

SCOTT CIRCLE
(Reservation Nos. 62, 63, and 64)
Intersection of Massachusetts and
Rhode Island avenues at 16th Street, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-684

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SCOTT CIRCLE
(Reservation Nos. 62, 63, and 64)

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Location: Intersection of Massachusetts and Rhode Island avenues at 16th Street, NW.

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

Present Use: Site for three statues, sitting parks, and traffic direction.

Significance: This large rectangular open space is indicated on the L'Enfant and Ellicott plans. Located on the 16th Street axis, vistas from the intersection lead to Lafayette Park and the White House. It is located within the 16th Street Historic Preservation District

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The land where the circle was planned fell within a tract of land known as "Jamaica" that was patented to John Peerce in 1687. In 1791, when the original proprietors donated the portions of their land that fell within the planned avenues, John Waring owned the part of the tract where this reservation is now located.¹
3. First improvement: 1873.
4. Alterations and additions:
 - 1874: The Scott statue was erected in the central circle and the flanking triangular reservations were graded, soiled, seeded, and enclosed.
 - 1901-02: Reservation No. 64 was highly improved; three gravel walks were constructed, 342 square yards of asphalt paving were laid and the post-and-chain fence was painted.²
 - 1901: Reservation No. 62 was further improved; four gravel walks were laid to connect with a circular walk around the base of the pedestal.³
 - 1911-12: All three reservations redesigned and refurbished.
 - 1941-42: Underpass constructed and surface reservations channelized.

¹ McNeil, 42, 50.

² Annual Report . . ., 1901, 3706; 1902, 2733.

³ Annual Report . . ., 1901, 3706.

B. Historical Context:

At the site of the intersection of Rhode Island and Massachusetts avenues with 16th street, Pierre L'Enfant left a small open rectangle that was significantly enlarged on Andrew Ellicott's engraved version of L'Enfant's city scheme. Laid out within a tract formerly known as "Jamaica," the area was not developed according to the plan until the 1870s. Prior to the paving of the surrounding streets, there were a few small buildings in the facing lots, as indicated on the Boschke map of 1857-61.⁴ Through the west side of the reservation ran a substantial stream called Slash Run, a tributary of Rock Creek that originated north of Boundary Street and looped through the northwest quadrant before dumping into Rock Creek around 23rd and O streets.

Between 1870 and 1875, the streets surrounding Scott Circle were graded and paved, the parks were landscaped, and homes were built facing onto the improved area. The rapid change was a product of the vast program of civic improvements overseen by the Board of Public Works during the short-lived territorial government between 1871-74. The Board of Public Works, under the leadership of Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, graded and paved miles of streets, laid water, gas and sewer pipes, and planted thousands of street trees. A map of the street improvements "completed or in the course of completion" between 1871 and 1872 shows Massachusetts Avenue and the roadways through the square paved with concrete, and Rhode Island Avenue and 16th Street near the square paved with wood. During these improvements, Slash Run was contained in a covered sewer.

The Army Corps of Engineers in charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G), under the leadership of Shepherd's close friend Orville E. Babcock, improved the federally owned open spaces left over between the city-managed roadways and privately owned city squares. A map produced by the OPB&G in 1871 shows that the shapes of the reservations at this intersection were still undetermined. It shows two overlapping configurations, a small circle flanked by two isosceles triangles, and a large rectangle bisected by 16th Street.⁵ A year later, this space was slated for improvements because, as Babcock reported, it had been selected as the site for a statue honoring Winfield Scott, a former presidential candidate and veteran of the War of 1812, the Mexican, and the Civil wars.

In 1868, the park at the intersection of Vermont and 15th streets (now McPherson Square, See HABS No. DC-680) was named Scott Square in honor of the General Winfield Scott, and the statue, approved by an Act of Congress in 1867, was probably intended for this site. In 1872, however, the Board of Public Works was given permission to continue Vermont Avenue through the center of the square, rendering it an impractical site for a central statue.⁶ After this site at 16th Street was selected to receive the statue in 1873, OPB&G began preparing for its installation. Babcock designed a pedestal for the statue, which was excavated and carved by the Cape Anne Granite Company of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The stone itself was discovered at the foot of G Street, NW, and it took laborers eight

⁴ Boschke.

⁵ "Plan of the City of Washington . . .," 1871.

