DUPONT CIRCLE
(Reservation No. 30)
(Pacific Circle)
Intersection of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut avenues, 19th and P streets, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DUPONT CIRCLE
(Reservation Number 60)
(Pacific Circle)

Location: Intersection of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut avenues, 19th and P streets, NW.

Owner/Manager: U.S. government, National Park Service.

Present Use: Sitting Park, monument site, demonstration site.

Significance: Shown as a large amorphous open space on L'Enfant's plan and a neat circle on Ellicott's plan, the open space at this ten-point intersection has served as a park since its first improvement in 1873. The fountain in its center as well as the surrounding neighborhood are both listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.

2. Original and subsequent owners: Within a tract of land owned by James Lingan, the land for the park was acquired by the federal government for streets and avenues in 1791.1

3. First improvement: The first documented improvements to the circle were made in 1873–77.

4. Alterations and additions:

1884: Adm. Dupont statue erected, park redesigned.

1916: Four sandboxes with concrete coping added to park

1921: Dupont Memorial fountain erected. New layout proposed.

1951: Construction begun on an underpass to tunnel Connecticut Avenue under the park.

1964: Streetcar ramps at Dupont Circle were filled in. Median strips formed and landscaped north and south of the reservation on Connecticut Avenue.

1973: Metrorail lines constructed under Connecticut Avenue, with a station built under the circle.

B. Historical Context:

1 McNeil, 43, 48.
On L'Enfant's plan of Washington, the area now designated as Dupont Circle is indicated as a large, amorphous open area formed by the convergence of Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts avenues with 19th and P streets, NW. Although it was not among the seventeen parcels appropriated March 30, 1791, by President George Washington expressly for public park land and federal reservations, it was part of the more than 3,606 acres acquired for the creation of streets and alleys by the federal government from the nineteen proprietors who owned the land selected for the nation's capital.

The Boschke map of 1857-61 showing the city's condition indicates that the circle was not clearly defined by the surrounding streets at the time and the few buildings surrounding blocks did not conform to the established property lines. A large complex of buildings east of the circle was probably the site of a large brickyard described by several sources in the vicinity of the circle before its development in the 1870s.

Rapid growth began on Connecticut Avenue after 1868 when the Metropolitan Street Railway was authorized to lay tracks from Georgetown along P Street to the circle where they would turn south on Connecticut Avenue. Soon after they were laid in 1874, additional tracks were added on the west side of the circle to extend the line along Connecticut Avenue to Florida Avenue. Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Michler, in charge of the Army Corps of Engineers Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) recommended in his 1868 annual report that Connecticut Avenue and the reservations along it should be landscaped and enclosed with protective fences since the railway would lead to the development of the properties facing the avenue and parks.

But Congress did not begin funding improvements in earnest until a territorial government was formed in 1871. Led by Alexander Shepherd, this government fell in scandal and debt in 1874, after a three-year whirlwind of infrastructural improvement. Particular attention was paid to the development of Connecticut Avenue and the Dupont Circle area, which contributed to rumors of corruption, because Shepherd and several of his friends had recently purchased property in this area. By 1872, the board reported that it had paved Connecticut Avenue with concrete from Lafayette Square to the city limits at Florida Avenue.

Orville E. Babcock, a close friend of Shepherd, replaced Michler in 1871 and worked in tandem with the Board of Public Works to improve the parks in the developing areas of the city. In 1872 he repeated Michler's request to landscape this circle, describing it as enclosed with a "poor wooden fence and graded; no walks laid out; no trees or shrubs; not surrounded by pavement; no drainage or water." He also identified the small unimproved triangle west of the circle between Massachusetts Avenue and P Street (Reservation No. 59). He reiterated his request in 1873, writing:

I desire to call attention to the circle at the intersection of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire avenues which is 380' in diameter, occupies a commanding position and in a locality where avenues and streets are becoming greatly improved by the city, and the adjacent property by the citizens who own it, by the erection of handsome residences. It is intended to erect in this circle a fountain 50' in diameter, with coping and a centerpiece of handsome design to be made of marble or granite and to
place a very fine selection of choice trees, evergreens &c in it.²

Within a year the circle was raised to conform to the grade established by the Board of Public Works and laid with water and gas pipes and the proper drainage for a fountain. Walks were graded, graveled, and paved, and the entire area was enclosed with a cast-iron post-and-chain fence. Twelve lampposts of a pattern similar to that of the fence were also installed around the park. In 1874, the OPB&G budgeted $5,000 for its continued improvement, and by 1876 it was complete, having all of the necessary plantings and furniture. A description of the park was included in the annual report of 1877:

