

L'ENFANT-MCMILLAN PLAN OF WASHINGTON, DC
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-668

HABS
DC
WASH
612-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
DC
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612-

L'ENFANT-MCMILLIAN PLAN OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
(The Federal City)

HABS NO. DC-668

- Location: City of Washington, District of Columbia. The location of the proposed structure--along with its related sites, structures, buildings, and objects--is roughly established on the east-southeast by the Anacostia River from Constitution Avenue, NE, to the Washington Channel; on the west-southwest by the Potomac River, up to and along Rock Creek to Sheridan Circle at 24th and R streets, NW; the boundary continues east one-and-one-half blocks to Florida Avenue, NW, which demarks the boundary northeastward, then east, then southeast to 15th Street, NE; continuing south to C Street, it follows this route east to its terminus at Anacostia Park. The boundaries of the nominated city plan extend beyond the D.C. shoreline to the high-tide level reached by the river on the opposite Virginia and D.C. shoreline, excluding Columbia Island. The area encompasses approximately 3,500 acres within zip codes 20001, 20002, 20003, 20004, 20005, 20006, 20007, 20008, 20009, 20024, 20036 and 20037.
- Present Owner: The reservations, structures, etc. included are owned by the Federal Government, Department of the Interior, National Park Service and by the District of Columbia city government.
- Present Use: The nominated area includes all parks and reservations; streets and avenues; buildings, structures, and objects; and corridor of open space that extends from original building line to building line and forms the right-of-way; though they may not be nominated, specific scenic vistas along major axes and among major monuments are important features to the character of the plan. The ceiling of the nominated area is not lower than the maximum allowable height of the buildings on adjacent blocks.
- Significance: The historic plan of Washington, District of Columbia--the nation's capital--designed by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 as the site of the Federal City, represents the sole American example of a comprehensive baroque city plan with a coordinated system of radiating avenues, parks and vistas laid over an orthogonal system. Influenced by the designs of several European cities and eighteenth-century gardens such as France's Palace of Versailles, the plan of Washington, D.C., was symbolic and innovative for the new nation. Existing colonial towns surely influenced L'Enfant's scheme, just as the plan of Washington, in turn, influenced subsequent American city planning. Limited changes were made to the historic city--bounded by Florida Avenue on the north and the waterways on the east, west, and south--until after the Civil War. The foremost manipulation of L'Enfant's plan of Washington began in the late nineteenth century, and was codified in 1901 with the McMillan Commission, which directed urban improvements that resulted in the most elegant example of City Beautiful tenets in the nation. L'Enfant's plan was magnified and expanded during the early decades of the twentieth century with the reclamation of land for waterfront parks, parkways, and improved Mall,

and new monuments and vistas. Two-hundred years since its design, the integrity of the plan of Washington is largely unimpaired--boasting a legally enforced height restriction, landscaped parks, wide avenues, and open space allowing intended vistas.

Historian: Elizabeth Barthold. Edited by Sara Amy Leach.

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CONTENTS

Pierre Charles L'Enfant's Plan 1

Andrew Ellicott's Plan

1800-1860: Slow Growth

Early Threats and Intrusions to the Plan

U.S. Department of the Interior

The Civil War

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Formation of a Territorial Government

Beyond the L'Enfant Plan

Regulating Building Heights

The McMillan Senate Park Commission

Early Effects of the McMillan Commission

World War I and Washington, D.C.

Toward a Comprehensive Plan

The New Deal in Washington

Adapting the Plan for Automobiles

World War II and Decentralization

Urban Blight and Southwest Redevelopment

The Inner Loop and the Southeast/Southwest Freeway

Redevelopment Plans for Virginia and Pennsylvania Avenues

WMATA and the Development of Regionwide Public Transportation

Significance of L'Enfant's City Today

Home Rule

Summary: Looking Ahead

Appendix A: List of Reservations/Parks and Avenues documented by HABS/HAER

Appendix B: Planned Capitals, American and Ideal Cities--Before and After Washington, D.C.

Sources Consulted

From the Tidal Basin to Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C.,'s magnificence comes as much from its urban landscape as from its buildings. Large green expanses such as the monumental Mall and the Potomac parks, and small triangles along the avenues landscaped with trees and benches, provide generous areas of open space throughout the historic city.¹ Coupled with the building-height restriction that allows sunlight to reach the streets, the system of open spaces connected by wide avenues gives Washington an undeniable openness. While Washington has few structures that date to its founding, this network of avenues, streets and open spaces, designed in 1791, remains largely intact today. Although threatened during its 200-year history--and in several instances, violated--the original design of Washington is a landmark urban plan meriting study, assessment, and preservation as it enters its third century.

Pierre Charles L'Enfant's Plan

A congressional act of July 16, 1790, empowered the president of the United States to appoint three commissioners of the District of Columbia to lay out the city and oversee the construction of government buildings. Andrew Ellicott (1754-1820) and Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) surveyed a diamond-shaped area measuring ten miles on each side and encompassing the forks of the Potomac River and its Eastern Branch, the Anacostia. Forty stone markers, each a mile apart, were erected to mark the boundary from the celestial calculations of Banneker, a self-taught astronomer of African descent, and one of few free blacks living in the vicinity. Within this 100-square-mile diamond, which would become the District of Columbia, a smaller area was laid out as the City of Washington. Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant (1755-1825), a French artist and engineer who had formed a friendship with George Washington while serving in the Revolutionary War, asked for the honor of devising a city plan for the roughly 6,111-acre area that would become Washington. The thriving port of Alexandria was located on the southern edge of the ten-mile-square, and another port city, Georgetown, was located within the diamond west of Rock Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River that defined the northwest boundary of the planned federal city. Within the city boundaries, towns called Hamburg and Carrollsburg had been already been planned on paper, although neither had been laid out on the land. A census of Prince George's County shows that the area to become the City of Washington was occupied by twenty households consisting of 720 persons: thirty-seven free white males older than 16, thirty-five free white males under 16, fifty-three white females, four other free persons, and 591 slaves.² The fact that the area was largely undeveloped gave the city founders George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, as well as Pierre L'Enfant, the unique opportunity of creating a capital city that would define the identity of the nation it would serve.

After surveying the site, L'Enfant developed a plan in the baroque tradition of ceremonial spaces and grand radial avenues while respecting the natural contours of the land, in the manner of a picturesque English garden.³ The result was a system of orthogonal streets with intersecting diagonal avenues radiating from two of the highest points in the city, selected as sites for buildings to house

¹ "Historic city" is defined as that area encompassed in the original plan, namely, the area north of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers, east of Rock Creek, and south of Florida Avenue and C Street, NE.

² Philip W. Ogilvie, "Chronology of Some Events in the History of the District of Columbia," Office of Public Records, District of Columbia, ca. 1988, 12.

³ Pamela Scott, "Pierre L'Enfant: A New Look at the Architect and his Plan," Washington, D.C. at 200, lecture series, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C., March 25, 1991.

the congress and president. L'Enfant specified in notes accompanying the plan that these avenues were to be wide, grand, and lined with trees, and situated in a manner that would visually connect ideal topographical sites throughout the city where he envisioned important structures, monuments, and fountains. On paper, L'Enfant shaded and numbered fifteen large open spaces at the intersections of these avenues and indicated that they were to be "divided among the several States in the Union, for each of them to improve, or subscribe a sum additional to the value of the land for that purpose." He speculated that the city would develop more rapidly and its population would be more evenly distributed if each of the states participated in its beautification. The plan of the capital would reflect the nation it represented. The squares, named for the states, would be separate unto themselves, yet be "most advantageously and reciprocally seen from each other . . . connected by spacious Avenues round the grand Federal Improvements . . .,"⁴ much like the United States themselves bound together by the Constitution. L'Enfant specified that each reservation would feature:

Statues, Columns, Obelisks, or any other ornaments, such as the different States may choose to erect; to perpetuate not only the memory of such individuals whose Counsels or military achievements were conspicuous in giving liberty and independence to this Country; but also those whose usefulness hath rendered them worthy of general imitation: to invite Youth of succeeding generations to tread in the paths of those Sages or heroes whom their Country has thought proper to celebrate.

The urban landscape could hereby embody and perpetuate accepted values and ideals as long as these national idols presided over the city from their pedestals. L'Enfant's scheme also displayed five grand fountains supplied by several of the area's more than twenty natural springs.

Fountains, statues, and the general scheme of radiating streets with parks and vistas were surely products of L'Enfant's admiration of Versailles, where he spent much of his childhood. The aesthetic and symbolic concepts embodied in Andre Le Notre's (1613-94) landscape plan for Sun King Louis XIV were, ironically, transferred to the new democracy across the Atlantic. By emulating the baroque plans of such auspicious empires as Rome and France, L'Enfant set forth his high hopes for the prosperity, longevity, and international importance of the new country. L'Enfant's plan even foretold the manifest destiny of America to someday encompass the vast expanse from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. At the site of today's Lincoln Park, he envisioned "an historic column--also intended for a Mile or itinerary Column, from whose station (a mile from the Federal house) all distances of places throughout the Continent [were] to be calculated."⁵

Thus, for L'Enfant, the open spaces were as integral to the capital as the buildings to be erected around them. Along with the streets and avenues he delineated, these circles, squares, and triangles were the city's only reality--they defined the voids that would be divided into lots to be sold and developed.

The integrity of the plan was so important to L'Enfant that he jeopardized his livelihood to preserve it. While clearing New Jersey Avenue south of the Capitol site, L'Enfant's workmen encountered a partially constructed house with walls projecting 7' into the planned right-of-way for the road. The house belonged to Daniel Carroll, a nephew of one of the three commissioners in

⁴ References on L'Enfant's 1791 plan of the city.

⁵ References on L'Enfant's 1791 plan of the city.

charge of the District of Columbia. Carroll refused to relocate the house, so L'Enfant, allowing nothing to violate his vision, ordered his men to raze the structure. In response, George Washington admonished him, "Having the beauty and regularity of your plan only in view, you pursue it as if every person, and thing, was obliged to yield to it."⁶ This incident, while exhibiting the extent of L'Enfant's dedication to his ideals, also displayed the stubbornness that would later cost him his job.

While L'Enfant concerned himself with vistas and avenues, Washington and Jefferson oversaw the real estate transactions that would finance the physical development of the city. At the suggestion of Georgetown businessman George Walker, they used a unique scheme for obtaining the land from the original proprietors, with all of the transactions contingent upon the yet-unfinished city plan. The government would purchase the land designated for federal buildings for \$66.67 an acre. The proprietors would donate to the federal government land set aside for streets and avenues. The remaining acreage would be divided into city blocks, and each block would be further subdivided into lots.⁷ The lots in each block would be distributed evenly between the federal government and the original owners. Anticipating that the value of the land would increase significantly, the original proprietors retained only 16 percent of their original holdings, turning over 84 percent of it to the federal government. Proceeds from the sale of the federally owned lots would fund construction of government buildings and the improvement of streets and parks.⁸

L'Enfant, believing the premature sale of lots would hinder the city's development, failed to provide the commissioners with a map in time for the first sale in October 1791. The sale was a resounding failure with only thirty-five of 10,000 potential government lots sold not only foreshadowing the apprehension of investors that would plague the city for years to come, but also solidifying the commissioners' resentment toward L'Enfant. Reluctantly, George Washington relieved L'Enfant of his post and engaged surveyor Andrew Ellicott to produce a map for the second sale scheduled for the following spring.

Andrew Ellicott's Plan

Stripped of his position, L'Enfant jealously refused to relinquish his manuscript to the commissioners, so Ellicott had to reproduce the plan from the Frenchman's notes, his memory, and the help of his brother Benjamin who had helped with the survey. Despite his diligence, Ellicott was also hard pressed to produce an engraved version of the plan for the sale, which had by then been postponed until October 8, 1792. When it appeared that Philadelphia engravers James Thackara and John Vallance would not meet the October deadline, Boston engraver Samuel Hill was contracted to do the work. Although Hill's engraving was used at the sale, the larger and more accurate Thackara and Vallance engraving was accepted as the official map when it was finally completed.

⁶ Albert E. Cowdrey, A City for the Nation: The Army Engineers and the Building of Washington, D.C., 1790-1967 (Washington, GPO, 1978), 8; and Elizabeth S. Kite, L'Enfant and Washington (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1929), 93-96.

⁷ Although the term "block" has been used here for clarity, in Washington, blocks officially were and continue to be called "squares."

⁸ Frederick Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1977), 23-24; Paul D. Spreiregen, On the Art of Designing Cities: Selected Essays of Elbert Peets (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 5; George Speer Colyer, "The L'Enfant Plan in Downtown Washington: Its History and Prospects for Survival" (MA thesis, George Washington University, 1987), 53.

Ellicott's plan closely follows L'Enfant's with several minor changes.⁹ Ellicott eliminated L'Enfant's notes concerning cascades, columns, and statues, as well as his fifteen yellow-shaded reservations, thereby abandoning any comprehensive directive for the treatment of the city's open spaces except for L'Enfant's suggestion of dividing the avenues into "footways, walks of trees and a carriage way."¹⁰ Even in his "Observations explanatory of the Plan," Ellicott copied L'Enfant's words almost verbatim, except that he deleted the word "Grand" from each place that it occurred in L'Enfant's text.¹¹ Perhaps Ellicott's most grievous omission from the engraved plan, however, was the Frenchman's name.¹² The plan had passed hands from the artist to the engineer, from the aesthetic and symbolic to the practical.

While Ellicott made deletions to L'Enfant's scheme, he also made several additions. In order to identify the blocks that would be divided into lots for public sale, he consecutively numbered those designated for private development, beginning with square No. 1 at the westernmost point in the city.¹³ While perhaps only incidentally, a comparative glance at the two maps reveals how Ellicott altered L'Enfant's conception of the void. L'Enfant's map delineates the streets and parks and indicates how they are to be improved while leaving the blocks they define as open space to be filled later. On Ellicott's map, the blocks are darkened by numbers and the streets and parks have become the voids. Ellicott further delineated the blocks in his survey of squares undertaken between 1793-96. In these sheets, the blocks are further divided into lots, irregular in size and shape due to L'Enfant's network of diagonals and the irregular grid. Almost half of the squares surveyed contain H-, T-, or X-shaped alleys.¹⁴ Although it is unknown who developed Washington's unique system of alleys, or how their configurations were determined, George Washington discussed them in his building regulations, referring to them as "the way(s) into squares being designed in a special manner for the common use and convenience of the occupiers of the respective squares."¹⁵ The alleys were intended to allow access to each property from both the street and the rear, but as early as the 1850s,

⁹ Gutheim, 31. The differences between the L'Enfant and the Ellicott plans were studied extensively in 1926 by William T. Partridge who created an overlay map comparing the plans.

¹⁰ Notation on Andrew Ellicott's engraving of the "Plan of the City of Washington," 1792.

¹¹ The 1991 Library of Congress/USGS digitization of the L'Enfant Plan reveals pencil notations inscribed on the plan believed to have been made by Thomas Jefferson. The word "grand" is crossed out to indicate it should be deleted. L'Enfant's references to the plan are also crossed out.

¹² Pamela Scott proposes that Jefferson and Washington deliberately omitted any references to L'Enfant on the engraved plan in her paper "The Manuscript and Printed Maps of Pierre Charles L'Enfant's Plan of Washington," presented at the Fourth National Conference on American Planning History/Fifth International Conference Planning History Group, Richmond, Virginia, November 1991.

¹³ There are 1,136 numbered squares on the Samuel Hill engraving, with 22nd Street forming the easternmost boundary. The highest numbered square on the Thackara and Vallance engraving is 1,146, with 25th Street forming the easternmost boundary. The later Dermott map extends east to 32nd Street, NE, and includes 1,170 numbered squares, many of which were actually in the Anacostia River. Manual of Practices for Real Property Survey in the District of Columbia, Office of the Surveyor, District of Columbia Department of Public Works, (ca. 1985), 7.

¹⁴ The alleys--historic and contemporary--were excluded from the HABS survey.

¹⁵ J. L. Sibley Jennings, Jr., interprets squares to mean the open spaces at the intersections in his article, "Artistry as Design: L'Enfant's Extraordinary City," Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress 6 (Summer 1979): 225-75.

some city squares would be subdivided to create small lots fronting these interior passageways.¹⁶

Ellicott's plan was also the first to include street names, although they were probably conceived by L'Enfant. The wide, axial avenues are named after the fifteen states that then comprised the new nation. The avenues south of the Capitol were named after the southern states, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina; the central states, Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania are centrally located on the plan; and the northern avenues in the city are named Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire. The grid streets are named with reference to the Capitol in a system suggested by Jefferson and James Madison on September 8, 1791.¹⁷ North Capitol Street extends due north from the capitol, East Capitol Street extends due east, and South Capitol, due south. The Mall lies west of the Capitol, stretching to the Potomac River. These four axes delineate the city's four quadrants. The north-to-south running streets east of the Capitol are numbered consecutively, in rising order going east, and those west of the Capitol rise consecutively going west. The east-to-west running streets are assigned letters in alphabetical order as they continue north and south from the Capitol, respectively.¹⁸

The area designated for the streets and avenues encompasses about 55 percent of the plan and was acquired at no charge to the federal government from the original proprietors. Extraordinarily wide for the time, the rights-of-ways of the twenty-one avenues and 116 streets spanned from building line to building line. The avenues varied from 120' to 160' wide, and the streets from 80' to 147' wide, the whole system embracing 228 miles and containing 2,654 acres. Additional federal acreage was created by many odd-angled intersections. On L'Enfant's plan, these numerous intersections were largely amorphous in shape. Ellicott reconfigured the blocks surrounding many of the intersections to form neat circular or rectangular openings.

Additionally, the federal government purchased seventeen parcels, encompassing 541 acres, as sites for public and federal buildings. Although appropriations were described by location and function in a note accompanying Ellicott's plan, they were not delineated graphically until surveyor James R. Dermott included them on his "Appropriations," or "Tin Case" map prepared in 1795-97.¹⁹ Although most of these original reservations remain in federal hands today, not all have been used for the functions assigned to them in 1792. Reservation No. 1 encompassed the grounds of the President's House, Treasury, Executive Office, and the areas that would later become the Ellipse and

¹⁶ "Blagden Alley/Naylor Court Historic District," Application for Historic District by Tracerics Inc. (D.C. Preservation Review Board, 1990), 6.

¹⁷ Scott, 1991.

¹⁸ The northern and southernmost streets in the plan are coincidentally "W" Street, so there are no X, Y, or Z streets. More perplexing, however, the letter J was also omitted, giving rise to many mythical explanations. One holds that L'Enfant so disliked Jefferson that he omitted the first letter of his name, another posits that John Jay was the one being slighted. Most likely the letter was omitted due to its visual similarity to the letter "I." A short-lived "J Street" appeared

¹⁹ Ralph Ehrenburg, "Mapping the Nation's Capital: The Surveyor's Office, 1791-1818," The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress 36 (Summer 1979): 293-94; Kenneth R. Bowling, Creating the Federal City, 1774-1800: Potomac Fever (Washington, D.C.: AIA Press, 1988), 91. The map received this moniker because it was transported to Philadelphia in a tin case. The Dermott Map, approved by President Washington and his successor, John Adams, as the official map of the city, supplemented the executive order by which the streets and reservations were transferred to the federal government. Although it was not engraved until the 1880s, this map was widely used by lawyers to settle property disputes.

Lafayette Square. Reservation No. 2 spanned from First Street East to 14th Street West and included the Capitol Grounds and much of the Mall. Reservation No. 3 was the area south of the Tiber Creek between 14th and 17th streets, which was designated as the site of an equestrian statue of George Washington, and later became the Washington Monument Grounds.

Reservation No. 4, located between 23rd and 25th streets south of E Street on the Potomac River, was originally designated as the site for a university and is the current site of the Naval Medical School Hospital. Reservation No. 5, known as Buzzard or Greenleaf Point, was intended as a fort and is now the site of Fort McNair and the U.S. Army War College. Reservation Nos. 6 and 7 were intended as market spaces. The former was located between 20th and 21st streets between the canal (Constitution Avenue) and the Potomac River, and the latter, between Seventh and Ninth streets. No market was ever built in Reservation No. 6 because until the end of the nineteenth century it was actually under the Tiber Creek. It now falls within Reservation No. 332, or West Potomac Park, developed on the reclaimed land extending west of the Washington Monument Grounds. Reservation No. 7, however, was continuously occupied by a market from 1802 until the 1930s when the National Archives was built on the site. (The large, mixed-use building complex erected north of the Archives in the past decade as part of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan is called Market Square, recalling the historic use of this space.) Reservation No. 8, designated as the site of a national church, was located between Seventh, Ninth, F, and G streets. In 1837 it became the site of the Patent Office building. When the venerable Greek Revival-style structure was slated to be torn down and replaced with a parking lot in the 1950s, the public rallied to its defense, and it was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution; it is now the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of American Art. Reservation No. 9, between D, G, Fourth, and Fifth streets, was designated Judiciary Square and intended as the site of the U.S. Supreme Court. Still known by this name, it was never used for this purpose, and became the site of municipal rather than federal buildings. Reservation Nos. 10, 11, and 12 were collectively the Bank and Exchange Squares. Located north of Pennsylvania Avenue between Second and Four-and-a-Half streets, they were sold for private development by an act of Congress in 1822.²⁰ Reservation No. 13, on the east side of the city between B, G, and 19th streets, and the Anacostia River, was designated as Hospital Square. It became the site of Gallinger Hospital and the city jail, and today is home to D.C. General Hospital. Reservation No. 14, on the Anacostia River between Sixth, Ninth, and M streets, SE, was reserved for the U.S. Navy Yard, which remains there today although expanded west to Second Street. Reservation Nos. 15 and 16, located between Fifth, Seventh, K, and L streets in the southeast quadrant, were set aside for a market; they are now the site of Reservation No. 19, a playground managed by the District of Columbia. Reservation No. 17, called the "town house square," was a large, oddly shaped tract at the intersections of Virginia, South Carolina, and New Jersey avenues, SE. Although much smaller today, this area now called Garfield Park features tennis courts and playground equipment.

1800-1860: Slow Growth

L'Enfant envisioned that the gradual improvement of the public spaces into attractive parks and tree-lined promenades would enhance the value of the lots and encourage buyers. His plan also included a canal beginning at the mouth of the Tiber River and running along the north side of the

²⁰ The three reservations were sold to the municipality of Washington so the city could drain the low grounds of Reservation No. 2. They were divided into lots and sold; Reservation No. 12 was the site of the first railroad depot in the city from 1835-1853. George J. Olaszewski, The Construction of Union Station (Washington, D.C. Office of History and Historic Architecture, NPS, 1970), 10-11.

