ALVARADO PARK
(East Richmond Park)
(Grand Canyon Park)
(Alvarado Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park)
5755 McBryde Avenue
Richmond
Contra Costa County
California

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001
HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ALVARADO PARK
(East Richmond Park, Grand Canyon Park, Alvarado Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park)

HALS NO. CA-104

Location: 5755 McBryde Avenue (address of office beside main entrance)
Richmond, Contra Costa County, California
Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, East Bay Regional Park District
37.95142, -122.32220 (main entrance, Garmin GPS unit, accuracy 8′, WGS84)
National Register of Historic Places NRIS No. 92000313 (added 1992)

Significance: Alvarado Park is an example of an urban park with Great Depression-era rustic stonework that was funded by state relief money, designed by the City Engineer in the National Park Service style, and built by local unemployed laborers.

Description: Alvarado Park and its adjacent park office lie on roughly 42.5 acres in eastern Richmond. The park is seamlessly joined on its east side to Wildcat Canyon Park; together they form the 2,427-acre Wildcat Canyon Regional Park in the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD).¹ Alvarado Park is known for its topography, hydrology, and its stonework.

The northern two-thirds of the park are on the south side of a steep ridge. The southern boundary of the park roughly follows the dramatic ravine carved by Wildcat Creek. Most of the park resources are located on a comparatively level strip in the southern third of the park, between the creek ravine and its watershed-ridge. The elevation ranges from about 420′ near the southeast corner, to about 120′ in the creek bed near the northwest corner.²

The climate is Mediterranean, with wet mild winters and dry summers cooled by Pacific Ocean fog. During exceptionally wet winters, Wildcat Creek is a torrent capable of undercutting creek-side walls and washing out bridges. Minimum winter temperatures average 44°F (7°C). Maximum summer temperatures average 71°F (22 °C). Annual precipitation averages 23″ (59 cm), but has ranged from 10 to 47″ (25 to 121 cm). The dominant soil type in the park is clay loam³

Alvarado Park has structures and small scale elements in multiple styles of masonry construction:
1. concrete from 1909-22

¹ Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.
² USGS, Richmond, CA, 1995 topographic map, revised 1999.
2. mortared gray rubble stone from 1923-33
3. mortared cream trimmed stone in a random pattern from 1934-39
4. poured or cast concrete, and mortared stacked concrete or brick from 1940-84
5. tan stone facing in a random pattern from 1985-2014

The 1934-39 style was funded by the State Employment Relief Agency (SERA) during the Great Depression. It was deemed significant enough for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.4

In its early days, the park was known for its sweeping views of the northern San Francisco Bay and the Marin headlands. Historic photographs show mostly grassland, except for trees in the ravine.5 Since then, trees have grown to obscure the view.

The trees near the creek are mostly native, including Alder (*Alnus*), California Bay (*Umbellularia californica*), and California Buckeye (*Aesculus californica*). The steep ridge-side is dominated by non-native Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*). Between the ridge and the creek is a mix of native and non-native trees including Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), Fremont Cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), Pine (*Pinus*), Wattle (*Acacia*), Date Palm (*Phoenix*), and Fan Palm (*Washingtonia*).

Circulation is non-vehicular only, except for service vehicles. The main service road runs south to north through the comparatively level strip of the park. Trails run along both sides of the eastern portion of the creek. Trails travel the length of the upper, middle, and lower ridge-side with connecting trails between them.

Buildings, structures, and small-scale elements are located on the comparatively level strip. These include stone entrance pillars, an arched stone bridge, obelisk-like stone light standards, stone retaining and free-standing walls, a stone-faced gazebo with a tiled roof, a stone and wood-faced restroom building, picnic-barbecue areas, benches, and a playground. There are also leveled picnic-barbecue areas along the creek rim. A horseshoe court is in a small Redwood grove on the lower ridge-side.

Alvarado Park was in the territory of the Ohlone Native American tribe. According to Sonin, archaeological surveys have found shell mounds and more than 100 cupules in Alvarado Park near Wildcat Creek.6

History: Alvarado Park has been in continuous use as a park since 1908. It was a private park from 1908 to 1922, city park from 1923 to 1984, and terminus of a regional park from 1985 to the present. A historic photograph of a school group gathered

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4 Praetzellis.
5 “Tomorrow, Sunday, April 12th,” *Oakland Tribune* 11 Apr 1908: 13; “San Pablo Public School 1885.”
6 Sonin, 17.
at the site in 1885 suggests that it was an unofficial scenic destination before becoming a park.  