⁶ Annual Report . . ., 1868, 11; 1872, 7.

days to excavate it and haul it to the circle. It was reportedly the largest stone successfully quarried in the country, and Babcock proudly reported that it was transported "without damaging either the stone or the roadways over which it was moved."⁷ In 1874, the statue and its 119-ton base were placed atop a circular grassy mound surrounded by granite curbing, a circular flag walkway, and four ornamental lampposts. Two triangular parks flanked the circle forming a bow-tie shape; these were also graded, landscaped with flowering plants and evergreens, and enclosed with cast-iron post-and-chain fences.⁸ This configuration was probably favored over a rectangle because it allowed traffic to flow more freely along the avenues and streets intersecting at the site.

The OPB&G continued to maintain and improve the three reservations planting four ornamental evergreens and flower beds in the mound at the base of the statue and flower beds in the center of both of the flanking reservations. By 1887, all three reservations were illuminated by gas lamps.

The park improvements coincided with the development of the surrounding city squares, which were soon filled with elegant houses occupied by powerful politicians and businessmen. An elaborate Victorian mansion was erected in the square northeast of the circle in 1879 and was occupied in 1882-89 by inventor Alexander Graham Bell.⁹ Soon after he moved in, Bell rented a small house facing the south side of the circle where he supervised a school for deaf and hearing children where he could test specialized teaching methods. Originally built as a home in 1870, the little building was dwarfed by its newer neighbors, such as the mansion built for Senator "Don" Cameron and the adjacent Queen Anne-style house built for Ohio Senator George H. Pendleton who later became U.S. minister to Germany. Both residences, as well as a house across the street on the northwest corner of the circle built for President Chester Arthur's Secretary of the Treasury William Windom, were erected in the early 1880s.¹⁰ The Pendleton House was later occupied by President Cleveland's Secretary of War William C. Endicott in 1885-89.¹¹

Toward the end of the century, Washington was turning away from the Victorian styles in favor of classicism which affected architecture as well as landscape design. As City Beautiful advocates of the twentieth century would abhor the "plethora of petrified generals" erected in the parks by the former generation, the two reservations flanking the Scott Statue were chosen as the sites for a great orator and a physician.¹² New Hampshire native and founder of the Washington Post, Stilson Hutchins gained congressional authorization in 1898 to commission a statue honoring Daniel Webster in Reservation No. 62 near his home at 1603 Massachusetts Avenue. The 30'-tall statue of the lawyer and statesman was unveiled at a solemn ceremony January 18, 1900. Several days later the American

⁷ Annual Report . . ., 1873, 13; 1874, 10.

⁸ Annual Report . . ., 1874, 6.

⁹ Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, 48-49.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, 71.

¹¹ Goode, Capital Losses, 395-97; 91-92.

¹² Burnap.

Institute of Homeopathy was granted congressional authorization to erect a memorial to Samuel Hahnemann, founder of homeopathic medicine, in Reservation No. 64. The imposing exedra and seated portrait statue was dedicated six months later on June 21. The OPB&G redesigned both parks to receive the statues.

Meanwhile, the architecture around the circle was changing to meet new Neoclassical ideals. In 1912 architect John Russell Pope updated Alexander Graham Bell's house, then occupied by former vice president Levi P. Morton, with a classical facelift so it would match its new neighbors such as the Beaux Arts house at 1227 16th Street built in 1907 for Carolina Caton Williams, widow of a millionaire industrialist.¹³

In accordance with this new respect for classical architecture, the Senate Park Commission was formed in 1900 to explore redevelopment possibilities for the central core of the city along more formal lines. In its final report of 1902, L'Enfant was lauded for creating so many open spaces throughout the city, while the work of the OPB&G of converting these vacant lots to green urban oases was only vaguely acknowledged. "Unfortunately for the general effect," the report stated "the sculptural decorations (in the reservations) have seldom been treated as a part of the design, but have been inserted as independent objects valued for their historic or memorial qualities or sometimes for their individual beauty, regardless of the effect on their surroundings."¹⁴

As if in direct response to this criticism, the OPB&G entirely relandscaped the parks at this intersection to "give a more pleasing landscape setting," to the statues. In 1911-12, all three of the reservations were redesigned so they could be considered as a whole. Old flower beds, which were seen as distracting "puddings and tarts spread out over the lawn," were sodded over and each park was planted with a 5'-wide border of English ivy just inside the perimeter walks and concrete coping. The Webster statue in Reservation No. 62 was accentuated by an evergreen background of Hemlock and privet bushes which were moved from behind it to each side where they would frame the statue. The paths were redesigned to fan out from the base of the statue, and rhododendrons were planted along the path to lead the eye to the statue. Directly in front of the statue, a large flower bed was planted in the form of a shield.¹⁵ Reservation No. 64 was treated similarly and with matching rhododendrons and three flowering peach trees.¹⁶

While neoclassical and Beaux Arts buildings replaced the Victorian structures, the residential character of the neighborhood gradually diminished as many of the elegant homes were occupied by embassies and private organizations. For example, Bell's former home was occupied in the 1930s by the National Democratic Club and then the National Paint and Coatings Association while the National Republican Club occupied 1600 Rhode Island Avenue. William Windom's home became the Peruvian Embassy in the 1930-40s, and the Chinese Legation occupied a former dwelling on the northeast side of the circle.

