



## **Berkeley Park Bathhouse, Preliminary Report 7 April 2019**

### **General Information**

Owner: City and County of Denver

Location Description: Bathhouse: located south of the lake and northwest of the tennis courts in Berkeley Park.

Berkeley Park: Extending between I-70 on the north, West 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the south, Sheridan Boulevard on the West, and Tennyson Street on the east.

Property Type: Public Park Bathhouse (1913) associated with the bathing beach. After lake swimming ended circa 1951, the building was vacant until 1952, when a group of Northwest Denver retired men were allowed to use it for their shuffleboard club.

Year Built: 1913, expanded 1919, modified in later years

Cost: The original cost was not found. One source reported it cost \$10,000 to build the bathhouse, create a swimming beach, and erect a pavilion and boat landing in 1913. In 1919 another \$10,000 was spent on the building.

Size: Original size not known. In 1919 two additions, each 30' X 40' were added to the original building.

Architecture: Mission Revival style (historic design)

Architect: Unknown. Possibly park department designer F.W. Ameter.

### **Historical Background**

#### *Berkeley Park Early History*

Ruth Wiberg's *Rediscovering Northwest Denver* summarizes the early history of Berkeley Park: "Berkeley Park was acquired piecemeal by the city [after it annexed the Town of Berkeley in 1902] from private owners, some as early as 1906. The city gradually improved it, especially under Mayor Speer's administration. Grass was planted, playgrounds put in, the lake dredged, dirt dumped on the swampy area at the east end of the lake. There was a rock garden and a memorial grove to the pioneers of the area, but these can no longer be identified. The Berkeley Family Resort and dancehall [on the south side of the lake, which was of much concern to local

residents for its sale of alcohol], of course, was discontinued, but a large pavilion and bathhouse was built at about the same location [as the resort] in 1913.”

#### *Early History of Berkeley Park Lake Use and Bathhouse*

In January 1907 the park department announced it would allow boating in Berkeley Lake, which would be “cleaned out and properly walled and boats will be put on it. This body of water covers thirty acres, and is larger than the lake at City park.... A pavilion will be put in Berkeley park, the place will be cleaned up and made attractive and privileges will be sold, so it will be a gala place for the crowds, which seek outdoor joy in the summer time.” (*Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 1 January 1907). In July the *Post* judged, “North Denver is to have a park, which except for size, is to be a likely rival of City park. Through the efforts of John McDonough [a prominent developer in the area], with whom boosting the North Side is a hobby, the park board today let the contract for fifty boats which are to be used on the Berkeley lake, around which a beautiful park will be built.” The land was to be plowed in the winter and a lawn sown in the spring. The park board promised to spend \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year for four or five years until Berkeley was equal to any park in the city. The lake in 1907 covered forty-seven acres (*Denver Post*, 19 July 1907).

The park formally opened to the public in early August 1907, when the celebration included a concert provided by the First Regiment of the Colorado National Guard. An August 1907 photograph shows a small frame pavilion attached to a boat landing jutting into the lake. A bandstand was also present at an unknown site. The park department promised to spend thousands of dollars in an improvement plan that, “combined with the large grove of trees which occupies the main portion of the park, will no doubt make it an ideal recreation spot” (*Denver Post*, 4 August 1907).

#### *History of Berkeley Park Bathhouse*

By early June 1913 the Berkeley Park Bathhouse was nearing completion, as was a bathhouse in Washington Park. The *Denver Post* noted both structures had been “demanded by frequenters of these parks for years. The pavilion [bathhouse] in Berkeley park will answer the double purpose of a general pleasure house and a bathhouse, and it means the opening of bathing [swimming] in Berkeley park. For years, residents in the vicinity and frequenters of this pleasure ground have been demanding of the park board that a bathing beach be established on the big lake....” Previously, swimming in the lake was not allowed (*Denver Post*, 1 June 1913).

Local newspapers began focusing attention on the park in anticipation of completion of the new improvements. The *Rocky Mountain News* extolled the “beauty of the setting—the lake at Berkeley park is one of the most picturesque in the West,” and calling Berkeley “Denver’s newest and prettiest bathing beach and park.” The water of Berkeley lake was described as “the warmest and cleanest water in any Denver lake” (*Rocky Mountain News*, 6, 9 and 13 June 1913).