This reservation is underdrained by pipes leading to a semicircular main drain connected with the main sewer on 19th Street. It has also been improved by gas and water, and streetwashers have been located in different parts of the circle. The walks are covered with concrete with seats placed in suitable positions and a variety of trees and shrubs have been planted in it... From the commanding position of this reservation a fountain of sufficient size provided with suitable jets, would be very conspicuous from the surrounding avenues and would prove a most attractive feature in the general ornamentation of the park. A number of ornamental trees and shrubs are required to complete the original design, as are also vases for flowering plants.³

At a grand ceremony on December 20, 1884, a bronze statue of Adm. Samuel Francis Dupont was dedicated in the center of the park, which was renamed in honor of the naval hero of the Mexican and American Civil Wars. These improvements made in preparation for the statue, were described in the 1884 annual report of the OPB&G:

The work of preparing this circle to receive the pedestal commenced in April, 1883, was completed in May last. All of the new walks provided for in the plan for the rearrangement of the grounds were outlined, excavated, and filled in with broken stone and bitumen concrete, compacted to a smooth surface, upon which was laid a good coating of asphaltum, making a desirable and durable footwalk. The lawn surfaces were spaded up and seeded and their borders sodded; some 850 ornamental trees and flowering shrubs were planted and flower beds were prepared and stocked. The lamp-posts in the post-and-chain fence enclosing the circle were taken down and re-erected at the entrances to new walks, and two new iron drinking fountains with lamp-posts and ornamental lamps were erected near the center of circle and connected with water and gas supply and park drains. The cut granite for the pedestal was delivered by the contractor on May 1 last, and immediately placed in position upon the foundation already prepared for its reception.⁴

² Annual Report . . ., 1873, 14.
³ Annual Report . . ., 1877, 11.
⁴ Annual Report . . ., 1884, 2343.
The small triangular space west of the circle was recognized as federal Reservation No. 59 and was improved in 1882 with a post-and-chain fence and an ornamental stone fountain. A frame watchman's lodge moved from the Smithsonian Grounds was erected in it in 1904 to protect the elaborate plantings and the sculpture in the circle and provide rest rooms for visitors. Another smaller federal reservation was recognized east of the circle, but was for many years tended by an adjacent landowner.

Before the circle was earmarked for the statue, it had been known since the 1870s as Pacific Circle perhaps due to its location on the west edge of the city, or due to the fact that a group of real estate speculators known as the California Syndicate had purchased a large tract of land around the circle and built homes in the vicinity. So named because many of them had made their fortunes in mining and other industries in the rapidly growing West, they erected some of the most opulent dwellings in the city to date.

Senator William Morris Stewart who had made his fortune mining in California built the first large home facing onto the circle in 1873. The magnificent "Stewart's Castle" was referred to as "Stewart's Folly" by skeptics who doubted development would ever reach the circle, and for about seven years, Dupont Circle must have seemed like his private park. In 1880, however, a duplex for two sisters known as the Hopkins-Miller House was built on the south side of the circle, and in 1885 the brick Queen Anne home of James G. Blaine was erected on the west.

Homes built facing onto the circle after 1890 began to reflect the Neoclassical ideals that were beginning to characterize the city's official buildings. Department store magnate Levi Leiter erected his classical home in 1891 on the north side of the circle, and Robert W. Patterson hired McKim, Mead, and White in 1901 to design his home on the east side of the circle. The widow of Congressman Robert R. Hitt employed John Russell Pope to design her home in 1908 adjacent to the Patterson House. Hoping to build a grand Neoclassical home on Dupont Circle, Montana Senator William Clark purchased Stewart's Castle in 1899 and razed it two year later. Clark's building plans went awry, however, and his home was never built, leaving the lot vacant until the Riggs Bank was built there in 1923. The Hopkins-Miller house met a similar fate when half of it was razed in 1912 for a bank; the remaining half was torn down in 1948.5

As the homes surrounding the circle took on a Neoclassical appearance, the park itself was updated along classical lines. The McMillan Commission, in its revised plan for the city and promotion of City Beautiful ideals influenced the OPB&G landscape designers who developed formal, symmetrical plans for the parks throughout the city. As if responding to landscape architect George Burnap's complaint that there were too many "petrified generals" in Washington's parks, descendants of Adm. Dupont petitioned to remove the Victorian bronze statue in 1917, replacing it in 1921 with a classically inspired marble fountain designed by Daniel Chester French. The park was redesigned to receive the fountain, and the organic, curved paths were replaced by straight paths on lines with the sidewalks in the adjacent blocks.

