AUDUBON PARK COMMISSION COLLECTION, ADDENDUM 1

(Mss 182)

Inventory

Earl K. Long Library
University of New Orleans
November 1985

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Summary

Size: 2 items
Geographic locations: New Orleans, La.
Inclusive dates: 1984, 1985
Audubon Park occupies a 190-acre site in uptown New Orleans bounded by St. Charles Avenue, Magazine Street, Exposition Boulevard, and Walnut Street, where the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition was held in 1884-1885. One of the fair's main buildings, Horticultural Hall, became the principal attraction in the development of the site into a park and served to centralize activity, even after a hurricane destroyed it in 1915. Meanwhile, on May 31, 1886, the New Orleans City Council established a commission to operate the park. Less than two months later, on July 19, the upper section was named in honor of naturalist and artist John James Audubon, who lived and worked in Louisiana.

In 1893, noted park designer Frederick Law Olmsted was invited to draw up plans for a million-dollar improvement program, but not until 1897 did his son, John Charles Olmsted, inspect the site and begin work on what would become the master plan for Audubon Park. Already, in 1891, the park had installed its first kiddie ride, the flying horses. In 1898 the miniature train began operating, and golfing became available. Three years later, Shetland pony rides for children were offered.

When a hurricane destroyed Horticultural Hall in 1915, the insurance payment of ten thousand dollars was used to build a greenhouse and a cage for flying birds. The latter foreshadowed today’s zoo. A formal garden took shape in 1921, and in 1924 an aquarium was opened. In the same year, the park regained use of a fifty-acre site which had been occupied by a sugar experiment station, and the additional space opened the way for various athletic facilities. Perhaps the most notable of these was the natatorium, which was, when it opened on May 3, 1928, the largest swimming pool in the South. User fees paid for the facility and set a precedent for the present zoo.

In 1919, Daniel D. Moore, manager-editor of the New Orleans Times-Picayune,
offered five hundred dollars in seed money toward the establishment of a zoo. During the 1930s, Civil Works Administration funds from New Deal agencies and a bequest from Valentine Merz financed zoo construction, and on May 15, 1938, the Merz Memorial Zoo admitted its first visitors. Some of its facilities still remain in use.

Despite national acclaim in the 1950s for its achievement in producing the first whooping cranes—an almost extinct species—hatched in captivity, inadequate funding in the 1950s and 1960s caused the zoo to deteriorate. Its rejuvenation began in 1971 when the Bureau of Governmental Research presented plans for expansion and improvement. The following year, voters approved a tax increase to fund the park’s development, and community efforts to rebuild the zoo began in 1976. An indication of the success of these initiatives is the Audubon Zoo's receipt in 1984 of the National Landscape Award of the American Association of Nurserymen. It was just the third time in half a century that the prestigious award was presented.


Container List


Index Terms

Audubon Park (New Orleans, La.)
Audubon Park Commission
Audubon Park: An Urban Eden (Book)
Forman, L. Ronald
Gleason, David King
Kleck, David
Logsdon, Joseph
Parks—Louisiana—New Orleans
Stern, Harriet
Wilds, John