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

HABS NY-6086-W
HABS NY-6086-W

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ELLIS ISLAND, RECREATION SHELTER

HABS No. NY-6086-W

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

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

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Recreation Shelter on Islands 2 and 3 was part of the last active phase of construction at the Ellis Island U.S. Immigration Station during the 1930s. The Recreation Building and two Recreation Shelters were designed for Ellis Island alongside the New Immigration Building (1934-1936) and Ferry Building (1934), all of which were financed through New Deal funding. The construction of these new facilities contributed to a reconfiguration of the island into clearly demarcated spaces for patients, immigrants and deportees, a shift that recognized the changing dynamics of immigration in the United States during the years of the Great Depression. This concern for the physical and mental well-being of the island's temporary inhabitants was tied to larger national and international concerns about public health and social services.

In 1933 the federally-appointed Ellis Island Committee completed a report that recommended widespread improvements to the Immigration facilities, among which was the development of adequate accommodations for recreation. Plans were initiated to make the new space created by filling in the lagoon between Islands 2 and 3 into an open-air recreation area, and to build a Recreation Building and Recreation Shelter at its west end. The Recreation Building and Recreation Shelters (a nearly identical structure on Island 1 was used by deportees) were constructed simultaneously in large part because of a new recognition of the need to accommodate patient, inmate, and immigrant leisure on the three-island complex.

During World War II, the building was used by the United States Coast Guard, which also made use of the facilities from 1951 to 1954, after the United States Public Health Service vacated on March 1, 1951. The Ellis Island United States Immigration Station ceased operation on November 12, 1954 and the complex was largely unoccupied until it was made part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965,

under the administration of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

Historian: Julia A. Sienkewicz, 2010.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

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

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

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

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

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

5. Original plans and construction: Historical research, original drawings, and field study of the building corroborate a strong correlation between the original design and the extant structure. The first plans for the Recreation Shelter between Islands 2 and 3 were prepared by Chester Aldrich in October 1933, at the same time that the architect prepared drawings for a nearly identical shelter on Island 1 and for the Recreation Building.[2] Subsequent adaptations were made to these

[1] Chester H. Aldrich (1871-1940) was trained in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. He was a prolific architect and practiced for most of his career in the firm of Delano & Aldrich, which he founded with William Adams Delano in 1903. Aldrich may have developed his working relationship with the Public Buildings Branch of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury during his work on the new Post Office Department Building at Washington, D.C. (completed 1933). Through his role as Consulting Architect for the Public Buildings Branch, he was involved on several commissions at Ellis Island including the Ferry Building, New Immigration Building, Recreation Building and the Recreation Shelters. For an account of Aldrich and his architectural practice see Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Delano & Aldrich* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

[2] The original drawings prepared by Aldrich either have not been identified or do not survive. Correspondence in the records of the Public Buildings Service document that Aldrich continued to consult about the design of the project through 1937, but working drawings and specifications were prepared by the architects of the Public Buildings Service, under the supervision of Louis A. Simon. See correspondence in Entry 31C "General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-1939, 1934-1939, New York, NY Ellis

plans in the ensuing months and construction drawings were prepared for the building by architects in the Procurement Division of the Public Buildings Service between January 1934 and October 1935.[3] The most significant alteration to the original plans was the elimination of restroom facilities in the end rooms of the shelters. The construction contract was made with the Albert Development Corporation in February 1936 and work began shortly thereafter. The shelters were completed by April 1937.

B. Historical Context:

The Recreation Shelter, located on Ellis Island in the open space between Islands 2 and 3, was constructed as part of a larger project to develop indoor and outdoor recreation facilities at the nation's premiere immigration station. The modest garden pavilion stands witness to a period when the Federal Government of the United States invested in cultural capital in the form of buildings, art, and infrastructure. Through its "New Deal" program, the Federal Government, under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, attempted to redirect the course of a nation that had been seriously derailed by the social and economic trauma of the Great Depression. The Recreation Shelter at Ellis Island offers only a modest architectural example of the buildings that were constructed under Federal oversight during the 1930s, but in both its architectural vocabulary and its social function, the structure is consistent with the priorities and paradigms of New Deal architecture. The history of the structure is integrally tied to the workings of federal bureaucracy as well as to the core principles of social welfare and cultural capital prevalent in the government during the 1930s.

The design and construction of the recreation facilities was also shaped by the particular needs of the hospital and immigration facilities on Ellis Island. As the nation's premiere immigration station, Ellis Island was a complex place in which social, logistical, and political factors influenced the gradual changes to its built environment. Two of these functions had a particular influence on the decision to build two Recreation Shelters at Ellis Island; this report focuses on the shelter located between Islands 2 and 3 and known as Shelter 1. First, long-term hospital patients and detained immigrants were without protected outdoor spaces in which they could relax. While the partially-enclosed Recreation Shelter on Island 1 offered a more restricted space for detained immigrants, the open-air pavilion shelter between Islands 2 and 3 was a landscape feature intended to offer shade and respite to convalescent hospital patients given access to the larger surrounding recreation space in the U-shaped hospital courtyard. As part of the larger hospital complex, the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelters were non-clinical facilities providing spaces intended to assist in the physical and mental convalescence of patients with chronic illnesses.

Island Immigration Station, 1937-38," Boxes 5870-5880, RG 121 – Records of the Public Buildings Service, National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II), College Park, MD [hereafter Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II].

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

The appearance of the Recreation Shelter was determined by the other New Deal funded buildings and the pre-existing built environment of Ellis Island. Both Recreation Shelters, along with the new Immigration Building, Ferry Building, and the Recreation Building, were part of a series of new Ellis Island structures designed by New York architect Chester Aldrich with New Deal funding. The new structures needed to fit with prominent older buildings such as the late nineteenth century Immigration Building and the adjacent Georgian Revival hospital buildings. In order to complement this larger built environment, the new recreation structures were built in a simplified modern style that adopted the vocabulary of the adjacent Georgian Revival architecture, while also incorporating features from contemporary building practices.[4]

Building Recreation into Ellis Island

By 1933, when the Federal Government began plans to build new recreation facilities on Ellis Island, the site had been in operation as an immigration facility for forty years. Until the late nineteenth-century immigration had been controlled by individual states rather than the federal government. The 1892 construction of the Ellis Island Immigration Station in the harbor of New York City coincided with the shift to federal control of immigration, and the new facility replaced the earlier state-run buildings known as Castle Garden on Manhattan. Positioned between New York City and the growing New Jersey industrial centers of Newark and Jersey City, the island was strategically located and came to serve as the nation's primary port of entry for aspiring immigrants. A fire in 1897 brought reconstruction of the original wood buildings and expansion of the island to include a grand Beaux Arts Immigration Building and Georgian Revival hospital complex. The New York City architectural firm of Boring and Tilton designed these elaborate new hospital and immigration facilities on the two islands and laid out the grounds in an ornate civic landscape plan. In 1907-08, Island 3 was constructed and filled with a new pavilion-style hospital for patients with contagious diseases.

During World War I, the hospital at Ellis Island treated injured servicemen who required a new range of social services and entertainments to fill the idle hours of their convalescence. Likewise, rejected immigrants and deportees whose homelands were ravaged by war were detained for long periods of time on the island. During these long periods of detention, prisoners and patients alike needed a greater range of outlets to make their stay tolerable and a greater number of social workers and advocates in order to respond to their range of needs and concerns.

In addition to the continuation of social services on the island, the detention system was never fully eliminated after the war. In fact, the practice of holding detainees on the island seems to have increased. During the Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover administrations, in particular, many immigrants were apprehended in raids and held for extended periods on Ellis Island awaiting deportation, many of these deportations having

[4] See the historical report for the Recreation Building (HABS No. NY-6086-V) for a detailed contextual narrative of recreation structures as a modern building type.

to do with suspected ties to socialism.[5] The detention of the "Reds" brought extensive press attention to the island, some of which highlighted the lack of demarcated spaces to separate negative or dangerous individuals (like those accused of socialism) from their more innocuous counterparts. Both of these long-term shifts in use of the site required changes to the architecture and landscape of the island. No immediate changes were made after the war, but by the mid 1920s the need for improvements was clear.