Throughout the 1910-20s the neighborhood was the center of fashionable society. Nannies pushed babies in strollers while older children played in the sandboxes placed in the park in a citywide effort to provide facilities for

5 Commission of Fine Arts, vols. I and II, passim; Goode, passim.
wholesome recreation. In the summer, Washingtonians gathered weekly in the park to hear military band concerts. But changes in the city and the neighborhood would drastically alter the character of the circle over the ensuing decades. Children began complaining of rashes contracted from the sandboxes, used by both dogs and drunks as urinals, while the new brick rest room facility erected in Reservation No. 59 in 1930 was described by National Park Service Police in 1936 as a gathering place for homosexuals.6

As Massachusetts Avenue developed as an artery to the northwest, Dupont Circle, located at the intersection of three important avenues, became a gateway to the downtown, and a transportation hub. This led to commercial development and increased congestion forcing many of the wealthy residents to flee to quieter enclaves to the north. The Connecticut Avenue Association was formed by local businesses in 1922 to promote the street as a shopping area rivalling New York's Fifth Avenue, while the Dupont Circle Citizen's Association, formed the same year, fought for decades to maintain the residential quality of the neighborhood.

Just as the Riggs bank filled the 23-year-old hole left by the demolition of Stewart's Castle, commercial interests gradually prevailed, manifesting physical changes to the park and the buildings surrounding it. To accommodate increasing traffic, Connecticut Avenue was widened in the 1920s.

Despite the widened roadway, traffic congestion on Connecticut Avenue increased drastically through the 1930s. Combined with Massachusetts Avenue traffic at the circle, the bottlenecks that resulted led city planners to attempt to ban traffic altogether from the circle in 1934.7 Calling it "one of the last ten-point circles in captivity," Washington Deputy Engineer of Streets S. R. Harrison discussed the circle and its planned treatment in his address to the American Road Builder's Association in 1947. Citing the fact that more than 52,000 vehicles drove around the circle each day and the large number of pedestrians necessitated adding "walk" signals at crossings, he wrote, "I am quite sure that all of you would agree with my fellow Washingtonians who must drive through this maze during morning and evening rush periods, that this experience in urban motoring is a rather trying one."8 He proposed creating an inner lane to segregate through traffic on Massachusetts Avenue and an outer lane for traffic approaching or leaving any of the other streets. The two lanes would be divided by medians with breaks at Massachusetts Avenue. Connecticut Avenue, with the highest traffic volume, would be carried under the circle through an underpass for both automotive traffic and the streetcar line.

Harrison's scheme was carried out the following year and necessitated the excavation of the park. The streetcar underpass was completed in 1949, giving Washington the distinction of having the first underground conduit cars in the country. The roadway underpass completed in 1950 made it possible to get from N Street to R Street in 55 seconds at 25 mph.9

Streetcar passengers waited at underground platforms accessed by four sets

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6 Dolan, 38.
7 Dolan, 23.
8 Harrison, 14.
9 Dolan, 23.
of stairs descending from the adjacent sidewalks and from Reservation Nos. 59 and 61. During the construction period, two more of the historic homes facing the square fell to the wrecking ball, as commercial buildings began to encroach upon this former residential enclave. The Leiter House was razed in 1947 and the remaining half of the Hopkins-Miller House in 1948, both for commercial structures. Remaining mansions were turned over to embassies and clubs, while the less imposing homes on the side streets were divided into apartments for students, and other lower-income groups.

By 1964, streetcar service had been discontinued in the District, so the ramps were replaced with median strips planted with trees in raised concrete beds. The access stairs still remain, however, in the adjacent reservations and sidewalks.

Park usage also changed with the times. While early 20th century visitors heard patriotic band concerts, in the 1960s the circle became a focal point for anti-war and civil rights demonstrations. In 1966 the area was described as "a simmering bouillabaisse of classes, colors, and types; a ferment of beatniks, genteel matrons, foreign students, thrill seekers and curiosity hunters." While the majority of the public parks at various reservations of the city are scenes of rest and tranquility for which they were originally laid out," an historian wrote in 1967, "Dupont Circle has always been a source of aggravation and complaints for the organization administering the area."11

When the continuing citywide traffic problem prompted the construction of a subway system, Connecticut Avenue was chosen as a rail route, and tracks were planned under the avenue from Farragut Square to several miles beyond the historic city boundary. When a Metrorail station was constructed under Dupont Circle, it was again disturbed by construction, but afterwards the area had even greater public access. To protect the diverse character of the surrounding neighborhood, which has been likened to New York's Greenwich Village, the Dupont Circle Historic District was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Overall dimensions: Within this space are three federal reservations. Reservation No. 59 is a quadrilateral that covers approximately 5,900 square feet; Reservation No. 60 is an approximately 2.28-acre circle; and Reservation No. 61, is a quadrilateral covering approximately 7,300 square feet.

