

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY (HALS) INVENTORY FORM

Site Name¹

Address²

City, Town, or Vicinity³ County⁴ State⁵ National Park⁶

Coordinates⁷
dd latitude dd longitude datum⁸ precision⁹

Statement of Significance¹⁰

The first storybook theme park in the United States, one of the main inspirations for the development of Walt Disney's Disneyland amusement park and other fairytale parks.

Physical Description and Historical Summary¹¹

Children's Fairyland is the first amusement theme park created to cater to families with young children. The park's ten acres include small rides, play sets, and animals. It is home to the Open Storybook Puppet Theater, one of the oldest continuously operating puppet theaters in the United States.

While visiting the Detroit Children's Zoo, Arthur E. Navlet, founder of Navlet's Garden Centers saw a group of nursery rhyme themed buildings and was inspired to create large sets for children in Lakeside Park. He presented the idea to the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club and William Penn Mott, Jr., then the director of Oakland's Parks Department and later director of the National Park Service, and raised \$50,000 to create the park. Navlet hired William Russell Everett, a fantasy architect who designed the sets. Everett presented 17 original models with straight-sided buildings of gingerbread and candy which he later gladly destroyed, after learning the buildings were too reserved. He created new sets featuring buildings with no straight sides decorated with bright and unusual colors and textures.

When the park opened on September 2, 1950, an estimated 750,000 people visited with admission between 9 to 14 cents, depending on age. The park's entrance, the shoe from The Old Woman in the Shoe nursery rhyme, was sized for children; adults needed to bend over to get through. The original sets of the park included Pinocchio's Castle, Thumbelina, Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Merry Miller, The Three Little Pigs, and Willie the Whale, in addition to the Old Woman and the Shoe.

The park provided one of the main inspirations to Walt Disney during the planning stages for his theme park, Disneyland, which opened five years after Fairyland. Disney also enticed Fairyland's first director, Dorothy Manes, to work as his new director.

Over the years, the park has added features including The Open Storybook Puppet Theater in 1956 and the Fairyland Talking Storybooks and Magic Keys. Several famous puppeteers have worked with

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the puppet theater, including Frank Oz (Sesame Street), Ruth Asawa, Tony Urbano, and Luman Coad. Bruce Sedley, a fellow puppeteer, was concerned about straining his voice as the puppet shows became more popular. To address this, he invented a system of talking books with recorded stories on tape activated with a key (Talking Storybooks and Magic Key). He took the system to other children's parks and zoos across the United States, where they still are used extensively today. From 1950 to 1994, the City of Oakland owned the park. In 1994, Children's Fairyland became a new 501(c) (3) non-profit organization. In 1996, voters approved a bond measure to renovate some of the park's best-known exhibits. Ace Architects redesigned the entry plaza, and EDAW, Inc. has been working on the renovation.

Today Aladdin's Genie overlooks the park entrance along with The Woman In The Shoe. The ticket booth is guarded by fairies floating in a domed ceiling. Once inside The Man on a Flying Carpet flies overhead, Mother glides on her goose in the top of a live oak tree, while the tail of a brightly painted dragon coils around the base of the oak. A giant toadstool offers shade opposite a drinks stand housed inside Cinderella's pumpkin. Willie The Whale still invites guests into his belly as does the White Rabbit to venture down the hole from Alice In Wonderland. There are 3 separate stages for live performances and guests can reserve a party area with a Cinderella theme that includes a slide built into her slipper. The Three Men in the Tub have not sunk at the Merry Miller and Alice and her Seven dwarfs still greet visitors. Miss Muffet is still frightened by a spider. River Rat's house is tucked under a tree and even the boys and girls restrooms are decorated with fanciful entries. Children climb up to an elevated pagoda where they view over the tree tops to the park and city beyond, and they can also climb the mast of a pirate's ship laden with trunks of treasure. The Crooked Man's House is still standing lopsided as ever. A fanciful train - The Jolly Trolley, a merry-go-round, and snack counters have been added. The park includes a small petting zoo near a little red schoolhouse. Children's Fairyland continues as a popular family attraction drawing visitors to more than 50 exhibits.