Government officials and immigrants alike complained that the buildings were run-down from a quarter century of heavy use. An increasing inundation of immigrants, combined with a growing population of detained émigrés and deportees, filled the facilities to overflowing. Negative press painted the island as "hell's island," criticizing both how immigrants were treated and the poor condition of the facilities. A key moment for the renovation of the island came in 1923, when Sir Auckland Geddess, the British Ambassador to the United States, published his assessment of its conditions:

> My general criticism of the buildings is that they are too small. Further, the immigration laws have been altered since they were built, and, however suitable they may have been at the time of their erection, they do not quite meet the present requirements … I understand that the superintending architect of the United States Government is now considering how they can be better adapted. I have no doubt that further improvement is possible. It is difficult to see, however, how any one can rearrange the buildings and grounds to make them really suitable. The ideal 'Ellis Island' would have, I imagine, ground around it so that those whose sojourn there could not be brief would have space to move about and to get away from what must often be a nauseating contact with their companions in detention.[6]

Henry Curran, then Commissioner Ellis Island, vehemently rejected the majority of Geddess' criticisms, but within two months of the ambassador's report he traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with officials and to propose a $1.5 million renovation to the Ellis Island facilities.[7]

By December 1923, Curran raised his request to over $2.5 million, and began a popular press campaign to advertise his program for the island, which included a significant emphasis on creating spaces for outdoor recreation. In explaining how the funds would be distributed, Curran noted, among other things, that:

> the whole arrangement of the buildings is radically wrong for the present immigration. To begin with, we have no proper outdoor space for health and recreational purposes. There are two or three little front yards that do

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[5] For a discussion of the impact of the "Red Scare" on Ellis Island see: Vincent J. Cannato, *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), esp. 326-331.
[6] "Geddess Recounts Ellis Island Evils, Suggests Remedies," *New York Times*, 16 August 1923, 1.
[7] "Curran Urges Funds for Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 25 October 1923, 5.

> very well for the sparrows and starlings, but they cannot take care of human beings. The first thing that must be accomplished is the extension of the island by sea wall and fill, so that detained immigrants may go out doors every day, instead of not at all, as at present. *I want to put a pavilion on the grounds as a shelter* [emphasis added], and, still more, I want to put up a separate building which may serve as a children's house, with kindergarten and nursery.[8]

Indeed, detainees rarely gained access to fresh air and exercise as emphasized in a January 20, 1924 news story, which remarked that detained immigrates were allowed outside for the first time since July 1st. In his comments on the day's events, Commissioner Curran made certain to emphasize the underlying difficulties of the situation and pointed out that: "at present there is no railing along the shore, no proper sea wall and no room for any considerable number of persons to move around. The guards that can be mustered to insure the safety of the aliens must see that the children do not fall into the bay and that their parents do not injure themselves by breaking through rotten planking."[9] Commissioner Curran did not receive his multi-million dollar appropriation but funding was gradually allotted in a smaller amount and improvements proceeded in a piecemeal fashion. Workers began to fill in the lagoon between Island 2 and Island 3 in order to create Curran's outdoor promenade, though it took nearly a decade before this infill process was completed.[10]

When Edward Corsi became Commission of Immigration at Ellis Island in 1931, he initiated a further series of improvements to the buildings and landscape. In his first year as Commissioner, Corsi expanded and fenced the recreation grounds on Island One. In the following year he proposed that the government should establish a formal program of recreational and occupational activities at Ellis Island. Ostensibly as a first step toward instituting such a program, Corsi established a system of armed prison guards and fencing to separate and control the "criminal element" on the island. Due to these more controlled conditions, Corsi claimed he could then allow other residents of the Island greater freedom:

> When I wanted to give more freedom I couldn't do it because of the danger and the chances of escape. With this guard they will get more freedom, and where they are now only allowed outside the building an hour a day, they will get more time, and will be happier. [Further, Corsi said] aliens are penned up and kept within doors such long hours that their mental condition is 'shameful,' and they conceive a hatred for those who keep them there.[11]

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[8] "Bigger Ellis Island asked by Curran," *New York Times*, 22 December 1923, 7.
[9] Ibid.
[10] See discussion in Chapter 5 of J. Tracy Stakely, *Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument* (Brookline, MA: National Park Service, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2003), 75.
[11] "Ellis Island is Put under Armed Guard," *New York Times*, 23 July 1932, 13.

Corsi then called for the United States Government to establish a committee that would "study conditions on the island and consider a projected occupational and recreational program."[12] Ultimately, it would be the formation of the Ellis Island Committee in 1933 by Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and more specifically the Subcommittee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment, which would finally offer a full assessment of the problems with extant recreational facilities at Ellis Island. After decades of vacillating between concerns about access to recreation, budgetary stresses, and the need to continue regulating immigrant activity, the Federal government and the administration of Ellis Island would finally develop a solution to the problem of recreation on Ellis Island.

Ellis Island Recreation Facilities and the "New Deal"

A significant factor in the conditions that led to the construction of the new Recreation Shelter at Ellis Island was the federal government's development of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) following the catastrophic stock market crash of October 29, 1929 and the subsequent tenacious economic downturn of the Great Depression. These federal programs were developed primarily as a means for creating gainful occupation for the unemployed and stimulating the economy. As Robert D. Leighninger, Jr. has compellingly argued, however, these programs were also the federal government's attempt to shape the cultural infrastructure of the United States in a period during which many were concerned both about widespread immigration and about the disintegration of communities in the wake of the financial collapse.[13] Through the creation of thousands of public buildings, among which hundreds were intended to serve as recreational facilities, the federal government sought to create communities. As Leighninger explained, "One of the things that public space can do is encourage the integration of all aspects of the community. Almost all of the projects that the PWA, WPA, and CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) undertook were places where people of all ages, classes, and races…might come together… National unity, or at least party solidarity, might have been somewhere in his mind."[14] Thus, he concluded that the "ideology of New Deal Civility" was creating the idea that all citizens could learn to "feel safe in the company of others," and gain "recognition of a common humanity."[15] Such ideological concerns had a clear bearing on the immigration work of Ellis Island and it is fitting, therefore, that among the works on Ellis Island that were funded by the WPA were the Recreation Building, Recreation Shelters (on Island 1 and between Islands 2 & 3), as well as the pavement of the promenades for the recreation grounds on Island 3.

The architectural projects of the WPA were funded through emergency governmental funding but were supervised by the preexisting Supervising Architect's Office within the Department of the Treasury (a third government bureau, the

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

Immigration and Naturalization Service, was also generally active in negotiations regarding the buildings on Ellis Island). A reorganization of the bureaucratic structure in 1933 following the establishment of the New Deal programs created the Public Buildings Service within the Procurement Division of the Department of the Treasury and it was this particular office that oversaw the design and construction of the recreation facilities at Ellis Island. The federal mandate for this division was the rapid and efficient construction of buildings, intended to maximize the impact of federal funding for unemployed construction workers.[16]

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

The role of the Public Buildings Service was not, however, limited to bureaucracy. The government department was both active and influential in the establishment of aesthetic and structural standards for buildings. The Supervising Architect played a crucial role in this process. During the period in which this project was brought to fruition, Louis A. Simon, a long-time government architect with an architectural degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was in the position of Supervising Architect. Simon was an aesthetic, as well as a logistical, leader for his office, shifting the work produced by the government architects from an "excess of elaboration or non-functional expression" to "an effort toward simplicity and restraint and the attainment of pleasing results, by a studied consideration of mass and proportion."[17] Simon worked closely with Aldrich throughout the commission and the building reflects an aesthetic and functional vision that combined the influences of these two professional architects.