**Private Park Phase 1909-22**  
When B. Schapiro & Co. advertised the April 12, 1908 opening of East Richmond Park, the company wrote that its natural beauty was comparable to Yosemite. The company offered free lunch and free shuttle service on opening day, in the hope of attracting buyers to the newly subdivided land surrounding the park. By 1909, community organizations were posting announcements of gatherings at the park in the *Oakland Tribune*, and the East Shore & Suburban Railway had a streetcar running to the park entrance. The company changed the name to Grand Canyon Park in 1909. Projects during this phase included a covered (open-air) one-story dance pavilion, 220-foot-long wood slide, baseball field, wood bridges, stroll garden, hotel-restaurant building, entrance gate, planting of trees, circulation routes, grading, stone retaining walls, and a short-lived dam-made lake. The park included the current park land and land to the west.  

Design was overseen by company president Bernhard “Ben” Schapiro (born Prussia ca. 1865 – died California 1930) and his partners, including former San Pablo constable John E. Bouquet (born California 1866 – died California 1930). Little is known about the builders and laborers, except that local resident Columbo C. Gavello (born Italy 1883 – died California 1956) planted trees in ca. 1909 and Eucalyptus in ca. 1920.  

**City Park Phase, city funds 1923-33**  
The Richmond City Council declined an offer from Schapiro to purchase the park and surrounding land in September 1919, but accepted his offer to purchase the core 42 acres of the park in March 1923. The City paid for it in installments between March 1923 and June 1932. Projects during this phase included poison oak removal, slide demolition, tree and shrub planting, retaining walls, paths and steps, and conversion of the pavilion to an enclosed two-story building. The City Council changed the park’s name to Alvarado Park in March 1925, in honor of former Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado and his son, Judge Enrique “Henry” V. Alvarado. According to Praetzellis, the dam for the man-made lake washed out in the late 1920s.  

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7 Praetzellis; “San Pablo Public School 1885.”  
Design was overseen by City of Richmond Engineers Harry D. Chapman (born Missouri ca. 1873) and Edward “Ed” A. Hoffman (born California 1893 – died California 1954). Hoffman grew up in Richmond, received a civil engineering degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1915, and worked for the City of Richmond Engineering Department from 1916 until his death in 1954, except for military service during World War I. Hoffman succeeded Chapman as head of the department in August 1924. Builders and laborers were City employees and contractors. Girl Scouts planted Acacia in May 1927.11

City Park Phase, state and federal relief funds 1934-39
Richmond hired its first workers for Civil Works Administration (CWA)-funded projects, including park work, in November 1933. Subsequent projects were funded by the SERA. Projects included a water tank, pipeline, convenience station, stone bridge (which replaced a wood bridge), stone entrance pillars, stone light standards, stone retaining and free-standing walls, picnic areas with barbecue stoves, tree and shrub planting, tree surgery, and creek bed cleaning.12

Hoffman was responsible for design during this phase. Laborers were local unemployed residents, including “Pete” Merlo (born Italy 1896) and Giuseppe “Joseph” Cozzo (born Sicily 1875 – died California 1955).13

City Park Phase, city funds 1940-84
Further retaining wall work was done in 1943, the parking area was paved in the 1950s, and the pavilion was severely damaged by fire in the 1970s. A controversial change in the early 1960s was the construction of Wildcat Canyon Parkway through the southeast section of the park, including twin culverts for Wildcat Creek under the parkway. Developers planned to build a subdivision east of Alvarado Park in Wildcat Canyon. Environmentalists protested until EBRPD purchased Wildcat Canyon.14

Regional Park Phase 1985-Present
In 1985, the City of Richmond transferred Alvarado Park to EBRPD. EBRPD changed the park name to Alvarado Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. Projects during this phase have included purchase and conversion of adjacent former fire station to park office, demolition of the remains of the pavilion and wood bridges, creek restoration, repair and stabilization of stonework, conversion

13 Ancestry.com; Gavello; Schaefer.
14 Praetzellis; Imboden; Lamb; “Wildcat Canyon Boom or Bust?,” Oakland Tribune 6 Oct 1960: C1; Aero Exploration Company; “Fuel Break Project.”
of parking areas to lawn, conversion of Wildcat Canyon Parkway to parking and trail, addition of custom ornamental iron safety railing around a raised barbecue area, Eucalyptus thinning, and planting of mostly native trees and shrubs. New construction has included an ADA-compliant playground, restroom building, and gazebo. Due to concerns about the strength of the stone bridge, EBRPD has closed Alvarado Park to vehicular traffic.