Mall. It turned south along the west side of the Capitol, forking at Reservation No. 17 to meet the Eastern Branch in two places. The canal was included at George Washington's suggestion as a means of promoting commerce in a city formed solely to house the federal government. The city founders, more interested in short-term economic gain, encouraged the rapid sale of the lots before improvements were made to the federal property.²¹ Worldwide ridicule was directed at the plan rather than at the financial neglect that prevented its proper execution. French traveler La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt wrote of the city in 1797, "One cannot say that [visitors] are pushing the idea of comfort to extremes when they wish to be preserved from falling into mud holes for lack of paved roads, or from breaking their necks for lack of streetlights. This sort of inconvenience will endure here for many years, given the size of the city's plan and the great distance between the two centers of public affairs."²² Derisive nicknames such as "the city of streets without houses," and "the city of magnificent distances," further discouraged the sales needed to fund improvements. Likewise, the canal begun in 1792 was abandoned by 1795 due to financial disarray; although construction resumed from 1802-15, inferior materials were used, and the canal was subject silting, rendering it more a hindrance than a benefit.

L'Enfant's vision was spawned in a political setting where kings spared no expense in creating beautiful buildings and parks for the glory of country and crown, whereas the agenda of the Americans, based upon the principles of democracy and a free-market economy, emphasized the growth of the private sector. The fact that more than half of the acreage of the original city was set aside as federal property decreased the tax base and drove up real-estate prices in the already undesirable and largely unimproved setting. Congress, charged with funding the development of the city, was indifferent to its needs while scornful of its crude condition. The annual reports of those charged with maintaining the roads and parks throughout the nineteenth century echo complaints of insufficient funds. Between 1791 and 1802, the commissioners' expenditures for the improvement of the city totalled \$900,857. This amount included \$478,040 gained through the sale of lots, as well as donations and loans from Maryland and Virginia. The entire sum of the receipts was spent on improvements, including: the Capitol, Treasury, war office, and president's house, two drawbridges (over Rock Creek and Tiber Creek), wharves on the Eastern Branch and the Potomac, a canal linking the Tiber and James creeks, temporary buildings for the government, sidewalks, the clearing of avenues, surveying, salaries and miscellaneous office expenses.²³ In 1802 the duties of the three commissioners were transferred to the office of the Superintendent of Public Buildings, a presidential appointee who was required by law to submit annual reports to Congress.

The problem of grading and paving the streets loomed large throughout the first half of the century, and the poor condition of the thoroughfares is well documented by the complaints of early visitors and residents. The city had been incorporated in 1802, giving it the power to tax residents to pay for the repair of all necessary streets and avenues, but authority to *open* streets was not granted until 1812. Described by the Secretary of the Interior in 1856, this power was "permissive and not obligatory . . . and the construction which seems to have been given to it is, that the government

²¹ John W. Reps, Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 18.

²² Gutheim, 21.

²³ "Report of the Committee on the expenditures on the Public Buildings in 1824," 18th Cong., 2nd sess., 273.

should provide for the opening and improvement of the avenues, and the corporation for the numbered and lettered streets."²⁴ The federal government made modest attempts to improve a few of the most heavily used avenues following incorporation of the city. Pennsylvania Avenue was improved in 1803 by order of Thomas Jefferson who rode down it on horseback for his 1805 inauguration, thus beginning the tradition of ceremonial use. Oil lamps were installed on the avenue in 1803, but no money was allocated for oil or lamplighters, so they remained dark. Several programs were initiated to illuminate the city's busiest streets throughout these first decades, but because maintenance was far more costly than installation, lamps burned on an irregular basis, often only when Congress was in session.²⁵ Congress dealt with the streets similarly, initiating piecemeal projects, often at the urging of city residents, to improve the well-traveled thoroughfares such as Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland avenues and Four-and-a-half Street, which led from Pennsylvania Avenue to Judiciary Square. Two of the earliest Anacostia River bridges in Southeast Washington, D.C., were built during the first decade of the century. The Eleventh Street/Navy Yard Bridge was a crude wood structure that survived until the mid nineteenth century, and the first Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge, a wood span built in 1804, existed intermittently with ferry service until burning in 1845.

Early urban landscape efforts were limited to meager improvements of the property surrounding federal buildings in several of the seventeen designated reservations and tree planting along the avenues. The first documented attempt to embellish the city with trees was in 1807 when Jefferson oversaw the planting of four rows of Lombardy poplars along Pennsylvania Avenue. Congress allocated \$100 toward their replacement in 1816, and in 1834 the Commissioner of Public Buildings reported that "choice trees of several varieties" had been planted on Pennsylvania Avenue and provisions had been made for their protection. To protect the improvements made to the public property, the commissioners passed a law punishable by a fine of \$1 to \$5 for fastening "any horse, mule or any other animal to any of the trees, boxes or other protections thereof."²⁶ Other records indicate that \$100 per year was allocated in Wards 1 and 2 "to keep trees in order in public squares, streets and avenues."²⁷

Although there were seventeen reservations in all, the grounds surrounding the President's House and Capitol, Reservation Nos. 1 and 2, seem to have been the only ones consistently maintained by federal funds. Before 1802, \$16,785 was allocated for their improvement, and throughout the 1820s-30s, annual allocations were made for their upkeep. Public gardeners were listed on the federal payroll as early as the 1820s to maintain these two reservations.

The northernmost section of President's Park within Reservation No. 1 was first landscaped as a separate park in 1824. That year, the beloved French hero of the Revolutionary War, the Marquis de Lafayette, was accompanied by throngs of Washingtonians in a parade along Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the park, which was planted with trees and shrubs and surrounded by a fence

²⁴ Report of the Secretary of the Interior, Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings (October 11, 1856), 855.

²⁵ Sarah Pressey Noreen, Public Street Illumination in Washington, D.C. (Washington, D.C.: GW Washington Studies No. 2, 1975), 5-6.

²⁶ Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, December 20, 1933, 3.

²⁷ William Tindall, "The Origin of the Parking System of the City," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 4 (1901): 76-77.

especially for this momentous event. From thenceforth, the commons was known as Lafayette Park.

The expansive tract spreading west from the Capitol to the Potomac River, Reservation No. 2--although conceived as a single, long boulevard--was carved into pieces by the crossing of Sixth, Seventh, Twelfth, and 14th streets. Furthermore, Missouri and Maine avenues were created at the east end of the Mall in 1817 to form a smaller triangle within the larger triangle formed by Maryland and Pennsylvania avenues and Sixth Street. Most of this reservation was south of the stagnant canal, and because of its undesirable location, received little attention until an unexpected and curious event in 1838. That year, Englishman James Smithson, who had never visited the United States, bequeathed his estate valued at approximately \$500,000 to the federal capital to establish an institution of learning; this large reservation was the site chosen for what would become the Smithsonian Institution. Robert Mills designed the building and the surrounding landscape to encompass the Mall, but when the "Castle" was finally begun in 1849 it was to the designs of architect James Renwick. The structure was built near the south side of the Mall, offset to provide a 600'-wide corridor to preserve the vista between the Capitol and the Washington Monument, begun a year earlier.

The only other park consistently maintained by the federal government in the early nineteenth century was not among the seventeen reservations, nor was it created by any of the avenue intersections. Fountain Square, located between 13th, 14th, I, and K streets in the northwest quadrant, was intended as City Square No. 249. The federal government purchased it in 1832 so water from its natural spring could be piped to the White House. Now known as Franklin Park, this is one of the few reservations in Washington not located along an avenue.

While transient government workers filled numerous inns and boarding houses when Congress was in session, Washington's permanent residents occupied dwellings ranging from small rowhouses to large estates. L'Enfant's squares were spacious enough to allow even the rowhouses deep back lots for stables and private gardens. Wealthier residents, such as Stephen and Susan Decatur and Peter and Marcia Burnes Van Ness, filled several contiguous lots, or even entire blocks, with elegant homes and their accompanying stables, kitchens, privies, and kitchen gardens. Domestic animals such as chickens, cows, and pigs often wandered freely from private yards into the public streets and open spaces and ravaged the meager public improvements.

Early Threats and Intrusions to the Plan

The concept of publicly maintained open spaces amid so much undeveloped land, fields, and virgin stands of trees must have seemed ludicrous to early inhabitants. Understandably, there were early attempts to redirect the plan of the city, despite the fact that original legislation securing the lands for the federal capital was "clothed with a perpetual condition and trust that they should forever remain streets and public reservations and never should be liable to be appropriated to any private use, or changed from their original purpose."²⁸ Critics of the plan who believed the oddly shaped open spaces were created by mistake recommended merging the smaller parcels with adjacent lots and selling the larger ones for private development. The original proprietors argued that they should be reimbursed for the parts of their land that fell within these large intersections, just as they had been paid for the seventeen appropriations. In deference, the commissioners added 129 new lots in the

²⁸ Report of the Secretary of the Interior, Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Oct. 11, 1856, 855.

areas shown simply as white open space within the road rights-of-way on the Ellicott Plan. These new lots, shown first on the Dermott map, can be identified today because they are designated as north, south, east or west of an adjacent numbered square.²⁹ The debate did not end, however, because the Dermott Map failed to delineate the boundaries of the small parcels and they remained undefined as appropriations or reservations. In 1798 George Walker, who still held a considerable amount of land, petitioned to assign lot numbers to several of these parcels so he could sell them. His efforts outraged landholders still angry at the first set of changes. While some wanted to prevent further alteration to the plan to preserve open space for parks and public conveniences, such as markets and churches, others wanted to prevent their sale because they had already purchased lots abutting the open spaces at inflated prices in anticipation of the future parks that would enhance property values. In 1799 William Thornton suggested in a letter to George Washington that the federal government purchase the land and add it to the list of appropriations. He calculated that the entire area comprised only 683 square feet, or eight acres that at £25 per acre would cost the government £200.³⁰

A committee was finally formed to examine the issue. It published a report in 1802 "respecting the adjustment of the existing disputes between the Commissioners of the City of Washington and other persons who may conceive themselves injured by the several alterations made in the plan of said city. Also to a plan of said city of Washington, conformably, as nearly as may be, to the original design thereof, with certain exceptions."³¹ The document includes a letter written to George Washington before his death in 1799 which states:

We are certain that your excellency will clearly perceive the necessity of convincing the public mind, that the appropriations and open areas cannot be diverted to private uses, but must remain sacred, inviolate forever, and forever considered the property of the United States of America.

Washington's reply affirmed the preservation of the plan. "I have never had but one opinion on this subject," he wrote, "and that is, that nothing ought to justify a departure from the engraved plan but the probability of some great public benefit, or unavoidable necessity." In 1803 Nicholas King, who was undertaking a survey of the city, commented on the newly created city squares. "Their introduction has been so inimical to faith pledged to the circulation of the printed plans," he wrote, "as to call for the establishment of a final and complete plan, from which no future deviation can be made to gratify individual proprietors, at the expense of former purchasers or the health of the citizens. These spacious avenues and streets and open areas or public spaces, at the intersections of streets and avenues (so ornamental and conducive to the purity of the air), which yet remain ought to be forever secured to the city."³² Although the King Plats created as a result of the survey have been used as the official maps of the surveyor's office until today, they were never officially

²⁹ Colyer, 59.

³⁰ Historical Data File Box 99, RG 328. (Erastus Thatcher Founding of the City of Washington, 10-11).

³¹ Report from the Committee to Whom was Referred a Motion in the Form of Two Resolutions (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, April 8, 1802).

³² Colyer, 62-63; Saul Padover, Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1946), 319-20.

recognized.³³ Furthermore, they did not indicate the boundaries of the small acute-angled parcels, an ownership issue that would remain unsettled until the 1890s.

As King feared, government property continued to be lost to private interest. In 1822 the canal was diverted so that it went due south between Sixth and Seventh streets to the center of the Mall, where it turned due east at a right angle to Third Street, and then continued along its former route. Missouri Avenue was created along its former path and Maine Avenue was created to mirror the new avenue running parallel to Maryland Avenue. Two lots were created between Missouri and Pennsylvania avenues, and two were created between Maine and Maryland avenues, designated lots A, B, C and D, respectively. These lots, as well as Reservation Nos. 10, 11 and 12, were sold for private development.³⁴

In late summer 1814, the very existence of the city was threatened when British troops invaded and set fire to most of the federal buildings. Residents of the scorched city remained uncertain of the capital's fate until Congress finally voted to rebuild it in February 1815.

Despite financial difficulties, national catastrophes, and the sale of a handful of reservations in the city's first six decades, development adhered for the most part to the framework directed by the L'Enfant and Ellicott plans. A map compiled by German immigrant A. Boschke in 1857-61 shows the original street plan with the structures built to date. Although the planned roads are clearly delineated on the map, they were not necessarily cleared or graded at the time. To depict this, Boschke hatched uncleared regions, such as the Dupont Circle area and the land east of Lincoln Park. The map reveals that private development was contained almost entirely within the city squares. The few buildings constructed within designated rights-of-way were generally wood shacks occupied by squatters.

With the exception of the sale of the reservations north of the Mall and the opening of Maine and Missouri avenues at its east end, no major violations were made to the footprint of the plan in terms of its separation of public and private property. L'Enfant's street plan was intact, however, in many cases his vision for the treatment of public spaces was ignored or misinterpreted. The most glaring intrusion is the placement of architect Robert Mills's U.S. Treasury Building. Built within Reservation No. 1, it was situated such that its rear/south portico blocks L'Enfant's axial vista between the White House and the Capitol along Pennsylvania Avenue. The Mall suffered similar indignities. Envisioned by L'Enfant as a grand boulevard visually connecting the Capitol Building with the Monument Grounds, the expanse had been divided into several segments, and the Smithsonian was situated within its boundaries. The Washington Monument Society further bungled the city's planned symmetry by laying the cornerstone for its memorial slightly northeast of the site where L'Enfant designated an equestrian statue in Washington's honor at the apex of the President's Grounds and the Mall.

A more subtle violation of the plan was created by an invention unforeseen by L'Enfant--the

³³ Office of the Surveyor, Manual of Practices . . . , 9-10.

³⁴ Colyer, 96. The trapezoidal squares between Missouri and Pennsylvania avenues and Maine and Maryland avenues featured private buildings until they were reacquired by the federal government in the 1930s, when Missouri and Maine avenues were closed as part of the Mall redevelopment.

railroad. When the first railroad was dedicated in Washington in 1835, the four cars that arrived from Baltimore were greeted by gala ceremonies. On a route crossing Florida Avenue, and running south to the depot on Pennsylvania Avenue, the tracks cut obliquely through nine city squares and passed over or along the streets and avenues at more than a dozen grade crossings. Because the city was relatively undeveloped in the vicinity of the tracks, the hazards of at-grade crossings were yet to be realized.³⁵

U.S. Department of the Interior

The midpoint of the nineteenth century marked increasing interest, both public and private, in the improvement of Washington, and foreshadowed the vast development that would resume in the 1870s as the nation recovered from the Civil War. In 1848 Congress appropriated \$10,000 to incorporate the Washington Gas Light Company to install a system of gas lamps along Pennsylvania Avenue from the Treasury Building to the Capitol.³⁶ Also that year, the cornerstone was laid for the Washington Monument, and the state of California was admitted to the Union. The following year, the U.S. Department of the Interior was created to settle disputes arising from the opening of the West to settlers. Including departments as various as the General Land Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Pension Office, and Patent Office, the Department of Interior was also charged with the care and development of federal property in the city of Washington. Through the Secretary of the Interior, the Commissioner of Public Buildings reported to Congress. He oversaw the improvements of the avenues (improvement of the streets became the responsibility of the municipal government) and the federal grounds, as well as the upkeep of all of the federal buildings: the White House, Capitol, jail, courthouse, infirmary and Patent Office.

Ignatius Mudd, the first Commissioner of Public Buildings under the new administration, devoted much of his annual reports to describing the condition of the grounds, strongly advocating their improvement. In 1851 he wrote:

The improvement of the federal grounds in the city of Washington, although gratifying to its citizens and calculated to give increased value to property, should not be regarded, as some are disposed to do, as a merely local object. These public grounds are the property of the nation, and were reserved at the founding of the city, as the means of beautifying and adorning the national capital.³⁷

In his 1850 report to Congress, Mudd wrote that he was induced to complain about the state of the federal grounds "not only because of their national importance, but from the fact that little care or attention had been previously bestowed upon them."³⁸ He described the eighteen acres in Reservation No. 1, including Lafayette Square, as highly improved, while the grounds south of the White House to the Tiber Creek (later the Ellipse) in the process of being graded and planted. He defined the Capitol Grounds as the portion of Reservation No. 2 surrounding the Capitol building and

³⁵ Olszewski, Union Station, 8-9. Efforts to remove these and subsequently built grade crossings, as well as the Baltimore and Potomac depot built in 1872 on the Mall, would provide impetus for the McMillan Commission in 1901.

³⁶ Noreen, 11.

³⁷ Ignatius Mudd, Letter from the Commissioner of Public Buildings transmitting his annual report for 1850, Congress, House, 31st Cong., 2nd sess., Ex. Doc. 47, 1851, 12.

³⁸ Mudd, 12.

extending west to Sixth Street. The remainder, stretching between Sixth and 15th streets, he referred to as the Mall. Congress had appropriated \$3,628 to grade, plant, and enclose the Mall with a wood fence, but the sum was insufficient to complete the scheduled improvements.³⁹ Mudd described the area between Seventh and Twelfth streets where the Smithsonian was currently under construction as "the largest and most beautiful of the several lots of ground belonging to Reservation No. 2," and planted with "200 and 300 thrifty young trees." He appealed to Congress for the improvement of Reservation No. 3, where construction had begun on the Washington Monument the previous year:

These three reservations are so situated, and so connected with each other, that they present an extensive landscape, and when viewed from a favorable point, cannot fail to strike the observer as the most beautiful and interesting feature of the federal metropolis.⁴⁰

Mudd also wrote of the many unattended parklets citywide:

A number of small open spaces formed by the diagonal intersections of avenues and streets, which demand speedy attention; some of which are located in thickly populated and growing sections of the city and should therefore be made ornamental and attractive. As they are, unenclosed and uncared for, private individuals use them at pleasure, and in many cases they are made the depositories of rubbish and offal.⁴¹

His request for funds in 1850 to enclose several of the triangles along Pennsylvania Avenue was the first official effort to landscape any of the oddly shaped open spaces within the avenue rights-of-way. Congress responded with an allocation of \$12,500 that was used to complete the improvements begun the previous year, and the planting of 2,000 trees. Mudd also oversaw the erection of a greenhouse and botanical garden due west of the Capitol where plants were propagated for use in the federal grounds and buildings.

His most notable accomplishment, however, was the appointment of a nationally celebrated landscape architect to consult his office. At the request of "several prominent gentlemen of this city," Mudd invited Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-52) "to examine and inspect the public grounds with reference to their more decorative and artistic improvement."⁴² An advocate of the romantic-garden tradition popularized in England, Downing had published numerous books and articles on landscape design and horticulture in addition to his professional activities designing estate gardens for wealthy patrons. When William W. Corcoran purchased property facing onto Lafayette Square in 1849, he hired Downing to design his extensive gardens. It was Corcoran and his friend, secretary of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry, who persuaded President Millard Fillmore and Mudd to enlist Downing to design the landscape for the federal grounds. From his office in Newburgh-on-the-Hudson, New York, Downing drew plans for the Mall and Lafayette Square. Enthusiastic about the prospect of designing "a real park," he expressed the hope that his design of sinuous paths and picturesque views

³⁹ Ignatius Mudd, Annual Report of the Commissioners of Public Buildings and Grounds for the year 1849, Congress, House, 31st Cong., 1st sess., Ex Doc. 30, 1850, 7.

⁴⁰ Mudd, 1849, 7.

⁴¹ Mudd, 1850, 12.

⁴² Mudd, 1851, 9.

would influence landscape design practices throughout the country.⁴³

Soon after he submitted his annual report of 1951, Ignatius Mudd died and was replaced by William Easby who continued to oversee the development of the public grounds to Downing's specifications. It appears that Easby found Downing's absentee supervision insufficient, however, and when Downing learned of the complaints issued against him, he wrote to Henry:

The Commissioner of Public Buildings is I think a very capable and honest public officer--but he is ambitious to *manage* everything relating to Washington--and among other matters *myself*. It was on this account discovering how matters stood at the outset that I made it a particular point, as you doubtless remember, in my first interview with the President that the improvements intrusted to me should be solely under my direction. Either I am judge of the proper progress of my work or I am not. If I am satisfied with it the Commissioner of Public Buildings has no right to complain . . . If I am interfered with or trammelled by any petty commissioner I will throw up the matter at once--as I am wholly independent of both it and the President--and shall do only what is right and just according to my own view of the matter.⁴⁴

This conflict between artist and bureaucrat echoes that between L'Enfant and the city commissioners sixty years before. And similarly, Downing never saw his plans realized, due to his untimely death in a steamboat accident July 28, 1852. Easby accomplished much in the ensuing year, but carrying out the Downing Plan was not among his priorities. He reported grading, graveling, setting carriage blocks, constructing curbs, sidewalks and gutters, planting trees, and laying crosswalks of flagstone on the various gravel-roadway segments of Indiana, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware avenues. His progress on the improvement of Lafayette Square included an iron-fence enclosure and a planting scheme (not Downing's) that reputedly included several exotic trees donated by Corcoran. In 1853 the equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson was erected in the square and unveiled in an extravagant ceremony on the 50th anniversary of Jackson's victory in the battle of New Orleans. Franklin (formerly Fountain) Square was also improved, and \$18,000 was requested for iron gates to enclose four triangular parks on Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and 20th Street.⁴⁵

In 1854 construction was temporarily halted on the Washington Monument due to a lack of funds. The same year, Easby was replaced by Benjamin B. French who spent the following twelve years implementing significant park and road improvements on a limited budget.⁴⁶ In his first annual report, he wrote:

There is perhaps no way in which the city of Washington can be so much improved in appearance, by like expenditures, as by the enclosing and improvement of the triangular and circular spaces so wisely

⁴³ Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Vision of life for the Mall," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (March 1967), 52-59; Commission of Fine Arts, Sixteenth Street Architecture (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1978), 1: 14.