The government oversight of the aesthetic characteristics of the building was coupled with their supervision of its structures and materials. Throughout the process of design and construction, the Public Buildings Service would weigh the merits of particular building materials and would test the integrity of all products used in the

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

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

building process, from concrete to paint to structural steel beams. Intended as a system to control the structural integrity of government buildings and to ensure their long-term stability, this complex system of checks and balances was also often politically motivated. In the design of the Recreation Building & Shelters, for example, the original call for bids, which had stipulated the use of limestone for all decorative features on the building's exterior, was revised to call instead for the use of glazed terra cotta blocks because politicians urged that this change would be to the economic benefit of local terra cotta manufacturers.[18] This politically-motivated decision caused a change in the structure that actually lessened its long-term durability and was the subject of comment by internal architects and engineers on several occasions. In November 1936, for example, the engineer C. T. Holden inspected the progress of the building for the division and reported to his supervisors that "terra cotta trim exhibits the usual terra cotta faults and seems to have been needlessly used on this job, as the contractor proposed to furnish limestone at no extra cost."[19] This example suggests the manner in which decisions within the department were influenced by a complex network of financial, administrative, political and aesthetic concerns.

A final aspect of the WPA program that had a strong influence on the construction of the Recreation Shelter, as well as other contemporary features at Ellis Island, was the federal system for defining the specifications of a building and selecting a general contractor. Because there was great concern about making the federal building projects as financially sound as possible, the Public Buildings Service would both prepare detailed working drawings and minute specifications for each commission. Prospective contractors would place bids based on these exact project descriptions and, except when contractors attempted to substitute materials or made other types of errors in their building proposals, federal law required that the government select the lowest bid. Throughout the subsequent construction process, the government would then supervise the accuracy with which the contractor adhered to these stipulations. Problems frequently arose especially when building conditions varied from those specified on drawings (as in the earlier construction at Ellis Island of the seawall), or when individual products were not available and substitutions needed to be made. This process could also prolong the total time from design to completion of a building, a phenomenon that is evident in the construction history of the Recreation Shelter, which was designed in 1933, not built until 1936, and the contract was not closed until 1938.

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

[19] Report from C. T. Holden to the Supervising Engineer, Public Building Branch, Washington, D.C., (25 November 1936), Box 5873, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

Designing Recreation Facilities for Ellis Island

The design process of the Ellis Island Recreation Building & Shelters was begun in 1933, but its conceptual origins can be traced to the reform initiatives begun by Edward Corsi when he became commissioner of the Ellis Island Immigration Station in 1931. Speaking to a conference on Immigration Policy in 1932, Corsi stated that, "the problem of the detention of aliens on Ellis Island is its most serious one and ought eventually to be met by a governmental program of recreational and occupational activities for those held there."[20] As Commissioner, Corsi took steps to improve the opportunities that detainees, patients, and émigrés had while at Ellis Island to gain access to outdoor spaces. Primarily, however, his efforts took the form of raising public and federal awareness of the insufficient recreational and leisure spaces on the island. In 1932, the Commissioner travelled to Washington, D.C. to present his frustrations to members of the Federal Government and discussed the island's negative conditions both at conferences and in interviews with the *New York Times*.

In June 1933, Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, responded to Corsi's complaints by naming a "non partisan group of men and women to inquire impartially into conditions at Ellis Island and the welfare of immigrants generally and to make recommendations for the guidance of the Department."[21] In an attempt to emphasize the important and upright purpose of the committee, Perkins emphasized that, "the personnel of the committee is such as to give assurance of a competent, careful, and impartial investigation reaching sound and helpful conclusions."[22] The committee appointed consisted of a range of individuals from wealthy benefactors to career social workers.

Within the "Ellis Island Committee" a special sub-committee on "Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment" (henceforth the "Buildings" subcommittee) was appointed by Carleton H. Palmer, the Head of the Ellis Island Committee.[23] Asserting that the "essential element of the report submitted must be that each and every member of the committee has approached the problem with a completely open mind determined to establish the facts before coming to a conclusion," Palmer announced, among other appointments, that Chester H. Aldrich, a New York City-based architect and principal in the firm Delano & Aldrich, would serve as the chair of the "Buildings" subcommittee. [24] Joining Aldrich on the sub-committee were Harvey Wiley Corbett, who served as vice-chairman, W. B. Poland, and C. D. Wallach.[25] This subcommittee was charged with the

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[20] "Corsi Wants Aliens in his Care to Work: Suggest Federal Program of Recreation and Occupation for Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 18 March 1932, 23.
[21] Carleton H. Palmer, *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*, (New York, 1934), Preface [n.p.].
[22] "Committee Named on Ellis Island," *New York Times*, 23 June 1933, 6.
[23] Palmer was president of the pharmaceutical company E. R. Squibb & Sons.
[24] Given Aldrich's involvement throughout the design of the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelters, it is remarkable that his role on this committee has not been noted elsewhere. Aldrich's position as chair of the sub-committee, and Palmer's discussion of committee member qualifications, were both discussed in the article, "Alien Treatment Investigated Here," *New York Times* 27 January 1933, 19.
[25] Corbett, like Aldrich, was a prominent architect. He held an engineering degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a degree in architecture from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. By 1933 he had been in private practice for thirty-one years. During the early 1930s Corbett was involved in the design and

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

The Ellis Island Committee would take a year to study the site and to prepare its final report, which it issued in March 1934 as the *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*. In the intervening months, however, Aldrich began to work directly with the Public Buildings Service as a consulting architect in the design of several new buildings for Ellis Island: the Recreation Building, Recreation Shelters, New Immigration Building, and New Ferry Building. The history of the earliest stages of the commission is uncertain, but seems to involve lack of communication and competing interests within different branches of the federal government. Even as the Ellis Island Committee pledged to offer a diligent and disinterested study of the immigration station, the Public Buildings Service sought to expend some of its large pool of "New Deal" funding on the modernization of the island's facilities. By July 1933 (one month after Aldrich was appointed to the "Buildings" subcommittee), the Public Works Administration, under the administration of Harold L. Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, had earmarked $475,000 for work at Ellis Island.[26]

No precise record has been uncovered to establish how the PWA came to have an interest in completing work at Ellis Island, but it seems reasonable to hypothesize that this project was initially conceived as a response to the successive requests first by Commissioner Corran and then by Commissioner Corsi for substantial funding toward renovation work at the island. Final approval for these funds and decisions about their allocation involved a multilayered process, much of which was carried out in a piecemeal fashion over the four years until all the buildings were completed. However, despite Ickes' insistence that the emergency federal monies were not a "grab bag" for the taking, the primary concern of the federal government with regard to these funds was their quick expenditure in order to infuse local economies and stimulate the flagging construction market.[27] Perhaps because of this urgent fiscal agenda, the Public Buildings Service

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construction of Rockefeller Center in New York City (1928-1937) and in the planning of the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. For further information about the biography of H. W. Corbett, see Carol Willis, "Harvey Willis Corbett," in *Macmillan Encycopledia of Architects, Volume 1,* Adolf K. Placzek, ed., (New York and London: The Free Press, 1982), 451-52. W. A. Poland was the architect for the Trenton City Board of Education and, like Corbett, was nearing the end of his career in 1933. For what little is known about his work, see the Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessy & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 477. Nothing is known about C. D. Wallach, who served as the secretary of the committee.

[26] See "Work Lists Sent Back by Roosevelt," *New York Times,* 18 July 1933, 11.

[27] Ickes was quoted in Ibid.

pressed forward in defining a construction and renovation project at Ellis Island before the committee had completed its deliberations or filed its final report.

