PEAVEY PARK PLAZA
1111 Nicolet Mall
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001
Location: 1111 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Peavey Plaza is located in an urban setting in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota. The plaza is sited on half a city block between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets along Nicollet Mall. The city block is shared by the Minnesota Orchestral Association building with is immediately adjacent to the plaza.

Present Owner: City of Minneapolis, City Hall, Room 203, 350 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415-1315

Present Use: Public Park

Significance: The plaza is significant for its association with the series of post World War II urban renewal projects that began in the late 1950s and continued into the 1970s in downtown Minneapolis. The plaza is one designed landscape constructed in downtown Minneapolis in an effort to connect the system of parks and boulevards known as the Grand Rounds. As such, it reflects important post World War II recreational development efforts, and community planning and development trends in the city. Peavey Plaza is also significant as a designed landscape. Constructed in 1975 in the modern style, the plaza is an example of a sunken park plaza. This type of urban plaza design emerged during the late 1950s and continued into the 1970s. The sunken park plaza departed from pervious landscape architecture design principles and represented a new urban park aesthetic. The plaza was designed by noted landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, FASLA, who is associated with the development of urban park plaza design and the application of a modern aesthetic applied to park design. Peavey Plaza’s defining features include the use of concrete to create hard space, water features, and green planting to produce an amphitheater-like environment characteristic of sunken park plaza design.

Historian: Minnesota Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, September 2006.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of plans: May 1974; beginning construction, circa August 1974; dedication: June 1975; Additional construction to north corner in plaza, 1979.

2. Landscape architect: M. Paul Friedberg


4. Original and subsequent owners, occupants: Minnesota Orchestral Association, City of Minneapolis (current)

5. Periods of development
   b. Completion of east retaining wall, circa 1979
A restaurant was originally proposed at the site at the unfinished northeast corner; however, the proposal failed because the privately owned business would be located on city property.

c. Completion of skating rink

The ice skating rink included in the original design of Peavey Plaza was finally constructed by the architectural firm of Griswold and Rauma and opened for use in 1982.

c. Changes and additions:\footnote{This section based on original plans, \textit{Peavey Park Plaza} (M. Paul Friedberg & Associates, dated 21 May 1974); and John Slack, "Peavey Plaza Maintenance," dated 24 May 2004 and 28 May 2004.}

New pre-cast concrete modular retaining walls were added adjacent to Twelfth Street in 1997. This city project replaced existing sloped lawn and planting area adjacent to the accessible pedestrian ramp to the lower plaza. New plantings consist of shrubs such as forsythia, barberry, and hosta plantings, none of which were included in the original Friedberg design.

A new pre-cast concrete modular retaining wall added adjacent to Nicollet Mall in 1998. This city project replaced existing sloped lawn and planting areas similar to sloped areas that exist along Twelfth Street.

New poured-concrete walks on portions of upper and lower plaza in 1998. The City Of Minneapolis Public Works Department replaced existing square concrete pavers, which match the pavers found in much of the lower plaza. The original concrete pavers were replaced with standard grey concrete. Wood planting edging was added to contain mulch and other materials from washing out and to reduce excessive storm water runoff.

Four Honeylocust trees were removed in 2004. The City of Minneapolis Parks and Forestry Department is responsible for maintenance of the trees in Peavey Plaza since circa 1995. Yearly maintenance activities include fall pruning when necessary and tree removal. The city is not in favor of replacing trees on the upper plaza level and the city desires to remove the lights and wiring from the existing trees and new trees will not be planted with lights. The lights and wiring are included in the original Friedberg design.