⁴⁴ Washburn, 53, 56.

⁴⁵ William Easby, Annual Report of Commissioner of Public Buildings, Congress, House, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., Misc. Doc. 20, (February 1853).

⁴⁶ In 1848, when French was chief clerk of the House of Representatives, he led a group of citizens in petitioning Congress to incorporate the Washington Gas Light Company. Noreen, 11.

reserved by the United States in the laying out of this city. Two of them, on Pennsylvania Avenue, are now enclosed with iron fences and beautifully improved; and they are, indeed, oases in the desert of dusty streets and brick pavements that surround them.⁴⁷

French recognized the potential of Washington Circle at the intersection of Pennsylvania and New Hampshire avenues north of the White House, which was then "unfurnished and most unsightly." Included with this report was a design for the park showing the street widths and paths traversing the reservation. He also submitted a plan for the large park at the intersection of East Capitol Street with North Carolina and Massachusetts avenues--today Lincoln Park--showing a very simple layout featuring sidewalks and trees, but no statues, flowerbeds, or fountains.⁴⁸ The Boschke Map, which reveals much about the development of the city at the time, also shows the parks that had been improved by the Commissioner of Public Buildings to date. On the map, most of the buildings are clustered in the triangle created by New York and Pennsylvania avenues west of First Street, NW, and in the southwest quadrant around the U.S. Navy Yard and Marine Barracks. Accordingly, the improved parks are also shown in these areas. Four triangular reservations embellish Pennsylvania Avenue, and Washington Circle is laid out along French's design. The Smithsonian Grounds, White House Grounds, and Lafayette Square are landscaped with foliage and meandering paths largely according to Downing's scheme, although Boschke probably depicted some intended improvements that had not actually been accomplished.⁴⁹

While Boschke's map creates a visual representation of the city at that time, a 1859 Harper's New Monthly Magazine article describes the quickening pace of development in the young city. Asserting that the "City of Magnificent Distances has become more remarkable for its magnificence than for its distances," the author praises Washington's progress and potential.

Foreign criticism properly wonders at our constant employment of the phrases "going to be" and "going to do," but it is also true that abroad--except in Russia--they can only use the past tense; for their noblest monuments and most beautiful surroundings are only the heirlooms and old clothes of departed generations. Their noblest mission is preservation, ours is creation.⁵⁰

The article's description of Washington's parks clearly reveals the social, charitable, and political concerns of a nation on the brink of civil war:

Spacious pleasure grounds are the best friends of law and order: it is well for the people to play and the instinct of childhood points to the open air as the best place for recreation. A grass plot has a magical virtue for "clearing the breast of perilous stuff." During the fierce heat of summer it is pleasant to see the large concourse of people which pours into the Capitol Grounds or those around the President's Mansion sitting under the shade of the trees while the Marine Band furnishes the choicest music; and it requires no poetic enthusiasm to picture the coming day when the Mall stretching from

⁴⁷ Benjamin B. French, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings for 1854, 8.

⁴⁸ "Map of Washington Circle," 1853, National Archives, RG 42, NCP-0-23, and "Map of square at Massachusetts Avenue, 12th St., Tennessee and Kentucky avenues," 1855, RG 42, NCP-0-22.

⁴⁹ Washington, D.C., architect Joseph Passoneau has copied the Boschke Map and color coded the buildings by use.

⁵⁰ "Washington in 1859," Harpers Monthly Magazine 115 (December 1959), in the anthology Washington: Turn of the Century Treasury, ed. Frank Oppel & Tony Meisel (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, 1987), 113.

the Capitol to the margin of the noble Potomac, shall be one continuous shade, covered with glorious foliage, and vocal with the rippling of fountains and the song of birds. Then hard-handed toil and weary brains shall find in every sight and sound of beauty not only rest, but hope--hope for the perpetuity of that strong Union which having created this costly capital may find it a center of attraction sufficiently strong to martial around it the orderly states, and to control even the wildest comets that seek to fly off into new orbits.⁵¹

The Civil War

If Benjamin B. French found it a challenge to beautify the city in the 1850s, it was all he could do to keep it functioning through the next decade. With the outbreak of war between the Union and the Confederacy--the border between them being literally a stone's throw from Washington--much of what was under French's charge was vital to the survival of the city and the Union. Open spaces became ideal camp sites for troops protecting the capital city, and crude encampments, barracks, temporary offices, and hospitals were erected in them. The troops stationed in Lafayette Square reputedly hung their laundry on the Andrew Jackson statue, and Lincoln Park gained its name from the infamous hospital located there, named for the chief executive. Cattle grazed on the Washington Monument Grounds awaiting slaughter by Union butchers at the foot of the incomplete obelisk. What little planting and landscaping had been completed before the war was damaged or neglected. The only park mentioned in the annual reports during the war years was Franklin Square, for which French designed a plan and requested an enclosure and some shrubs.⁵²

Roads and bridges were also vital to the war effort and suffered from overuse. In 1863 Congress extended the charter of the Alexandria and Washington Railroad, allowing its tracks to cross over the Long Bridge from Virginia and along Maryland Avenue to the Capitol Grounds. There has been a span by that name at this site from 1809 until 1906, a wood structure that was frequently damaged and repaired and, after 1870, was supported by retaining walls. A parallel bridge was erected 75' downstream in 1863 to help move traffic.⁵³ Eleventh Street/Navy Yard Bridge was replaced in 1874 with a wrought-iron truss span.

To expedite traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company was chartered by Congress to run streetcar tracks from Georgetown to the Capitol on the same gauge as the railroad. French indicated in his 1862 report that Pennsylvania Avenue was "much broken up by the constant running over it of omnibuses before the street railroad was laid down." Of the rest of the roads in the city he wrote:

There is not, perhaps, in this union a city the streets and avenues of which are in so bad a condition as those of the city of Washington. During the wet weather of winter many of the streets are more like quagmires than streets, and it is next to impossible to pass along them with carriages, and in the dry weather of summer, the holes left where the water and mud stood in the winter are such as to render driving over them at a faster pace than a walk dangerous. The injury to the streets thus prominent is mainly due to the constant use of them by army wagons, which I have seen moving along them in long trains heavy laden, *each wagon having one wheel locked*, so as to drag them through the mud and

⁵¹ Harper's, 113.

⁵² Benjamin B. French, "Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings," Report of the Secretary of Interior, 1864, 685.

⁵³ Donald Beekman Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington (Washington, D.C.: Commission of Fine Arts, 1983), 29.

along the pavements and doing more injury in a single hour than the ordinary travel would do them in years.⁵⁴

Following the war, Congress passed legislation to improve the city infrastructure. In May 1864, Congress enacted a law requiring the federal government to reimburse the incorporated city for any road improvements on streets, avenues, or alleys passing through or by any federal property, just as these costs were to be apportioned among private property owners.⁵⁵ French reported, however, that he failed to pay the required sum to the city because Congress had not allocated funds for it in his budget. The next month, Congress passed another act to clear the streets and parks of squatters' shacks and other unauthorized structures. The act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to "reclaim and preserve certain property of the United States."⁵⁶

For several years after the war, French concentrated mainly on repairing the White House, which had fallen into neglect during the conflict, and the U.S. Capitol Building. Construction of the Capitol had continued throughout the war and came to be seen as a symbol of hope for a Union victory, but while masons and craftsmen were at work on the exterior, inside doctors and nurses tended 1,200 or so sick and wounded soldiers in a makeshift hospital.⁵⁷ With the enlargement of the Capitol underway, French strongly lobbied for the expansion of the surrounding parkland. "To the eye of one having any appreciation of the beautiful in architecture or the fitness of things," he said, "it is certainly anything but pleasant to see the beautiful north and south facades perched up on unseemly banks of rough earth, and approached by an unseemly flight of wooden steps that would be pronounced inappropriate to the most humble private dwelling!"⁵⁸ He also returned to his mission to beautify city parks, reporting in 1865:

Many of the triangular reservations belonging to the United States still remain open as places for the deposit of filth, instead of being made great ornaments to the city. Some years ago Congress made appropriations nearly every year to enclose one or more of them, and they were enclosed and beautified with trees and shrubbery, and present a beautiful feature in our expanded city. The last one enclosed with an iron fence was, it is believed, that on the south side of Pennsylvania avenue, between 13th and 14th streets west, some ten or twelve years ago. It is much to be desired that Congress will again turn its attention to some of those still remaining open and make the necessary appropriations to enclose and beautify them.⁵⁹

French also recommended improving the large reservation in the east section of the city suggesting that it officially be named Lincoln Park after the recently assassinated president.

⁵⁴ French, 1864, 685.

⁵⁵ An Act to Amend "An Act to incorporate the inhabitants of the City of Washington," Statutes at Large 13, sec. 3, (1864) 68.

⁵⁶ Benjamin B. French, Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, 1865, 7. French cited the act as House Ex Doc. No. 5 38th Cong. 2nd Sess.

⁵⁷ "Sentinels were stationed at every door and the entire building became so obnoxious to the senses that the regular civil employees in the building were very much annoyed." Benjamin B. French, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, 1862, 1.

⁵⁸ French, 1864, 686.

⁵⁹ French, 1865, 7.

Perhaps the feature most unpleasant to Washingtonians at this time was the City (or Tiber) Canal running along the north boundary of the Mall and south through the Mall and Capitol Grounds. French urged Congress to allocate funds to improve this "grand receptacle of nearly all of the filth of the city." Not only did he see it as it aesthetically offensive, but also a hazard to the health of the citizenry:

When it is apparent to the eye, by the constant rising and bursting of bubbles all along the canal, that it is an immense laboratory of mephitic gas, and when it is known as a fact that the prevailing summer winds are from the southwest and that through their influence this deadly poison is being constantly wafted over the densest population of Washington, we can only thank a merciful and beneficent Providence that our city has thus far escaped pestilence.⁶⁰

Despite French's repeated complaints, the canal remained unimproved during his tenure. Congress acknowledged the health risk it presented, however, and assigned Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Michler (1827-81), a U.S. Army Corps Engineer experienced in military mapping, to the task of finding new sites for the buildings and parks most threatened by its proximity. Michler surveyed the region north of Boundary Street for a new site for a public park and for the White House, then located "just above a pestilent flat on which a large portion of the sewerage of the city is cast to fester in the sun."⁶¹ After an extensive study of the countryside surrounding the city, Michler found several sites beyond the "miasmatic influences" of the Potomac marshes and described them in a report to Congress. The bulk of his report, however, was a detailed--even poetic--description of the beauty of the valley of the Rock Creek and its tributaries, and its suitability as the site of a large public park. "In no place has nature been more bountiful of her charms than in the vicinity of this city, and all can be found so near and accessible," he wrote. "All the elements which constitute a public resort of this kind can be found in this wild and romantic tract of country."⁶²

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Six weeks after Michler completed his study, control of the federal land in the city was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers through its newly created Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) and Michler was appointed to its helm. This not only transferred the federal land from the responsibility of the Department of the Interior to the Department of War, but it also put Michler in the position to carry out the proposals he made in his report. With the election of Ulysses S. Grant in 1868, plans to move the executive mansion fell by the wayside, but the OPB&G remained in control of the federal land in the city until 1933.⁶³ Michler oversaw all work on public buildings, parks, streets, and the aqueduct, as well as four river crossings--Long Bridge, the Bridge at Little Falls, Benning's Bridge, and the Navy Yard Bridge.

Although he never mentioned L'Enfant by name in his annual reports, Michler's respect for

⁶⁰ French, 1864, 687.

⁶¹ Cowdrey, 24.

⁶² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, Communication of N. Michler, Major of Engineers relative to a suitable site for a public park and presidential mansion, prepared by Nathaniel Michler, 39th Cong., 2nd sess., Misc. Doc. No. 21, 1867. Rock Creek Park was finally purchased in 1890.

⁶³ Seale, William, The White House: History of an American Ideal (Washington, D.C.: AIA Press, 1992), 121.

the integrity of his plan is evident. In 1868 he derided current intrusions upon the plan, writing: "Market stalls extend over the pavements, houses protrude beyond the building lines, piles of lumber block up the way . . . junk shops encroach upon the public grounds." He complained that these violations hindered travel and blocked vistas.⁶⁴ Michler advocated landscaping the wide avenues as elegant boulevards after the fashion set in Europe. In his 1868 annual report, he included several sketches showing different manners of dividing the avenues into carriageways, sidewalks, and rows of trees and illustrations comparing cross-sections of the *Champs Elysees* in Paris and *Unter Den Linden* in Berlin. A plan specifically for Pennsylvania Avenue shows a central macadamized roadway flanked by sodded strips planted with a double row of trees with paved sidewalks abutting the buildings.⁶⁵ These elegant schemes were extravagant, however, considering the constant shortage of funds. Michler complained, for example, that in 1869 Congress allocated no money for the maintenance of Pennsylvania Avenue and that two men, a cart, and a horse comprised the entire force responsible for cleaning the three-mile stretch.⁶⁶ The following year, however, the avenue was beautifully paved with wood laid in differing fashions by four companies. "By this arrangement," Michler explained, "the entire work would be more carefully executed, as all the competitors would be anxious to see the use of the paving of so long and broad an avenue as a favorable advertisement as to the superiority of their respective patents."⁶⁷

While devising a scheme for the improvement of the avenues, Michler acknowledged parks and parklets created by the road system as an integral feature of the original plan: "Several of the triangular places formed by the intersections of the avenues and streets have been enclosed and sodded during the latter part of the last fiscal year . . . similar works should be attended to as soon as possible, as they not only enhance the value of the adjoining property, but also aid in developing the original plan of the city."⁶⁸ He also recognized that the original plan had been misinterpreted when the Mall was divided into segments by Sixth, Seventh, Twelfth, and 15th streets. He recommended that these streets be tunnelled under the Mall so that the entire expanse would be conceived as one unit.⁶⁹ Michler's suggestions for the Mall would eventually come to pass, as would his suggestion in 1870 that the silting problem in the Potomac River be solved by dredging the channel and reclaiming the Potomac flats area with the dredged material.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Report of Brevet Brigadier General N. Michler in Charge of Public Buildings, Grounds, Works, Etc. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1868), 9.

⁶⁵ "Sketch showing Plan for the Improvement of the Streets & Avenues in the City of Washington," accompanying the Report of Brevet Brigadier General N. Michler (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1868). A form of this system was adopted and employed by the Parking Commission in 1870.

⁶⁶ Michler, 1869, 498.

⁶⁷ Michler, 1870, 979.

⁶⁸ Michler, 1868, 11.

⁶⁹ "Public Squares and Reservations," Report of the Secretary of War, 1867, by N[athaniel] Michler, Officer in Charge, 525. Unification of the Mall into one continuous park was again promoted by the McMillan Commission in 1901, but the clearing of trees and the creation of a continuous greensward from the Capitol to the Washington Monument was not enacted until the late 1920s.

⁷⁰ Michler, 1870. The Potomac flats were filled throughout the 1890s and were added to the park system as East and West Potomac Parks.

In 1868 Michler described Lafayette and Franklin squares and Washington Circle as highly improved and recommended that rectangular parks be formed at the current sites of McPherson and Farragut squares as soon as the wood-frame buildings of the Freedman's Bureau were removed from the latter. Mount Vernon Square was bisected by Eighth Street at the time and a community market operated from the east side of the unimproved open space. Seeing the market as unsanitary, Michler recommended its removal. He wrote, "The refuse of vegetable matter thrown from the wagons of the hucksters, and the offal from the stall of the butcher, mingle with the filth created by the many animals which are brought and allowed to stand around the place, causing a most disagreeable stench, especially in the summer, and thereby engendering sickness."⁷¹ He also recommended the formation of the circular parks at the intersections that now feature Thomas, Scott, and Dupont circles, and the development of parks in the open spaces east of the Capitol, in what he referred to as "a hitherto much neglected portion of the city as far as the general government is concerned."⁷²

Michler's reports reflect the popular current that park development could lead to societal reform. Parks would not only improve the appearance of the city, but would at the same time "largely contribute to the health, pleasure and recreation of its inhabitants."⁷³ Additionally, the improvement and maintenance of both the parks and the roads would provide much needed employment in the war-ravaged capital. "Public works should be, in more sense than one, public benefactors," he wrote, recommending that indigent freed slaves who migrated into the city following the war be hired to perform the labor involved in grading and paving streets and improving parks. Also recognizing the plight of the many disabled veterans, he suggested they be employed as watchmen and gatekeepers in the public reservations.

Although Michler enthusiastically embarked upon his mission to improve the city, by 1870 his reports began to echo those of French, becoming constant pleas for financial assistance. "A less amount is appropriated for the care and improvement of the several hundred acres of government reservations throughout the city than many private individuals expend toward the adornments of their own domains," he wrote: "As no appropriations were made by Congress for the repair of the main or any other avenue, it is evident that little can be written upon the amount of work accomplished."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Michler, 1867, 524.

⁷² Michler, 1867, 524.

⁷³ Report of Brevet Brigadier General Michler in Charge of Public Buildings, Grounds, Works, Etc. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1868), 6.

⁷⁴ Michler, 1870, 320. Also in this report, he alludes to and denies the allegations of corruption in his department.

Formation of a Territorial Government

Although the requests of French and Michler for funds went unheeded in the 1850s-60s, Congress began to listen in the 1870s, and responded with large allocations for urban improvements. As the nation emerged from the bitter Civil War, it was also expanding westward to encompass the full width of the continent. Washington felt the profound effects of both these currents. As a result of the war, Washington's population more than tripled from 61,000 in 1860 to 200,000 in 1864.⁷⁴ This population was made up of former soldiers as well as slaves who fled north from the Confederate states, many of them possessing nothing but their newly gained freedom; other newcomers were the wealthy who moved to Washington in search of political appointments in the expanding federal government. While the poor found shelter in alleys and shacks built on the unimproved federal lands, the rich sought housing sites with access to good roads, sewers, and gas lines. The suffering infrastructure suited the needs of neither group.

As newcomers flooded into Washington, another segment of the population was moving west to the newly annexed land in California. The capital was strengthened by the wealth flowing in from the West and the new jobs created in the burgeoning bureaucracy. Once again, however, its very existence was threatened. The disgraceful condition of Washington, coupled with the fact the country now stretched from ocean to ocean, invoked strong arguments for the removal of the nation's capital to a more central location such as St. Louis, Missouri. Horace Greeley, an advocate of this proposal, wrote of Washington, "The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting, the mud is deep, and the morals are deplorable."⁷⁵

To save the capital on the Potomac, Congress finally made a commitment to its improvement by passing two important laws in 1870 and 1871. The April 6, 1870, act that formed the Parking Commission embodied the definitive interpretation of L'Enfant's wide streets and avenues that remains in effect today. While the sketches presented in Michler's 1868 report feature uniformly planned treatments encompassing the entire area between building lines, the 1870 legislation enabled a large percentage of the right-of-way to be maintained and improved by the owners or occupants of the abutting properties, effectively decreasing the amount of land requiring federally funded improvement. In annual addresses to the city council in 1868 and again in 1869, Washington Mayor Sayles J. Bowen presented the idea of narrowing the streets by moving the curbstones in 10' to 20', and planting the area between the sidewalks and roadbeds with grass and trees. He argued that this system would not only save the city the "expense of paving, cleaning and repairing so much of the street, but [would also] add greatly to the health, beauty, and comfort of the city."⁷⁶ He referred to the areas planted with sod and trees as "parked," thereby introducing the term "parking," which would be used to refer to this practice of foliating portions of land within the rights-of-way. Within weeks of enactment of the parking act, a segment of K Street, NW, was narrowed. Sidewalks were installed abutting the building lines, and the wide area between the curbs and sidewalks were fenced

⁷⁴ Constance McLaughlin Greene, Washington Village and Capital 1800-1878 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 255.

⁷⁵ Cowdrey, 24.

⁷⁶ Message of the Mayor of the City of Washington, July 19, 1869 (Washington, D.C.: Chronicle Print, 1869), 22, cited in Alison K. Hoagland, "Nineteenth-Century Building Regulations in Washington, D.C., Records of the Columbia Historic Society (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 70.

in and planted. The rectangular fenced areas, separated from the houses by the sidewalk, appeared to some critics like cemetery plots.⁷⁷ The system employed today, whereby a narrow parked area maintained by the city separates the sidewalk from the roadbed, and a wider parked area maintained by the abutting property owner spans from the sidewalk to the building line, was developed during the vast program of improvements overseen by the Board of Public Works between 1871-74.

While the parking legislation of 1870 assured a lasting interpretation of the L'Enfant Plan, the territorial government formed by a congressional act of 1871 remained in effect for less than four years. What it accomplished before being dissolved in debt and shame in 1874, however, drastically changed the face and reputation of the city and inspired decades of growth, investment, and improvement. The most influential character during the short-lived experiment in self government was native Washingtonian Alexander "Boss" Shepherd. Trained as a plumber, Shepherd lobbied along with 150 or so influential citizens for the federal government to incorporate the city and county of Washington and Georgetown in a system of home rule. President Ulysses S. Grant approved the measure and appointed Henry D. Cooke as territorial governor and Shepherd as head of the Board of Public Works. Jurisdiction of the avenues, streets, and bridges was transferred to the Board of Public Works, with the exception of the Long Bridge, which was transferred to the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad.

Shepherd immediately undertook the monumental task of improving the city's neglected infrastructure. His comprehensive plan called for the grading and paving of streets, laying sewer and drainage systems, and planting trees in the parkings along the streets and avenues. By 1872 most of the streets and avenues in the northwest and several in the southeast and southwest quadrants were under construction, or had been completely graded and paved with concrete, wood, or stone.⁷⁸

The new parking system required narrower roadbeds and as the Board of Public Works graded and paved them, the Parking Commission (appointed by the board) planted thousands of trees in the narrow strips between the curbs and the sidewalks. City residents also shared the burden of the improvements, as they were expected to follow suit with "horticultural embellishments of those garden spots in front of their house." Adolph Cluss, chief engineer of the Board of Public Works, pointed out, however, that the program "indemnified the property holders for the cost of the improvements adjoining their premises, [by] virtually adding a parterre of green turf to their lots, an improvement calculated to humanize our city life by surrounding our dwellings with the quiet sweetness of the garden instead of the dust of the street."⁷⁹

Gradually this parking system, begun partially as an economic measure, garnered national admiration for its beauty. As the trees matured and more residents moved to the city and enclosed and planted their front yards, Washington became known as the "City of Trees." An 1884 article in

⁷⁷ Hoagland, 70.