Working more rapidly than the larger committee, and probably in response to the promise of WPA funding, the Buildings Sub-Committee submitted its internal report on September 13, 1933, two days after Chester Aldrich received an offer from the Public Buildings Service to serve as the consulting architect for the work at Ellis Island.[28] Not surprisingly, the work that Aldrich proposed to complete for the federal government aligned with the needs and recommendations set forth by his sub-committee. Aldrich received the commission despite the fact that he drafted a proposal that far exceeded the realistic available funds, itemizing expenses totaling $1,151,800 to be completed at Ellis Island under the auspices of the PWA.[29] Included within this proposal was mention of the construction of "shelters" though Aldrich did not offer specific construction estimates for the structures.[30] The Report of the Sub-Committee prepared in September 1933 was equally vaguely stipulated the need for "new shelters with comfort stations in all out-door recreation spaces."[31] More specific attention was given to the designation of portions of the island that could be transformed into outdoor recreation spaces, probably in direct response to the concerns expressed by Corsi. Most relevant to the Recreation Shelter was the subcommittee's recommendation that the "space between the two hospitals …be regraded and planted and used for hospital recreation." Several other outdoor recreation spaces were discussed in general terms, including a "Recreation Space for Deportees" on Island One, in which a second Recreation Shelter would eventually be constructed (Figure 1).[32]

In the final *Report of the Ellis Island Committee* the "Buildings" subcommittee offered greater detail in its analysis of the site, perhaps reflecting a more detailed vision developed by Aldrich during the months spent executing his designs. After discussing the shifting administrative and functional needs of the site, which would require both new structures for accommodating immigration, and a significant number of alterations to existing support structures, the report then turned to the suitability of Ellis Island as a

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

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

[30] The document stipulates a total of $456,000 for new buildings, but these include the new immigrant building and ferry house, and additions to the covered passages, alongside the proposed social service building and shelters.

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

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

place for the healthy convalescence of patients and for welcoming new émigrés to the landscape of the United States. Although Ellis Island had always exuded an institutional feel, the subcommittee hoped that its positive features could be put to greater advantage:

> Ellis Island is beautifully located in upper New York Bay and enjoys an abundance of sunlight and fresh air. The view of lower New York with its amazing skyline is without parallel. The harbor has a never ending procession of water craft—giant ocean liners, tugs, freighters, ferries, excursion boats. These furnish variety and interest all day long, if the alien were free to enjoy them.[33]

In order to "lessen apprehension and to promote a healthy state of mind and body on the part of the detained alien," therefore, the subcommittee proposed to take advantage of these natural attributes and recommended, "That more adequate facilities be provided for recreation and occupational work on the Island; that to provide more adequately for out-door recreation a new sea-wall be built as shown on the accompanying plan, this new sea-wall to be carried up three feet above grade to afford protection from salt water, for planting."[34]

The subcommittee's stipulations for the recreation space between Islands 2 and 3, connecting the two Hospital complexes, emphasized that much work remained to be done to prepare this area for use. Although work had begun in the 1920s to fill in the lagoon between the Contagious Disease Hospital and the Main Hospital building, the U-shaped space was still just a mass of debris when the committee conducted its investigation. Accordingly, the sub-committee recommended that, "the space between the hospital buildings on Islands No. 2 and No. 3, now covered with cinders, be regraded, surfaced, planted, landscaped and used for hospital recreation for all classes of patients including a separate enclosure between pavilions for illegal entrants under hospital care."[35] By creating a large lawn space with plantings, pathways, and a shelter in this space, the committee members hoped to transform what must have been a dismal area into a useful and aesthetically pleasing portion of the island.

The subcommittee completed its report with the comment that:

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

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[33] *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*, 16.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 15.

> Committee's recommendations in regard to buildings and grounds are thus already in the process of being carried out.[36]

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

As the work of the Committee moved forward in preparing the *Report*, the Public Buildings Service progressed along a separate, but parallel, course toward the planned work on Ellis Island. The histories of the new Ferry Building, new Immigration Building, seawall, Recreation Building, and Recreation Shelters are intertwined at the earliest stages of this work, though they developed distinct chronologies by the first months of 1934.[37] At the end of August 1933, the Public Works Administration released the funding for the Ellis Island projects to the Department of the Treasury and less than two weeks later Chester Aldrich was officially contracted to develop "sketches to show what the Department of Labor desired."[38] Under a system for private "consulting architects" that was in operation for only a brief period, Aldrich was paid a set fee of $5,000 for his initial preparation of the drawings and consultation and then compensated further for his time on an as-needed basis for the duration of the project.[39]

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

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[36] Ibid., 17.

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

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

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

Architect as a subordinate department within the Procurement Division.[40] The restructuring had a direct impact on the design and construction of the recreation facilities by adding layers of administrative oversight, which pushed and pulled the project in different directions over the four-year-long construction project.

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

Aldrich prepared initial designs for the work at Ellis Island and submitted them to the Public Buildings Service on October 21, 1933, with a second set of "more detailed" drawings submitted ten days later.[41] These initial sketches have not been located, nor do the first working drawings prepared by the Public Buildings Service and given to Aldrich on December 14, 1933, survive. The drawings prepared in 1934 and 1935 by the Public Buildings Service, however, correspond closely to the details discussed during the correspondence between Aldrich and federal architects in 1933 and 1934 (Figure 2). Aldrich worked closely with the Public Buildings Service during the development and revisions of these drawings, even visiting the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the service to review the drawings and recommend revisions.[42] The close correspondence between the extant structures and the 1934-1935 drawings supports the conclusion that the Recreation Shelter remains substantially true to Aldrich's original designs.

Aldrich designed two Recreation Shelters for Ellis Island. "Shelter 1" was positioned between Islands 2 and 3 just east of the Recreation Building. Together the Recreation Building and Recreation Shelter were located at the head of the recreation yard for hospital inmates, creating a visual apex for the otherwise open area crisscrossed by sidewalks and covered in grass. "Shelter 2" was sited within an enclosed recreation space for deportees on Island 1. The structure was positioned adjacent to the powerhouse and the Baggage and Dormitory Building. The two shelters were designed along the same basic model. Both were 82 feet long by 16 feet, 5 inches wide, with a central open colonnade space of 60 feet in length, flanked by a small enclosed room at either end. The only difference between the two structures as planned was along the west wall. In Shelter

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

1, both the west and east colonnade was open, allowing free movement and a clear line of sight. In Shelter 2, west wall was solid brick, with the shelter doubling as a portion of the west fence of the recreation yard for deportees.

The shelters were designed to be garden pavilions for the recreation spaces. Designed in simple, durable materials—cement foundations, brick walls, with limestone coping and trim (for which terra cotta was later substituted)—these structures were both functional and decorative. By utilizing purely geometric massing, Aldrich created long, thin structures that would be unobtrusive next to the more elaborate immigration and hospital buildings. In the case of Shelter 1, Aldrich planned the elevations of the buildings so that the white trim of its limestone courses paralleled those of the Recreation Building, adding to the repeating cadence of white trim against red brick.

The most significant alteration made to the appearance of the Recreation Shelters after their design by Aldrich involved the purpose of the enclosed rooms at either end. Aldrich had designed these spaces to be bathrooms. Although the original layout of the plans of these spaces has not survived, the extant drawings from 1935 maintain some indications of this original purpose, namely in the opaque privacy glass planned for the door windows. Louis Simon explained the financial constraints that forced the elimination of these bathroom facilities to Frances Perkins in April 1934 and suggested that the small rooms could be repurposed as storage areas:

> Attention is called to the fact that Mr. Aldrich's sketches showed toilets in the end rooms of the shelters, but as they were so located as to require a considerable run of plumbing and heating pipes, and as it is believed the bids will be close to the amount available these services were omitted as indicated on drawing #6-1 and the rooms made available for playground equipment or other apparatus required to be locked up.
>
> If the result of the bidding shows that money is available for heating and plumbing, these services can be installed later.[43]

In reviewing the working drawings prepared by the Public Buildings Service, Aldrich raised the point that the bathrooms offered a crucial contribution to the needed changes to Ellis Island. Responding to this criticism, Simon emphasized to Perkins that if circumstances changed so could the revised plans for the structures: "Space for the toilets was provided and toilets can be installed at a later date if it develops that funds are available."[44] The end rooms were never remodeled into restrooms and no evidence indicates that they were used as anything other than storage.

