blend in with the scenic space are recommended.

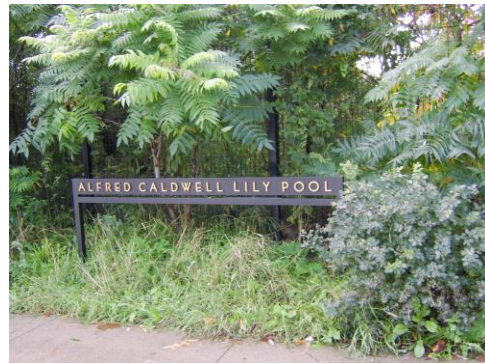


A trash receptacle, like the one on the left, would blend well with the wooden entrance and Pavilion

Addition: Permanent signage on wooden stakes should be placed throughout the space. For example, there are temporary tags on a wired fence that tell visitors to keep off the garden. The wired fence is disruptive to the beautiful scenery of the Lily Pool and appears unprofessional. A sign that also describes the park's honors, such as National Historical Landmark, should be



placed near the entrance of the pool to communicate to patrons of its importance. The billboard containing the history of the Lily Pool located near the east entrance of the pool, looking out at Cannon Drive, should be where it is visible. This sign is successful in achieving a short, detailed outline of the pool's history. However, it is not in an area where it could be appreciated, since Cannon Drive is merely a parking lot for the zoo. The sign should replace the current sign on Fullerton Parkway.



This billboard (left) currently located on Cannon Drive should replace the existing sign on Fullerton Parkway (right) because it receives more traffic. The billboard is also more noticeable and more informative than the simple sign.

Funds

Permanent signage and trash receptacles are a one-time investment. This money could be raised through private donations from architecture organizations, such as the Art Institute of Chicago. Money could be raised through a community/Lincoln Park Conservancy joint fundraiser. Brochures, however, will need a permanent spot on the yearly budget. The Chicago Park District should aid the Lincoln Park Conservancy and give them the appropriate funding to finally include brochures in their budget to help educate visitors.

Conclusion

Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile... The... third place is determined by its regular clientele and is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres... the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends... They are the heart of a community's social vitality, the grassroots of democracy, but sadly, they constitute a diminishing aspect of the American social landscape.

- Ray Oldenburg

Ray Oldenburg, an urban sociologist, claims that people have three places; the first which is the home, the second which is the workplace, and the third which is a place away from the first and second place of which they can relax and escape the stress and concerns of life. The Lily Pool is the third place of Chicago. Although not commercialized areas as Oldenburg specifies, the Lily Pool has the exact functions of a third place such as providing "psychological comfort" and establishing the "grassroots of democracy." People can sit at the Pavilion and gaze into the endless river or sit atop the Council Ring and listen to the birds chirp. However, all this becomes irrelevant if no one knows the Lily Pool exists.

The Lincoln Park Conservancy is doing a wonderful job with upkeep and maintenance, but it means nothing if money is not invested for publicity of this public space. The Lincoln Park Conservancy only has limited funds to maintain the docent program. It is up to the Chicago Park District to treat it as its own and offer the same publicity and education it does for public spaces that even lack National Landmark status like Millennium Park. The enactment of this proposal could compensate for when the Lily Pool was denied funding for wild perennials.

Unlike any other park, the Lily Pool has symbolism as the most representative example of the Prairie School Architect style as well as historical significance landing itself Chicago and National Landmark status. Both of these honors show the recent and growing appreciation for Caldwell's work after half a century, yet, these honors only appreciate the historical and architectural value of the Lily Pool, not the conceptual value. Visitors as well as residents need to be educated about this place in order to understand how to use nature to its fullest potential as a place of relaxation and contemplation. It is true that Alfred Caldwell created the Lily Pool as "a hidden garden of the people of Megalopolis," but he created the pool to be hidden from the city, not from the people.