B. Historical Context

\textit{Urban Development Trends in Minneapolis}

Rapid expansion characterized American development patterns during the second half of the twentieth century as many people and businesses relocated outside metropolitan areas. Automobiles and housing shortages fueled this great exodus out of the urban core and into suburban areas as returning veterans sought greater privacy and the "American Dream." Municipalities, assisted by groups in the private sector, fought this migration with initiatives that sought to
reinvent the city identity. Following traditional planning concepts yet embracing modern urban design principals, organizations planned to beautify urban areas in order to attract residents, businesses, and investors back to the city. Older, blighted areas were often destroyed to clear the way for redevelopment processes that provided increased housing options with artistic elements incorporated to attract the populace.

A dense municipality, Minneapolis emulated the development patterns of many American cities post World War II. During the 1950s, large downtown business ventures followed the residential exodus into suburban regions. Dayton’s Department Store commenced construction on Southdale, the first indoor shopping mall in the country, in Edina in 1952. General Mills, among the oldest and largest companies in Minnesota, relocated its headquarters to Golden Valley in 1958. Fearing that the city would gradually lose its vitality, businesses and government officials established a progressive strategy to channel investment back into Minneapolis proper. Focused on reshaping itself and reinventing its urban core, the city redesigned its values and envisioned a new concept for its future.

In 1952 the City Planning Department, under director Herman Olson, together with University of Minnesota Professor Robert Cerny, announced a proposal that would transform portions of downtown Minneapolis into a contemporary industrial district complete with highways, a civic center, and large parking garages. The proposal, “Beautiful Entrance to a Beautiful City,” unfortunately called for a massive demolition in the city’s downtown core, which stimulated a trend by the city that lasted through the next several decades.

Prior to World War II, downtown Minneapolis retained much of its original architectural fabric of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By the 1950s, portions of downtown once displaying fine architecture now hosted areas of crime and dilapidated buildings. The Housing and Redevelopment Authority, established in 1947, and the Downtown Council, established in 1955, together proclaimed a chief aim “to assure continued growth and development of downtown Minneapolis.” This aim, combined with the progressive visions of the planning department, stimulated the sweeping urban renewal projects of the 1950s and early 1960s. These projects allowed clearance for the downtown urban construction efforts of the 1960s and 1970s.

Continued efforts to lure business development back to the urban core of Minneapolis, resulted in a number of major development projects that involved buildings and landscapes. Conceived using modern design principles that stressed the use of fountains, green space, sculpture, trees, and concrete, these cultural urban designs fulfilled the city’s aspirations. Nicollet Mall was among the first landscape design projects that distinguished Minneapolis as a progressive urban center. Designed by Lawrence Halprin, FASLA in the mid-1960s, Nicollet Mall was an eight-block pedestrian and public transit mall extending along Nicollet Avenue from Washington Avenue to Tenth Street in the heart of downtown Minneapolis. Halprin encouraged pedestrian occupancy by designing wide and curving streetscapes including various lounging areas with surrounding fountains, trees, flowers, and sculptures. Nicollet Mall opened to the public in 1967 and immediately drew large crowds. An instant success, it became the

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2 Joseph Hart, Down & Out: The Life and Death of Minneapolis’s Skid Row (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 40.
3 Hart, Down & Out: The Life and Death of Minneapolis’s Skid Row, 42.
prototype for pedestrian urban malls in the country and garnered international acclaim.4

Nicollet Mall achieved the business revitalization desired by Minneapolis and furthered the long term planning objectives of the city. For many years since the exodus of residents to suburban areas, the city wished to replenish the supply of downtown housing and commercial development. Marketed toward singles and young married couples, development activities continued to search for blighted areas near the urban core.5 Additionally, a common theme in Minneapolis planning focused on urban improvement through a connected system. The City Beautiful Movement of the 1917 Plan of Minneapolis proposed connecting the city’s renowned park system to the heart of its downtown by creating a mall. Together these objectives were initiated with Nicollet Mall and advanced with the establishment of the Loring Park Development District and the Loring Greenway.