Although Aldrich and the staff of the Public Buildings Service moved quickly forward with the plans for the new buildings, the months of planning led to concern among other federal administrators that the appropriated funding was not being spent

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[43] Letter, Louis A. Simon to Frances Perkins, (24 April 1934), Box 5880, RG 121, NARA II.
[44] Letter, Louis A. Simon to Frances Perkins, (10 May 1934), Box 5879, RG 121, NARA II.

rapidly enough. Since these stimulus funds were intended specifically to employ large numbers of workers quickly any delay was deemed to have a negative impact on the government's program. Accordingly, in mid-January 1934, D. W. MacCormack, the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS] wrote to Lawrence W. Roberts, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, hoping to speed up the process. Enclosing a letter that Ickes had written to the Secretary of the INS threatening that federal funds appropriated for building projects would be redistributed if not used quickly, MacCormack queried:

> Will you be good enough to take up with the Office of the Supervising Architect the necessity for expediting this work? The suggestion has been made to us that if an adequate force is not available in the Office of the Supervising Architect part of the work might be transferred to one of the large architects' offices in New York who would be in a position to obtain and put to work the number of men necessary to press the completion of the plans to an early conclusion. Personally, I am averse to this procedure in view of the highly satisfactory work done up to the present by the Office of the Supervising Architect in connection with the design of these structures and trust that the means may be found to complete this work in the Office of the Supervising Architect within the time limit permitted us.[45]

MacCormack was not alone in his concerns. W. E. Reynolds, Assistant Director of the Public Works Branch, had written a few days earlier to the Assistant Director of the Department of Labor, discussing the accelerated timeline proposed for the completion of the drawings for the Ellis Island buildings. Reynolds, however, was also familiar with the physical constraints governing work at the site and he cautioned that, "the seawall and fill forms the foundation for nearly all of the three buildings and it is very doubtful that this portion of the seawall contract will be completed and ready for the superstructure to go above it until early in April."[46]

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

> By reducing the checking period to one week for the three divisions concerned, it would be possible to send the drawings to the Architectural-Engineering Division for specification in one week from January 31, 1934, that is, on February 7. And if the specifications were started now, while the drawings are being brought to completion, it should save considerable time in the Department for placing the work on the market.[47]

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

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

As the situation developed, Reynolds was right to caution his peers to remember the extensive work necessary to complete the seawall prior to building foundations for any of these structures. Within a few months the seawall construction project had run into numerous problems, was both behind and over-budget, and the allocated public funds were running dry. Frances Perkins and the INS worked together to itemize aspects of Federal Project 62 (FP 62: the Ellis Island allocation fund) which could be cut in order to recuperate a deficit of $176,000. Faced with the choice of compromising aspects of the urgently-needed new Ferry Building and Immigration Buildings, or of eliminating other "optional" projects, they began to consider the wholesale elimination of the new Recreation Building. Finally, on June 26, Perkins authorized the elimination of the $11,000 allocated for the two Recreation Shelters and the $45,000 set aside for the construction of the Recreation Building.[48] In December, W. H. Wagner, Assistant Director of the INS wrote to the Public Works Branch of the Procurement Division, ranking the desirability of various projects at Ellis Island, confirmed that the government should focus on the construction of a new Recreation Building rather than renovating the older structure. He further commented, "The two yard shelters would be desirable if all other work specified under 62 is taken care of."[49]

Constructing new Recreation Facilities for Ellis Island

In August 1935, Wagner applied to the WPA for further funds for work on Ellis Island, which he described in an internal office memo as a request for "an allotment of $84,340 for renovation of station buildings and equipment and for landscaping grounds."[50] It may have been partially these funds that allowed the Recreation Shelter project to be taken up again in the following months. With this infusion of additional funds, the Procurement Division resumed its plans for constructing a new Recreation Building and Recreation Shelters on Ellis Island. In defining the new work to be completed, the Procurement Division grouped the construction of the new Recreation Building and Shelters with extensive work laying on pavement and concrete in the open area between Islands 2 and 3 and the adjacent hospital wards.[51]

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[48] Memorandum, Frances Perkins authorizing cuts to F.P. 62, (26 June 1934), Box 5879, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II. For further information regarding related delays to the Recreation Building see historical context of, Sienkewicz, "Ellis Island, Recreation Building," HABS No. NY-6086-V.
[49] Letter, W. H. Wagner to the Procurement Division, Public Works Branch, (26 December 1934), Box 5878, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[50] Letter, W. H. Wagner to District Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, (27 August 1935), FF 330, Box 16, RG 79, NARA – NE Region.
[51] A copy of the written specifications for the job is available FF175 - Recreation Building: Construction, 1935, Box 9, RG 79, NARA – NE Region.

On December 9, 1935 the Division authorized an advertisement soliciting bids for the completion of this work to be circulated in newspapers throughout New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston.[52] Nine bids were received and the Albert Development Corp. of Brooklyn, New York offered the lowest construction bid of $127,245.[53] Given the federal government's strict policy of accepting the lowest bid, the Albert Development Corporation was eventually awarded the contract, but not without a challenge from the second lowest bidder, John Milnes Co. Inc., whose bid had totaled $128,000. The issue centered on the government's alternate indication of limestone string courses and details in the drawings, but terra cotta work in the specifications. Unaware of the political motivations behind the government's switch from limestone to terra cotta, John Milnes Co. Inc. wrote to the Procurement Division after receiving the list of bids, reminding the officials that they had submitted an alternate bid in which limestone could be used at a significant savings:

> …we submitted an alternate proposition in which we could make a reduction in our price of $2000.00 if Indiana limestone was used in lieu of Terra Cotta as specified.
>
> Inasmuch as this would make a saving to the Government of $1245.00 if limestone were used—and the plans were originally drawn for the use of limestone—we would be glad to know if it is likely that this will be taken into consideration in the award of this contract. It is generally conceded that the use of limestone is a much better and more expensive material to use than Terra Cotta, and, no doubt, this latter material was specified in order to keep the cost within the appropriation.
>
> As it is evident from the figures quoted, and which you have in hand, that the acceptance of our bid on Limestone will not only make a saving on this job of $1245.00, but will also give a better job, we hope that due consideration will be given this matter in the award of the contract.[54]

Despite the inconsistency between the written specifications and the drawings, the government rebuffed John Milnes Co. Inc.'s request on the basis that their alternate proposal did not correspond precisely to the materials specified in the written guidelines.[55]

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[52] Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[53] Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[54] Letter, John Milnes Co., Inc. to Assistant Director of Procurement, PWB, (22 January 1936), Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[55] On January 27, 1936 Balch at the Procurement Division answered John Milnes Co. Inc. with the response that, "It is noted that you submitted with your proposal a proposition offering to make a reduction in your price of $2,000 if Indiana limestone is used in lieu of terra cotta as specified. Consideration cannot be given to your offer as it is a requirement that proposals submitted must be in strict conformity with specification requirements and an award, if circumstances permit, must be based thereon." Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

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

> Since award of the above contract was made to us, we have investigated the possibility of the use of Limestone throughout instead of using Architectural Terra Cotta above the water table. Since the specification calls for the Terra Cotta to be finished similar in texture to the Limestone of the water table, the use of Limestone throughout will achieve the wall appearance required.
>
> Furthermore, solid Limestone blocks would probably be preferable structurally to hollow Terra Cotta.
>
> The cost of natural stone is more than that of cast Terra Cotta but we propose to furnish natural Limestone as called for in the specifications and shown on plans above the water table at no addition to the contract price. Our experience in using Terra Cotta leads us to believe that avoidance of the difficulties in construction arising from use of this material will compensate us for the additional cost.[56]

In an internal office memo, Key proposed that the Procurement Division accept the substitution, noting: "It is the recommendation of the Construction Engineer that this proposal be accepted as a minor modification with no change in contract price. Early action should be taken on this proposal as the contractor is holding the awards of his subcontracts awaiting this action."[57] However, the proposal was again rebuffed, with an explicit reiteration of the local politics of terra cotta in place of limestone, "As this bldg. is in the TC [terra cotta] district & the other bldgs recently constructed on the Island use TC, the spec require TC in place of stone where shown on the drawings, above the water table, this material is architecturally satisfactory—Rec. no change."[58] This exchange ended any further discussion of substituting limestone for terra cotta, but the issue would arise again in an interim inspection of the building when the inspecting engineer C. T. Holden, who had looked over the building on-site with Key, pointedly reported that,

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[56] Letter, Albert Development Corp. to Clyde C. Key, (5 March 1936), Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[57] Letter, Clyde C. Key to an unspecified official, [n.d.], Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121.
[58] Hand written notes of a reply written to Key on the verso of his letter, Box 5875, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II; Final rejection of Albert Development Corp. was not made to the contractor until March 26, 1936 by CR Roberts, who also advised the contractor to "follow contract requirements," Box 5874, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.

