

ALVINA HIMMEL PARK  
(HIMMEL PARK)  
1000 North Tucson Boulevard  
Tucson  
Pima County  
Arizona

HALS AZ-20  
*HALS AZ-20*

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

### ALVINA HIMMEL PARK (HIMMEL PARK)

HALS NO. AZ-20

Location: 1000 N Tucson Blvd, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona

Himmel Park is located in the Sam Hughes historic neighborhood of Tucson, east of the University of Arizona. The northern border of the park is defined by E. 1st Street, the southern border is south of E Hawthorne Street and north of E 3rd Street. The park's borders to the east run along N. Treat Ave and to the west is N Tucson Blvd. Main cross streets of the park are Tucson Blvd and Speedway Avenue.

Lat: 32.233939 Long: -110.933176 (1000 N Tucson Blvd, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Himmel Park is significant for its role as a vernacular and vital landscape within the Sam Hughes neighborhood, a federally-listed National Register of Historic Places Historic District. Himmel Park was originally designed and built in 1936 by the Engineering Parks Department with the aid of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It also served as a camp for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in its early days and is the home site of the Pima County Public Library's first branch, Himmel Park Library. The park's historic and formerly racially segregated pool built by the WPA in 1936, speaks to the history of segregation in the United States and Tucson until the 1960s. Himmel Park's most notable period of historical significance spans from the 1960s to the 1970s when its central location, proximity to the University, and design features such as Hippie Hill, served as a platform for free speech, civil rights rallies, and other social movements and monumental public gatherings. Various events including marches and riots in the park helped to inform judicial and social decisions in the area.

The park's patrons and members of the Sam Hughes community continue to safeguard the park because of its enduring historic value as a reminder of Tucson's political past, as well as for its rich recreational opportunities, which range from community events and social gatherings to quotidian activities and sports to visiting the historic, family-friendly library and participating in its wide-ranging public programming. A Conservation Plan was written in 2017 by a group of city planning and heritage conservation students at the University of

Arizona alongside members of the greater Tucson and Himmel/Sam Hughes community. Plans are in place to create a committee dedicated solely to the conservation and preservation of Himmel Park's vital role in the city of Tucson.

Description: Himmel Park is located within the historic neighborhood of Sam Hughes, a largely residential neighborhood with a number of schools and businesses. The neighborhood is adjacent to the University of Arizona along Campbell Avenue to the West and runs along S Country Club Road to the East. E Speedway Blvd encloses Sam Hughes Neighborhood to the North and E Broadway Blvd runs to along its southern border. The 24.3 acres that make up Himmel Park are nestled to the northwest of the northeastern quadrant of the neighborhood. There were approximately four phases of significant expansion or alteration to Himmel Park's footprint. The first was its acquisition by the city from Ms. Alvina Himmel in 1936 and its relatively swift erection of the WPA-constructed swimming pool, tennis courts, and recreational areas still used for picnicking and other leisurely family activities (Figures 1-4).

Following the park's initial construction, the city acquired an additional segment of adjacent land in 1944, intended for building a playground and providing a greater area for recreational activities. Between 1944 and 1961, when the Himmel Park Library was established as the first branch of the Pima County Public Library system, the historical record does not suggest any notable alterations to the park's physical landscape. Culturally speaking, however, there was a shift in the park's social landscape as the park became a significant meeting place for an increasingly diverse population.

It was not until the mid-1960s that the pool was no longer racially segregated and that groups of students and "alternative" populations, including LGBT advocates, feminists, and other supporters of civil rights and social justice reform began to use the park as their meeting place. Commonly referred to as "Hippie Hill", the man-made hill-like feature directly to the west of the library, became a well-known platform for theatrical productions, free-speech rallies, and other forms of vocal gatherings (Figures 5 and 6). The story of its construction is currently being explored and needs to be expanded on. Oral histories from the community suggest that the landmass is a result of the excavation and construction of the adjacent library building.

The Himmel Park Library opened in 1961 and the park, formerly known as a popular "bookmobile" stop, became a community space for families from across

Tucson's neighborhoods, as well as for social gatherings and protests (Figure 7). More recently such beautification and improvement projects as the "Himmel Park Beautification Project" of 2010 and plans to paint a mural around the pool by the Friends of Himmel Park, both community-led and funded initiatives (*need to check on funding*), have emerged to support preservation of the park's vital role in the community. Mosaicked benches and sculpted bike racks are some elements of the park's recent beautification project. In 2015, additions were made to the library entryway and landscaping native vegetation. This new design was a part of the Beautification project and provided a formal entrance for the Himmel Park Public Library. Modern playgrounds, made of steel, rubber, and plastic, have been added to the landscape in the last two decades, as have wood and iron exercise stations and baseball cages, soccer goals, and basketball hoops, all located within their respective, designated areas within the lands acquired by the city in 1944.