⁷⁸ District of Columbia Board of Public Works, "Exhibit Chart of Improved Streets and Avenues of the Cities of Washington and Georgetown," in the Report of the Board of Public Works of the District of Columbia from its Organization until November 1, 1872, Congress, House, Ex Doc. 1, part 6, 42nd Cong., 3rd sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1872).

⁷⁹ Adolph Cluss, "Report of the Chief Engineer," 1873 Board of Public Works Annual Report, cited in Hoagland, 71-72.

Century Magazine enthusiastically described the effect.

One feature of the tree-planting project was a continuous drive of several miles under lindens; a part of this extends for over three miles on Massachusetts Avenue, where there are four rows of the lindens, two on each side of the roadway already of sufficient size to unite with their summer foliage in an arch over the sidewalk. In this matter of trees, Washington is unrivaled among all the cities of the world. Other cities have trees in their parks and here and there on a few streets, but nowhere else has it been attempted to plant trees systematically and thoroughly on every street, except those devoted exclusively to business purposes. Nowhere else are there 120 miles of shaded streets. The effect of this planting is not yet developed, the elms and other slow growing varieties being still quite small; but the quick growing maples and poplars are now 7" and 8" in diameter and 40' high. The view in the spring and early summer of the streets thus shaded, and flanked by lines of lawn or terrace or flower gardens, is novel and beautiful.⁸⁰

In addition to the "parked" spaces under the private and municipal jurisdiction, the nature of the L'Enfant Plan also created many small parcels at the street and avenue intersections, which fell neither within the area assigned to parking nor within the roadways. These tiny parcels, both free-standing and at the acute angles of larger city blocks, fell under the jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds of the Army Corps of Engineers along with the remaining fourteen of the original seventeen reservations and City Square No. 249 (Franklin Park). The same day the territorial government was installed, Michler was replaced by Shepherd's good friend, Orville E. Babcock. Babcock's first report to Col. Humphreys suggests that the two worked in tandem to improve the city's infrastructure:

The citizens of the Territory, through the Board of Public Works, are making such valuable improvements in every direction, and taking such liberal and energetic action in beautifying the city, that their efforts should be seconded as much as possible by enclosing such small triangular and circular reservations as come within the line of the city improvements, thus making green and beautiful what are now, in most cases, open places of sand and mud.

Unlike the seventeen reservations identified at the city's outset, the size of these numerous smaller areas was largely determined by the width of the roadbeds cleared within the rights-of-ways. Although several of the larger circles and squares at the major intersections had been improved and named by various acts of Congress after Revolutionary and Civil war heroes, such as Lafayette and Farragut parks, many of the smaller reservations had still not been identified as federal property. When surveyor Randolph Coyle resurveyed all of the original seventeen reservations in 1858, just as Nicholas King had more than fifty years earlier, he offered to calculate the dimensions and improvement costs of the "public spaces designed on the plan of the city at the numerous intersections of the streets and avenues."⁸¹ It wasn't until 1864 that Congress passed legislation mandating their reclamation by the federal government. Until the roadbeds were actually improved, however, the dimensions of these spaces were difficult to calculate. Although several of these parks had been

⁸⁰ "The New Washington," The Century Magazine (as published in the anthology Washington: Turn of the Century Treasury, ed. Frank Oppel & Tony Meisel (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, 1987), 123-24.

⁸¹ Randolph Coyle, "Expenditures in the District of Columbia," Report of the Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Cong. Senate, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., Ex. Doc. No. 5, 6.

highly improved under the charge of B. B. French and Nathaniel Michler, many were still being used by adjacent landowners for gardens, refuse heaps, and even buildings. Still no system had been devised to identify, manage, or protect this federal land.⁸²

In 1871 Babcock oversaw the first survey to locate the federally owned spaces within the street rights-of-way and published a set of eight sheets titled Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, showing the Public Reservations. They depict about 250 circles, triangles, and squares, as well as the original appropriations all shaded green. Many parklets remain in the same general locations today, although their sizes and shapes differ slightly. The rectangular intersection now known as Marion Park, for instance, is represented as two triangular parcels separated by South Carolina Avenue; the site of today's Seward Square, which now consists of six small parklets dissected by Pennsylvania and North Carolina avenues, was indicated on the historic map as a large rectangular park. Because these parcels are merely the portions of the intersections unused for vehicular travel, their shapes and dimensions were chosen somewhat arbitrarily and continue to be altered to suit the changes in traffic patterns and modes.

In response to a House of Representatives' resolution to identify the federal reservations in the city, their dimensions, and the amount estimated for their improvement as parks, Babcock published a list of the reservations in the 1872 Annual Report of the Chief Engineer in Charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The compilation includes most of the remaining original reservations as well as about eighty of the parcels located at the intersections of the streets and avenues.⁸³ All of the properties are referred to as reservations, and each is described by shape, location, and condition. In all, these spaces encompassed more than 340 acres. The large parks in the central area of the northwest quadrant--such as Judiciary, Franklin, Lafayette, Scott (today's McPherson Square), and Farragut parks--were described as having wood or iron fences, graveled walkways, shrubs, trees and, in some cases, fountains. Lincoln Park was the only reservation outside of the northwest quadrant that had received any care, and it was described as partly improved and enclosed with a picket fence.

Having made this inventory of the locations and conditions of the reservations, Babcock set out to systematically improve them in areas being developed as a result of the work of the Board of Public Works. Babcock's term lasted six years despite the scandals that marked the demise of the territorial government. In his last report in 1876, he identified twenty-five reservations improved during his tenure. This consisted of grading, irrigating, seeding, planting trees, making walks and roads, and enclosing the parks with post-and-chain or ornamental iron fences. He wrote:

I take a pardonable pride in reverting briefly to the work that has been accomplished in the way of improving and beautifying the various public reservations in the national capital. Many of these reservations were commons and public dumping grounds when I assumed the duties of the position.⁸⁴

⁸² Michler mentioned in his report that several of the city journals had suggested they be named for poets or orators, while he advocated naming them for special species of trees that would be planted in them. Michler, 1868, 12.

⁸³ Although the Reservation Map of 1871 shows at least 250 parcels shaded green, for reasons still undiscovered, Babcock included only ninety reservations on his 1872 list.

⁸⁴ Babcock, O[rrville]. E., "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of the Public Buildings and Grounds in the District of Columbia and the Washington Aqueduct," Appendix KK1 of the Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1877, 13.

Babcock is credited with introducing water and gas lines into many of the parks, and installing 975 seats, eighteen drinking fountains, eighteen vases, ten fountains and bowls, five lodges, and four statues. His achievements did not go unnoticed. An 1875 Harper's New Monthly Magazine reported, "At all points of junction new squares and circles appeared, their verdure relived with flashing fountains, or bits of statuary, or effects in sodded terraces, all ready for the sculptor."⁸⁵

Despite the obvious enhancement of the city after the installation of the territorial government, the change was too drastic for the populace. A congressional investigation of alleged corruption was instigated as early as 1872, and Governor Henry D. Cooke resigned. The lengthy transcription of the hearing includes testimonies of contracts being awarded at inflated prices to companies owned by friends and by board members themselves. The accusers also indicated that most of the improvements were made in areas where board members and their cronies owned property, namely in the northwest quadrant, while areas such as Capitol Hill were left largely unimproved. Other controversies revolved around the setting of street grades. Landowners who crossed board members would find grades set in their neighborhoods such that their homes would be left either far below the street level, or raised way above it. Despite the allegations of corruption in the Board of Public Works, as well as its gross overexpenditures, Board Chairman Alexander Shepherd replaced Cooke as territorial governor in 1873. The Panic of 1873 only served to worsen the debt into which the government had fallen, and by 1874 the entire administration was dissolved amid financial obligations and scandal. In the three years between its birth and demise, the territorial government changed the face of Washington at the cost of \$22 million to \$30 million, and bequeathed the city a debt that would not be paid off until 1922.⁸⁶

Most of the construction performed during this period of vast improvements remained within the confines of the L'Enfant Plan. One major departure, however, was filling the canal envisioned by George Washington and Pierre L'Enfant as a way to promote commerce in the city. The growing primacy of the railroad made canals across the country obsolete. The Washington Canal was almost unanimously viewed as an economic failure, eyesore, and health hazard that demanded either improvement or removal. Michler had drawn up plans to dredge the canal, while others had suggested it be arched over and used as a sewer. Under Shepherd, the canal was converted to an underground culvert and a roadway--today known as Constitution Avenue--was paved along its former path.⁸⁷

A much less popular change to L'Enfant's vision was similarly prompted by changing transportation modes. In 1871, before the territorial government was installed, leaders of the Pennsylvania Railroad requested permission from the District government build a railroad station

⁸⁵ Colyer, 112.

⁸⁶ Reps, Monumental Washington, 58; Maury, Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, 5; Colyer, 111.

⁸⁷ A commission was formed by an 1870 Act of Congress to "cause the Washington Canal, either in whole or in part, to be dredged, or, if decreed best, dredged and narrowed, or arched over and converted into a sewer." Nathaniel Michler, who had performed extensive research concerning the treatment of the canal, was consulted by the committee and oversaw the forming of a contract "with very responsible parties." On May 18, 1871, the same day control of the canal and the various other public works were turned over to the jurisdiction of the territorial government, Michler was given twelve days notice that he was being transferred to the Military Division of the Pacific where he worked on the improvement of rivers in Oregon and the state of Washington. (Michler, 1870, 980-81).

south of Pennsylvania Avenue at Sixth Street on the Mall. Supporters of the railroad emphasized the prosperity that improved rail access would bring to the city. Opponents objected to the desecration of a site reserved by the city's founders as a park. During heated debates in Congress, one proponent stated, "No man who desires to see this country prosper would for a moment take into consideration the difference between this little bit of park and the great benefits which a railroad like this is going to bring into the city." Another suggested that the station would improve what had been "the dirtiest hole in Washington and a disgrace to the city," obviously referring to the fact that much of the Mall had yet to be improved.⁸⁸ Supported by Shepherd, the measure passed easily in Congress, and by 1873 the station on the Mall was complete. Although the ornate depot was credited with boosting the economy, its nuisances soon became apparent. The noise and smoke from the engines and lines of empty cars standing idle between trips were a blemish on the beauty of the national capital, while the trains barrelling down the streets and through the park were a constant safety hazard.⁸⁹ As with its precursor, the canal, Washingtonians would eventually petition for its removal.

With the demise of the Board of Public Works in 1874, responsibility for the streets, bridges, and other public works was transferred to a temporary Board of Commissioners until a more permanent municipal government was established by the Organic Act of June 11, 1878. Richard L. Hoxie, a lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers, had been on the Board of Public Works for only two days when the territorial government was abolished. He was then appointed to the new board of commissioners, beginning an eighty-year tradition of placing an Army Corps Engineer on this municipal board.⁹⁰ Although a member of the Corps of Engineers, Hoxie made his annual reports to the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia. His first reports mainly discussed efforts to restore departmental order after the chaos created under Shepherd. "Owing to the imperfect state of the records and accounts of the engineers' office of the Board of Public Works," he wrote, "each of these examinations has been a task of considerable magnitude."⁹¹ He cited many instances of poor workmanship and the use of inferior materials: "It is to be regretted that so large a proportion of the pavement of carriageways is of wood, the life of which in this district is short." Hoxie also predicted that many roads would have to be repaved, recommended placing the street names on lampposts, and even suggested that the streets be renamed to avoid the confusion of duplication under the quadrant system. He agreed that the system respecting the Capitol be maintained, but recommended that latitudinal streets be designated by names rather than letters.⁹²

⁸⁸ Dian Olsen Belanger, "The Railroad Station in the Park: Washington's Baltimore & Potomac Station, 1872-1907," Washington History 2 (Spring 1990), 4-27.

⁸⁹ Olszewski, Union Station, 16-17.

⁹⁰ Gutheim, 89-90.

⁹¹ Richard Hoxie, "Engineer's Report," Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1875), 165-67.

⁹² In addition to Hoxie's recommendations for street-name changes, a resolution to change the names of the avenues was also brought up in the Senate. The author(s), believed that the Capitol, White House, and Mall were such large interruptions to an avenue that the different segments created by the interruptions be assigned different names. For instance, Maryland Avenue northeast of the Capitol could retain its original name, while the segment to the southwest would be renamed after one of the new states in the Union, such as Iowa. (U.S. Congress, Senate, 44th Cong., 1st sess., Misc. Doc. 56.) None of these changes were made.

Two years after the 1874 dissolution of the territorial government, the nation celebrated its centennial. Rich in natural resources, the United States of America now spanned the continent, and its capital was finally beginning to resemble a city worthy of its stature. Shepherd and Babcock had laid the groundwork for development, and with the population on a steady upward climb, the next decade was marked by the continuing improvement of the parks and streets. Development gradually encroached upon the boundary of the L'Enfant Plan and would, by the turn of the century, spill over and begin to fill the rest of the District. It was also in this centennial year that Congress voted to appropriate \$200,000 to resume construction on the Washington Monument. Babcock's successor, Thomas Lincoln Casey, oversaw its construction. Casey also recommended hiring more maintenance workers and watchmen to protect and improve the parks and urged the development of the parks on Capitol Hill, as the streets there--formerly neglected by the Board of Public Works--were brought up to the condition of the streets in the northwest quadrant. He reported in 1880 that consumption of Potomac River water had peaked at a dangerous level, and included in his report an extensive list of all of the public buildings and parks and the amount of water used annually in each.⁹³

The Washington Monument was completed in 1884 under the leadership of A. F. Rockwell, who had been appointed chief of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1881. The same year Century Magazine reported, "Within the past ten years, Washington has ceased to be a village." Although Washington still did not merit the title of "city" because it lacked "evidences of commercial prosperity which are proudly shown to the traveler in every thriving town all the way from New York to San Francisco," the author recognized L'Enfant's foresight. "His plans were as comprehensive and far-reaching in their way as was the Constitution itself. He planned for centuries and for a population of half a million people." Although in 1884 Washington's streetscape consisted of clusters of buildings separated by long, uninhabited expanses, the author predicted that when the blocks within the planned city were finally filled in, Washington would be "among cities, the wonder of the world."⁹⁴ The author recognized the city's slow development in previous decades as providential:

Fortunately, during all the years that the place had remained a wretched village, its grandiose plan had never been entrenched upon in any way; and when the work of development was taken in hand in earnest, it was at once manifest what immense possibilities the plan contained.⁹⁵

The author described the oddly shaped lots created by L'Enfant's street system and how they created a great variety of building possibilities. Finding the variety of lot shapes and buildings refreshing compared to the monotony of cities built on a regular grid, he wrote, "The architects were not slow to cover them with every conceivable variety of houses,--square houses and round houses, houses with no two walls parallel, with fantastic roofs and towers and buttresses and bay windows and nameless projections."⁹⁶

⁹³ Thomas Lincoln Casey, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds in the District of Columbia and the Washington Aqueduct," Appendix NN to the Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1880 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1881), 2340-64.

⁹⁴ "New Washington," 117-36.

⁹⁵ "New Washington," 123.

⁹⁶ "New Washington," 124.

In addition to the territorial government's extensive improvements to the city's infrastructure, the Board of Public Works also initiated comprehensive building regulations that would affect the nature of the building lines that formed the boundary between public and private property, the framework that visually defines the open space in Washington. At the outset of the city, George Washington proclaimed a prohibition on all private encroachment into the wide public rights-of-way, even vaults extending under the streets. Vaults, steps, colonnades, and porches were later allowed to extend beyond the building lines into public space, according to a law passed in 1845. Historian Alison K. Hoagland argues that the Board of Public Works actually encouraged encroachment into federal property; first by creating the parking system in 1871, which blurred the distinction between public and private spheres, and second by requiring builders to obtain permits to construct bays, oriels, and porticos projecting beyond the building line. By requiring permits for such extensions, the board acknowledged their legality, thereby increasing their proliferation throughout the city. Most buildings constructed in the 1870s-80s featured some type of projection, creating the popular, picturesque streetscape.⁹⁷

Throughout the 1880s-90s the commissioners of the District of Columbia and the Army Corps of Engineers continued to work together to improve the city's infrastructure. While the District paved and swept streets, planted trees, and erected street lamps, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was responsible for the city's parks, bridges, and the executive mansion. By 1881, most of the avenues had some type of pavement, such as asphalt, granite or cobblestones, wood blocks or gravel. Within the next ten years, most streets in the northwest quadrant were paved with asphalt as far as Florida Avenue. Travel into and out of the city was eased by improved river crossings: a new iron-truss Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge opened in 1890, followed by the third Eleventh Street/Navy Yard Bridge, an early heavy steel-arch bridge erected in 1908. Also by the 1890s, most of the streets, with the exception of the area east of Lincoln Park and a roughly triangular area west of Delaware Avenue, SW, and south of Virginia Avenue, SE, were swept at least once a week and featured rows of trees and gas street lamps.⁹⁸

City travel was not only ameliorated by comfortable pavements and the shade of trees, but also beautified by the parks scattered along the avenues. While the city commissioners published detailed maps showing the locations of street lamps, shade trees, and street-sweeping schedules, the Corps of Engineers published maps indicating the locations of parks under their jurisdiction and assigning them numbers for management purposes.⁹⁹ In 1883 Col. A. F. Rockwell and surveyor

⁹⁷ Hoagland, 69-75.

⁹⁸ Statistical Maps accompanying the Annual Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1891-92.

⁹⁹ In general, the larger named and improved parks--Lafayette, Lincoln, and Mount Vernon squares--were assigned lower numbers; the remainder, described by shape and location, were numbered consecutively along the avenues. For example, the thirty-four reservations along Massachusetts Avenue were numbered consecutively east to west, from No. 57 to No. 90. A. F. Rockwell, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds in the District of Columbia," Appendix SS of the Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1884 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 2348.

William Forsyth identified all the government-owned parcels in a large volume of plats.¹⁰⁰ The large plat book was condensed into a smaller map included in Rockwell's annual report. An accompanying list described each of the 246 reservations by size, shape, and state of improvement. Comprising a total of 408 acres, thirty-eight were described on the list as highly improved, forty-seven were partially improved, and the remaining 161 were "vacant and unimproved." Although the term "reservation" was used to describe all the newly numbered parcels, many of the original seventeen reservations were excluded from the tally because they were no longer the responsibility of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds.¹⁰¹ They had been reserved for the buildings that had finally been erected: the newly numbered reservations were, for the most part, intended for parks and open spaces. The Mall, Monument Grounds, and President's Park were included on the new list of reservations, but were renumbered according to their changed configurations. Instead of being seen as one large reservation, the Mall had been divided into several pieces, each with its own name and number.¹⁰²

Rockwell left this new management system to his successor, Lt. Col. John M. Wilson, who included detailed ground plans of many of the highly improved parks in his annual report of 1886, as well as a list of the trees planted in them. He described the work of his office as follows:

Each newly improved reservation adds that much to the city, the welfare and prosperity of the locality in which it is situated; the capital of the nation should be in advance of other cities, and take the lead in the decoration of its parks, rather than to follow in the wake of New York, Boston, Chicago and Cincinnati; its beauty is attracting the admiration of the crowds of strangers who annually visit it, and its pleasant climate, its charming surroundings, its splendidly paved streets and its handsome parks are attracting to it, as a home, an element of wealth, refinement, and intelligence that will aid in making it, as it should be, an ornament to the nation.¹⁰³

The surveys of federal land in the city were not only valuable for management tools, but were increasingly necessary to settle legal disputes. When surveyor John Stewart visited each of the sites to compile a map for the 1887 annual report, he noted that several reservations were occupied by

¹⁰⁰ Plats of Reservations and Public Spaces under the Control of the Commissioner of Public Buildings and Grounds in the City of Washington, 1883. This volume is only available at the National Archives and Records Administration, Maps and Cartographic Division, Pickett Street Annex.

¹⁰¹ Original reservations that were unnumbered but identified by buildings erected on them were: the Capitol, Botanical Garden, and Agriculture Department grounds (all within Reservation No. 2); Observatory (No. 4); Arsenal (No. 5); Patent Office (No. 8); jail and almshouse grounds (No. 13); and U.S. Navy Yard (No. 14). Reservation No. 17, Garfield Park, retained its original number.

¹⁰² The White House Grounds remained Reservation No. 1, but Lafayette Park was separated from it to become No. 10. The Monument Grounds, referred to as Washington Park, became No. 2 (formerly No. 3), and Judiciary Square (No. 9) became No. 7. The Mall (No. 2) was divided into four sections: Smithsonian Park, between Seventh and Twelfth streets became No. 3; Armory Park, between Sixth and Seventh streets, became No. 4; the trapezoidal site between Four-and-one-half and Sixth streets became No. 5; and the trapezoid between Third and Four-and-one-half streets became No. 6.

¹⁰³ John M. Wilson, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of the Public Buildings and Grounds in the District of Columbia, Appendix TT of the Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1886 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 2093.

buildings, railroad tracks, or other intrusions erected by private citizens.¹⁰⁴ Wilson then instructed Stewart, who was also charged with keeping the records of the office, to gather documentation necessary to prove federal ownership of the small triangular spaces.¹⁰⁵ Stewart compiled a lengthy report in which he cited a letter signed by George Washington on January 4, 1793, indicating that all the irregularly shaped spaces created at the intersections of the streets and avenues were transferred to the federal government along with the areas designated for roads as part of the original agreement of transfer with the original proprietors.

Wilson's main concern was the intrusion of the railroads on spaces intended for beauty and recreation. Railroad tracks ran along large segments of Virginia and Maryland avenues in the southeast and southwest quadrants, destroying intended vistas and precluding the beautification of any of the federal parks along them. Although Washingtonians had greeted the railroads with celebration, they soon discovered the hazards and nuisances of the great steam engines and cars barreling through the city. Trains caused severe accidents at many grade crossings and generated unpleasant dirt and noise. In an attempt to abate the clamor and unsightliness of the railroad tracks at the foot of the Capitol, the OPB&G formed large mounds of dirt alongside the tracks on the Mall and planted them with trees to screen the station and its affiliated nuisances from the rest of the park.