"terra cotta trim exhibits the usual terra cotta faults, and seems to have been needlessly used on this job, as the contractor proposed to furnish limestone at no extra cost."[59]

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

Once begun, the construction of the Recreation Shelter was both rapid and unremarkable. Periodic inspection reports filed by government engineers document the expected and actual progress of the building and show that, with a few relatively small issues along the way, the Albert Development Corporation succeeded in meeting expectations. At the end of May 1936, the inspection engineer John J. England found that the concrete foundation of Shelter 1 had been completed. The contractor was at work on all the recreational facilities as a group, so England further noted that the foundations and much of the underground plumbing for the Recreation Building were finished, and the preparatory work for pouring the foundation of Shelter 2 was completed. He reported, "The quality of workmanship and materials and concrete work now in place is very satisfactory."[60] England concluded that overall, "The work as a whole is proceeding in a satisfactory manner and is under good direction and supervision both by Contractor and Government."[61]

He did take issue with the terra cotta work on the shelters. The original design had called for the lintels in the colonnades to each consist of a single, long limestone slab spanning the distance between the pilasters. In the transition from terra cotta to limestone, however, the treatment of this detail had not been adjusted. The result was unappealing and structurally worrisome. England recognized that there was nothing that could be done to change the existing treatment of the terra cotta, but he commented for future reference:

> the lintels…on Shelter Bldgs are in four pieces which creates a joint on the center line of opening. Structurally and also from a point of view of good

[59] Letter, C. T. Holden to the Supervising Engineer, Public Buildings Branch, (25 November 1936), Box 5873, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[60] Report, John England, Jr., Supervising Engineer for the Public Works Branch, (26 May 1936), Box 5874, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[61] Ibid.

> jointing for an opening, that is not so good. In this particular case it may not matter but it is respectfully suggested by writer that such masonry and other joints should be spaced and material be of sections in size to straddle center of opening.[62]

England did not expect that the problem would be corrected and he did not blame the contractor or the architects of the Public Buildings Service specifically for the lack of oversight. Nevertheless, his comment pointed toward a significant shift between the planned façade and the building as completed.

In November, C. T. Holden travelled to conduct a second inspection of the work. The Recreation Shelters were completed, except for finishing the floors, and the sidewalk work was fully finished. At the Recreation Building, structural work was complete and interior plastering over half completed. Other interior details such as finished floor and trim were not yet installed. Although the contractor was "delayed originally 70 days" due to the tardy delivery of structural steel for the Recreation Building, Holden assessed that the contract was 91.5% completed and that the contractor would still have "an excellent chance of making up this time," in order to meet the contractual completion date of December 27, 1936 with a concession of some additional days for time lost.[63]

With regard to the appearance of the structures, though, Holden had very specific criticisms. In addition to objecting to the use of terra cotta in place of limestone, as cited above, Holden criticized aspects of both the appearance and the integrity of the bricks. Although the brick had been approved by the government, Holden noted that "the exterior brick work is a Hudson River product and has previously been criticized for its lack of quality for face work."[64] Holden further pointed out that sufficient attention was not given to the aesthetic quality of the brickwork. The uniform color of the brick meant that the Flemish bond pattern, more difficult and costly than common bond, was not really visible.

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

> We have substantially completed our contract for construction of Shelters, Recreation Building, etc. The sidewalks and pavements have been in use for many months, the Shelters have been available for occupancy for

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Letter, C. T. Holden to the Supervising Engineer, Public Buildings Branch, (25 November 1936), Box 5873, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[64] Ibid.

> several months, the Recreation Building has been used for storage of furniture for several weeks and is now fully occupied.[65]

Final settlement of the contract, however, would not occur for another year and a half, delayed in part by the contractor taking on an additional unrelated contract at Ellis Island and, in part by protracted government inspections of the Recreation Building, which identified several problems that needed to be addressed. While they worked on correcting these problems, the Albert Development Corporation conducted protracted negotiations with federal officials in order to gain approval for the delay in the completion of the building. Initially, the office manager intended to deny the contractor's request, but in an internal memo Melick, one of the job engineers, itemized the numerous delays and errors caused by the federal oversight of this contract and firmly asserted, "the Office is not in a position to deny the contractor's request for further consideration."[66] Finally, in November 1938, W. E. Reynolds reviewed the status of the work and the original requirements of the contract and recommended that the government drop any further claims against the contractor and close the account by paying the Albert Development Corporation $4,257.50.[67] The check was written the next week and the final letters exchanged with regard to the work on November 13, 1938.

Photographs taken upon the completion of construction reveal that the Recreation Shelter originally stood in an open area devoid of foliage or substantial ground cover (Figure 3). Concrete sidewalks crisscrossed the flat expanse of ground created between Islands 2 and 3 but otherwise the outdoor recreation area offered few amenities to its potential users. Patients could certainly sit in the shade of the Recreation Shelter, from which they may have been able to glimpse views out over the water or to study the simply decorated east façade of the Recreation Building, but those strolling along the wide sidewalks would have been fully exposed to the elements. In 1939 a planting plan was developed to increase the utility of these spaces and some of the extant rich foliage dates from this project.[68] Not all of the outdoor recreation spaces planned by the Ellis Island Committee were brought to fruition, but a new open air recreation space was created for detainees on Island 1, and a baseball field was added near the new Immigration Building. Additional small fenced yards were created attached to the wards on Island 3 to allow restricted fresh air access for patients who were also detainees.[69]

The specific ways in which the shelters were used were not documented. It seems reasonable that the buildings served primarily as a shaded seating area for hospital

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[65] Letter, D. Thyme at the Albert Development Corporation to Key, (13 April 1937), Box 5872, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[66] Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[67] Box 5871, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II.
[68] Box 5870, Entry 31C, RG 121, NARA II. See Folder 6 for the Report of Brian Uhl to LeRoy Barton about the proposed planting plan at Ellis Island. For further discussion of the landscape plan see Stakely, 95.
[69] For a more extensive summary of the landscape work completed on Ellis Island during the 1930s see Stakely, 87-90.

patients. Perhaps in good weather vocational training courses or other activities were hosted in the shade of the pavilions by social services workers.

During World War II, immigration was severely reduced at Ellis Island and the facilities were used primarily for detainees, including a large number of German war prisoners. The island also was used as a base by the United States Coast Guard. Following the war the U. S. Public Health Service again resumed management of the buildings. When the health service facilities closed, the Coast Guard again occupied the buildings from 1951 to 1954. At some point after its construction, and probably during the Coast Guard's tenure on the island, the shelter's oculus windows were covered in a thick wire mesh. It may also have been during these years that the east facing open colonnade of Shelter 2 was filled in with brick, enclosing the building on all four sides and eliminating its function as a garden pavilion.[70] In 1954, Ellis Island was closed completely. When the facilities closed all the buildings lay fallow and the islands became over-grown in foliage. When Ellis Island became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, conditions on the islands had deteriorated so significantly that a number of years passed before an attempt was made to even clear out the overgrowth from Islands 2 and 3.[71] The Recreation Shelter at the junction of Islands 2 and 3 remains in deteriorating condition, with roofing tiles from nearby buildings stored in the colonnade space.

The Recreation Shelters at Ellis Island stand in company with their contemporary Recreation Building as relatively intact representatives of the type of buildings constructed by the Works Progress Administration in the mid-1930s. The well-documented design and construction history of the island's recreation facilities links the structures to a social and historical moment in the United States when public and private organizations placed an increasing emphasis on the value of leisure and recreation for both individual and social health. As part of a larger hospital complex, the Recreation Shelter contributed to the medical regime at the island for long-term convalescent care, by providing an outdoor space wherein patients could enjoy fresh air while being protected from the elements.