With the rise of the automobile, came an increase in the pace and

¹³ Goode, Capital Losses, 133-34.

¹⁴ Senate Committee . . . , 80.

¹⁵ Annual Report . . ., 1911, 2969.

¹⁶ Annual Report . . ., 1912, 3491.

congestion of traffic at the intersection. A guidebook to the city written during the height of the Depression in 1937 warned, "With its inner and outer rings of surging traffic, this is for pedestrians probably the most hazardous ground within the district."¹⁷ In an effort to ease this bottleneck in three major commuter routes, a tunnel was constructed in 1941 to carry 16th Street traffic underneath the circle. On grade, the circle was also altered by the formation of four sodded traffic islands and the reduction of both the central circle and the flanking triangles to create more lanes for traffic.

After many months of inconvenience, construction was complete, but the neighborhood would never be the same. The old homes were razed one-by-one to be replaced by modern office buildings. A year before the underpass construction began, the Cameron and Pendleton houses were razed and replaced by the General Scott Apartment House. The William Windom House was torn down for the Australian Embassy in 1964, and the Neoclassical Williams House was demolished in 1965 for an expansion of the National Education Association's headquarters.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Overall dimensions: Reservation No. 63 is an approximately 0.39-acre oval at the center of the intersection. The flanking triangles, Reservation Nos. 62 and 64, are both cover about a quarter acre. The four triangular traffic islands surrounding the circle, Reservation Nos. 62A, 62B, 64A, and 64B are each about 0.04 acres.
- B. Materials:
1. Pathways: Since the central reservation is not intended for pedestrian use, it has no paths. The two flanking reservations, however feature concrete perimeter walks and interior pathways. In Reservation No. 62, a straight walk leads from the west side forking north and south around the circular mound upon which the statue stands. The paths in Reservation No. 64 are designed in the mirror image, but an additional path leads from the apex of the triangle on the west side to the exedra.
 2. Vegetation: Elongated shrub beds flank the north and south sides of the Scott Statue. Formal shrub hedges line the interior paths of both Reservation Nos. 62 and 64. Both reservations also feature several shade trees. All three reservations, as well as the four triangular traffic islands, are sodded.
 3. Structures:
 - a. Benches: Marble seating is incorporated in the Hahnemann Memorial exedra. Additional benches face onto the straight interior paths in both Reservation Nos. 62 and 64.
 - b. Statues, monuments:
 - i. Lieut. Gen. Winfield Scott: This 15'-tall equestrian portrait

¹⁷ Federal Writer's Project, 688.

statue honors a military hero of three wars who served in the army under every president from Jefferson to Lincoln. Sculptor Henry Kirk Brown intended to place Scott on his favorite mount, a small mare, but when the general's descendants protested, he chose a rather small stallion with the body of a mare, making this individualized horse quite unlike any of the other equestrian statues in the city that feature strong, majestic stallions.

- ii. Daniel Webster: This bronze portrait statue faces east from atop a granite pedestal that features bronze panels portraying events in the statesman's life. Sculpted by Gaetano Trentanove, the entire memorial stands 30'-tall.
- iii. Dr. Samuel Hahnemann Memorial: This memorial was designed by sculptor Charles Henry Niehaus and architect Julius F. Harden and erected in the triangle in 1900. The seated bronze figure of the German doctor and founder of homeopathy is placed in a niche under a canopy in the center of an exedra. The granite exedra is decorated with mosaic and four bronze relief panels each measuring 4' x 10'. The pedestal under the seated statue is inscribed "Similia Similibus Curentur" (Likes are Cured by Likes) and on the stone benches, "Die Milde Macht Ist Gross" (Gentle Power is Great) and "In Omnibus Caritas" (In All Things Charity).¹⁸

c. Lighting: Washington Globe lights illuminate all three reservations.