Wilson's successor, Col. Oswald Ernst, continued to examine the legal issues caused by incomplete or inaccurate property records. In addition to railroad intrusions, the issue of riparian rights became particularly intense, and in 1889 Ernst requested funds to hire an assistant for surveyor William Forsyth, who became increasingly busy as court cases arose concerning the wharf property along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers. Property disputes along the waterfront began in the early 1880s as a result of public and private efforts to fill areas of flats and shallow water to increase the area of dry land. When the Corps of Engineers began the reclamation project, private landowners sued for the land being reclaimed by the federal government. A court battle lasting more than six years, *Morris et al v. the United States*, prompted a detailed study of the legislative and topographical history of the city.¹⁰⁶ In addition to these waterfront-ownership squabbles, Ernst identified eight illegal occupations by the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Company and one by the Baltimore and Ohio in his annual report of 1892.¹⁰⁷

In response to these legal issues, Wilson, who was reassigned to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1893, and Stewart undertook one final survey of federal property in 1894. The resulting map, published in the 1894 annual report, showed 301 reservations: ninety-two highly improved, forty-one partially improved, and 168 unimproved. At Wilson's request, Stewart hatched

¹⁰⁴ The reservations were renumbered on a new map and list in 1887 to include additional reservations created in the old canal bed. The total number on the 1887 list was 331 reservations comprising 413 acres. Most of these canal-bed reservations were eventually sold as sites for railroad tracks.

¹⁰⁵ John Wilson to John Stewart, 1883 (NARA RG42, Reports of the surveyor to the officer in Charge box 229, letter 3851 and 3851½).

¹⁰⁶ Gutheim, 93-94.

¹⁰⁷ Oswald H. Ernst, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument in the District of Columbia," Appendix BB of Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1892 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1892).

the eight reservations occupied illegally by railroads.¹⁰⁸ In 1898 Congress passed an act to define the legal jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The legislation determined that streets and street parkings--the landscaped strips flanking the roadbeds--were the jurisdiction of the District commissioners, while the park system under the OPB&G encompassed all those reservations delineated on the 1894 reservation map, as well as any additional spaces within the street rights-of-ways set aside by the commissioners of the District of Columbia for park purposes. The 301 reservations defined on the 1894 map thereby became the official basis for the park system in Washington.¹⁰⁹

With clear legal rights to the land, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds began to reclaim those properties illegally used as dumps, or occupied by shacks, gardens, railroad companies, and even a public schoolhouse and a church.¹¹⁰ To claim these spaces, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds marked them with 6" x 6" granite blocks placed at each corner, inscribed with "U.S." or "U.S.OPB&G."

As the larger reservations at the intersections of the avenues were improved, the commissioners heeded L'Enfant's recommendation for making them the sites of statues to honor "individuals whose Counsels or military achievements were conspicuous in giving liberty to this Country."¹¹¹ By 1884 eleven statues stood in prominent reservations throughout the developed areas of the city: equestrian statues of Nathaniel Greene in Stanton Park and George Washington in Washington Circle honored Revolutionary War heroes; Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott in Scott Circle and Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Square represented victories against Mexico and the Indians for U.S. territory; and Brig. Gen. James B. McPherson, Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, Maj. Gen. John A. Rawlins, Rear Adm. Samuel Francis DuPont, Adm. David G. Farragut, and former President Abraham Lincoln presided over squares named after them--exhibiting the memory of the very recent Civil War upon Washington's citizenry. The figure of Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, stood alone on the Smithsonian Grounds as the only statue honoring a civilian; landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing was similarly honored with a memorial urn placed there, as well, in 1856. The parks were generally relandscaped or improved to receive these statues, which were set atop imposing marble or granite pedestals usually designed by the Corps of

¹⁰⁸ He also specified that no new measurements be undertaken unless the actual square footage appeared to be largely different from the existing dimensions. In 1915 all the reservations were resurveyed because this map was said to have included arbitrary dimensions.

¹⁰⁹ For the most part, new parks added to the system beyond the original L'Enfant boundaries were numbered consecutively after 301. Some reservations added within the L'Enfant boundaries were numbered similarly to the adjacent parks, such as two medians, 47A and 47B added near reservation 47; others were numbered according to the nearest large reservation, such as the eighteen medians numbered from 15A through 15R along Maryland Avenue, after Stanton Park (No. 15); still others were assigned entirely new numbers such as Nos. 362 and 363 on North Carolina Avenue. Numbers are only used once, even if the site no longer exists, so although there are reservation numbers into the 700s, there are significantly fewer parks.

¹¹⁰ According to OPB&G reservation lists, in the 1880s-90s a public schoolhouse stood in Reservation No. 125 at the intersection of Virginia Avenue and K Street, SE. By 1902 the site was used as a place of worship, and in 1904 it was transferred to the District of Columbia for a fire station. Likewise, sometime before 1876, Bethany Chapel was built without permission in Reservation No. 186, at 13th Street and Ohio Avenue, NW. The problem of illegal occupation was solved in the early twentieth century by formally leasing the space to the individuals who had appropriated them, with contracts renewable every five years. Bethany Chapel, for instance, attained such a permit in 1929, and may have occupied the land until the site was eliminated in the 1930s for construction of Federal Triangle.

¹¹¹ L'Enfant plan, 1791.

Engineers. The elaborate unveiling ceremonies that accompanied their dedications featured parades, military-band concerts, hymns, orations by presidents and dignitaries, and even poetry readings.

Exotic flowers and trees grown locally at the botanical and propagating gardens were planted throughout the reservations. A growing, nationwide interest in all matters of science was reflected in the efforts of park designers and botanists to cultivate rare specimens. Contemporary philosophy viewed parks as pleasure grounds to provide the restorative benefits of nature apart from the corrupt and unhealthy city. Although designed for relaxation and contemplation, they could also serve to educate urban residents in matters of natural history. Col. A. F. Rockwell justified the expense of selecting various plants stating in 1884:

This collection is necessarily of varied character and planted more for the purpose of park ornamentation than the natural botanical classification of an arboretum. But it affords the visitors to the capital, and others desirous of obtaining a knowledge of the vegetable world displayed in a comparatively small space, a large field for examination.¹¹²

In 1886 gardener George H. Brown prepared an inventory of all the trees and shrubs in the federal reservations, and the information was disseminated to the public on cast-iron labels attached to the trees. The lush plantings of the Victorian era gave way to sparser plantings toward the turn of the century, however, as an abundance of plants was seen as a "concealment" for "wrongdoers and an obstruction of the breezes Washingtonians sought in the sweltering summers."¹¹³

This fascination with the natural world was not limited to the plant kingdom, and the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds introduced various animal species to several reservations. The same year Babcock requested \$2,000 from Congress to begin a nursery in 1871, he also requested \$500 to purchase sparrows and tree boxes for them to live in, maintaining that the birds would help control insects. When the state of Washington gave Ulysses S Grant a pair of eagles, they were placed in a cage in Franklin Park. Similarly, Lafayette Park featured a pair of prairie dogs and several deer until Congress no longer allocated funds for their upkeep.¹¹⁴ Later, as fountains were built in many of the parks, the pools were stocked with goldfish and planted with water lilies.

While few of the triangular reservations were large enough for statues or extensive displays, they were "tastefully laid out according to their size either as simple lawns or flower beds, or as parks, with walks, fountains, etc."¹¹⁵ The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds systematically improved the parks in the areas of the city "where private enterprise was making corresponding

¹¹² Rockwell, 1884, 2364.

¹¹³ Theodore A. Bingham, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of the Public Buildings and Grounds and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument, in the District of Columbia," Appendix CCC of the Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1899 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 3824.

¹¹⁴ Referring to the lack of funds, Babcock wrote in 1877, "The engineer department having instructed me that no appropriation for the year could be used in feeding the animals, [deer, eagles, owls, prairie dogs and sparrows,] I gave the buck to the gate-keeper at the receiving reservoir, Washington Aqueduct, and fed the others with food from the reservations and from my personal means." Babcock, 1877, 9.

¹¹⁵ "The New Washington," 124.

improvements."¹¹⁶ First graded and laid with irrigation pipes, the parks were then sown with seeds and planted. Throughout the 1870s-80s, cast-iron posts were placed around these smaller spaces--often referred to as the "breathing spaces" of the city--connected by chain or pipe to protect the areas from trespassers. The smaller areas function as decoration rather than for recreation and leisure, and they were readily accessible to residents unable to venture out of the city to larger pleasure grounds.

The annual reports of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds provide detailed accounts of the intensive labor involved in maintaining these improved parks throughout the seasons. Routine labor included annual painting of fences, vases, benches, and lampposts, sweeping the gravel and paved paths, raking leaves in the fall, removing snow and ice in the winter, and planting flowers and shrubs in spring. Parks were fertilized with manure from public and private stables, canal muck, oyster-shell lime, leaf mold, and even Peruvian guano.

As early as the era of Benjamin B. French, parks were subject to vandalism and abuse, and those charged with their care sought ways to protect them. French called attention to vandalism in Washington Circle at the hands of "mischievous boys." Dogs, chickens, and pigs roaming free throughout the city caused so much damage to the newly improved parks that wood fences were erected to keep them out. Trees near the avenues were encircled by protective wood frames to prevent people from hitching horses to them. Low post-and-chain and post-and-pipe fences, some with finials engraved with U.S. OPB&G, discouraged trespassing in the smaller parks. Taller iron fences were erected as real barriers around larger parks, including Franklin and Lafayette squares, which were only open to the public only during daylight hours. Watchmen, hired to police the parks and perform routine maintenance, were issued bicycles on which to patrol the large parks where they were posted, as well as the smaller nearby triangles. The larger parks featured ornate Victorian lodges equipped with public toilets, storage rooms, and lockers for the watchmen. When gas lamps were installed in the 1870s, these parks remained open until midnight, and the watchmen's hours were extended. Lighting, fences, and watchmen also helped to limit park use to "the better people," as Babcock discussed in his report in 1876:

The public parks in this city, like those in all other cities, become in some localities the resort of a class of people which drives away the better people who wish to occupy the seats and walks. It is a difficult thing to discriminate as to who shall occupy the seats, yet, with the efficient support of the metropolitan police now so freely given, it is believed that these people can be kept in such order that their presence will not drive away anyone, especially the nurses in charge of small children.¹¹⁷

Whether Babcock was referring to criminals, the indigent, or a certain race or social class is unclear, but Washingtonians apparently saw these police measures as discriminatory, and created such an outcry in the late 1880s that all the tall fences were gradually removed.¹¹⁸ While the removal of the fences democratized the parks, it also increased the responsibilities of the watchmen. The plantings

¹¹⁶ John M. Wilson, *Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument in the District of Columbia*, Appendix BBB of the *Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 2848.

¹¹⁷ Babcock, 1876.

¹¹⁸ The tall iron fence removed from Lafayette Square was re-erected at Gettysburg National Battlefield.

were changed accordingly, with shrubs pruned and removed to allow better surveillance, but nonetheless the watchmen reported numerous crimes and arrests, ranging from violating the speed limit on a bicycle, to drunkenness, immorality, indecent exposure, and murder. One particularly dangerous area was the "White Lot," today known as the Ellipse. OPB&G chief officer Theodore Bingham described the problem in 1899:

At night this large area with thickets of shrubs is absolutely defenseless, as there is no night watchman. After dark no decent woman, or couple of them, dare go through these grounds, and it has on several occasions proved dangerous for men. Robberies and other crimes occur here every now and then, and this within 1,000 yards of the Executive Mansion. It is a reproach that this part of the National Capital should be the haunt of the criminal classes of the city, especially in spring and summer when the parks should be the safest.¹¹⁹

Because their duties had largely shifted from maintenance to law enforcement, chief officer Thomas W. Symons later lobbied for redesignation to park police along with comparable salaries and benefits of other law-enforcement professionals. He explained their versatile responsibilities:

This requires a great deal of delicacy on the one hand in dealing with women and children and on the other the roughest and most dangerous kind of police work in dealing with toughs and offenders of all kinds. The duty of the men is not simply to watch the parks, but also to protect the respectable people, especially women and children, in their full enjoyment and unmolested by had men and dissolute women.¹²⁰

Beyond the L'Enfant Plan

As the turn of the century approached, Washington had finally developed so far as to fill most of the area south of Boundary Street as delineated on paper by L'Enfant more than 100 years earlier. Most streets were paved to the boundaries of the historic city and, for the most part, the parks were identified and slated for improvement. In 1889 Richard Hoxie reported that the city's streets were "beyond question unsurpassed by any city of the world." He also requested that carriage steps be removed from public streets, "as modern carriages are nearly all hung so low that their steps are but a few inches above the curb."¹²¹ Hoxie's reference perhaps foreshadows the tremendous changes in city planning and development to come over the next decades with the advent of the automobile. Not only were private vehicles being modernized, but by the 1890s, ten different streetcar companies provided reliable public transportation throughout most of the historic city. The Eckington & Soldier's Home Railway was the first to convert from horse to electricity, and by this time Congress had prohibited animal traction within the downtown core.

The improvement of streetcar lines had a direct effect on the city's street system because the lines extending to Georgetown and up 14th and Seventh streets encouraged the construction of

¹¹⁹ Theodore A. Bingham, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument, in the District of Columbia," Appendix CCC of The Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1899 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1899), 3846.

¹²⁰ Thomas W. Symons and Chas. S. Bromwell, Annual Report . . . 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904), 3918.

¹²¹ Richard L. Hoxie, "Engineers Report," Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1889).

suburbs for middle- and upper-class residents wishing to escape the urban heat and congestion. Col. Hoxie foresaw this suburban flight as early as 1875, and recommended a topographical study of the areas beyond the boundaries of the L'Enfant Plan in order to devise a uniform system of roads. "All plans for the future improvement in the District should have the same painstaking study and the same adaptation of wants of the more remote future that are shown in the original plan of the capital," he wrote. "The execution of such plans, when well digested, may be swift and sure, but the hurried work of imperfect plans, awaiting its own destruction in the future, is time and money thrown away."¹²² Hoxie's concern arose from the new suburban developments collecting around the old city, through the subdivision of large tracts of land. One of the earliest, LeDroit Park, was laid out in the 1870s north of Boundary Street with a street pattern consciously designed to oppose the L'Enfant grid and emphasize suburban separateness. Recognizing this as a dangerous precedent for future growth, Hoxie urged Congress to adopt a unified street plan. He also recommended Boundary Street be renamed in order to dispel the distinction between the area planned by L'Enfant and the rest of the District. "The name is objectionable," he wrote, "because it conveys the impression that with this street the city or the District ends, whereas in fact the city has extended beyond this street and a large portion lies beyond it." The street was renamed Florida Avenue in 1893, but legislation to adopt a unified highway plan was not enacted until 1898. As a result, over the next twenty years of uncertainty, while the city continued to grow, surveyors and designers of the outlying suburbs laid out streets at whim.

While Florida Avenue between 14th Street, NE, and Eighth Street, NW, formed a man-made boundary between L'Enfant's orderly scheme and the random suburban sprawl, west of Eighth Street it followed an escarpment dividing two distinct geological zones. L'Enfant had limited his street plan to the coastal plain, but the northern reaches of the ten-mile square encompassed the undulating hills and deep stream valleys of the foothills of the Piedmont Mountains. The heights above Florida Avenue were attractive for their fresh air, magnificent views and lush foliage, and by the turn of the century developers had hurdled the deep Rock Creek valley, making it accessible to L'Enfant's city. A popular receptacle for the city's refuse, the valley containing Rock Creek was such an eyesore that in 1908 some advocated filling it to the level of Massachusetts Avenue.¹²³

Congress first addressed the need for a single large park in 1867, assigning Nathaniel Michler to the duty of finding one. The site he recommended, a large verdant tract of undeveloped land along the ravine created by the Rock Creek, was finally purchased by the federal government in 1890. Named Rock Creek Park, its improvement began eight years later. When the federal government purchased the area for parkland in 1890, however, developers bridged over it--creating dramatic vistas over the verdant valley to complement the ordered vistas of the downtown core.

The first bridges over the creek and valley carried M and K streets, built in 1788 and 1792, respectively. M Street Bridge was subsequently rebuilt in 1800, 1839, and 1871 before the present and fifth span was erected in 1929-30. Similarly, K Street Bridge was replaced in 1869 and 1907 before the existing crossing was last rebuilt in 1939-41, and modified in 1947-49. These were

¹²² Richard L. Hoxie, "Engineer Report," Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1875), 61.

¹²³ For an in-depth discussion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Rock Creek valley, and the bridges spanning it, see HABS No. DC-697, by Tim Davis (summer 1993).

followed by construction of Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge, designed by Montgomery Meigs, in 1858-60; the water pipes from this structure were encased in its successor bridge, erected in 1915-16.

In 1888 developers sponsored erection of a bridge to carry Massachusetts Avenue traffic over the valley. The first bridge here was a dirt culvert built in 1901; it was replaced in 1939-41. An insubstantial bridge was erected in 1875 to extend Connecticut Avenue; this crossing was replaced in 1888-89 with the an iron-deck truss Woodley Lane Bridge, which was demolished sometime after 1905--probably after Connecticut Avenue Bridge was completed. where the valley depth is greatest at 120'. To promote development in northwest Washington and Chevy Chase, Maryland, the Rock Creek Railroad Company built two bridges in 1891, one extending Calvert Street over the Rock Creek Valley, which was replaced in 1933-35; the other carrying Connecticut Avenue over the Klinge Valley, created by a tributary of the Rock Creek. Thereafter, Q Street Bridge with its distinctive Indian heads was erected in 1914, and P Street Bridge in 1933-35. All but one bridge over the valley--carrying M Street--is an arch bridge constructed with masonry.¹²⁴

As the city streets stretched beyond the historic core, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds lobbied for more parkland outside the original city. Although there were numerous parks within the L'Enfant Plan boundaries, few areas were reserved for recreational open space in the growing suburbs. Additionally, a growing nationwide interest in the healthy benefits of recreation and the out-of-doors gave further credibility to the engineers' requests to enlarge the park system. In 1890 Congress ruled that more playgrounds be constructed for children. In an attempt to comply, large parks such as Washington and Dupont circles were equipped with sandboxes, and the Mall was used for team sports. But no amount of landscaping or playground equipment could transform these settings into the type of pleasure grounds that were gaining popularity throughout the rest of the nation.

Large recreational areas were also created south of the historic city prior to the turn of the century. The land reclaimed by the Corps of Engineers along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, also originally proposed by Michler, was designated as parkland. The two rivers had been subject to repeated silting and flooding since the founding of the city, so in 1882 Congress allocated \$400,000 to fill in the flats and create the Washington Channel. The dredged material was piled on the Potomac Flats for more than a decade before this area was transformed into a large landscaped park. By 1899 the flats along the Anacostia River were also scheduled to be filled and converted to parkland. Theodore Bingham, chief officer of the OPB&G from 1897 to 1903, envisioned these larger parks connected by a system of parkways to "form a systematic and well-considered whole."¹²⁵ The area was further altered with the construction of the Highway Bridge (near the future 14th Street Bridge), a steel truss with swing span completed in 1906, which carried trollies, automobiles, pedestrians and equestrians.

¹²⁴ Myer, 55, 65-74; miscellaneous HAER bridge reports, see Davis.

¹²⁵ Theodore A. Bingham, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument, in the District of Columbia," Appendix CCC of The Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1899 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1899), 3825. This vision was partially fulfilled by the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, authorized by Congress in 1913 to connect East and West Potomac Parks with Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo.

In the tradition of all of the OPB&G chiefs before him, Bingham's annual reports feature repeated entreaties for congressional funding for park maintenance and improvement. Asking for a \$10,000 appropriation for a comprehensive study of the Washington park system, he wrote in 1900:

Let it not be forgotten that generous parks bring in large returns in the better health of the population and reduction of the death rate; in providing pleasure grounds for young and old; in improving real estate values; in refining and hence making better citizens of all classes, and by no means least, in establishing a reputation for attractiveness which brings visitors and residents and hard dollars to a city.¹²⁶

But with the coming of the new century and the centennial of the city, Congress responded more readily to the following appeal:

With the close of one century and the opening of another--considering the unexpectedly grand and new future opening before us as the leading nation in the progress of humanity, charity and good will toward all others--it is not only my duty, but it seems also a fitting time to call the particular attention of Congress to the needs of a greater liberality in developing and beautifying the parks of our capital city.¹²⁷

Regulating the Heights of Buildings

A special direction was taken around the turn of the century to preserve the essence of L'Enfant's horizontal baroque city plan with the invention of the elevator and the incumbent skyscraper that threatened to overshadow the open spaces. As early as 1791, Thomas Jefferson had observed that, "In Paris it is forbidden to build a house beyond a given height, & it is admitted to be a good restriction[.] it keeps the houses low & convenient, & the streets light and airy."¹²⁸ Though less familiar with other capital cities than his well-traveled vice president, George Washington established the first height restriction in the capital, 45'; it was suspended in 1822, however, by President Monroe.¹²⁹

The first modern legal restraint on building heights was triggered by the construction of the Cairo Hotel, twelve-story, 165' building erected in 1894 at 1615 Q St., NW, which loomed over the otherwise low-rise city.¹³⁰ The public law of 1 June 1910, based overall limits on the width of the street in front of the property:

No building shall be erected, altered, or raised in the District of Columbia in any manner so as to exceed in height above the sidewalk the width of the street, avenue, or highway in its front, increased

¹²⁶ Theodore A. Bingham, "Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument, in the District of Columbia," Appendix HHH of The Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1900 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1900), 5239.

¹²⁷ Bingham, 1899, 3825.

¹²⁸ Cited in Reys, 4.

¹²⁹ Caemmerer, National Capital, 108.