The *Rocky Mountain News* noted that “special pains have been put forth in the constructing of the bathhouse and pavilion. Every room is sunny, well ventilated and so constructed to provide the minutest needs of the bather. The park commission has spared nothing in making the buildings the best yet offered to the public.” A brief description of the bathhouse noted that it

included “hot showers, rest and refreshment rooms, rustic veranda overlooking the lake...” (*Rocky Mountain News*, 9 and 13 June 1913).

The public was eager to celebrate the new improvements thanks to a *Rocky Mountain News*-sponsored a swimming contest described as the “greatest in the history of the West.” The *News* reported, “Never before has an attempt been made here to hold aquatic sports on a similar scale.” Workmen erected a 20’ diving tower and bathing pier for the contest, which was intended to generate interest in swimming and water sports (*Rocky Mountain News*, 6 June 1913). Before the event controversy arose among women participating in the swimming contest who objected to the requirement that they wear suits which included skirts to their knees, bloomers, and high necks (*Denver Post*, 13 June 1913).

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1913, when the new bathhouse and bathing beach opened, a reported 30,000 people were present to see the swimming contests, view the improvements, and enjoy the park. The *Rocky Mountain News* commented, “It was inspiring in this dust-bound city of the plains to witness the scene.” *The City of Denver* stated, “At Berkeley Park, the handsome bathhouse has just been finished, and public bathing privileges granted for the first time on July 4<sup>th</sup>. The appreciation of the people was attested by the large crowds invading the suburban park throughout the entire day...” (*City of Denver*, 12 July 1913)

In the years after the opening of the bathhouse and bathing beach, local newspapers contained many articles about the popularity of swimming events at Berkeley Park. In January 1919 the parks department announced the bathing facilities at Berkeley Park would be more than doubled in size. James A. Burnett, Manager of Improvements and Parks, prepared the expansion plans. The plans called for two additions to the original building, each 30’ X 40’, which would be used solely for locker rooms and greatly increase the total number of lockers. In addition the main part of the building was remodeled and improved (no description provided) (*Denver Post*, 17 January 1919). In May *Municipal Facts* reported that, “the most notable improvement was made at Berkeley Park by the addition of two wings to the concrete bathhouse. The large veranda facing the lake has also been enclosed with concrete and steel lockers installed.” The improvements cost \$10,000. (*Denver Municipal Facts*, May 1919)

#### *Later Uses*

The bathhouse functioned during the summer season in association with lake swimming for many years. In the September-October 1930 issue of *Municipal Facts*, a drawing of the “Bathhouse and Restaurant” at Berkeley appeared. In 1950 the bathhouse was remodeled into a year-round recreation center at a cost of \$21,184 from a million-dollar bond issue of 1948. An article noted it had previously been used only three months each year (*Denver Post*, 6 June and 22 July 1950). An outbreak of polio led to the end of swimming in Denver lakes.

The bathhouse was vacant when the Berkeley Park Shuffleboard Association formed in 1952 and requested that the parks department allow them to utilize it. Reportedly, “the Denver Recreation Department was happy to find a use for the idle building.” The group was composed principally of retired Northwest Denver men, including former railroad and tramway workers, firemen, and post office employees. A 1967 article in the *Denver Post* indicated the members “noticed that the old bathhouse on the shores of Berkeley Lake stood empty and deserted after

the city closed the lake to swimmers.” The club created shuffleboard courts in the building and moved in furniture for their member’s use. The building was described as “warm and cozy in the winter and refreshingly cool in the summer.” It was shaded by large trees and had forced air heating. Another article indicated “the old bathhouse, built on two levels, is ideal for the club. The lower floor, being cement, lends itself to painting and striping for shuffleboard. The clubhouse was open three afternoons a week and its members competed with clubs from other cities and states. (*Denver Post*, 15 November 1974)

*Other Uses of Berkeley Lake.* Berkeley Lake was also the site of some of the best skating ice in Denver. In December 1911 *Municipal Facts* reported, “Berkeley park lake was filled with skaters last Sunday. The ice was smooth and heavy and it is estimated that over 1,000 persons, at one time, were on the lake. For some reason yet unknown the waters of Berkeley lake freeze better for skating, and also earlier in the season, than other public lakes.” (*Denver Municipal Facts*, 16 December 1911).