The northern and southern boundaries of the park are marked by iron gating, some of which is painted blue and some red. There are two parking lots, both of which are included in preliminary maps in the Engineering Parks Department's initial park plans. One parking lot is located north of Hippie Hill and west of the library along E First Street and the other is located just west of the tennis courts and the pool along N Tucson Blvd. There are entrances along each of the park's four boundaries and one bus stop located on N Tucson Blvd.

Recreational features, including the pool, exercise stations, tennis and basketball courts, soccer and baseball fields, and the two playgrounds were built between 1937 and 2010. These spaces comprise most of the park's area, although open spaces along the wash and picnic areas are also used for several purposes including walking, jogging, dog walking, and recreational music and sports gatherings. Grills are scattered throughout the park near to concrete and stucco picnic tables constructed in a style reminiscent of Art Deco (Figure 8). There are a number of gravel and sand-marked paths throughout the park. Circulation systems connect playing fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, pool, and library.

As an extension of the socially engaged community work that claimed Himmel Park as its home in the 1960s, The Captive Nations Coordinating Committee of Tucson decided to incorporate public art within the landscape of Himmel Park. On March 9th, 1986, a 1,600-lb. curtain of three eight-foot panels of rusted steel and iron rebar braces was constructed to pay tribute to persons affected and held

captive by Soviet communism.<sup>1</sup> The monument reads:

“Afghanistan/Vietnam/Angola/Ukraine/Bulgaria/Romania/B  
yelorussia/Poland/Cambodia

In Memory of the millions of people who have been killed  
and in Honor of those who continue to struggle for freedom  
in those nations held captive by Soviet Imperialism. The  
Tucson Captive Nations Committee 1983 - 1986

North Korea/Cuba/Lithuania/Czechoslovakia/Latvia/East  
Germany/Laos/Estonia/Hungary”

The landscaping found in Himmel Park has remained relatively the same since the development of the park. Early plantings that are still present in the park include a tall allée of palm trees (*Washingtonia robusta*), Olive trees (*Olea europaea*), Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), and evergreen pines, along the exterior of the park. The south border of the park is lined with oleander (*Nerium oleander*) shrubs that create a barrier between the residential neighborhood of Sam Hughes and the park. In 1986, Cypress trees (*Cupressus spp.*) were added surrounding the Captive Nations Coordinating Committee of Tucson Monument to frame the structure. Newer additions to the park’s landscape feature native plantings including Baja Fairy Duster (*Calliandra californica*), Woolly Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja marrubifolia*), Desert Ruellia (*Ruellia peninsularis*), and Mesquite trees (*Prosopis velutina*). These plantings were added in 2016 as part of the Himmel Park Beautiful Project led by the UA College of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture and Friends of Himmel Park, a sub-organization of the Sam Hughes Neighborhood Association.

The layout and design of Himmel Park promotes a place where people can engage in a variety of activities. The Sam Hughes Neighborhood Association is the involved in maintaining and developing the park for residents and visitors along with the City of Tucson.

History: Himmel Park dates to the year 1936, when it was originally named Alvina Himmel Park. Since its initial construction, Himmel Park has experienced a variety of changes in both the physical and social environment, many of which

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<sup>1</sup> The Arizona Daily Star. March 9, 1986.

took place prior to 1967. Originally a homestead bought by the City of Tucson from Alvina Himmel Edmondson in 1935 for \$3,500, the park remains a city-owned and operated park and serves as a central feature of the Sam Hughes Neighborhood while serving the larger Tucson community. In 1948 Alvina Himmel Edmondson passed away in the home she had inhabited for 51 years on E. 1st Street at the park.