Loring Park was the original “Central Park” of the Minneapolis park system, designed by H.W.S. Cleveland in 1883. By the early 1970s, the Loring Park area was an undesirable fringe neighborhood directly south of downtown. After the presentation of the “Metro Center ’85 Plan” by the planning department in 1970, a Loring Park Community was formed, followed by Council designation of the Loring Park Development District in 1972. The district proposed to clear nine blocks of land and over the next ten years construct a multitude of apartments, condominiums, and other public improvements.6 The Loring Greenway, a special three-block pedestrian-oriented path, would serve as the central unifying element connecting the nearby Nicollet Mall to the district. The greenway would feature shaded walkways, fountains, informal sitting areas, and playgrounds for the enjoyment of area residents.

Development of Peavey Plaza7
As the Loring Greenway concept was being developed in the early 1970s, a four-block extension of the mall to the south was proposed with plans for a plaza to allow room for gathering crowds and events. The plaza was planned as a complement to the proposed Minnesota Orchestra Hall, to be located at the southern terminus of Nicollet Mall. Designed by local architects Hammel Green & Abrahamson and New York Architects Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, the concert hall executed a modern approach compatible with the progressive building ambitions of Minneapolis in the 1970s. Incorporated into the full design, the plaza primarily would serve as the entranceway to the new concert hall and lie adjacent to the proposed extension of Nicollet Mall. The designers believed the plaza would serve as a transitional space signaling a change from urban shopping to tranquil park. It would facilitate outdoor performances, concerts, exhibits, and dining.8 Construction of Orchestra Hall was approved by the City

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7 Research for the development of Peavey Plaza based in part on notes and copies of records provided by Hess, Roise and Company, based on the Minnesota Orchestra Archives Collection found at the Manuscripts Division of the University of Minnesota.
Council in May 1973 and groundbreaking for the concert hall commenced the following month.

The Minnesota Orchestral Association agreed to provide half a city block for the plaza between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets along Nicollet Mall. The architects of Orchestra Hall had a direct influence on the plaza’s configuration, but did not design the plaza itself. Hugh Hardy of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates stipulated that the park plaza should be a series of levels above and below the existing grade and serve as an extension of Nicollet Mall. He also suggested the lower level include a pond to alleviate site drainage.

Funding complicated the progress of the plaza’s construction, until the Peavey Company, a local agricultural business, donated a substantial sum in October 1973. In return, the plaza was named in honor of the company. Additional funding towards the construction of the plaza came from a financial agreement between the Minnesota Orchestral Association and the city of Minneapolis.

Once funding was secured, the city proceeded with selecting a designer for Peavey Plaza. Interested in the quality of the design, the city envisioned a plaza to correspond with the modern urban architectural trends exhibited by Minneapolis during this period, including Nicollet Mall, the Loring Greenway, and Orchestra Hall. Their ideas followed the American form of the “park plaza,” featuring green space and hard cover, terraces to create amphitheatre-like environment, and water to minimize the amount of hard cover.

In December 1973, the city chose M. Paul Friedberg, a New York landscape architect, to design the Loring Greenway and Peavey Plaza. Friedberg was already well known for his modern urban landscape designs, such as the Riis Plaza in Manhattan. Construction on Orchestra Hall and the excavation of the plaza was well underway by the time Friedberg was hired. After Friedberg visited the shallow depression that existed on the site, he decided to incorporate the feature into his design. Inspired by Rockefeller Center in New York and encouraged by Minneapolis to limit the overall paving of the site, Friedberg designed a 140 foot by 200-foot pool as the central feature that could be drained to provide space for events in the summer and frozen in the winter to serve as an ice-skating rink.

**An Adventure Playground for Music**

M. Paul Friedberg was born in New York City in 1931. At the age of five, his family moved to rural Pennsylvania. Friedberg studied ornamental horticulture at Cornell University during the early 1950s with the intent to manage his family’s nursery business. Upon earning his degree in 1954, he moved back to New York City, but was unable to find employment in the field of horticulture. He was subsequently hired as an apprentice for a landscape architecture firm in Hartford, Connecticut. By 1958, Friedberg had established his own landscape architecture and urban design firm, M. Paul Friedberg & Partners.