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## Historic Photographs of Berkeley Park Bathhouse

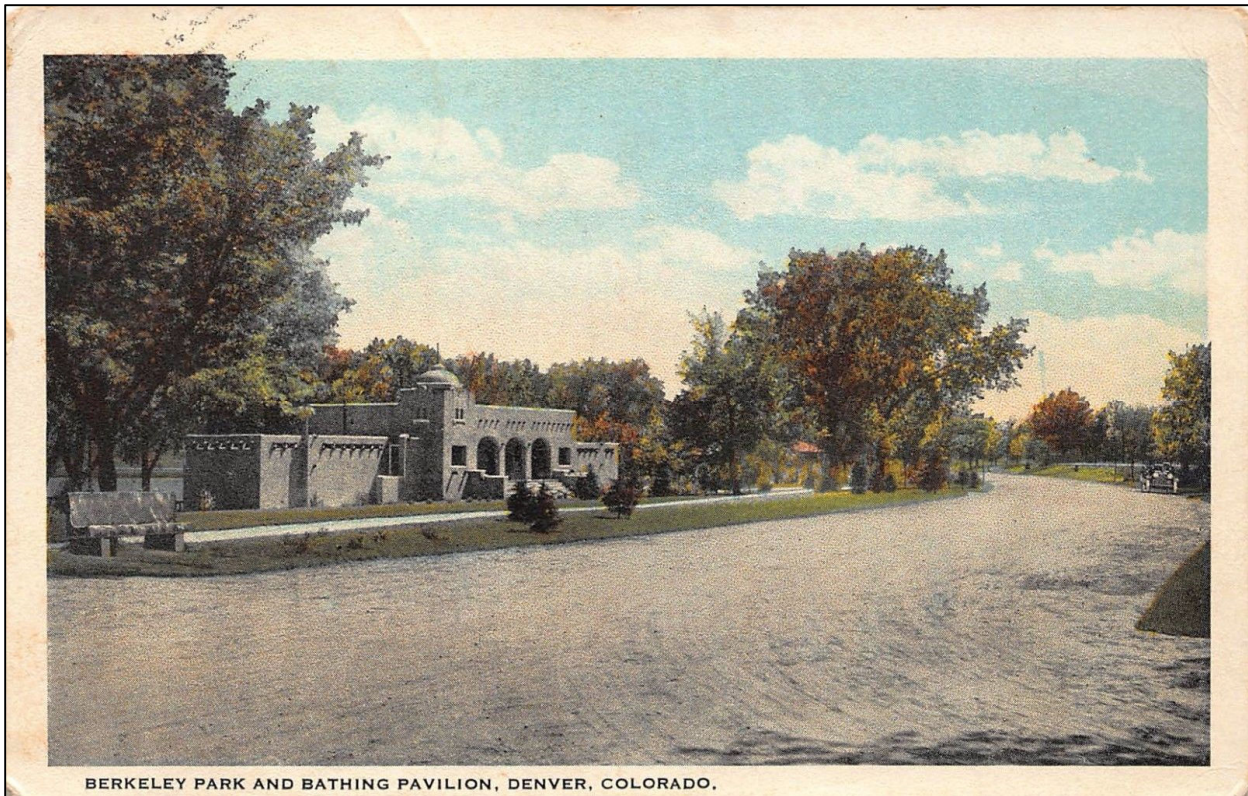


Front (south) of bathhouse (view north). SOURCE: image number X-27149, ca. May 1918, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.



Front (south) and west wall of bathhouse (view northeast). SOURCE: image number X-27148, ca. 1918, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.





BERKELEY PARK AND BATHING PAVILION, DENVER, COLORADO.

Front (south) and west wall of bathhouse (view northeast). SOURCE: historic postcard view, ca. 1924 (postmark), Tom and Laurie Simmons, historic postcard image collection, Denver, Colorado.



Front (south) and east wall of bathhouse (view northwest). SOURCE: image number X-20281, ca. 1930-50, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.





Rear (north) and west wall of bathhouse (view southeast). SOURCE: image number X-20283, ca. 1930-50, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.



Interior of the bathhouse in 1962, when it featured shuffleboard courts and served as the headquarters of the Retired Men's Club. SOURCE: Getty Images, 26 July 1962.