Designers during this phase have included landscape architect Michael Lamb, wildland hydrology consultant Dave Rosgen, and ornamental iron artist Eileen Ruth Webb. Work has been done by EBRPD employees and contractors.15

Sources:

**Historic drawings**

*Alvarado Park.* 28 Aug 1939. [Praetzellis, 7-21.]

*Existing Alvarado Recreation Unit.* Oakland: EBRPD, 1985. [Imboden, 58]

Haviland, P.A. *Map of Tewksbury Heights, Contra Costa County, California.* Filed 20 Sep 1909. [Contra Costa County Recorder.]


Hoffman, Edward. *Location Map and Plan.*.... Richmond: City Engineer, 4 Sep 1936. [Praetzellis, 7-19.]

Hoffman, Edward. *Proposed Masonry and Concrete Bridge.* Richmond: City Engineer, 20 Jun 1935. [Praetzellis, 7-17 and 7-18.]

*Map of Richmond, Pullman, San Pablo and Siege, Contra Costa County, Cal.* 1911. [Imboden, 39.]

**Historic photographs**


“An Interior View of the Pavilion in Grand Canyon Park.” Richmond Museum of History. [Imboden.]

“East Richmond, 1918.” Richmond Public Library. [Online Archive of California.]

“Entrance to Grand Canyon Park.” Genser-Maack Collection. [Imboden.]


“San Pablo Public School 1885.” Richmond Museum of History. [Imboden.]

**Interviews**

Gavello, Louis. Interviewed for EBRPD in 1989. [Praetzellis; Imboden]


Schaefer, Mary Cozzo and [grandsons] Al and Mike Bruzzone. Interviewed by Susan Imboden for EBRPD in 2011. [Imboden.]

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15 Lamb; Imboden; Eileen Ruth Webb, “Alvarado Park Railing,” 2003, ornamental-iron.com; *Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.*
Bibliography
*Oakland Tribune*. 1908-77.
*Wildcat Canyon Regional Park*. Oakland: East Bay Regional Park District, Jun 2013. [park brochure]

Historian: Cate Bainton
HALS Northern California Chapter
31 Jul 2014

2014 Entry HALS Challenge: Documenting the Landscapes of the New Deal
Alvarado Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park
(Photograph: U.S. Geological Survey, Apr 2011
Delineation: Cate Bainton, Jul 2014)

A  Main Entrance, for non-vehicular traffic and service vehicles only
B  McBryde Avenue
C  Arlington Boulevard to Berkeley
D  Park Avenue
E  Former Wildcat Canyon Parkway, converted to parking area between E and F, and converted to trail east of F
G  Grand Canyon Avenue
H  North Arlington Boulevard Entrance
I  Marin Avenue
J  Additional extant masonry
K  Site of non-extant Casino Avenue Bridge Entrance
View of stone entrance pillars and park office (former city fire station) from Park Avenue looking west. (Cate Bainton, Jul 2014)

View of stone light pillars from entrance looking north. Lawn to right was stroll garden during private park phase. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)

View of top of stone bridge from main sidewalk looking north. (Cate Bainton, Jul 2014)

View of west side of stone bridge from stone gazebo area looking east. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)
View of stone walls from stone bridge looking east. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)

View of stone-walled picnic area from main sidewalk looking southeast. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)

View of picnic area, capped well, and unrestored creek on north side of Wildcat Canyon Parkway looking southeast. Non-extant wood bridge to right before regional park phase. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)

Restored creek northwest of stone bridge looking northwest. Short-lived, dam-made lake during private park phase. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)
Stone gazebo (a modern addition). Lawn in background was parking area during city park phase. (Cate Bainton (Jul 2014)).

View of large picnic-barbecue area from main service road looking northeast. Metal railing is a modern addition. (Cate Bainton, Jun 2014)

View of modern restroom building and former dance area from main service road looking north. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)

View of Native American grinding rock from stone gazebo area looking south. (Cate Bainton, Jan 2014)