Friedberg’s early career focused on public housing and playgrounds in an urban environment. His redesign of the Jacob Riis Plaza in the lower east side of New York City during the mid-1960s became the landscape model for housing plaza design. A series of 14-story buildings, the Riis Plaza was refurbished by Friedberg to create space for a central plaza with a play sculpture at the heart.

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An element of the Riis Plaza design, Friedberg introduced the “Adventure Playground.” The idea consisted of playground designed with natural materials to integrate the play area in the land itself.\(^1\)

The design displayed perpendicular, hard surfaces characteristic of post World War II landscape design and evident in such well-known projects as the Forecourt Fountain, a sunken waterfall plaza in Portland, Oregon directly adjacent to that city’s concert hall. Designed by Lawrence Halprin, and completed in the late 1960s at roughly the same time as the Nicollet Mall, Forecourt was a likely inspiration for Peavey Plaza. Yet, Peavey’s character-defining slopes are more shallow and the overall drop-offs much less deep and ravine-like. Friedberg incorporated slight grade transitions, groves of varied vegetation, aggregate surfaces, small tiled squares, and sharp fountains into his design of Peavey Plaza.\(^2\)

Friedberg’s design of Peavey Plaza was approved by the Minneapolis City Council in May 1974 and groundbreaking commenced three months later with Nystrom Constructors selected as general contractors. The plaza was dedicated in June 1975 as the first completed element of the Loring Park Development District and the proposed four-block extension of Nicollet Mall. Friedberg returned to Minneapolis in 1979 to complete a corner of the plaza with McCrossan general contractors. A restaurant was originally proposed at the site near the unfinished corner; however, the proposal failed because the privately owned business would be located on city property.\(^3\) The ice skating rink included in the original design of Peavey Plaza was finally constructed by the architectural firm of Griswold and Rauma and opened in 1982.

Friedberg’s career propelled the development of the “park plaza.” Combining elements of green space and hard cover, Friedberg used this design element in major urban downtown spaces. His international achievements include Pershing Park in Washington, D.C., the Olympic Plaza in Calgary, Canada, and the Andromeda Houses in Jaffa, Israel.

**A Green Connection Expressing an Historic Era of Support for the Arts**

With the extension of Nicollet Mall to Thirteenth St. and the completion of Loring Greenway from Peavey Plaza to Loring Park, Minneapolis created a remarkable green connection between its downtown retail core, Orchestra Hall, Loring Park, the Walker Art Center, and Guthrie Theater that stood at the eastern edge of Kenwood Parkway. Downtown was thus linked in to H.W.S. Cleveland’s Grand Rounds Park System. Cultural venues for music, theater, and modern art served as key landmarks along the new greenway system linking downtown and the city’s park system.

Set at the meeting point of Nicollet Mall, Peavey Plaza was the lynchpin for this new pedestrian and bicycle link. Programmatically and technically, the plaza performed superbly in its first decade with summer music festivals, art installations, and events at the stage an amphitheater. The plaza proved to be both immersive and, because of its sunken nature, a relatively quiet city space for music and special events. Though spatially complex, the plaza, as a three-dimensional space proved quite flexible for temporary stages, short-term

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installation of café tables and chairs, food tents, and public art such as the fabric banners stretched over the main pool space to celebrate the Orchestral Association's 75th anniversary.

Peavey Plaza remains among the finest landscape architectural expression of a period from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s when Minneapolis was a national leader in support for the arts. Within a brief ten-year period, local corporations and private donors funded an array of cultural building projects of extraordinary range and quality. These projects include Edward Larabee Barnes' Walker Art Center, Kenzo Tange's extensive additions to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and finally Orchestra Hall and Peavey Plaza.