Condition¹²

- excellent fair threatened
 good deteriorated altered

Accessible to Public¹³

- Yes No Unknown

Property Contact (owner, manager, etc.)¹⁴

Owned by City of Oakland (oaklandnet.com). Oakland Children's Fairyland, Inc. (fairyland.org), a non-profit corporation, raises funds for operations, programs, restoration, and capital improvements at

Existing Site Surveys¹⁵

- HABS/HAER National Register County None
 NHL State Local Other

If Other, identify:

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Bibliographical and Other Sources on the Site¹⁶

- Anonymous, black and white and color photographs of Fairyland,
<http://theimaginaryworld.com/cfl.html>
- Anonymous, Children's Fairyland to Celebrate 50th Anniversary with a Face Lift," http://www.fairyland.org/news/20_dec_99.html, December 20, 1999.
 - Caldwell, Bill, Oakland A photographic journey, 2003, page 83.
 - City of Oakland, Children's Fairyland, http://www.oaklandnet.com/park/facilities/points_childrens_fairyland.asp.
 - DeFao, Janine, "The MAGIC Renovation promises more happy childhoods at Children's Fairyland," SF Chronicle, September 21, 2000, page A-17.
 - Stinnett, Peggy, Council friend help out Fairyland, "Inside Bay Area," December 13, 2004.
 - Fagan, Kevin "Back on Track Children's Fairyland reborn with new spirit and old feeling," SF Chronicle, March 18, 1998, Page A-15.
 - Geib, Kathleen Grant, "Puppets Draw Crowds to Oakland's Fairyland," Oakland Tribune, February 26, 2004.
 - Nakao, Annie, "Oakland's Fairyland park to get major renovation," San Francisco Chronicle,

Inventoried by¹⁷ Date¹⁸

Email Address¹⁹

Other Contact Information²⁰

Images²¹



Enter image caption and citation information (photographer, date, etc.) below:

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Entrance to Fairyland with the Old Woman In The Shoe

Deck of cards maze from Alice In Wonderland.

Photos taken by Chris Pattillo, June 2009.

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Refer to these step-by-step instructions while completing this form.

¹ **Site Name:** Enter a name for the site. For more information on assigning a name, see Section 2.2 of <http://host.asla.org/groups/hppigroup/HALSHistoryGuidelines.pdf>.

² **Address:** Enter a street address of a location description (i.e.: “Bounded by ...”).

³ **City/town or vicinity:** Enter the name of the incorporated city or town closest to the site and within the same county or parish as the site. In cases where a site crosses county lines, enter the name of the nearest city or town in which most of the site is located.

⁴ **County:** Enter the county or parish in which most of the site is located.

⁵ **State:** Enter the state or territory in which most of the site is located.

⁶ **National Park:** If the site is located within a national park, enter the 4-letter park code.

⁷ **Coordinates:** Enter point coordinates (in decimal degrees) for the site. For the purposes of inventory, the point should be taken from the center, or in the case of linear sites, at midpoint. Coordinates taken with a GPS unit and an accuracy of 5 meters are preferred. If you do not have a GPS unit, approximate GPS coordinates can be obtained for an address from <http://terraserver-usa.com/>.

⁸ **Datum:** If known, enter the datum for the geospatial data in #7 above.

⁹ **Precision:** If known, enter the degree of precision for the geospatial data in #7 above.

¹⁰ **Statement of Significance:** Enter a summary statement of significance about the site.

¹¹ **Physical Description & Historical Summary:** Briefly describe the physical characteristics of the site and provide a summary history of the site, including significant periods.

¹² **Condition:** Provide a candid assessment of the current physical condition of the site.

¹³ **Accessible to Public:** Indicate whether the site is accessible to the public, inaccessible, or unknown.

¹⁴ **Property Contact:** Enter name and contact information of person or organization responsible for the site.

¹⁵ **Existing Site Surveys:** If surveys for the site already exist, indicate the types of surveys by checking all boxes that apply.

¹⁶ **Bibliographical and Other Sources on the Site:** Use this space to list books, articles, surveys, reports, brochures and other material relating to this site.

¹⁷ **Inventoried by:** Enter the name of the person conducting the inventory.

¹⁸ **Date:** Enter the date the form was completed.

¹⁹ **Email address:** Enter an email address for the person listed in #17 above.

²⁰ **Other Contact Information:** Enter mailing address and telephone number of person or organization listed in #17.

²¹ **Images:** Click on the image boxes to upload up to 2 images of the site to the form (file size 1MB maximum per image).

Provide caption, bibliographical, and any other information on the images in the space provided.