Original plans for Himmel Park were developed by the city-county planning office and Charles B. Maguire, former city landscape engineer. In 1944, three additional blocks of land (area undefined) were purchased by the city for further development of the park.<sup>2</sup> A children's playground, which still stands, served as the central feature of the county's goals in acquiring this land, although discussion surrounding the acquisition was contentious amongst members of the Sam Hughes neighborhood, who did not wish to see their historic park expand in size.<sup>3</sup> Various walking paths, landscaping projects, and shuffleboard courts were also in construction during the mid-1940s.<sup>4</sup>

The addition of a public swimming pool in 1936, at a cost of \$32,000, was made possible by joint funding from the City of Tucson and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).<sup>5</sup> Designed in Spanish Colonial Revival style, the pool was considered to be an innovative and exciting new feature of the park upon its opening to the public in 1937. The 50-ft. wide by 100 ft. long swimming pool was built to accommodate up to 600 swimmers at the height of Tucson's summer season. The pool's wastewater is now collected to irrigate the landscaped area surrounding the pool.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the pool's construction, plans were in motion for spring planting of the surrounding landscape. The pool was built by E.D. Herreras, a well-known city building inspector of the time.<sup>7</sup>

Himmel Park became a bookmobile stop which led to the construction of the Himmel Park Library on the Northeast corner of the park.<sup>8</sup> Planning and construction for the new library started in May of 1960 and was completed on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1961. This library was the first branch of the Tucson Public Library

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<sup>2</sup> Arizona Daily Star, November 13, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Arizona Daily Star, February 20, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Jeanne Michie. "A Short History of a Small Place," 1995.

System, which expanded throughout the city in the following years. The project, designed and constructed by William Carr in collaboration with architect D. Burr Dubois and Mann Construction Co.,<sup>9</sup> cost a total of \$76,290. Additions to the library were made in 1968, 1980, and 1992 to expand meeting spaces and update utilities. No changes to the building's footprint were made, however, and the library has remained in its original location despite the county's numerous proposals to move it elsewhere or to build additional stories.

In 1962, the Engine 1973 Locomotive was placed in Himmel Park as a public art exposition commemorating the Southern Pacific Railroad Locomotive No. 1673. This historic locomotive was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the Survey of Railway Cars and Locomotives for its association to a specific period and symbolic role in the history of the United States. The overall cost of the placement was \$1,800.<sup>10</sup>

Use of Himmel Park and the Library decreased in the 1970s while demand for larger library branches on main streets increased. An article was published which showcased the neglect and deterioration of the Southern Pacific Railroad Locomotive No. 1673. In 1973 as a response to these trends, the city of Tucson proposed closing the library. Decisions regarding the library's fate were postponed due to objections from surrounding residents and community members.<sup>11</sup>

By 1982, a community outreach program to engage people at Himmel Park was started. The first event, Picnic in the Park hosted by the Sam Hughes Neighborhood Association, was held on March 18th, 1982. The event's focus was to answer the question, "Who says Tucson has gotten too big for an old fashioned, small-town good time?"<sup>12</sup> Following this event, the Invisible Theatre's Shakespeare Under the Stars Festival started on May 27th and hosted regular performances in the park.

The development and use of Himmel Park since the 1930s has centered on building a place for community and public outreach in the Sam Hughes Neighborhood. Features added to the park such as Himmel Park Library and Himmel Pool offered visitors to the park a place to engage in recreation and

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<sup>9</sup> Jeanne Michie. "A Short History of a Small Place," 1995.

<sup>10</sup> The Arizona Daily Star. September 6, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Jeanne Michie. "A Short History of a Small Place," 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Tucson Citizen. March 18, 1982.

learning. These defining features also highlight the significance that the park has had on the community. From Himmel Park's start as private land to its current development as a place for public activities, the site displays a successful example of democratic space in the Tucson community.

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Entry – 2017 HALS Challenge: Documenting City or Town Parks



Figure 1. Exterior of Himmel Pool at Himmel Park. Facing North. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 2. Interior of Himmel Pool at Himmel Park. Facing East-South East. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 3. Tennis courts in the background with historic water fountain in the foreground. Facing East-South East. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 4. Recreational Area-Soccer field with view of Hippie Hill, Library, and Bathrooms in the background. Facing North. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 5. Close-up of “Hippie Hill”. Facing South. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 6. “Hippie Hill”, historic lampposts, soccer fields in the background with original picnic table in the foreground. Facing East. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 7. Alvina Himmel Library Entrance. Facing West-North West. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 8. Recreational/Picnic Area-Historic Table. Facing South-South West. Jaimie Luria, 2017.



Figure 9. Swimming Pool and historic Lampposts in the background, Picnic Tables in the foreground. Facing North East. Jaimie Luria, 2017.