After nearly a decade of negative press about the island's facilities and four years between its design and construction, the Recreation Shelter was completed toward the end of the site's active history, and may well have seen more use by members of the Coast Guard and detainees during World War II then it did by the patients for whom it was intended. Nevertheless, as New Deal structures with a public and social purpose, the Recreation Shelter is linked to the larger history of the nation's premiere immigration station and played a contributing role in the federal government response to the shifting dynamics of immigration in the interwar period.

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[70] This documentation only covers the history and appearance of Shelter 1 and the HABS team did not gain access to the interior of Shelter 2. Further information about the repurposing of this structure can, therefore, not be provided here.

[71] For a detailed discussion of the conditions of the island in this period, see Stakely, *Cultural Landscape Report*; and Unrau, *Historic Structure Report*.

PART II. PHYSICAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Ellis Island Recreation Shelter is a single-story brick structure, which sits on a concrete foundation and features terra cotta detailing. It consists of an open colonnade of square brick columns with buff glazed terra cotta bases and capitals and enclosed rooms at the north and south ends.[72] As a subsidiary structure to the Recreation Building, the Shelter also features a simplified, Modern version of the Georgian Revival design characteristic of the adjacent hospital buildings.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair. The architectural terra cotta detailing of the building is beginning to degrade.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions (at brick): 82'-2" x 16'-4 ¼"

2. Foundations: The structure sits on wood pilings and concrete spread footings supporting a low reinforced concrete slab, making the structure appear to sit at grade. This slab also serves as the floor surface.

3. Walls: The exterior walls consist of Flemish bond brick veneer over structural hollow clay tiles. There is a glazed terra cotta block entablature encircling the building that includes a plain frieze and projecting cornice joined by a simple ogee molding. Six square brick columns on both the west and east façades of the building create an open-air colonnade. Each column sits on a buff glazed terra cotta base and is topped by a simple Tuscan capital.

4. Structural System: The building rests on a system of creosoted wood pilings and concrete spread footings. The walls are load bearing masonry. The flat roof utilizes a system of concrete beams and panels.

5. Stoops: The east face of the structure has three concrete ramps rising from the pedestrian walkway to the floor of the shelter. These ramps were not included in the original design of the building and were added at an unknown date.

6. Chimneys: None.

7. Openings:
    a. Doorways and doors: The Recreation Shelter is accessed via open colonnades that run along both the east and west façades. The enclosed rooms on the north and south ends of the structure each have a single

[72] The enclosed ends of the Recreation Shelter are oriented to the south/southeast and north/northwest, but to simplify the description here they are considered to be facing due south and north.

entrance door facing the interior colonnade space. The door into the north enclosure is a wood panel door. Heavy gauge wire has been installed on the interior side of the door and the lower half of the door, which was once an inset wood panel, is now missing. The upper half of the door is fenestrated, with nine rectangular lights. The door into the south enclosure is a wooden panel door. It preserves an intact square panel with beveled edge in the lower half. The upper half of the door, which was once fenestrated like that of the northern enclosure, has been covered with plywood on both the interior and the exterior.

b. Windows: The enclosed rooms at the ends of the shelter each feature four oculus windows; one each on the east and west fronts, and two on the north and south. The oculus windows visually connect the Recreation Shelter to the contemporary Recreation Building. The circular openings are outlined by a course of header bricks. The steel sash windows are roughly three and a half feet in diameter and divided into nine smaller lights by a grid of perpendicular metal muntins. The sash is set directly into the brick wall with a moderate reveal.

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

At the south storage room, these oculus windows have a square heavy-gauge metal grille added on the exterior that conceals the windows. In the north storage room, these same metal grilles have been attached on the interior wall, securing the oculus windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, Covering: The Recreation Shelter has a flat concrete panel roof covered in composition roofing and bounded by brick parapet walls terra cotta coping and copper flashing.

b. Cornice: The Recreation Shelter has a decorative buff glazed terra cotta cornice at the base of the parapet walls.

c. Dormers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See measured drawings HABS NY-6086-W for complete plans for this structure. Original construction drawings for the building are still extant and the plans, as prepared by the Public Buildings Service in 1935 remain substantially accurate with minor subsequent alterations.

The floor plan of this structure reflects its indoor-outdoor function. The central rectangular shaft of the building is a semi-enclosed indoor-outdoor space, bounded by the colonnades on the west and east façades. The north and south ends of the structure both contain a small, square room. Originally designed as toilet rooms, these spaces had already been transformed into storage areas when the Public Buildings Service completed their final plans for the structure in 1935.

2. Stairways: None.

3. Flooring: The interior floors of the end-rooms are concrete, as is the floor of the indoor-outdoor colonnade. Large squares are incised into the concrete, giving it an unobtrusive decorative cadence.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The end walls of the colonnade space are Flemish bond brick like the exterior walls, with the addition of a course of soldier bricks at the bottom of the wall. The structural concrete beams of this ceiling are covered with stucco on metal mesh lathe. The interior walls of the north and south storage rooms originally consisted of structural terra cotta finished with plaster. The ceilings were composed of structural concrete beams covered with plaster on metal mesh lathe. These surface treatments are now badly deteriorated, revealing the structural materials below.

5. Openings: A single door at both the north and south storage rooms gives access to the indoor-outdoor colonnade. On the interior, these doorways are finished with simple wood trim and have a shallow reveal. These door surrounds are composed of unornamented wood, once painted white but now weathered, and rest on simple wood plinths.

6. Decorative features and trim: None.

7. Hardware: The hardware has been removed from the doors. Original window hardware, however, is partially intact. These windows opened horizontally along a central pivot hinge. Several metal hand cranks remain.

8. Mechanical equipment: None.

a. Heating, Ventilation: None.

b. Lighting: A line of ceiling fixtures runs down the center of the colonnade space, with a single matching ceiling fixture in each storage room. The original fixtures, four of which remain in place, feature a metal flush mounted base with an opaque white glass globe. Interspersed between these original fixtures on the ceiling of the colonnade area are small circular porcelain light fixtures with exposed bulbs.

c. Plumbing: None.

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

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: A computerized Drawings Index System for all types of Ellis Island architectural and engineering drawings is located at the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center (TIC). Many historic drawings are digitized and available at http://etic.nps.gov. The drawings most useful in preparing this report were a full set prepared by the Public Works Branch, Procurement Division, Treasury Department of "Shelters No. 1 & No. 2, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, NY." Specific sheets are listed below:

- Elevations, Plans, Sections, Drawing No. 6-1A, (17 October 1935).
- Plumbing, Heating and Lighting, Drawing No. PHL-4-450A, (1 November 1935).

Several site plans were also useful:

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

B. Early Views: The Recreation Shelter appears with the Recreation Building in several construction photographs located in the collections of the Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. They are found in Record Group 121-BCP, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Prints: Photographs of the Construction of Federal Buildings, 1995-1954. Selected useful views include:

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

C. Bibliography:

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

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Leighninger, Robert D., Jr. "Cultural Infrastructure: The Legacy of New Deal Public Space," *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 4 (May 1996): 226-236.

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IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Recreation Shelter and other selected structures on Ellis Island (Phase II) was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), within the Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) of the National Park Service (Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief, HABS; Richard O'Connor, Chief, HDP) during 2010. The project was sponsored by Statue of Liberty National Monument, David Luchsinger, Superintendent. Field recording and measured drawings were completed by Paul Davidson, HABS

Architect and Project Supervisor; and HABS Architects Daniel De Sousa, Alexander Matsov, and Anne E. Kidd. HAER Architect Dana Lockett and HABS Architect Robert Arzola served as Project Leaders. Julia Sienkewicz (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) and HABS Historian Lisa Pfueller Davidson served as project historians. HABS Photographer James Rosenthal completed large-format photographs during fall 2010. Assistance was provided by the staff of Statue of Liberty National Monument, particularly Diana Pardue (Chief, Museum Services Division), Richard Holmes (Archaeologist), Don Fiorino (Historical Architect), and Kathleen Sullivan (Project Manager).

V. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL – ILLUSTRATIONS

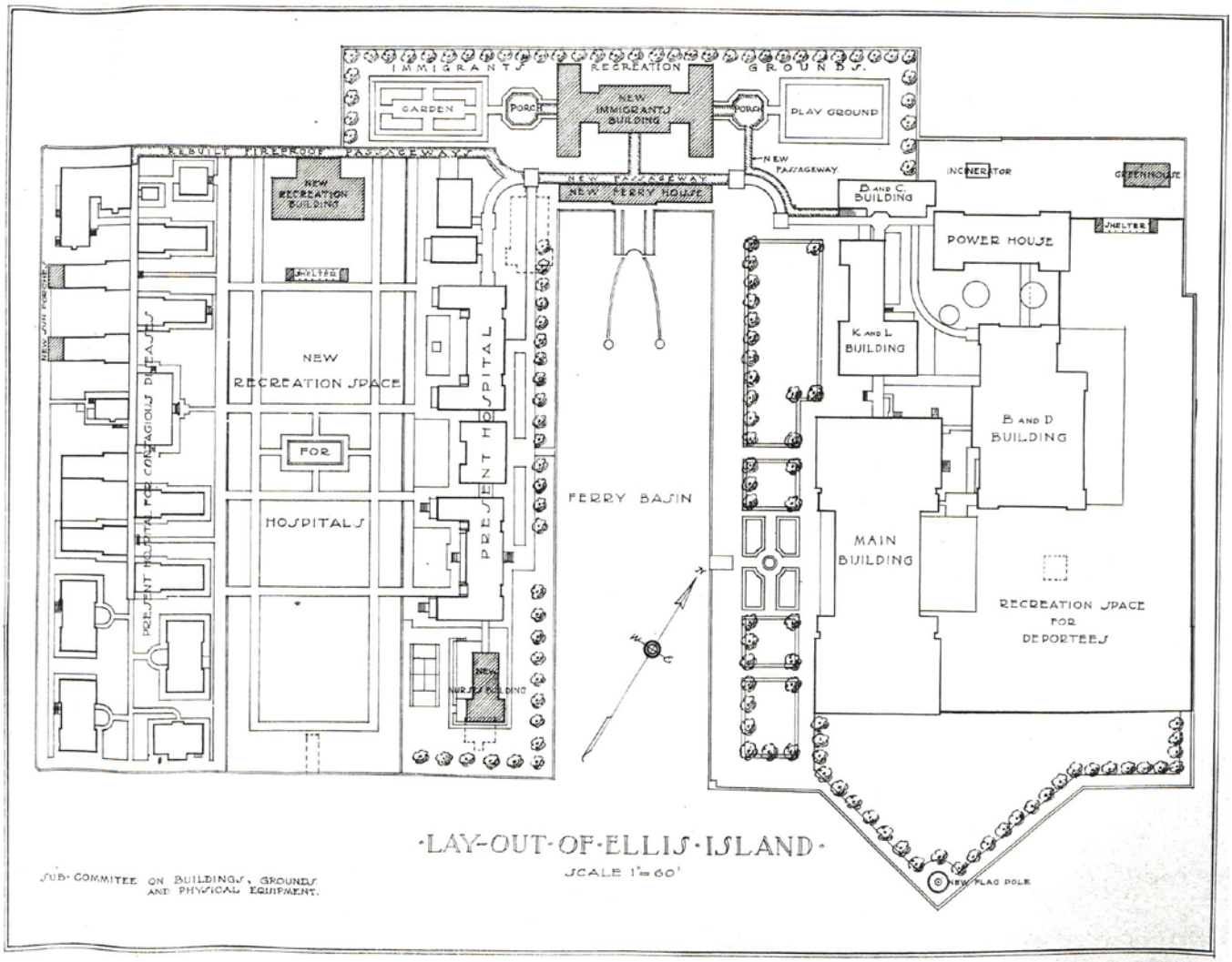

Figure 1: "Lay-Out of Ellis Island," 1934
Source: *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*

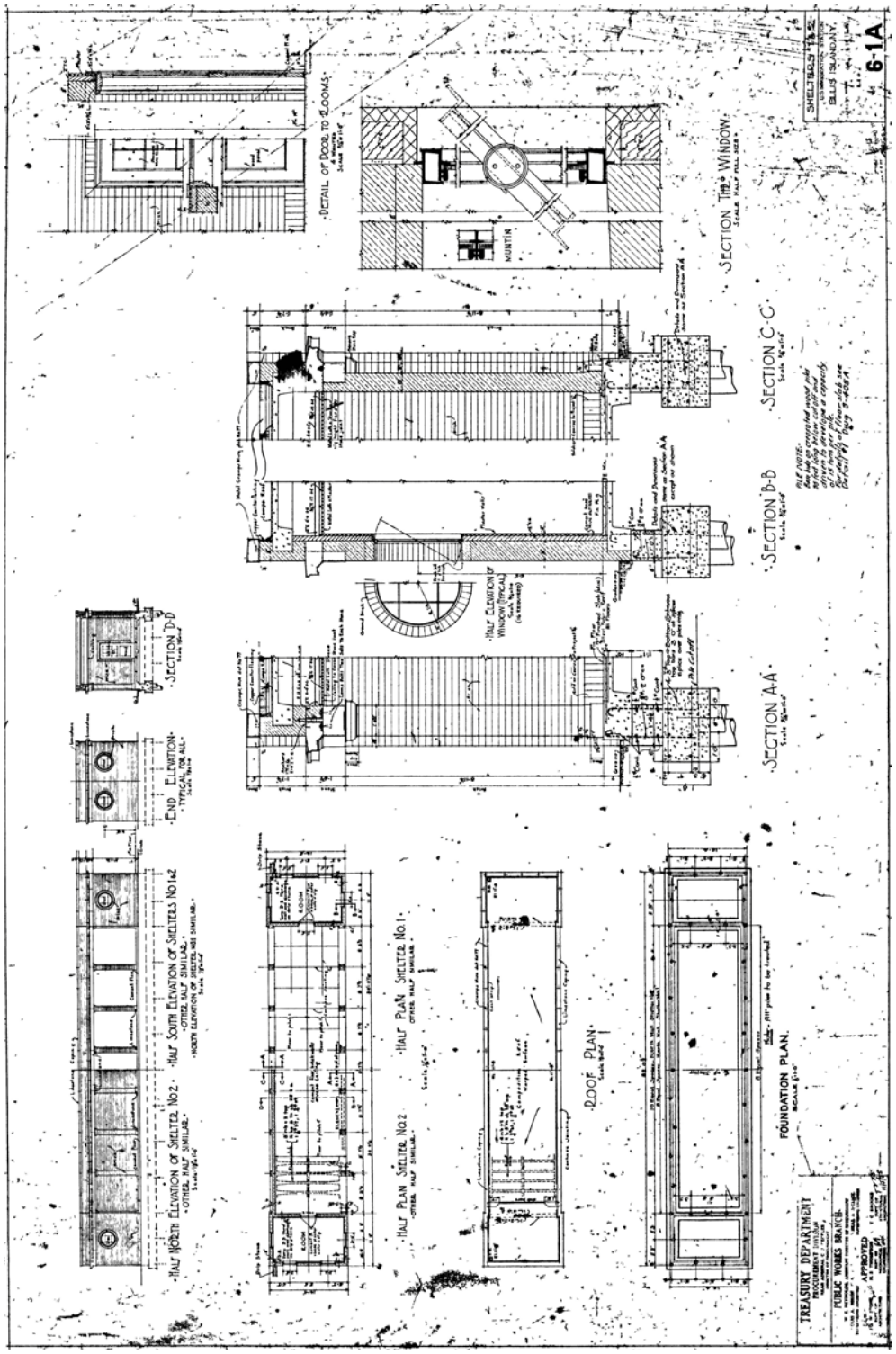

Figure 2: "Shelters No. 1 & No. 2, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, NY," Drawing No. 6-1A, (17 October 1935).
Source: Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, National Park Service

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