C. Site:

1. Character of surrounding structures: All of the historic structures except for the Brodhead-Bell-Morton residence east of Reservation No. 64 have been replaced in the late twentieth century with large commercial structures or embassies. Minimally ornamented boxlike structures are built at varying setbacks and fail to frame the circle.
2. Traffic patterns: Sixteenth Street tunnels under the park, while all other intersection streets travel counter-clockwise around it. Lanes of traffic are guided by four large sodded traffic islands.
3. Vistas: This reservation offers reciprocal vistas south on 16th Street to the White House, northeast on Rhode Island Avenue to Logan Circle, and both northwest and southeast on Massachusetts Avenue to Dupont and Thomas circles, respectively.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

¹⁸ Goode, Outdoor Sculpture, 286.

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.

Ellicott, Andrew. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1792.

L'Enfant, Pierre Charles. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1791.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, showing the Public Reservations." Prepared by Orville E. Babcock. 1871.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.

B. Early Views:

1888: Photograph of circle with Windom house in background (Sixteenth Street Architecture, xxvii).

ca. 1890: Photograph with circle and Alexander Graham Bell residence (Sixteenth Street Architecture, xvi).

ca. 1900: Photograph of the circle (Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, xvii).

1903: Photographs of each statue (Annual Report . . ., 1903).

1911: Photograph showing the revised landscape setting of the Webster statue in Reservation No. 62 (Annual Reports . . ., 1911).

1927: Survey photographs of Reservation Nos. 62, 63, and 64 (NPS Reservation files).

1932: Aerial view of circle (Sixteenth Street Architecture, xxviii).

1941: Photograph of underpass construction (Sixteenth Street Architecture, xxi).

C. Park plans: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans. Additional plans are located at the Office of Land Use, National Capital Region.

D. Bibliography:

Annual Reports of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1867-1933.

- Burnap, George. Parks, Their Design, Equipment and Use. Washington, D.C., 1916.
- Commission of Fine Arts. Massachusetts Avenue Architecture II. Washington, D.C.: GPO. 1975.
- Commission of Fine Arts. Sixteenth Street Architecture II. Washington, D.C.: GPO. 1988.
- Federal Writers' Project. Washington, City and Capital. American Guide Series. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1937.
- Goode, James M. Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.
- Goode, James M. The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.
- "Government Reservations within the City Boundaries." City Lots. Real Estate Atlas, NARA RG42 230.
- Harrison, S. R. "Modern Street Intersection Design, Washington, D.C." Washington, D.C: American Road Builders' Association, Municipal Bulletin No. 131, 1948.
- McNeil, Priscilla W. "Rock Creek Hundred: Land Conveyed for the Federal City." Washington History 3 (Spring/Summer, 1991): 34-51.
- Record Group 42, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA RG42).
- Reservation Files, Office of Land Use, National Capital Region, National Park Service.
- U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia. ed. by Charles Moore. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1902.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
1993

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

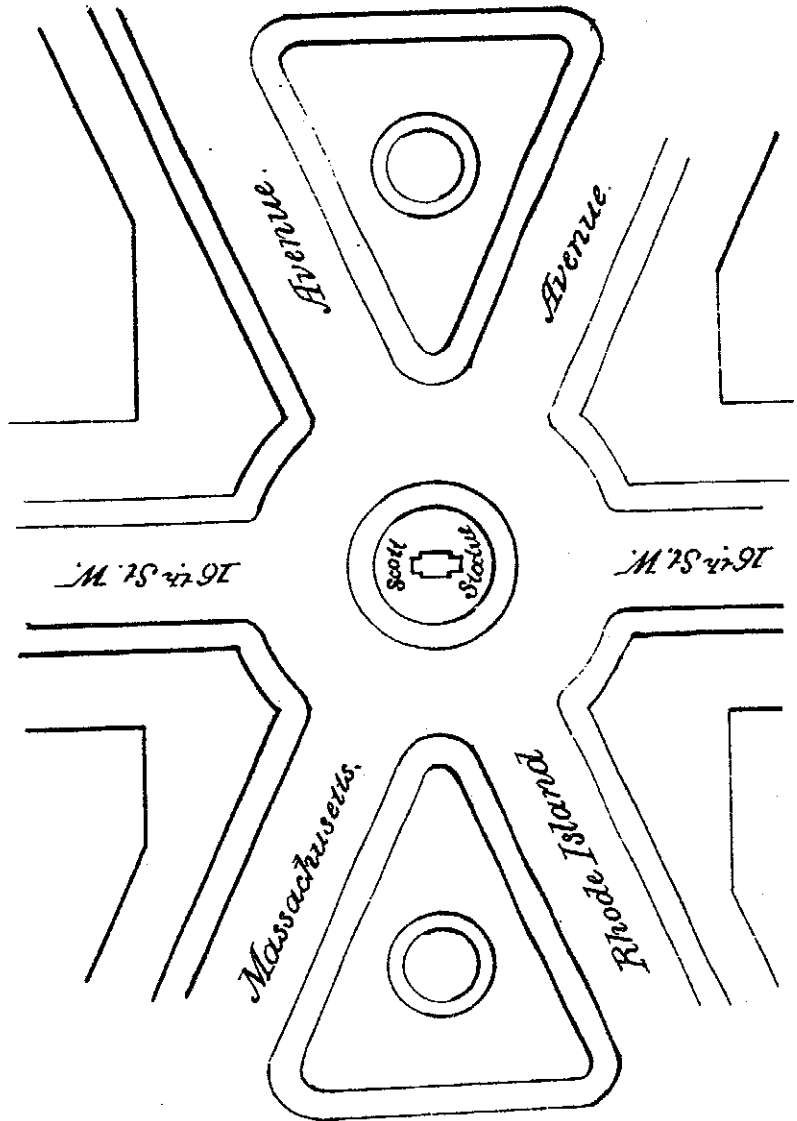
The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic 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.