During this time, Minneapolis became a national model for corporate giving to the arts. The Dayton family encouraged fellow leaders to donate 5 percent of corporate pre-tax profits to local causes, a cash infusion that ultimately built one of the richest collections of theater and music groups in the country. In later years, foundation and private support has nurtured pioneering artist support organizations to help playwrights, photographers, digital filmmakers, composers, ceramic artists, and fabric artists find input on their work, educational and grant opportunities, and venues to highlight their word.

At the Millennium, Minneapolis undertook four new major building projects. They are Cesar Pelli's Minneapolis Central Library, Michael Graves' addition to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Herzog & de Meuron's expansion of the original Walker Art Center, and Jean Nouvel's entirely new three-stage Guthrie Theater on the banks of the Mississippi where much of the city's original wealth was created by milling. Peavey Plaza survives as a modernist landscape from the post World War II wave of modern cultural investments and parkway development in Minneapolis. Like the Minneapolis Park and Boulevard System itself, Peavey Plaza has become a symbol of this ongoing urban tradition, expressive of the social optimism of American landscape architecture in the early 1970s.

PART II. PHYSICAL INFORMATION

A. Landscape Character and Use:
Peavey Plaza is a significant example of a designed urban park plaza in the Modernist style. As such, it consists of a variety of well-organized, rectilinear, interconnected spaces composed of humble materials. The plaza is built mostly of standard grey concrete and is sunken below street level in an amphitheater configuration. Access to the space takes place via concrete steps and terraces at various levels, sizes, and degrees of openness and seclusion.

A large elevated metal and concrete water feature cascades through numerous rectilinear, multi-level basins to a central reflecting pool at the plaza's lowest point. The reflecting pool serves as the focus of the plaza. Honeylocust trees near street level and sloping planting beds descending into the space enhance the vertical spatial orientation of the plaza.

Peavey plaza is associated with important community planning and development efforts in downtown Minneapolis after World War II. The plaza was developed as an important recreational and cultural gathering space for the city. The concrete steps and wood benches serve as places of relaxation and social interaction. The upper level along Eleventh Street and the central reflecting pool, when
drained, frequently serve as staging areas for social events during the summer months.

The site is located in a densely built-up urban area of Minneapolis. Three sides of the plaza are bordered by streets and one side is bordered by an institutional building (Orchestral Hall). The plaza is frequently used as both a formal and informal gathering space for residents.

Complexity of stairs, terraces, walls, water features, and larger gathering spaces is a hallmark of Modernist landscape architecture, as is the mission to provide public outdoor space for urban dwellers. Peavey Plaza employs these principles in ways that are unique to Minneapolis's temperate climate, rectilinear street arrangement, and affinity for its arts and cultural institutions.

B. Overall Description

The plaza is organized around a central reflecting pool recessed 10 feet below the elevation of the surrounding streets. The pool was designed to be drained and used for cultural gatherings and performances. Concrete steps provide seating, and the entire space is softened by sloped planting beds along the northwest, southwest, and southeast sides of the reflecting pool. Large terraces occupy the upper and lower elevations of the northeast side. The street level features a bosque of Honeylocust trees, while the northeastern lower terrace has smaller groupings of Honeylocust leading to the edge of the reflecting pool. The entire plaza is interspersed with wood benches, metal poles with clusters of globe-shaped lights, and a system of metal cylindrical lights hanging from the branches of the Honeylocust trees.

The original plan sheets of Peavey Plaza, dated May, 1974, provide overall site plans, specific details, and specifications for the entire site.