B. Materials:

1. Pathways, paving: Two concentric concrete sidewalks surround the circle, one abutting the roadway and another about 15' inside. Six straight concrete sidewalks leading to the center of the circle continue basically on axis with the sidewalks on the intersection streets. A circular flagstone walk is laid in the center around the central fountain. Both Reservation Nos. 59 and 61 feature straight concrete walks on lines of travel.

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10 Dolan, 36.
2. Vegetation:
   a. Grass: The pathways create six large pie-shaped panels and six strips between the two circular paths. These are all sodded.
   b. Trees, shrubs, hedges: A low formal hedge surrounds the central walk. About fifty mature shade trees are planted throughout the sodded panels. Some shrubbery has been planted to camouflage the tunnel-exhaust units, but for the most part the circular park is very open and unobstructed to secure safety. Reservation Nos. 59 and 61 both feature dense shrub beds around the old streetcar entries at their acute angles.
3. Structures:
   a. Benches: Continuous rounded benches with backs follow the contours of the circular walks. They are constructed of concrete supports with wood slats. Concrete chess tables with concrete stools are on the east side of the reservation inside the inner walkway.
   b. Fountains: The Rear Adm. Samuel Francis Dupont Memorial Fountain was designed by sculptor Daniel Chester French and architect Henry Bacon, and it was erected in 1921 to replace an earlier bronze portrait statue of the admiral. The DuPont family moved the bronze statue to Wilmington, Delaware, and commissioned this marble statue as a replacement. The fountain consists of a large bowl on a pedestal in the middle of a round pool. Niches in the pedestal house three 8 1/2'-tall allegorical figures representing the arts of ocean navigation; the sea, the wind, and the stars.
   c. Lamps: Washington Globe lamps surround the perimeter of the circle while the interior walks are illuminated with modern "mushroom" type lamps. Both Reservation Nos. 59 and 61 feature Washington Globe standards affixed to the subway staircase handrails.
   d. Buildings: The brick lodge with a hipped roof erected in 1930 remains in Reservation No. 59.
C. Site:
   1. Character of surrounding structures: The ten odd-angled lots facing the circle are filled with a combination of high- and low-rise buildings. Only three of the grand homes remain, although none are used as residences. The other structures include large office buildings, banks, a hotel, and a pharmacy.
   2. Traffic patterns: The traffic patterns established in 1949-50 remain in effect. Massachusetts Avenue through traffic is limited to the inside lane, while traffic making other interchanges is confined to the outer lane.
Connecticut Avenue passes under the circle. Traffic is regulated by traffic signals in the medians, on the perimeter of the park, and in the triangular traffic islands at each intersecting avenue.

3. Vistas: The vista southeast on Connecticut Avenue is terminated by Farragut Square. Connecticut Avenue also offers a view from the circle northwest to the Lothrop Mansion near the city's historic boundary.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Boschke, A. "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years '57, '58, and '59."

District of Columbia Board of Public Works. "Exhibit Chart of Improved Streets and Avenues." 1872.


B. Park plans and early views: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans and views. Additional plans and views include the following:

1927: Photographs of Reservation Nos. 59 and 60 (NPS Reservation Files).


1967: Dupont Circle Study (NPS Reservation Files).

D. Bibliography:


PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990–93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.
PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Page 11  1876: Park plan showing dimensions and path plan (City Lots, NARA RG42 230).

Page 12  1886: Park plan showing gas pipes and lamps, soil and water pipes and washers in Reservation Nos. 59 and 60 (Annual Report, 1886).


Page 14, 15  1905: Park plan and accompanying list identifying the species of each tree in Reservation Nos. 59 and 60 (Annual Report, 1905).

Page 16  1924: Park plan for Reservation No. 59, including tree types and placement of lodge (NARA RG42 69-59-3).

Page 17  1928: Plan for lodge in Reservation No. 59 (NARA RG42 33.15-18).

Page 18  1932: Photograph of lodge in Reservation No. 59 (Annual Reports, 1932, 33).

Page 19  1986: Landscape rehabilitation plan (NPS Reservation Files).
ADMIRAL DU PONT, DUPONT CIRCLE, NINETEENTH AND P STREETS NW.
### DUPONT CIRCLE—Continued

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### Notes:
- Native deciduous tree.
- Foreign deciduous tree.
- Foreign deciduous shrub.
- Foreign evergreen tree.
PLATE 4.—New lodge house in reservation 69 at Twentieth and P Streets NW.