

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR listed 12/06/90

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lamar Porter Athletic Field

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number North West Corner of Johnson Street

not for publication n/a

city, town Little Rock

vicinity n/a

state Arkansas

code AR

county Pulaski

code 119

zip code 72205

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
_____	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
<u>1</u>	_____ structures
<u>5</u>	<u>2</u> objects
<u>6</u>	<u>2</u> Total

of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Catherine St. Boyd
Signature of certifying official
Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

10-29-90
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/Sports facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: WPA Construction

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof tin

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1936

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Works Progress Administration

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 2.5

UTM References

A

1	5	5	6	3	3	4	0	3	8	4	4	8	8	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

Zone		Easting						Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description: Beginning at the Northwest corner of Johnson and Seventh Streets, thence Westerly one block to the Northeast corner of Seventh and Brown, thence Northerly to a point formed by the intersection with a perpendicular line running along the South edge of Sixth Street, thence Easterly to the intersection with the western edge of Johnson, thence Southerly to the point of beginning. (NW 1/4 of NE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Section 5, Township 1 North, Range 12 West, Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas.)

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with this resource.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mark Christ, Public Information Officer
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date October 16, 1990
street & number 225 East Markham, Suite 300 telephone (501) 324-9346
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

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Summary

The Lamar Porter Athletic Field includes a steel-beam support, poured concrete grandstand with masonry laid cobblestone walkways in the southeast corner of the property and along the first-base line on the east side of the field. There is a masonry laid fieldstone water fountain with a low, three-sectioned wall surrounding it and a concrete and fieldstone drainage culvert traversed by a fieldstone and concrete bridge just outside the west side fence. The field is surrounded by a chain-link fence and contains a non-contributing batting cage on the east side of the field and wooden bleachers in the northeast corner.

Elaboration

The Lamar Porter Athletic Field is a regulation-sized baseball field with an angular U-shaped plan and a steel-beam supported, poured concrete grandstand to which more recent wooden benches have been added and a metal shed roof. There is an access stairway and catwalk on the west end of the grandstand. The entrance faces southeast and has slant-roofed interior hallways heading east and north. A concession stand, bathrooms, equipment rooms and dressing rooms lie off of the hallways.

A field of masonry laid cobblestone lies before the entrance elevation. Masonry laid cobblestone walks follow the first- and third-base lines on the east and south sides of the ballfield.

The entrance elevation includes an arched tunnel entrance with a centrally pivoted chain-link door and glazed black tile on the lower portion.

The original dugouts on the south and east legs of the grandstand have been filled in with cinder blocks and later added shed-roofed bullpens sit on the field in front of those positions.

A concrete and fieldstone drinking fountain sits near the northeast corner of the field. It is surrounded by a low concrete and stone wall that is separated into three segments.

On the west end of the field, outside the left-field fence, is a poured concrete drainage culvert with masonry set fieldstone walls. It is traversed by a masonry arch bridge about two-thirds of the way to Brown Street.

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Summary

Criterion C, local significance

The Lamar Porter Athletic Field is a regulation baseball field featuring a steel-beam supported, poured concrete grandstand that survives in its original location as the earliest site associated with the Boys' Club in Little Rock.

Elaboration

The Boys' Club movement started in 1860 with the founding of the Dashaway Boys' Club, which provided supervised after-school activities and leadership training for disadvantaged boys in Hartford, Conn. That club, and all those that followed, were "dedicated to helping boys become productive, responsible citizens" by teaching good citizenship, participating in community and youth betterment campaigns, and through activities stressing physical fitness and mental and manual skills. The clubs, which remain nonsectarian in control, leadership and membership, are typically located in or near densely populated areas. Membership fees are kept low so no boy will be turned away for lack of money.

In 1906, 53 separate clubs across the U.S. joined together as the Boys Club Federation of America. The name of the group was changed to the Boys' Club of America in 1931, and that organization was formally chartered by Congress in 1956. While they share a national identity, each individual Boys Club is guided by its own board of directors. The national headquarters is in New York City; there are eight regional offices that guide and assist local operations.