C. Charactering Defining Features and Conditions:

1. Natural systems and features
   a. Topography
      Topography is the most prominent feature of the plaza design. There is a 10-foot change in grade from the adjacent streets to the reflecting pool. The variation in topography is accentuated by a series of concrete steps, sloped planting beds, benches, and water feature pools.

   b. Vegetation
      The most prominent vegetative elements in the plaza are the bosque and individual plantings of Honeylocust trees (Gleditsia triacanthos). The majority of the Honeylocust plantings remain. All areas originally planted in grass interspersed with concrete pavers have been removed and replaced with concrete. Many of the mixed deciduous and coniferous plantings on the sloped planting beds are nearing their final years of viability. The plan sheets provide a detailed plant list. New ornamental perennials and flowering annuals (not in keeping with the character of original plant list) currently exist in the sloped planting beds and in large off-the-shelf commercial pots interspersed in the northeastern terraces.

   c. Water
      Water is a prominent element in the plaza design. Large stainless steel tubes serve as origins of a complex water feature that begins at the street
level and cascades through a series of rectilinear concrete pools all the way down to the main reflecting pool 10 feet below street grade. The fountains provide a sensory experience both visually and acoustically. In the summer months, the fountains provide a cooling effect in adjacent areas of the plaza. In the winter, the reflecting pool functions as an ice skating rink.

2. Spatial Organization and land patterns

a. Circulation and paths
Discrete entry points to the park are provided along the southwest- and lower northeast-facing sides of the plaza via concrete steps. The upper northeast-facing side provides access to the upper street-level terrace, with concrete steps leading to the lower terrace and reflecting pool. There are no specifically designed circulation patterns within the plaza that allow easy movement from one end of the plaza to the other, especially on the lower terrace level. Rather, the site provides vantage points at which to sit and congregate. Circulation is not a significant defining factor of the plaza itself, though city sidewalks border the southwest, northwest, and northeast sides of the plaza.

b. Views and vistas
The views throughout the plaza are decidedly expansive. The upper terrace and concrete steps provide full panoramic views of the space. The repetitive geometric shapes offered by the concrete steps, terraces, and fountain pools create a strong horizontal aspect to the site, despite the vertical grade change. Together, this horizontal geometry and the vertical lines offered by the Honeylocust trees and light poles give an experience of spatial volume while insulating the inner spaces from the surrounding bustle of city streets. A full range of solar conditions exists in the plaza, from full sun to heavy shaded areas.

3. Structures, site furnishings, and objects:

a. Buildings and structures:
Orchestral Hall frames the northeastern-facing side of the plaza. While this building is actually outside the plaza, the development and history of the plaza is linked to the development of Orchestral Hall (see Historic Context). The building serves to define the edge of the plaza on this side. The Modern style of the hall complements the design of the plaza.

b. Small scale elements:
Several custom-designed elements are detailed in the original plans and are still present at the site. Cylindrical metal light fixtures were designed to hang from the Honeylocust trees. Custom metal pole lights each contain three groups of globe lights. Freestanding wooden benches also adhere to the original plans, and are constructed of 12-inch by 12-inch timbers. Concrete bollards measure 18 inches in height and are found around the plaza to define its edges. Wall-mounted wood benches are used in the plaza. They are attached to the concrete and utilize 4-inch by 4-inch timbers. Poured concrete trash receptacles are found at key points within the plaza. The poured concrete walls, curbs, stairs, and planter edges have custom detailing.

c. Archeological sites:
There are no known archaeological sites.
d. Other:

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Drawings, plans: "Peavey Park Plaza," plans held by Orchestral Hall Association, original plans for the plaza.


C. Interviews: N/A

D. Bibliography:
   1. Primary and unpublished:

   City of Minneapolis Office of the City Coordinator. "Loring Park Development Progress Report." Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis, 1975. Available at Northwest Architectural Archives, Minneapolis, Minn.


   Research for the development of Peavey Plaza based in part on notes and copies of records provided by Hess, Roise and Company, based on the Minnesota Orchestra Archives Collection found at the Manuscripts Division of the University of Minnesota.


   2. Secondary and published:


   Nonmonumental Achievement. Progressive Architecture, 1975. Available at Hess Roise Historical Consultants, Minneapolis, Minn.
E. Sources not yet investigated:

Interview with landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg.

F. Supplemental material:

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

List individuals that need to be acknowledged for project.

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