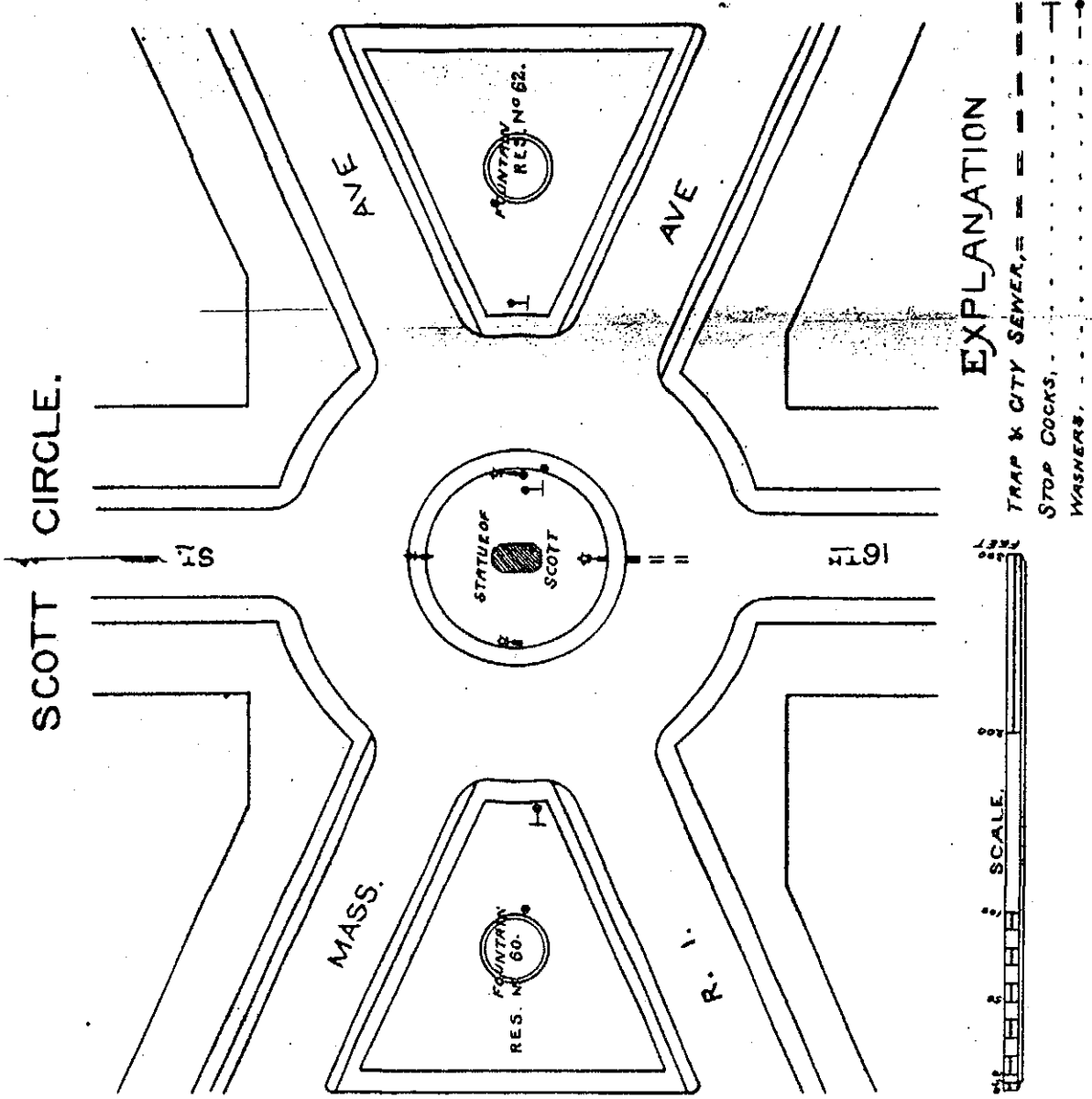
HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz 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