Little Rock's Boys' Club has its roots in a "Newsboys' Club" founded around 1912 when a group of young men led by T.J. Craighead borrowed local YMCA facilities on Wednesday nights to help local "heroes of the streets" seek better lives. Up to 150 "urchins" showed up to use the Y facilities most Wednesdays. (Craighead, the first executive director of the Little Rock Boys' Club, remained active in the organization throughout his life, finally retiring as a regional director in 1959.)

The "Newsboys' Club" then became the "Citizenship Club," a group dedicated to "bettering street boys of the city," and from this organization the Little Rock Boys' Club was born.

The Little Rock Boys' Club officially began July 14, 1914, when an organizational meeting was held. That meeting was supervised by John Melpolder, who had managed the Indianapolis Boys' Club for seven years.

There was a true need for a Boys' Club in Little Rock, which faced a growing juvenile delinquency problem in the absence of mandatory schooling and adequate recreational facilities. (It was not until 1917 that the State of Arkansas passed a mandatory school law. That law

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required parents or guardians of children aged 7 to 15 to send their children to a public, private or parochial school for at least 3/4 of the length of the common school term in the district in which they resided or face a \$10 fine for each violation. "Weak-minded" children and those whose labor was necessary for the support of a widowed mother were exempt from the provisions of the law.) Local youths "had formed gangs and were committing depredations here and there," including gambling, drinking and petty thievery.

After the club was organized, volunteer workers sought to befriend the gangs of rambunctious youths. The youngsters were initially suspicious, but gradually came to accept membership in the club and to invite their friends to take part in activities.

After getting the young gang members to come to the club, the volunteer workers would break the youths up into teams, which would then elect captains and engage in "games of strength and skill with other groups."

"In other words, they utilized the very gangs into which the boys had formed themselves and through the use of the leader properly directed the activities of the gang members, thus welding with force the same weapon which the boys had used to harass society," an Arkansas Democrat article explained.

The club was an immediate success, from society's point of view. The local probation officer reported a 50 percent drop in juvenile delinquency after the first month the program was in operation.

The Boys' Club had a financially shaky first year, but the local Elks Lodge stepped in the second year and proposed to finance the club for a year. After that, it apparently was self-sustaining through dues, fund-raisers, and donations.

By 1916, the Boys' Club offered an employment bureau that helped members find jobs and printing equipment that enabled the youths to issue publications.

The Little Rock Boys' Club grew rapidly. It left its original home at the old Presbyterian Church at Fifth and Scott in 1916 and moved to the Fulk Building at 317 West Markham, where there would be more space for its 150 members. By 1921, it was hoping to acquire even larger quarters that would allow lodging of some boys. The club had grown "from a small organization with no equipment and a few boys to an organization with equipment for carpentry and printing classes, a splendid library, well-equipped meeting and game rooms and a complete gymnasium." It had 650 members.

In 1924, the Boys' Club acquired the Concordia Club at 8th and Scott, buying the 30,000-square-foot structure for \$42,500 in donated funds. Boys' Club officials, who had turned some

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potential members away for lack of space at the previous facilities, predicted the new site would allow membership of up to 1,500 children.

The Concordia Club building was razed by fire in 1929, but undaunted Club leaders vowed to build a new one on the same site. The structure was finished by 1931, using \$150,000 in funds donated in what Executive Director J.W. "Billy" Mitchell described as "one of the first, black Depression years." The original Little Rock Boys' Club, later renamed in Mitchell's honor, remained in that building until moving to facilities adjacent to the Lamar Porter Athletic Field in 1978. (The building was designed in a Colonial Revival style by the Thompson, Sanders and Ginocchio partnership in 1930. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places 12/22/82 as part of the Charles Thompson thematic listing.)

While the Little Rock Boys' Club was the first in the Pulaski County, others followed. A North Little Rock Boys' Club was affiliated in 1923; nine years later it had acquired spacious accommodations at 419 1/2 Main Street and boasted 700 members. By 1967, there were three clubs in Little Rock: The original, at 801 Scott; the South End Boys' Club at 721 W. 33rd; and the Dunbar Boys' Club at 1624 Ringo. There were two clubs in North Little Rock: The North Little Rock Boys' Club at 13th and Main and the East End Boys' Club at 5th and Palm.