¹³⁰ For more information, see the written report for HABS DC-307.

by 20'; but where a building . . . confronts a public space or reservation formed at the intersection of two or more streets, avenues, or highways, . . . the limit of height of the building shall be determined from the width of the widest street, avenue or highway.¹³¹

The maximum height a building could ascend on a street or avenue was set at 130', except the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue between First and 15th streets, NW, where they may reach 160'. Structures erected on residential streets are limited to 60'-85', contingent upon street width. Protuberances such as spires, towers, ventilation shafts, and domes may exceed these heights if they are set back from the exterior wall as far as they are tall.¹³²

NCP&PC member William Adams Delano asserted that while typical urban settings were threatened by the "indiscriminate use of skyscrapers, without system or order,"

Washington is the one city in our land which began life with a plan; in fact, it had a plan before it had life. It is a splendid plan. No city in the world has finer open spaces or finer sites for buildings, public and private, but they will be ruined if encroachments are allowed on the sky line . . . It is the sky line that counts in the city as a whole.¹³³

A subsequent control measure came later that year with the Shipstead Act, as amended, which directed aesthetic controls over "the architecture of private or semipublic buildings adjacent to public buildings and grounds of major importance," with regard to height, appearance, color, and texture. These sites include the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, White House, Pennsylvania Avenue between the two, Lafayette Park, Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, East and West Potomac parks, and the Mall--all part of the monumental core of the city that was the focus of the McMillan Commission, and its influential report.¹³⁴

¹³¹ U.S. Congress, House, An Act to regulate the height of buildings in the District of Columbia, H.R. 19070, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., 1910: 452-55. (Vol. 36, Stat 452)

¹³² Act. . . The distances are measured from the sidewalk at the center front of the structure to the highest point of the roof; if there are two primary facades, that which offers the greatest height is allowed.

¹³³ William Adams Delano, "Order and Scale in City Building, with Reference to Public Buildings in Washington," Landscape Architecture 20 (April 1930), 189-90. (188-91)

¹³⁴ U.S. Congress, _____, An Act to regulate the height, exterior design, and construction of private and semipublic buildings in certain areas of the National Capital (Shipstead Act), (46 Stat. 366), 16 May, 1930; amended 31 July, 1939 (53 Stat. 1144) to include Lafayette Park: 77-78.

The McMillan Senate Park Commission

The McMillan Senate Park Commission Plan has been called the nation's first comprehensive plan for modern city development.¹³⁵ Although the final report gave little credit to the Army Corps of Engineers, it borrowed many of the ideas and built upon the foundations laid by the officers who had labored and lobbied to improve Washington's parks for more than thirty years. In retrospect, historians have described the events of 1901-02, which precipitated the appointment of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, as beset with political maneuvering, ulterior motives, and interagency competition. Nevertheless, the outcome would capture the imaginations of congressmen and Washingtonians, and would guide the development of the national capital for decades to come.

As early as 1898, a committee was formed to meet with President William McKinley to propose the erection of a monument to commemorate the centennial of the city. A joint committee formed by Congress held its first meeting February 21, 1900, with Sen. James McMillan of Michigan as chairman and Charles Moore as secretary. McMillan envisioned a Centennial Avenue running north of the Mall to a bridge across the Potomac River. Simultaneously, Bingham produced a plan for the development of the Mall, which included the newly reclaimed Potomac Flats. This and his pleas for a comprehensive park system helped expand the scope of the study. Bingham's plan, however, was criticized for its lack of artistry; the second plan he produced, designed by Samuel Parsons who had worked with Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., on Central Park, was also ridiculed.

As the bureaucracy planned for the centennial, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) joined the fray under the leadership of its secretary, Glenn Brown. He initiated members' interest in the project by soliciting designs from them in 1898 for the improvement of Washington. The official centennial celebration took place December 12, 1900. The next day, the annual national AIA meeting convened in Washington. Its leaders envisioned the nation's capital as the perfect place for the group to express the ideals of the City Beautiful movement promoted by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

The architects of this pivotal fair incorporated Neoclassical architecture in a grand and ordered civic space to create an impressive White City along the shores of Lake Michigan. This model of urban planning would affect the face of cities worldwide for decades to come. Seven years after the fair, the sole focus of the architects' annual meeting was the development of Washington as a permanent White City on the Potomac River. The architects examined possibilities for the interaction of open space and civic architecture in the downtown core, thereby expanding the scope of redevelopments already under scrutiny in that centennial year.

When the Senate Commission was formed in 1901 to explore and plan the design of the city, the project then encompassed the historic core, as well as areas in Virginia as far north as Great Falls and south to Mount Vernon. The illustrious committee was comprised of Daniel Burnham, visionary of the World's Columbian Exposition, as well as landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., architect Charles F. McKim and sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens, all noted members of their professions. Charles Moore and all but the sickly St. Gaudens ventured to Europe for seven weeks to study precedents in park and city planning. The report they produced aimed "to prepare for the city of Washington such a plan

¹³⁵ Jon A. Peterson, "The Nation's First Comprehensive City Plan: A Political Analysis of the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C.," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 51 (Spring 1985), passim.

as shall enable future development to proceed along the lines originally planned--namely, the treatment of the city as a work of civic art--and to develop the outlying parks as portions of a single, well-considered system."¹³⁶

One issue foremost in the minds of these men was the amazing foresight and genius of Pierre L'Enfant. Moore wrote in the preface of the committee report: "The original plan of the city, having stood the test of a century, has met universal approval. The departures from that plan are to be regretted and, wherever possible, remedied."¹³⁷ The departures of greatest concern to the commission were the fragmentation of the Mall and the railroad station erected on it in 1872. As if to symbolize the rebirth of the plan, in 1909 L'Enfant was disinterred from Digges Farm in Maryland where he had been buried in 1825 after living the last years of his life in poverty. His remains were reburied in front of the Custis-Lee House in Arlington Cemetery, on a site offering a magnificent vista of the city he designed. At the reinterment ceremony, former Secretary of War and Senator Elihu Root said, "Few men can afford to wait a hundred years to be remembered. It is not a change in L'Enfant that brings us here. It is we who have changed, who have just become able to appreciate his work. Our tribute to him should he to continue his work."¹³⁸

In sum, the grandiose plans made by the McMillan Commission called for: relandscaping the ceremonial core, consisting of the Capitol Grounds and Mall, including new extensions west and south of the Washington Monument; consolidating city railways and alleviating grade crossings; slum clearance; design of a coordinated municipal office complex in the triangle formed by Pennsylvania Avenue, 15th Street, and the Mall; and a comprehensive recreation and park system that would in turn preserve the ring of Civil War fortifications around the city.¹³⁹ The plans of the McMillan Commission, while inspired by L'Enfant's visions of grandeur, sought on one hand to preserve the original scheme, but would also call for the most drastic changes to the city since its design in 1792.

Early Effects of the McMillan Commission

No funds were appropriated to implement the plan of 1901, since it had never been approved by the House of Representatives. Its earliest visible effect was the legislatively mandated removal of the Pennsylvania and Potomac Railroad terminal from the Mall and the construction of Union Station where all of the city's rail lines would converge.¹⁴⁰ Construction was greeted with citywide approval, as evident in an Evening Star article:

As the bill now stands amended, it secures the elimination of grade crossings, the removal of the tracks and railroad structures from the Mall, the combination of the terminals, the erection of a monumental

¹³⁶ Charlea Moore, The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 12.

¹³⁷ Moore, 10.

¹³⁸ Cowdrey, 35.

¹³⁹ Although Federal Triangle was eventually built as a complex of U.S. Governmental Buildings, the McMillan Commission originally intended it as an area for District of Columbia government offices due to its proximity to the city's commercial center.

¹⁴⁰ This was not a new idea, for as early as 1869, Orville. E. Babcock had recommended the consolidation of all rail lines in the city at one central depot. (Babcock, 1868, 498).

station building in keeping with the plans for Washington's development and the clearing of obstructions from one of the city's thoroughfares. It constitutes a heavy net gain.¹⁴¹

Not begun until 1908, erection of the new station northeast of the Capitol at the intersection of Massachusetts and Delaware avenues, and demolition of the one on the Mall, opened the ceremonial expanse for development as a comprehensive pleasure ground. The relocation of the railroad tracks and construction of the building, however, demanded the reconfiguration of the original street plan. As a result, Delaware Avenue north of Massachusetts Avenue was annihilated, along with seven of its abutting reservations. Three reservations on Massachusetts Avenue were lost under the new Union Station, and segments of E, F, G, H, I, and K streets were permanently erased from the city plan. Situated flush with Massachusetts Avenue, the station opened out onto a semicircular plaza with the remaining segments of Massachusetts and Delaware avenues and First and E streets radiating from it like the spokes of a wheel. An entirely new thoroughfare, Louisiana Avenue, was planned to extend southwest from the plaza—visually and practically connecting the station to the east end of the Mall. Twelve squares southwest of the station were purchased by the federal government to be treated as a grand connection between the Capitol Grounds and Union Station.¹⁴²

While the lengthy McMillan report focused on the central ceremonial core and the areas beyond L'Enfant's boundaries, few pages were devoted to the treatment of the smaller parks along L'Enfant's avenues. The report acknowledged their bountiful placement, recommending that more be established in the newly developing neighborhoods beyond the historic plan, but granted the labors of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds only faint praise:

The treatment adopted [by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds] aims to provide an agreeable appearance to passersby, and shade and pleasant surroundings for those who resort to the squares for recreation. To these ends they are generally planted with trees, turfed, more or less decorated with shrubs, flowers and sculptural monuments, often defined and protected by curbing or fences, and when of sufficient size provided with paths and benches. Unfortunately for the general effect, the sculptural decorations 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.¹⁴³

The report also suggested that the parks be treated more individually, with specific reference to the local environment. As the city was becoming more divided into residential and commercial districts, treatment of the parks should adapt to the needs of their users.¹⁴⁴

To protect the new goals introduced by the McMillan study, the AIA appealed to President Theodore Roosevelt to form a fine arts commission. Established by an Act of Congress in 1910 during

¹⁴¹ Evening Star, December 19, 1902.

¹⁴² Commission of Fine Arts, The Plan of the National Capital, from the Ninth Report of the Commission of Fine Arts (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1923), 11. Soon after their purchase, these spaces were used for temporary housing for women participating in the war effort.

¹⁴³ Moore, 80.

¹⁴⁴ Moore, 81.

Taft's administration, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) was created as a consulting organization to the government on the design of bridges, sculpture, parks, paintings and other artistic matters; an executive order later that year added to its responsibilities the design review of all public buildings. Although the CFA could deal with such endeavors nationwide if requested, it focused particularly on the development of Washington, D.C. Here it guided the interpretation of the public spaces, approving federal building projects, statuary for the parks, and even park-landscaping programs, such as the 1912 planting of 1,800 cherry trees around the Tidal Basin. Burnham and Olmsted, both former members of the McMillan Commission, and Moore, McMillan's secretary and secretary of the Park Commission, were appointed to the CFA--thus assuring that their plans would be followed.¹⁴⁵

At the outset, the Commission of Fine Arts concentrated on the development of Washington's monumental core. Its first major project, begun in 1911, was the design and construction of the Lincoln Memorial and the surrounding landscape treatment of West Potomac Park.¹⁴⁶ The memorial was to be located west of the Washington Monument, effectively closing the Mall vista set forth by L'Enfant. The CFA also oversaw the construction of federal buildings, perhaps the most comprehensive project being the Federal Triangle office-building complex. Constructed throughout the 1920s in the area bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, 15th Street and the Mall, Federal Triangle was one of Washington, D.C.,'s earliest urban-renewal projects since it replaced one of the city's most infamous slums. It was also the greatest departure from the L'Enfant Plan to date, obliterating twenty-three original city squares, closing numerous streets, and eradicating Ohio Avenue altogether.¹⁴⁷

The ideals set forth by the McMillan Commission and promoted by the Commission of Fine Arts gradually trickled into the smaller parks and were espoused by landscape designers in the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. In 1913, OPB&G landscape architect George Burnap echoed its tenets in his book Parks, Their Design, Equipment and Use. He criticized the "usual plethora of petrified generals" in Washington's parks. "In America, we have the horrid habit of placing an equestrian statue to some war hero or another in the exact center of every park," he wrote, "A park is a park and should not be made into a setting for a statue."¹⁴⁸ He recommended that the nation's heroes be remembered with commemorative trees, fountains, or flower beds rather than cast effigies. He also agreed with the McMillan Commission's recommendation that parks be landscaped individually, rather than according to the OPB&G's former policy of systematic grading, sodding, and surrounding with post-and-chain fencing.

Burnap redesigned many parks according to these principles. For instance, when asked to install a statue of Adm. Barry in Franklin Square, he placed it at the far west side facing not into the park, but out to the street--thereby maintaining the central fountain as the focus. This statue was one of the first erected after the Commission of Fine Arts was established, and accordingly, it had to meet their approval before the 1914 installation. Around the same time, the bronze statue of Adm. Samuel Dupont in Dupont

¹⁴⁵ Senator McMillan died in August 1902.

¹⁴⁶ It was formally dedicated eleven years later, May 30, 1922.

¹⁴⁷ Sue Kohler, The Commission of Fine Arts: A Brief History, 1910-1976 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991), 52-66.

¹⁴⁸ George Burnap, Parks, Their Design, Equipment and Use (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1916).

Circle was replaced with a commemorative marble fountain. To prove that the parks could be landscaped individually, Burnap designed a Japanese rock garden complete with a stream and stepping stones in a small reservation at the intersection of Rhode Island and Connecticut avenues.¹⁴⁹

The City Beautiful ideals espoused by the McMillan Commission also influenced the placement of paths within parks. The modern Neoclassical fashion favored formal and symmetrical paths rather than the curvilinear, meandering routes of Andrew Jackson Downing and the picturesque or romantic garden movement. This ideological shift is perhaps best illustrated by the McMillan Commission's plan to convert the Mall from a segmented pleasure garden replete with winding paths and uneven topography leading to asymmetrically placed fountains and flower beds, to a flat open greensward lined with evenly spaced elms to frame the reciprocal vistas from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. A 1918 article in Landscape Architecture described this change in taste:

Forty or fifty years ago, when many of the small parks in Washington were first laid out, there did not exist the rush of business of today, and the dignified, slow-going gentleman of those times did not mind following the curvilinear walks about numerous flower beds, or describing large semicircles around fountains and statues . . . Throughout the central portion of the city today, the businessman feels that he must get from place to place as quickly as possible, and he will usually dodge such a park rather than wind around the long paths or run the chance of being shunted off in the wrong direction.¹⁵⁰

The author contended that parks in the central core should provide pathways directly along the lines of travel so the harried office worker could enjoy their green scenery en route to his destination. "Old-fashioned" parks with meandering paths were still appropriate in residential neighborhoods where use was limited primarily to mothers or nurses with children during the day and businessmen during their evening leisure time. In his book on landscape design, Burnap also addressed the need for park design to correspond to the needs of the user, distinguishing the smaller reservations as either "passing through" or "passing around" parks. While the passing-through park offered directional paths on axis with the streets ornamented for the appreciation of the hurried observer, the passing-around park would be designed along the busiest thoroughfares and would offer foliage and plantings that could be appreciated from the sidewalk or passing car.

While the Corps of Engineers worked to create a park system that met the needs of the central core, the business districts, and residential areas, many reservations continued to be occupied illegally. To define the extent of federal holdings, in 1908 Congress appointed a commission to investigate the titles to all federally owned lands in the historic city. The legislation contended that approximate measurements had been used for so long in official documents that it was impossible to calculate the total acreage of federal land.¹⁵¹ The act resulted in four separate reports that documented the original platting and sale of lots, the current property titled in fee or some lesser interest to the federal government, all encroachments upon lands owned by the federal government in the District, and the ensuing litigation to

¹⁴⁹ Reservation No. 151 was relandscaped to receive the Nuns of the Battlefield memorial in 1924.

¹⁵⁰ John H. Small, Jr., "Some Small parks in Washington, D.C.: Evolution in Path Systems," Landscape Architecture (October 1918), 24.

¹⁵¹ Act to Create a Commission to Investigate the Title of the United States to Lands in the District of Columbia, Statutes at Large, Vol. 35, sec. 543.

establish the rights of the federal government in each instance.¹⁵²

To exhibit the information gathered, Office of Public Buildings and Grounds Chief Col. William H. Harts, in charge of the office from 1913-17, submitted a forty-one-sheet set of maps showing all clear and contested titles in the original city of Washington. Entitled "Public Lands under Federal Jurisdiction in D.C.," the collection of maps shows federally owned streets, avenues, and alleys shaded green; federal reservations green and hatched; District-owned streets, alleys, lots and reservations shaded red; and privately owned spaces unshaded. The map confirmed that within the confines of the L'Enfant Plan, 53,521,245 square feet (1,228.7 acres) were U.S. reservations and 102,215,497 square feet (2,347 acres) were streets belonging to the federal government. While the federal government owned the vast majority of the streets and reservations, the District of Columbia owned almost three times as many alleys. In reference to the study, Harts states:

Washington is owned practically outright by the U.S. Government. The Government owns the streets, it owns the parks and public reservations, it owns the sites on which stand the great public buildings of the nation, and only those lots and tracts which were reserved to the original holders or which the U.S. has since sold are now in private ownership. In no other American city does this condition exist.¹⁵³

From the study, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds administrators gained a clearer knowledge of the work that remained to improve the federal parks, as well as the extent of property illegally occupied. By 1913 only thirteen reservations remained unimproved in the northwest quadrant, while the southwest quadrant contained twenty-nine reservations still vacant and unimproved, or illegally occupied. While the OPB&G used small stone markers to designate its property at the turn of the century, after the 1913 survey, the corners of the remaining unimproved reservations were marked with the same cast-iron fenceposts used to enclose many of the parks. Since it lacked the funds to improve many of the reservations, and because some of the illegal occupants maintained the land in better condition than it might have otherwise been, the OPB&G began leasing the spaces to the occupants for a nominal annual fee. The leased reservations listed in the annual reports each year were used for a variety of purposes. With the outbreak of World War I, however, the most common usage, as small garden plots, was in keeping with the nationwide effort to maximize productivity in every sphere.

World War I and Washington, D.C.

Just as the Civil War effected profound changes in Washington in the 1860s, the United States' entry into World War I in 1917 wreaked havoc on the nation's capital. The population expanded from 280,000 in 1900 to 525,000 in 1918, and temporary buildings to house and serve as office space for the new federal employees were built on the cheapest land available--that already owned by the federal government. Wood and stucco "tempo" were built on the Mall, West Potomac Park, and the grounds southwest of Union Station. Meanwhile, the officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds pleaded for more money for maintenance to keep up with the increased wear and tear on the downtown parks. As if to indicate the shift in national priorities during the crisis, however, First Lady Edith Wilson

¹⁵² January 14, 1909, Senate Document No 563, 60th Cong. 2nd Sess. Title to U.S. lands in DC; June 16, 1910, Sen. Doc. No. 632, 61st Cong, 2nd Sess.; July 13, 1912, Sen. Rept. No. 907, 62nd Cong. 2nd Sess.; March 1, 1913, Sen. Doc. No. 1137, 62nd Cong. 3rd Sess.

¹⁵³ Col. William W. Harts, "The Development of the Park System in Washington," paper presented before the Second Pan American Scientific Congress, Washington, D.C., December 17, 1915-January 8, 1916.

oversaw a flock of sheep that grazed on the White House lawn, demonstrating that every possible resource would be used to promote the war effort.

Yet in the midst of the international turmoil, the Corps of Engineers did not lose sight of the importance of the L'Enfant Plan; the map itself by this time had become an object of veneration. Concerned for the safety of what he called "one of the most important historical papers of the Nation, particularly when considered from a city planning and engineering point of view," Col. C. S. Ridley, in charge of the OPB&G, in September 1918 deposited L'Enfant's original map in the Library of Congress for safekeeping.¹⁵⁴

As Washington's population grew, the city expanded well beyond the L'Enfant Plan boundaries. With the increasing popularity of the automobile, as well as the improvement of the streetcar system, demographers began to recognize the suburban flight that would continue throughout the century. The large volume of commuters traveling across the Rock Creek valley bridges necessitated replacement of the old truss models with those made of sturdier materials. The Massachusetts and Connecticut Avenue crossings, both built in 1888, were obsolete within fifteen years; the former was replaced in 1901 and the latter between 1897 and 1907. The Calvert Bridge became unstable and had to be reinforced after 1911, and a new bridge was built to extend 16th Street over the Piney Branch in 1907-10.¹⁵⁵ As residential areas thrived farther and farther out from the downtown nucleus, the function of the inner city gradually shifted from residential to office and commercial.

Connecticut Avenue provides an excellent example of this shift. The segment between Farragut Square and Florida Avenue was largely undeveloped until streetcar tracks were laid on the avenue in 1868. During the Shepherd regime the avenue became a fashionable address, featuring public buildings such as schools and churches situated among expensive rowhouses and detached mansions. Starting in 1910, businesses began locating on the avenue, and by the 1930s shoppers referred to it as the Fifth Avenue of Washington. Today it is occupied almost entirely by business and commercial establishments, with few reminders of its residential past. One of the earliest responses to the haphazard development and changes within the city core was an effort to regulate growth through a new concept called zoning. Recognizing the potential for chaos amid the uncontrolled growth, D.C. commissioners Charles Kutz and Louis Brownell initiated the zoning strategy that was adopted in 1920. City planner Harland Bartholomew helped devise the plan that divided the district into regions according to height, area, and property use.¹⁵⁶

While zoning was instituted to regulate new growth, many of the older buildings in the historic

¹⁵⁴ C. S. Ridley to Herbert Putnam, letter, Washington, D.C., September 26, 1918. Historical files of the National Capital Planning Commission, NARA, RG 328. Describing his reasons for the transfer, Ridley writes, "While the map is still quite legible, it appears to be fading and disintegrating; furthermore, the floor on which this office is housed is far from fireproof. While I am not prepared to relinquish title to the map, it occurred to me that it would be possible, and appeal to you as desirable, to deposit it for safekeeping in the Library of Congress; and perhaps even, while in such custody, to have it restored should that prove advisable."

¹⁵⁵ Of these four bridges, Connecticut Avenue/Taft Bridge, and the bridge carrying 16th Street over the Piney Branch are still in use; the Calvert Bridge was replaced with the current bridge in 1935 and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge was replaced in 1940. Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington, 66, 70.