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|-----------------|-----------|---|
| Page 10 | 1876: | Park plan showing the configuration of the intersection (<u>City Lots</u> , NARA RG42 230). |
| Page 11 | 1885: | Park plan showing city sewers, stop cocks, and washers in Reservation Nos. 62, 63, and 64 (<u>Annual Report . . .</u> , 1885). |
| Page 12 | ca. 1900: | Photograph of the circle (<u>Massachusetts Avenue Architecture</u> , xvii). |
| Page 13, 14, 15 | 1903: | Photographs of each statue (<u>Annual Report . . .</u> , 1903). |
| Page 16 | 1911: | Photograph showing revised landscape setting for Reservation No. 62 (<u>Annual Reports . . .</u> , 1911). |

6.



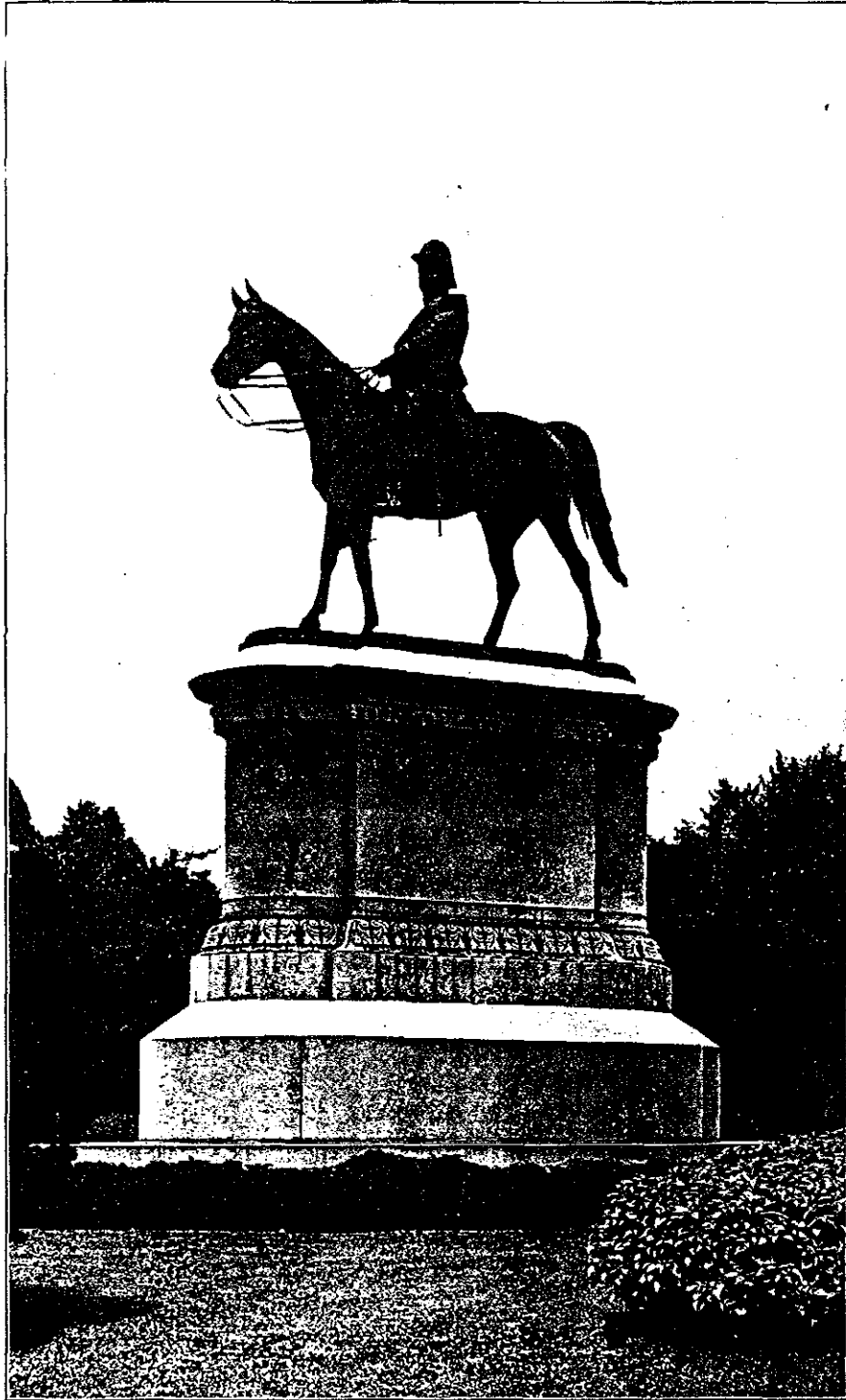


To accompany Annual Report of Officer
in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds
for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1886. H Ex1 pt2 v2 49 2