By 1979, the three Little Rock Boys' Clubs had moved to their present locations: Billy Mitchell Boys' Club, built in 1978 at 3107 W. Capitol; James H. Penick Boys' Club, also built in 1978, at 1201 Leisure Lane, just west of University Avenue on 12th Street; and William E. Thrasher Boys' Club, which opened in 1972, at 3301 S. State. The Mitchell Club had 280 members, Penick had 1,084 and Thrasher had about 1,000 members. "The moves reflect the clubs' decisions to follow growth patterns and move to residential areas where the boys are," a 1979 newspaper article explained.

One of the bellwether events of the early years of the Little Rock Boys' Club was construction of the Lamar Porter Athletic Field.

Lamar Porter was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Q.L. Porter of Little Rock, born Aug. 17, 1913. He was educated in Little Rock's public schools, attended Little Rock High School, and graduated from Sewanee Military Academy in Tennessee in 1931. Porter was a junior at Washington and Lee University in Virginia when he was killed May 12, 1934, in an automobile accident between Lexington and Staunton, Va.

The land for the ball field, which is located in what was then western Little Rock, was donated to the Little Rock Boys Club on the first anniversary of his death, which coincidentally fell on Mother's Day. The donors were Porter's mother, his aunt, Mrs. J.D. Jordan, and his brother, Jim S. Porter.

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The 10-acre plot is surrounded by Capital Ave. on the north, Brown Street on the west, Johnson Street on the east and Seventh Street to the south. It is located in an area that was targeted for park purposes in a 1930 planning survey by John Nolen, a nationally renowned city planner and landscape architect who was dismayed by the lack of recreational facilities in Little Rock. It lies about one mile from the 1936 population center, which Nolen said was located at Twelfth and Battery Streets. When the donation was made, the Little Rock Boys' Club served 2,554 boys and 739 girls, who were to be granted use of the facilities at certain times.

Construction on the field by the federal Works Progress Administration began in Fall 1934, and it took 18 months for the complex to reach completion. It took 400 workmen "several weeks" to clear trees, stumps and underbrush from the wooded site; a permanent crew of 100 workmen labored on the project the remainder of the time. The project was deemed finished April 22, 1937, though work still remained on levelling tennis courts and cleaning the grounds.

The total cost of the project was \$122,244.53. The federal government provided \$108,710.82 for the project.

When the complex was complete, it held a lighted softball diamond with underground wiring, four lighted tennis courts, a regulation baseball diamond, a 1,500-seat grandstand complete with club rooms, shower and locker rooms, rest rooms and a concession stand. It was first used by Boys' Club teams in the summer of 1936; by 1937, it was also being used by City Leagues and American Legion teams.

The property also held an apparatus area with swings, slides and jungle gyms; a small children's play area that included hammocks, small slides and kindergarten tables; a play area for older children with facilities for handcrafts and quiet games; and other areas with courts for shuffle board, marbles, horse shoes, handball, volley ball, and table tennis, as well as picnic areas and a "stage for dramatics."

The field was lighted for softball, but the first night baseball game was held at Lamar Porter Field in August 1941. (Young's Tire of North Little Rock beat Craig's of Little Rock, 3-2.) This game was considered an experiment since the field was lighted for softball only. In 1949, the field was lighted for baseball. The World Series of Softball was held there that year.

Throughout its history, the Little Rock Boys' Club produced some outstanding ballplayers, including New York Yankees catcher and manager Bill Dickey and Pat Seerey, an outfielder with the Chicago White Sox. Only one, however, played at Lamar Porter Athletic Field - the outstanding Baltimore Orioles third baseman and Hall of Fame member Brooks Robinson.

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On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Boys Clubs of America, an Arkansas Democrat editorialist mused: "Nobody knows how many youngsters these clubs have saved from misspent, unhappy lives. The number must be very great." The Little Rock Boys' Club, which took juvenile delinquents from the street and instilled in them the virtues of hard work, fair play and good citizenship, did its share in proving that statement.

The Lamar Porter Athletic Field, as the only site remaining from the early days of the Little Rock Boys' Club, is most closely associated with the roots and history of that group.

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"Greater Little Rock Boys' Clubs Exemplify American Idea of Molding Nation's Youth." March 27, 1949 *Arkansas Gazette*.

"Arkansas Boys' Clubs Celebrate 50th Year." Jan. 25, 1956 *Arkansas Democrat*.

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