¹⁵⁶ Cowdrey, 47.

city were rapidly deteriorating. The population of the L'Enfant-designed city had fallen from 247,323 in 1908 to 234,085 in 1913, while the suburbs had grown from 92,080 to 119,212 during the same period.¹⁵⁷ As middle- and upper-class Washingtonians moved north of Florida Avenue, the poor who remained in the historic city crowded into smaller and smaller residential areas, many of them relegated to the squalid life of the ill-famed alley dwellings. A byproduct of the large blocks delineated in the L'Enfant Plan, these substandard homes were built facing onto the complex alley systems, screened from the rest of the city by the larger houses that faced the city streets. Alley dwellers, many of them blacks who migrated north after the Civil War, generally provided the domestic labor for the larger houses on the perimeters of the blocks. In 1872 the alley population was estimated at 25,000, a number comprised of 22,000 blacks and 3,000 whites. Construction of new alley dwellings was banned in 1892 and legislation to eradicate these crude homes was passed in 1918--at the urging of First Lady Ellen Wilson before her death in 1914. Nevertheless, by 1934 the alley population remained high: 10,500, composed of 10,000 blacks and 500 whites.¹⁵⁸

While attempts were made to eliminate the dwellings, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds worked to mitigate the supposed evils of these slums by developing inner-city parks into playgrounds and areas for healthy recreation. By 1915, four reservations had been converted into playgrounds: Reservation Nos. 17, 19, 126, and 201. Although these parks were located in the southeast or southwest quadrants--areas of primarily middle- and lower-class residences, the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor still felt there were too few parks in the inner city. In 1917 the Children's Bureau published a congressional report, "Facilities for Children's Play in the District of Columbia." Extensive maps showed that the number of harmful places (i.e., pool halls, movie houses, and pubs) far outnumbered the places available for wholesome pastimes. Although L'Enfant's plan allowed for many small breathing spaces, it lacked large areas for organized sports such as baseball. The nineteenth-century city, with its large tracts of undeveloped land within easy reach of city residents, was known for offering a variety of outdoor diversions. These ran the gamut from hunting on Nighthawk Hill in the vicinity of Thirteenth Street and Massachusetts Avenue in the northwest quadrant, fishing in the Tiber or Goose creeks, or bicycle racing (to the chagrin of the park watchmen) around the undeveloped Ellipse south of the White House. As the city grew many of the creeks were converted to underground sewers and open fields were filled with buildings. By 1917 the large tract east of Lincoln Park known as "the commons" featured "rows upon rows of houses built within the last two decades" in a spot that had formerly served as "a baseball ground for the entire eastern section of the city."¹⁵⁹ The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds began to provide large recreation areas in East and West Potomac parks and some of the larger reservations throughout the 1920s. The annual reports at the time list facilities available for: golf, croquet, medicine ball, quoits, roques, schlag-ball, soccer, speed-ball, tennis, polo, ice skating, hurling, and volleyball. The reflecting pool between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument was used for model yacht and motorboat sailing, and fishing was permitted in the Tidal Basin. Children younger than 14 were permitted to swim in all nineteen display fountains throughout the parks and the

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, Facilities for Children's Play in the District of Columbia, Misc. Sen. No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1917).

¹⁵⁸ Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, Washington, City and Capital (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1937), 1076-77.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Facilities . . .

reflecting pool, but not after dark.¹⁶⁰ In 1917 a bathing beach was opened on the Tidal Basin near where the Jefferson Memorial stands today.

Toward a Comprehensive Plan

As the nation returned to normalcy following the armistice, Washington, D.C., was faced with planning dilemmas that could not be solved by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Commission of Fine Arts or the city's commissioners alone. With the rapid expansion of the city--ever accelerated by the exploding population of people and automobiles--the need for a body to oversee regional city planning became apparent. Citizens groups such as the American Planning and Civic Association and its local arm, the Committee of 100, under the leadership of Frederick A. Delano and Harlean James, lobbied for congressional intervention. An editorial in Landscape Architecture pointed out the danger of the rapid destruction of the natural beauty "lost by the blind spread of the city," and encouraged Congress to form a permanent body to plan for city growth and corresponding parkland acquisition.¹⁶¹

The National Capital Park Commission (NCPC) was created by an act of Congress on June 6, 1924.¹⁶² Comprised of the chief of the Army Corps of Engineers and the officer in charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, the director of the National Park Service, and the chairmen of the congressional committees on the District of Columbia, the NCPC was charged with acquiring new parkland in the region surrounding the original city. Hindered by the ever-present lack of funds, as well as the inability to influence city planning, the function of the group was amended in 1926. The new National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCP&PC) was granted the power to make a comprehensive plan for the national capital and the region.

In its first year, the NCP&PC made numerous studies of the issues facing the city, each with proposals for action. L. Deming Tilton, of Harland Bartholomew's firm, wrote a "Report upon a Major Thoroughfare System and Traffic Circulation," which delineated different streets for different types of traffic to create smooth passage along major commuter thoroughfares in and out of the city. In his "Preliminary Report on a Park System for the National Capital," NCP&PC city planner Charles Eliot recommended the creation of neighborhood recreation centers around library and school buildings. He prepared a study, "Problems of the Central Area," in which he recommended the decentralization of the city core by the monumental development of East and South Capitol streets and the development of more impressive "gateways" to the city at the various points where L'Enfant's avenues crossed out of the historic city into the rest of the District.

L'Enfant's ideals continued to provide the guiding beacon for these planners in the late 1920s. Looking to the L'Enfant Plan, William T. Partridge, chief draftsman of the McMillan Commission in 1901-02, assessed the possibilities of completing the lost elements of the L'Enfant Plan, such as the

¹⁶⁰ Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Parks, 1926, 29-32.

¹⁶¹ "A Permanent Regional Park Commission for the National Capital," Landscape Architecture (January 1924), 137-38.

¹⁶² The National Capital Park Commission (NCPC) was reorganized in 1926 as the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCP&PC). As a result of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, the NCP&PC was reorganized again, and the word "park" was dropped from the title. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) formed in 1952 should not be confused with the National Capital Park Commission (NCPC) of 1924, although they have the same acronym.

fifteen state-designated squares, monumental columns, five grand fountains, and ceremonial entrances to the city.¹⁶³ He also created an overlay of the L'Enfant and Ellicott plans to depict the changes in the plan as it passed from artist to engineer. In 1929 author Elizabeth Kite gave the misunderstood Frenchman the chance to speak on his own behalf when she compiled the L'Enfant papers into a book, L'Enfant and Washington. CFA Chairman and former McMillan Commission secretary Charles Moore managed to praise the McMillan Commission as much as he did L'Enfant in an introduction to the book: "A full century after [L'Enfant's] plan was adopted, a commission composed entirely of artists (who were also experienced planners) was called on to do for the entire District of Columbia what L'Enfant had done for a portion of that area."¹⁶⁴

Concurrent with the organization of a body to oversee city and regional planning was the reorganization of the office in charge of the improvement and care of the Public Buildings and Grounds on February 26, 1926. The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds merged with the office of the Superintendent of the State, War and Navy Building to form the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks (OPB&PP). Ulysses S. Grant, III, executive officer of the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, was also appointed director of the OPB&PP in 1926 and remained at the post until jurisdiction of Washington's public buildings and grounds was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. In his first annual report in 1926, the grandson of the general and former president reported that the OPB&PP oversaw 7,490,887 square feet of building floor space, 3,427.6 acres of parks comprised of 562 reservations and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, a roadway begun in 1913 alongside Rock Creek that connected the Potomac park to the National Zoo.¹⁶⁵ In addition to overseeing an office of 2,320 people, Grant was also required to serve as a member of the Public Buildings Commission, the NCP&PC, and the D.C. Zoning Commission.¹⁶⁶ By the end of his term in 1932, almost 100 new reservations comprising 1,621 additional acres had been added to the system. Additions to the system were all outside of L'Enfant's original boundaries, including Civil War ramparts at Fort Dupont, Fort Totten, Fort Reno, and roadways connecting them; recreation areas such as the Petworth and Palisades playgrounds; and large tracts of undeveloped land for parkways, including the Soapstone and Klinge valleys. The Capper-Crampton Act, passed by Congress in 1930, insured that funds would be available to realize the McMillan Plan's goal of a regional park system throughout the District of Columbia and into the adjacent states.

As the responsibilities of the office continued to grow, the care and maintenance of reservations in the historic city demanded a much smaller portion of attention from the office in charge. To manage the original 301 reservations and the new ones being added to the system each year under the acquisition program of the NCP&PC and Capper-Crampton Act, the new office undertook a program of surveying

¹⁶³ William T. Partridge, "Review of L'Enfant Recommendations Completed and Obsolete" (Unpublished mss., 1929) in the planning files of the NCP&PC, RG 328, NARA.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Moore in his foreword to Kite, 1929. See footnote 6.

¹⁶⁵ The OPB&PP was responsible for the upkeep of the White House, State War and Navy Building, Lincoln Memorial, House Where Lincoln Died, Washington Memorial, and several "temples."

¹⁶⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, III, Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1926), 1-2.

and photographing each reservation in 1926-29.¹⁶⁷ The complete series offers excellent photographic images of the city and the park system at the end of the first quarter of the century. Although automobiles already lined inner-city streets, the occasional horse can be seen stopping for a drink from the water troughs installed by the Humane Society in many of the reservations in the early 1900s. The streets surrounding the parks were mostly paved with sheet asphalt, although a few still featured cobble and asphalt block. Many of the parks were still enclosed with the cast-iron post-and-chain barriers that would gradually be phased out, except in several of the smaller reservations on Capitol Hill where they remain today. Although the majority of the smaller parks were improved by 1927, in the less-developed areas of the city some remained as weeded patches of land scattered with rubbish, identified only by the OPB&G posts placed in each corner. A number of parks still unlandscaped in 1927--such as those along the southern segments of Potomac and Virginia avenues--were never improved.

From this thorough study of park conditions, NCP&PC landscape architect Conrad L. Wirth compiled estimates for park development and maintenance in 1928 and 1930. In his "Preliminary Report on Maintenance and Operation of the Smaller L'Enfant Parks," Wirth upheld the ideals of Burnap and the McMillan Plan. He noted that Dupont and Stanton parks still had "curved walks and small odd spaces that are of little practical use," featuring flower beds that "look like puddings or fancy tarts scattered about on the lawn." He recommended simpler plantings such as native vegetation and flowering shrubs.¹⁶⁸ He divided the park system into four general types: parks and parkways, recreation centers, playgrounds, and small open spaces. Within these categories he identified parks needing initial improvement or redevelopment, and those that had been previously improved but needed "reconditioning." Within the "Old City" he cited seven planned recreation centers, forty-one playgrounds, and fifty-seven small open spaces (or reservations) that needed original improvements or extensive redevelopment. Of the existing parks, he pointed out that many of the older sites needed reconditioning and redesigning to meet the needs of the times.¹⁶⁹ Realizing the costs involved with keeping the parks clean and neatly planted, he recommended that park designs take into account the costs of subsequent maintenance. "Well designed and well-appointed park and recreation areas are beneficial for any community," he wrote, "But civic enthusiasm and ambition must be held within the limits of the city's ability to keep such park and recreation areas in good, serviceable condition."¹⁷⁰ Wirth studied different types of parks and their comparative maintenance costs. Those with fountains and fencing, for instance, were more expensive to maintain than those simply sodded and surrounded by coping, which eliminated the need for laborious edging.¹⁷¹

The New Deal in Washington

¹⁶⁷ Photographs of the parks still under the jurisdiction of the National Capital Region of the National Park Service are maintained in files in the Land Use Office. Photographs of the reservations transferred to the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia are in the collection of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁸ Wirth was appointed director of the National Park Service in 1951.

¹⁶⁹ "Estimates for Development and Maintenance of the National Capital Regional Park System," Preliminary Report by Conrad Wirth, landscape architect, National Capital Planning Commission, March 8, 1930.

¹⁷⁰ Conrad L. Wirth, "Notes on Cost Data for Park Maintenance, Washington D.C.," Landscape Architecture (April 1930), 215.

¹⁷¹ Wirth, "Notes on Cost Data," *passim*.

In 1933 jurisdiction of the parks was transferred from the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks to the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The transfer came as part of a massive restructuring of the National Park Service signed by President Herbert Hoover on March 3, 1933, the day before Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inauguration. The reorganization created a single system of federal parklands nationwide, including memorials and battlefields formerly managed by the U.S. Department of War, and forests and caves formerly under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The National Capital Parks were added to the National Park Service domain, with the original reservations becoming some of the oldest parks in the system.¹⁷²

This transfer came during a period of growth and crisis caused by yet another national emergency, the Great Depression that followed the 1929 stock market crash. During the first two years of Roosevelt's New Deal, the federal payroll in Washington increased 50 percent. With this expansion came the customary proportional rise in the local population. While the national crisis again strained the city's resources, it also affected great infrastructural improvements by way of relief work for the unemployed. Several months after the transfer of the parks to the National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes announced a \$600,000 allocation for labor and equipment to carry out the Mall Development Plan. In the midst of the Great Depression, 350 men were employed to grade and landscape and construct roads in the expanse between the Capitol and Washington Monument, finally shaping it in accordance with the ideals of the McMillan Commission posited more than three decades earlier.¹⁷³ This final realization of the 1901 scheme was due largely to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the youngest member of the McMillan Plan who continuously influenced the development of Washington along the lines of the 1901 scheme through his involvement with the Commission of Fine Arts from 1910-18, the National Capital Park Commission from 1924-26, and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission from 1926-32. In 1928, NCP&PC Director Charles Eliot, with the input of Olmsted and William Partridge, devised guidelines for the Mall development that combined L'Enfant's intentions with those of those McMillan Commission.¹⁷⁴ Congress authorized the plan in 1929 and with the Public Works Administration (PWA) funding, construction began in 1933.

In January 1935, Ickes asked the NCP&PC to suggest more projects for the PWA. They responded with a list that included projects to widen streets and avenues, restore older parks, build newly proposed parkways and playgrounds, and erect more comfort stations in the parks, which were frequently used by the many transients displaced by the economic disaster. While the Mall had been relandscaped, the smaller parks had fallen to neglect during the Depression years; in 1936, Frank Gartside, acting superintendent of National Capital Parks, was granted \$1 million to upgrade the minor parks throughout the city through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)--two Depression-era make-work programs. As with the Mall, the new designs planned for the smaller parks drew inspiration from the City Beautiful ideals promoted by the McMillan Commission. WPA and CCC laborers were able to put in place many of the landscape ideals of Burnap and Wirth, redeveloping

¹⁷² Barry MacIntosh, The National Parks: Shaping the System (National Park Service, 1984), 24-34.

¹⁷³ Gutheim, 216.

¹⁷⁴ David C. Streatfield, "The Olmsteds and the Landscape of the Mall," The Mall in Washington, ed. Richard Longstreth (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 130-34.

the majority of the remaining parks in the historic area.¹⁷⁵

But just as proponents of the McMillan Commission were dubbed "tree butchers" for their proposed replacement of the old trees scattered about the mall with neat lines of elms, the NCP&PC designers were called "a bunch of New Deal schoolboys [who were] tearing up the park system." The Washington Post reported in 1936, "Parks shouldn't be such formal places with walks as straight as a die and trees planted like soldiers at attention, but cozy spots where one may rest . . . and these broad walks! We don't want our parks concreted. All that surface will draw the summer heat."¹⁷⁶ The landscape architects for the National Park Service saw the initial expenditure as a savings in the long run because the new plans would significantly reduce maintenance costs. The path layouts, much of the coping, and fencing installed during this period of intense labor in 1935-38 remain largely intact today.

Throughout the 1930s, master plans were drawn up to improve parks throughout the national system as well as the national capital area. For Washington, the National Park Service's Branch of Plans and Design produced an impressive set of oversized pen and pastel drawings titled "Master and Progress Plans for Washington, D.C., 1936-37."¹⁷⁷ Divided into two groups, eight sheets of drawings delineate extant and planned development of the central area--encompassing the Mall, East and West Potomac parks, Greenleaf Point, and the opposite shoreline of Virginia--and five sheets include all of the minor parks flanking the avenues. The drawings of the central core indicate extant and planned buildings, as well as those slated for demolition, such as the World War I "tempo" and the old Smithsonian Castle. The drawings of minor parks show the current path layouts and proposed changes, which generally call for more simplified, axial plans.

Over the next twenty years, as many of these proposed designs were implemented in the central area and in the minor parks, the National Capital Park system continued to expand. In 1933 the entire system, including those parks in Maryland and Virginia, comprised 6,367.39 acres. By 1951 it included 45,000 acres, making the little L'Enfant parks a smaller and smaller portion of the whole.¹⁷⁸ As the city approached metropolitan proportions, the commercial core became an expanding workplace for the suburban dweller and the remaining residential areas within the historic city became overcrowded and deteriorated. This evolution was enabled by something L'Enfant had not foreseen--the automobile.

Adapting the Plan for Automobiles

Between 1920-30 automobile registrations in the city quadrupled.¹⁷⁹ The growing popularity of motorized vehicles--the invention having the greatest impact on city planning and development in centuries--not only enabled suburban sprawl, but it also took its toll on L'Enfant's plan. The 6,111 acres he so painstakingly designed for beauty and liveability became simply a place to enter and exit daily for the auto-commuting worker.

¹⁷⁵ WPA and CCC projects are documented in photographs filed with the 1926-29 survey photographs (see footnote 153).

¹⁷⁶ "Park Plan Critics Told to Hold Fire," Washington Post, 1936.

¹⁷⁷ National Park Service Branch of Plans and Design, "Master Plan: National Capital Parks, The Central Area" (1936), and "Progress Plan of the Minor Parks and Reservations" (1937).

¹⁷⁸ Cornelius Heine, "A History of the National Capital Parks," 1953.

¹⁷⁹ Gutheim, 272.

Within the first decade of the twentieth century, landscape architects and city designers came face-to-face with the issues of traffic movement. In 1910 Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., authored an article in Landscape Architecture specifically discussing the pros and cons of "gyratory traffic flow" and the physics of intersections.¹⁸⁰ L'Enfant's plan, with its combination of radial avenues and a grid, creates many more intersections than a simple checkerboard plan; it is further complicated by its many acute and obtuse angles, rotary circles, and squares. While the multiple intersections and angles complicate traffic patterns, the wide and numerous streets and avenues support many more automobiles than other cities of similar size.

L'Enfant envisioned his wide avenues as convenient and direct routes of travel, and they were developed accordingly. As the city expanded into the suburbs, avenues such as Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania became major crosstown routes and arteries to the suburbs. The roadbeds of many of these thoroughfares were widened to support commuter traffic, since the number of workers commuting daily by automobile more than doubled from 48,000 in 1925 to 108,500 in 1940.¹⁸¹ Widening the roads was relatively uncomplicated because the federal government still owned the generous right-of-way between the building lines, therefore no property transfer was necessary when the wide front yards, established in the 1870s by the parking commission, were simply narrowed to allow more room for automobiles. The development of Connecticut Avenue exemplifies an extreme transformation. It originated as a residential street with landscaped parkings and wide lawns spreading out from the elegant homes facing the 50' roadbed. As it evolved into a commercial street and major artery to the Maryland suburbs, the roadbed was widened to consume all of the planted parkings. Now only a concrete sidewalk with widely spaced cutouts for trees fills the narrow strip between the roadway and the building facades.

Because the L'Enfant reservations are actually part of the legal rights-of-ways, their very existence has been threatened by automobile traffic and its need for more lanes. Rather than termini for grand vistas, places to honor heroes with statues and monuments, and urban green spaces for rest and relaxation, they became known to the auto-commuter simply as "bottlenecks." As early as 1931, the D.C. Highway Department proposed cutting through Thomas and Logan circles to ease traffic flow. Due to the efforts of the McMillan Commission, CFA, and NCP&PC, L'Enfant's plan had become an object of admiration with many defenders willing to rise in dissent to protect the historic scheme. The proposed channelization of Thomas and Logan circles met strong opposition from the Commission of Fine Arts; member James Greenleaf stated that it would "mutilate the plan of Washington and would simply be yielding to the desire of motorists."¹⁸² Again in 1933, Thomas Circle was threatened with the erection of streetcar tracks through its center. The CFA made its opinion very clear that to destroy any of the circles in Washington would be "an act of vandalism perpetrated at the expense of the people of the United States. They literally own the streets of the old city of Washington."¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Street-Traffic Studies," Landscape Architecture (October 1910), 1-8.

¹⁸¹ Colyer, 136-37.

¹⁸² Kohler, 40.

¹⁸³ Kohler, 40.

Thomas Circle remained a particularly troublesome crossing, however, and the needs of traffic prevailed when a tunnel was built in 1941 to divert several lanes under rather than around the rotary. It marked the intersection of two of Washington's busiest thoroughfares: Fourteenth Street, which had become a major thoroughfare extending due north into Maryland and south to a bridge over the Potomac to Virginia, and Massachusetts Avenue--the most direct cross-town route from the central business district to the populous upper northwest quadrant. In addition to the underpass below, the circular park was carved into an oval flanked by two boomerang-shaped traffic dividers with a variety of concrete traffic islands to direct surface-level traffic. The park was virtually lost to pedestrian traffic, becoming simply a place to get under or around as quickly as possible.

While seen by some as a gross indignity to the integrity of the city plan, others perceived the construction of underpasses as a viable solution for the city's most troublesome interchanges. In his address to the American Road Builder's Association in 1947, deputy engineer of streets S. R. Harrison described in detail the modern engineering feat that had eliminated the surface pressure on Thomas Circle by 42 percent. The estimated 22,000 automobiles travelling daily along Massachusetts Avenue were channelled under instead of around one of the city's "most difficult highway facilities." Fully aware of L'Enfant's contribution to the city, Harrison attributed the Washington's traffic woes to its archaic plan. He wryly designated Dupont Circle as "one of the last ten-point circles in captivity . . . as it was inherited as is from Major L'Enfant, our first planner, the highway department is very happy to disclaim all responsibility for this complicated design," he continued. After giving a brief biography of L'Enfant, he said, "This commendable exhibition of foresight and devotion to duty has backfired into the twentieth century by creating as many problems of traffic control as would have arisen in the ordinary course of events, had the city been permitted to grow willy-nilly as other cities, with neither plan nor reason, but under the curiously accurate direction of a rising population which instinctively knows where it wants to go."¹⁸⁴ His report also included the plans for underpasses already approved through Washington and Dupont circles, which were installed with requisite "compression" of the parks and the corresponding concrete traffic islands. By 1950 Logan Circle, although compressed and segmented into the "ellipse and lunes" form, remained the only circle in the northwest quadrant without a tunnel. Scott and Thomas circles were reduced to merely symbolic statue pedestals since reaching the parks on foot now constitutes jaywalking.