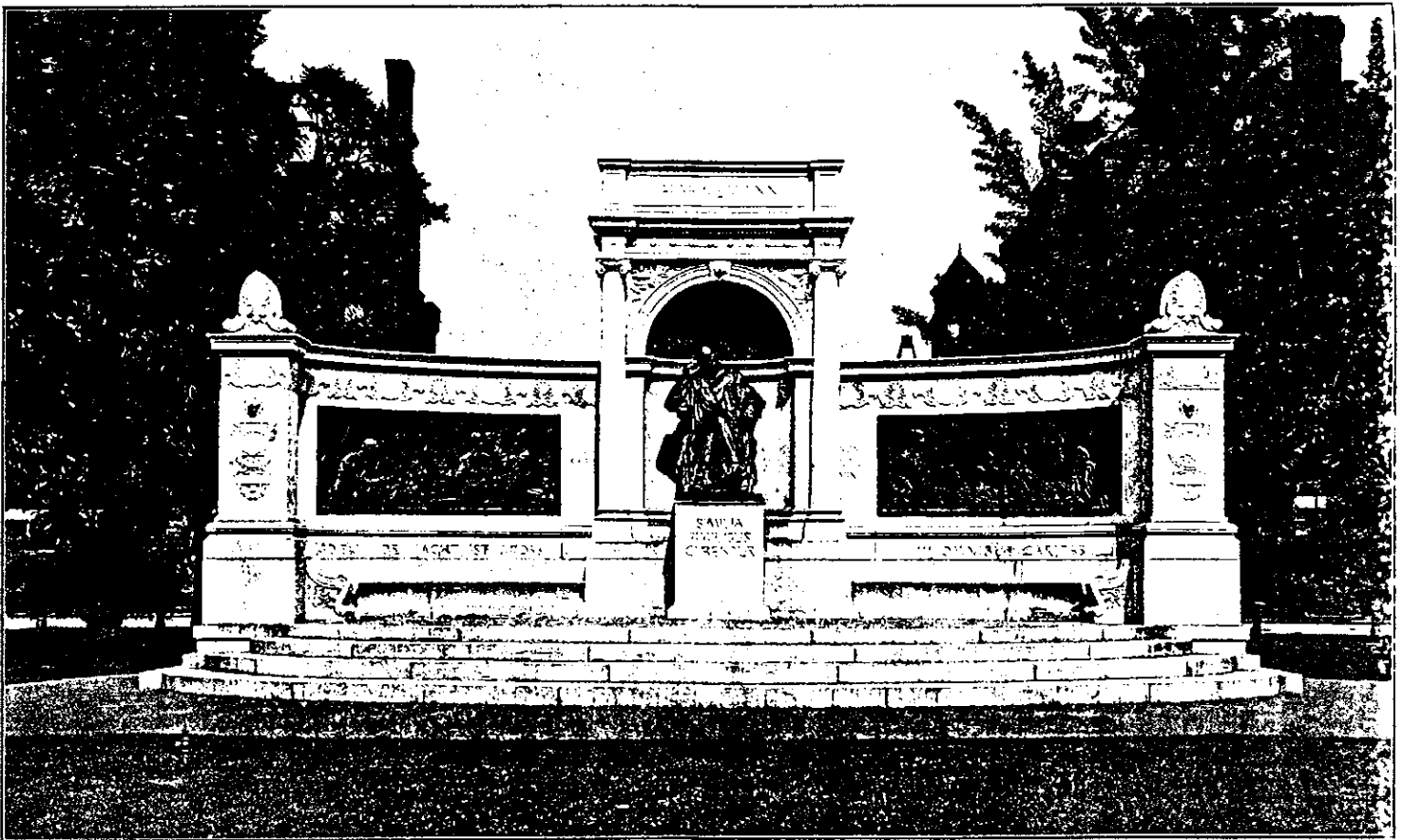




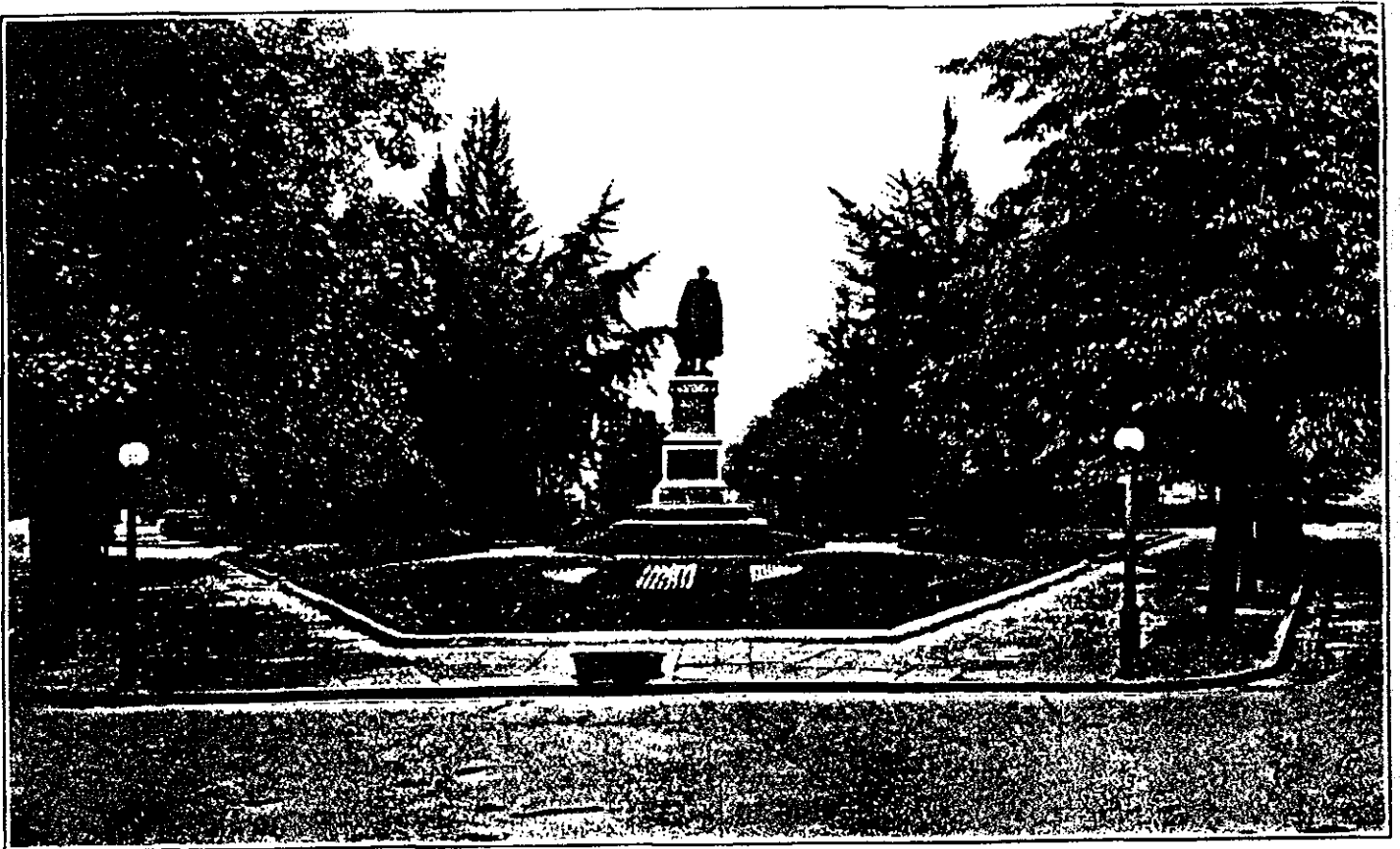
DANIEL WEBSTER, RESERVATION AT MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, BETWEEN SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH STREETS NW.



GEN. WINFIELD SCOTT, SCOTT CIRCLE, SIXTEENTH AND N STREET NW.



DR. SAMUEL HAHNEMANN, RESERVATION AT MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, BETWEEN FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH STREETS NW.



REVISED LANDSCAPE SETTING OF WEBSTER STATUE. VIEW FROM SCOTT CIRCLE, LOOKING WEST.