McKinley Park is a significant cultural landscape as Sacramento’s first park related to the American urban parks movement of the nineteenth century and to the phenomenon of pleasure grounds created by streetcar companies. Developed in 1872, McKinley Park is also one of the earliest parks developed in the West – only San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park being older (1871). Its naturalistic design of meadows, informal tree plantings, and curving pathways is typical of urban parks during that period. The park is also significant for its collection of recreation features added during the reform park movement of the twentieth century prior to 1940. McKinley Park is significant at local and state levels.

Description
McKinley Park was originally known as East Park and was created as a destination park by Sacramento’s street car company to promote use of the streetscar. Similar to other late nineteenth century pleasure grounds, the park’s primary uses were picnicking, musical performances, dancing, ball games, and enjoying the naturalistic landscape. The park’s naturalistic design was typical of urban parks of the period as pioneered by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux at New York’s Central Park. McKinley Park is characterized by its naturalistic planting of native trees, open meadow areas, the naturalistic lake - a remnant of a former slough, and its formal rose garden.

In 1902 the park became a city park with the encouragement of civic groups and it was named for President William McKinley who was assassinated a year earlier. The growth of suburban development in Sacramento resulted in the park being situated in a residential neighborhood, rather than an agricultural area on the outskirts of the city. As the park evolved, new facilities were added, but the overall naturalistic design was maintained.

The rise of Progressivism in the in the early twentieth century led to government reforms and the search for solutions to social problems such as public health. Parks, and particularly services for children, became part of the Progressive-era goals. McKinley Park became a focus of city improvements including the Clune Memorial building, library, and pool. A playground for children, basketball court, tennis courts, and other recreation facilities were also added to the park during this period.

Today, McKinley Park is a focus of activity for the east Sacramento community.

Other Key Dates:
1871 - 20-acre parcel purchased by Sacramento Street Railway Company for a park
1872 - Early development of East Park includes 2-story park building and large deck for sports and music events. Streetcar line extended into park.
1873 - Additional parcel purchased for picnic grounds (park behind).

1890 - Perimeter sidewalk constructed.
1902 - At the urging of the Tuesday Club, the City purchased the park and it was dedicated to assassinated President William McKinley.
1911 - The City annexes the East Sacramento area and provides funding for park maintenance.
1916 - Auto camp established in the park area to serve travelers on transcontinental Lincoln Highway.
1922 - Auto camp closed.
1927 - McKinley Park Zoo, which dated to East Park, was relocated to Land Park.