

A Look Back in Time

The Simmons Island Park and Simmons Island Beach House, located on Simmons Island, was built in 1934 by architect Chris Borggren.

Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance establishes standards for designating structures and sites as historic and the site or structure must meet at least one of these standards. It was determined that Simmons Island Beach House is architecturally significant under Standards 1: "exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural... history." 3. "Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship. And 4., "Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced their age." The Simmons Island Beach House is architecturally significant because it is a fine example of a Tudor Revival style building. The building is also significant because it is the work of City of Kenosha Department of Parks and City Planning architect Chris



Borggren, whose known designs are few, but impressive and innovative. The Simmons Island Beach House is also historically significant because it was constructed as a FERA project, a federal government works program designed to provide jobs for unemployed people in the Great Depression of the 1930's. It was one of the new and important social welfare programs of that era that had a lasting impact on the built environment of the United States.

The Simmons Island Beach House was one of the first federally-funded public works projects in the city of Kenosha during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Begun in 1934, the beach house was officially opened for the city's centennial celebration in June of 1935. Along with the completion of the beach house, federal funds were used for landscaping and physical improvements throughout Simmons Island Park. Simmons Island was originally known as Washington Island and was a long-time favorite recreation spot for Kenosha residents. A private bath house had been erected on the island and was taken over by the city when it acquired much of the island for park land. By the 1930's, though, this bath house was dilapidated and modern park facilities were needed for the entire island.

As the Great Depression worsened in the 1930's, the newly-elected Franklin D. Roosevelt administration began pushing through many different relief programs to aid people who were unemployed. The most famous of the work-relief programs the Roosevelt administration fostered was the Works Progress Administration, or W.P.A. and many W.P.A. funded projects were completed in the City of Kenosha. Prior to the W.P.A. though, a work-relief program called FERA was used to build the Simmons Island Beach House. Under this program, the city provided about 25% of the funds for the materials for the beach house, while the federal government provided the remaining money and to pay the workers. Chris Borggren, a draftsman for the city's parks department, designed the beach house, which included open air dressing rooms, a check room, a life guard station and first aid room, concession space, and showers. When the facility opened, it was hailed as a modern bath house that could accommodate 1,000 people at a time. It also had the most updated safety features for beach users.