While bottlenecks at circles were usually treated with a vertical separation of grades, many of the smaller triangles along the avenues were channelized to ease the flow of traffic. Harrison highlighted a channelization project on Vermont Avenue in which through traffic on the avenue was routed through cuts in the two flanking reservations to consolidate a three-way interchange into a two-street intersection. Similar methods were used throughout the city, effectively dissecting many of the triangular reservations in order to save precious driving time. In many cases, the smaller segments created by channelization were simply paved or bricked over, rather than sodded. Two casualties of channelization were Truxton and Barney circles. Although not part of the L'Enfant Plan, land for Truxton Circle was acquired by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1900. Located at the so-called north portal of North Capitol Street where it passed beyond the boundary of the L'Enfant Plan at Florida Avenue, the circle was named after the Revolutionary War admiral, Thomas Truxton, and improved with plantings and an ornate iron

¹⁸⁴ S. R. Harrison, "Modern Street Intersection Design, Washington, D.C.," report presented at the 44th Annual Convention of the American Road Builder's Association, 1947.

fountain in 1901. By 1947, the circle was considered "one of Washington's most bothersome bottlenecks," and was entirely eliminated as part of the city's program to "assure safer, faster, and more orderly traffic."¹⁸⁵

Barney Circle, a part of the L'Enfant Plan located at the terminus of Pennsylvania Avenue at the Anacostia River, met a similar fate. Never landscaped as an open park, it was used for a time as a terminal for buses and trolleys. In the 1960s, the circle disappeared altogether when it was sliced to pieces by the construction of the Southeast Freeway.

Although many of the underpass and channelization projects were opposed by citizen groups which coined sardonic phrases such as the Dupont Circle "blunderpass," the prevailing attitude was that the inconvenience to the few was mitigated by the overall benefit of smoother-flowing traffic and pedestrian safety. Residents and city planners alike were feeling the gradual menace of the "downtown disease" and urban blight, and it was thought that improved traffic flow would encourage people and money back into the historic city.

World War II and Decentralization

While the inner city was suffering from neglect, development continued into the suburbs, the streetcar lines and the extensions of L'Enfant's avenues reaching out like the tentacles of an octopus. When the United States was thrust into World War II in 1941, as in previous national calamities, newcomers surged into the city on the tide of the bloated war economy and bureaucracy. Population in the District of Columbia increased from 486,869 in 1930 to 663,091 in 1940. By 1950, there were 1,464,089 persons living in the metropolitan area.¹⁸⁶ Workers, especially young women, were encouraged by the federal government to come to the city and work for the war effort, enticed with the promise of steady work, good wages, and a chance to serve their country. New housing developments, such as McLean Gardens on Wisconsin Avenue, were built to ease the resultant housing shortage, while elegant inner-city townhouses were divided into apartments. Defying their appellation, the "temporary" structures that were built only to last the duration of World War I remained on the Mall and other federal lands. They served once again as vital office space and were joined by a whole new set of World War II "tempo."

While the plans of the McMillan Commission tended to cluster government buildings in the downtown core of the city, planners in the 1940s recommended the decentralization of federal offices. By the 1930s, most of the lots in the historic city were occupied by substantial buildings, except for the remaining industrial areas of the southwest quadrant between Greenleaf Point and the Navy Yard and the northwest quadrant near the intersection of Virginia and New Hampshire avenues. New construction throughout the developed areas would have necessitated the destruction of existing buildings, a costly and time-consuming undertaking at a time when building materials were scarce. Furthermore, increasing the density of the downtown population and office buildings severely taxed existing transportation systems. With West Potomac Park almost entirely filled with temporary wartime office structures from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial, public-transportation schedules were drastically

¹⁸⁵ "Truxton Circle Hazard to End this Summer," Washington Star, March 24, 1947.

¹⁸⁶ Gutheim, 229.

expanded to accommodate so many workers concentrated in one place.

The War of 1812 prompted the construction of forts at river entries to the city, and during the Civil War, the city was protected by a ring of forts built on the high ground around the low-lying city. The advent of the airplane, however, rendered the city vulnerable to attack from the sky. Fear of the national paralysis that would result from an air strike on the capital motivated planners of the 1940s to decentralize the offices that L'Enfant and the McMillan Commission had planned to cluster in the downtown core. Construction of the Pentagon, an immense building to house the U.S. Department of Defense, was begun in 1940 south of Arlington Cemetery in Northern Virginia; it was one of the first moves toward this decentralization. Ulysses S. Grant III, grandson of one of the Civil War's greatest tacticians, was a strong advocate for dispersing national agency headquarters beyond the downtown core. He also pointed out that moving federal offices into the surrounding region would necessitate major revisions in current transportation systems to accommodate the large volumes of traffic entering and leaving the city each day. Then in his second decade with the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Grant recommended a comprehensive thoroughfare plan to increase the capacity of the major arteries, the construction of a Fort Drive encircling the city, and an inner-loop freeway within the historically planned city, and the gradual replacement of the streetcar system by buses.¹⁸⁷

Although the outbreak of the war delayed many of these projects, it supported arguments for decentralization. World War II tempos were also built for wartime bureaucrats in nearby areas of Maryland and Virginia, and residential communities and greenbelt cities soon sprung up to house the new civil servants. While streetcar schedules in the old city were expanded to provide transportation for wartime workers, highways were built to connect to the outlying federal centers among each other and to the downtown. Limited-access parkways were actually a product of the City Beautiful and the McMillan Commission. Prompted by suburbanism and the rise of the automobile, the McMillan Commission had recommended leisurely scenic routes for recreational motoring. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was the first such route built in Washington. The two-and-one-half-mile roadway winding through the Rock Creek Valley from West Potomac Parks to the National Zoological Park was built between 1913 and 1936. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, built in 1928-32 to connect George Washington's estate to Arlington Memorial Bridge--to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first president's birth; built primarily for recreation, it also provided a commuter access from downtown Washington to the Pentagon, and by 1930, this route was authorized to continue north another 15 miles as the George Washington Memorial Parkway. In 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave first priority to roads built for national defense, appropriating \$10 million of the federal budget for their construction. The Baltimore-Washington Parkway was built between 1942 and 1954, extending out from New York Avenue to several federal properties, including Fort Meade, the Agricultural Research Center, and Greenbelt, an experimental community begun in 1936. Suitland Parkway, although planned much earlier by the McMillan Commission, was constructed as part of this program in 1943-44 and provided access from the District via South Capitol Street to Bolling Field and Andrews Air Force Base.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Ulysses S. Grant, III, "Major Problems Planning a Worthy Capital for the Nation," *Landscape Architecture* (October 1940). A parkway connecting the peripheral forts built to protect the city before the Civil War was proposed by the McMillan Commission. Although it was discussed and advocated during the 1920s-30s, it was never realized.

¹⁸⁸ Sara Amy Leach, "Parkways of the National Capital Region," Multiple property nomination (National Register of Historic Places, 1990), 14-17.

Necessitated by threat of war, the idea of decentralization and connective freeways would be inherited and realized by peacetime Washington. The 1946 report, "Transportation Plans for Washington," prepared for the District Highway Department, recommended the construction of expressways as an "engineering answer to the public's desire for highways that make travel facile, fast and foolproof."¹⁸⁹ Unlike the Rock Creek and Mount Vernon parkways, these roadways were designed more for economy than aesthetics and more for commuting than leisure. The first of these limited-access roadways within the historic city was the elevated Whitehurst Freeway, completed in 1949. It ran along the Georgetown waterfront from Foggy Bottom to the Francis Scott Key Bridge, built in 1923 to replace the old Aqueduct Bridge.

Key Bridge was one of the first of several river crossings erected after World War I to ease access to and from Virginia and Maryland. While it was one of the many bridges built to replace aging structures, the twentieth century also saw the construction of several new crossings. Before 1934, automotive travel over the Anacostia River was limited to a 1908 steel-arched bridge at Eleventh Street, an 1890 underslung-truss bridge at Pennsylvania Avenue, and an 1892 iron and stone bridge at Benning Road. The Anacostia Railroad Bridge, carrying the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks between the Sousa and East Capitol Street bridges, erected in 1890, was redesigned about 1920. By 1955, four modern bridges capable of carrying high-speed traffic extended L'Enfant's streets and avenues to Washington neighborhoods east of the Anacostia and the rapidly developing Maryland suburbs. Just in time for World War II, the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge was rebuilt in 1938-40 and renamed the John Philip Sousa Bridge. New crossings were provided by the South Capitol Street, or Frederick Douglass Bridge, built in 1942-49 as part of the Suitland Parkway project, and the 1955 East Capitol Street Bridge.¹⁹⁰

Access to Virginia was improved between the wars with the erection of Key Bridge and the elegant Neoclassical-style Arlington Memorial Bridge, completed in 1932 to ease transit into Arlington National Cemetery and symbolically reunite North and South. Unlike the graceful Key and Memorial bridges, Potomac River crossings erected after World War II were simply efficient and economical components of the freeway system. The controversial Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, carrying Constitution Avenue extended into Interstate 66, was begun in 1960; three spans of the Fourteenth Street Bridge, completed in 1950, 1962, and 1971, facilitated links with the freeway system, accessed by ramps elevated above the old street system.¹⁹¹ Construction of the circumferential Beltway, Interstate 495, required the construction of two river spans: the southernmost Woodrow Wilson Bridge at Alexandria, 1961, than a mile long; and the twin American Legion/Cabin John Bridge, 1962, at Great Falls between Maryland and Virginia. New and renewed Anacostia River crossings accommodated the growing high-speed freeway-access points, when East Capitol Street Bridge, a plain girder-type extension of the

¹⁸⁹ J.E. Greiner Company and DeLeuw, Cather and Company, Transportation Plans for Washington, prepared for the Board of Commissioners, District of Columbia (n.p., 1946), 3-4, cited in Colyer, 150.

¹⁹⁰ Myer, 41-54.

¹⁹¹ Myer, 33, 45. Nicknamed "the Potomac Compromise," construction of the Roosevelt Bridge was vehemently opposed by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Park Service. Seen not only as an intrusion to the Mall, the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, and the shores of the Potomac River, it also crosses over Theodore Roosevelt Island, dedicated to the conservation-minded president as a natural sanctuary and memorial. The Highway Department built the bridge despite the opposition, ignoring a report received by the National Capital Planning Commission indicating that a tunnel at the same site would cost approximately the same as a bridge.

orthogonal foundation of the city, was completed in 1955, and the current Eleventh Street twin structures were built in 1965 and 1970.

Urban Blight and Southwest Redevelopment

As access to the growing suburbs was simplified by modern bridge- and highway-building programs, L'Enfant's core city seemed to be caught in a stranglehold by miles of concrete connectors. Inadequate parking and poor public transportation left the inner city choked with traffic and burdened by block after block of slum dwellings. Rather than watch the city decay, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission searched for ways to revitalize the historic city with the twofold goal of improving the lot of the urban poor while encouraging suburbanites back to the heart of the metropolis. The Redevelopment Land Act, authorized by the NCP&PC in 1946, designated areas in need of attention. The Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA), created by the act, had the unique authority to acquire land in blighted neighborhoods and oversee its improvement.

Soon after the establishment of the RLA, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission released its 1950 Comprehensive Plan, which focused on the redevelopment of obsolete areas of the city. The NCP&PC's focus had shifted from acquiring and planning new parks to the larger issue of overseeing the acquisition and redevelopment of distressed neighborhoods. When the National Capital Planning Act was passed in 1952, the commission was entirely restructured, becoming a separate federal agency rather than a division of the District government. It was reoriented and renamed the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) with the word "park" dropped from its title.¹⁹²

The issues faced by the NCPC and RLA were explained in detail in an eighteen-part series published in the Washington Post in 1952. Titled "Progress or Decay: Downtown Blight in the Nation's Capital," the articles included a map that designated almost all of L'Enfant's city as "blighted." These affected areas were defined as having at least one-quarter of the buildings in need of major repairs or lacking indoor plumbing. The only areas within the historic city considered free from urban decay were almost entirely non-residential, and encompassed the Federal Triangle area and the office and business section bounded roughly by Pennsylvania Avenue, 18th, M, and Twelfth streets in the northwest quadrant.¹⁹³ The rapid development here justified the enactment of stricter zoning regulations, after "three years of wrangling," in the late 1950s. Respecting the traditional 110'-130' height limit, density became about 20 percent stricter than the existing law had allowed for gross building area: structures on a street less than 110' wide (ie., Pennsylvania or Connecticut avenues) were limited to gross floor space 8.5 percent of the lot size; if the street exceeded a 110' width, the total gross area may be ten times the area of the lot. Exempted from this zone-regulation change was the Southwest quad of the city, whose footprint was fated to be dramatically altered.¹⁹⁴

The worst area identified encompassed 113 blocks in the southwest quadrant in which half of the structures were described as substandard. This region of the city was historically referred to as "the island" because it was separated from the rest of the city, first by the James Creek and later by the canal.

¹⁹² Gutheim, 256-59.

¹⁹³ "Progress or Decay: Downtown Blight in the Nation's Capital," Washington Post (January-February 1952).

¹⁹⁴ "Washington, D.C. Zoning Gets Tougher," Architectural Forum (June 1958), 11-12.

It also featured few of the elements for which the L'Enfant Plan was known. Although Virginia Avenue was designed to afford a view of the Washington Monument, and Maryland Avenue offered a vista of the Capitol, neither had been developed as tree-lined boulevards because railroad tracks had been laid within their rights-of-way in the late nineteenth century. The tracks that ran along Maryland Avenue from Long Bridge to Seventh Street, and on elevated tracks aside Virginia Avenue from Seventh Street east to Delaware Avenue, created yet another barrier between this region and the rest of the city. The largest open space in the southwest quadrant was at the intersection of Virginia and Maryland avenues. Not only was this intersection shaded yellow on L'Enfant's plan--indicating it as one of the fifteen squares to be assigned to the states for enhancement--but it was located on the significant Eighth Street axis. Perhaps second only to 16th Street as a significant north-south axis, Eighth Street bisected three sites in the northwest quadrant intended for parks or specific public buildings, and it terminated on the banks of the Potomac River at a large open space L'Enfant designated as the site for a naval itinerary column. Despite its potential as a significant park in this neglected quadrant, Reservation No. 113 had been occupied by railroad tracks since the mid-nineteenth century and never featured the elaborate landscapes found in many of the other major intersections.

While much of the potential for developing the L'Enfant elements in Southwest the last century, Delaware Avenue remained largely undisturbed. Extending from Greenleaf Point to the Capitol, the avenue afforded an impressive vista of the Freedom-topped dome. The Commission of Fine Arts envisioned the avenue as a grand boulevard linking the Capitol to the Army War College at Greenleaf Point, and recommended in 1917 that it be paved and the parks along it be landscaped. Nevertheless, it remained largely undeveloped at the southern end, and although most of its reservations featured trees by the 1920s, they were poorly maintained and lacked fencing, fountains, and flower beds. Amid the World War II housing shortage, Arthur Goodwillie, director of the conservation service of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, recommended federally funded rehabilitation of the extant buildings in the southwest quadrant to create homes within walking distance of the tempos on the Mall while conserving building materials.¹⁹⁵ Although approved by the NCP&PC, the plan was never executed.

While Goodwillie proposed rehabilitation, throughout the 1950s many city planners nationwide were fueled by the ideas of Swiss architect and planner Le Corbusier, and recommended replacement of aging city fabric with modern high rises. The redevelopment plan of Southwest Washington was an attempt to combine these two ideals. Elbert Peets, commissioned by the NCP&PC in 1951, was a scholar of the L'Enfant Plan who proposed a scheme that would keep the streets largely intact while upgrading the historic buildings. Dissatisfied with this conservative approach, the RLA enlisted Louis Justement and Chloethiel Woodard Smith in 1952 to devise a redevelopment plan that would justify the expenditure of federal money. Their expansive proposition included an elevated Tenth Street that formed a new avenue into the southwest quadrant, bridging over the divisive railroad tracks. It also featured new residential areas composed of a combination of townhouses and high-rise apartment buildings along the waterfront. Fulfillment of the Justement-Smith plan would necessitate rearrangement of L'Enfant's street plan and the formation of new open spaces.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Gutheim, 232-33.

¹⁹⁶ Gutheim, 314-16.

Noted city planner Harland Bartholomew was chosen to review these two divergent proposals and advise the National Capital Planning Commission and the RLA. The resulting redevelopment plan issued in 1952 included some low-rise residential areas, reflecting the traditional character of the neighborhood, and emphasized the creation of neighborhoods rather than individual buildings. It also necessitated merging groups of adjacent city squares into "superblocks."

With the integrity of the plan in mind, the Commission of Fine Arts discussed these proposals in spring 1952. CFA Chairman David E. Finley wrote, on behalf of the commission, to NCPC Chairman John Remon:

Unlike most cities, Washington is not the product of accident nor do we see here a monotonously repeated pattern. The L'Enfant plan is coherent and unified. In such a plan the elimination or mutilation of streets may have more than local effect; they may undermine the logic of the entire plan.¹⁹⁷

He specifically referred to proposals that would close Delaware Avenue in the southwest quadrant. Finley concurred that superblocks were necessary, but recommended that the former street and avenue rights-of-way remain as landscaped areas or grassy malls in order to preserve the historic scheme of open spaces. To create guidelines for future urban-redevelopment projects, he also recommended that a list be compiled of "the essential aesthetic elements of Washington, the streets, plazas, parks, and structures that should be considered inviolate to any but the most necessary and generally improved changes."¹⁹⁸ The National Capital Planning Commission accepted Finley's recommendation for such a plan, agreeing that "minor adjustments required by modern redevelopment planning and by the demands of automobile traffic can be made without doing violence to the basic unity of the L'Enfant Plan."¹⁹⁹

Bulldozers began clearing the area in 1954, launching a project that would continue well into the next decade and change the face of Southwest beyond recognition. The quadrant was divided into several project areas that were developed by private architectural firms, and the plans underwent many revisions during construction. Construction was further hindered by lawsuits that began pouring into District courts almost from the start. Questioning the legitimacy of the RLA's powers of condemnation, one case, Berman v. Parker, led to a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that established the Southwest project as a test case for subsequent urban-renewal schemes nationwide.²⁰⁰ Looking at the Southwest redevelopment in retrospect, architect I. M. Pei wrote in 1963, "The case history of this important project is truly representative of many of the urban renewal programs in the United States. It has suffered an inordinate amount of delay in its execution, partly due to a lack of experience in a virgin field and partly due to the multiplicity of agencies and powers so typical of Washington."²⁰¹ Although the redevelopment was initiated to improve housing in the city, by 1954 the entire northern section, between

¹⁹⁷ David E. Finley to John A. Remon, letter, Washington, D.C., May 16, 1952, Planning files of the NCPC, NARA RG 238.

¹⁹⁸ Finley, 1952.

¹⁹⁹ John A. Remon to David E. Finley, letter, July 1, 1952, NCP&PC planning files, NARA, RG 328; Minutes of the NCP&PC, June 27, 1952. NCP&PC planning files, NARA, RG 328.

²⁰⁰ Gutheim, 318.

²⁰¹ I. M. Pei, "Urban Renewal in Southwest Washington," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (January 1963), 69.

E Street and the Mall, was designated for large office buildings. The last section to be completed, this complex of mammoth federal and commercial buildings was ironically named L'Enfant Plaza. Featuring the work of world-renowned architects such as Marcel Breuer, Edward Durell Stone, and Pei, this \$63 million "capstone" of the New Southwest was greeted largely with praise. One Washington Post architecture critic called it "a work of truly magnificent urban architecture . . . it does justice to the genius of the man after whom it was named."²⁰²

Much like the Federal Triangle project approved in 1926, the urban renewal in the Southwest quadrant replaced a blighted area with large office buildings for federal workers and would alter L'Enfant's street system. It differed from the earlier project, however, in its promise to create new housing adequate for rich and poor. Adding a modern twist to L'Enfant's system of parks and vistas, the elevated roadway along the Tenth Street axis envisioned in the Justement-Smith plan terminates in a large circular park overlooking the Washington Channel and the New Southwest. In keeping with the tradition established in 1894, the new park was designated Reservation No. 719 of the National Capital Park system and was named Benjamin Banneker Circle in honor of "the first African American of Science"²⁰³ who made the celestial calculations determining the boundaries of the city in 1791.

The Inner Loop and the Southeast/Southwest Freeway

While the developers of the New Southwest closed portions of Delaware Avenue to traffic, they attempted to respect its axis, leaving open spaces and parks along most of its former right-of-way. But while this vista was preserved, others were eliminated. For instance, the Tenth Street axis, terminated by the Smithsonian Institution's Castle at Independence Avenue could have had a magnificent vista of the Gothic landmark, but the Forrestal Building spans the roadway, effectively blocking the view. Responding to the Commission of Fine Arts' concerns about the obstruction of L'Enfant's vistas, the National Planning Commission warned the CFA in 1952 that the numerous avenues would be closed or bridged if the proposed inner-loop freeway were superimposed upon the L'Enfant Plan in accordance with the comprehensive plan of 1950.²⁰⁴

First advocated in the 1940s, the concept of a limited-access, high-speed freeway elevated above or recessed beneath the existing street grid was discussed throughout the next two decades. A 1955 plan for the inner loop proposed a route from the Benning Bridge, northwest along Florida Avenue, turning south through Foggy Bottom to West Potomac Park, and traversing over the northern edge of East Potomac Park and the Washington Channel. It would continue east through the southwest quadrant along F Street to Virginia Avenue, SE, where traffic could leave the city over the Pennsylvania Avenue or Eleventh Street bridges. Two freeway "legs" connected the north and south stretches of the loop; the east leg running straight up Eleventh Street and the center leg running north from Delaware Avenue under the east end of the Mall along Second, Third, and Fourth streets, to where it joined the north portion of the freeway at Q Street.

²⁰² Wolf von Eckardt, "L'Enfant Plaza: A Triumph," Washington Post (November 16, 1968).

²⁰³ Congress, House, Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton speaking on the occasion of the first public event initiating the celebration and observance of the Bicentennial of the District of Columbia. Extension of Remarks. Congressional Record (6 February 1991). Her speech also supported the current effort to erect a statue of Banneker.

²⁰⁴ John A. Remon, 1952.

In anticipation of the southern leg, planners of the New Southwest left a wide corridor between E and G streets open to accommodate the limited-access roadway. Constructed there shortly after, it runs along the former F Street right-of-way, recessed below the grid from the Fourteenth Street Bridge to Seventh Street, where it rises above the old street grade all the way to the Anacostia River. At Delaware Avenue, the freeway turns south along Virginia Avenue above and alongside the old railroad right of way. Also at Delaware Avenue, several lanes turn north to form the center leg of the freeway.

Running under the east end of the Mall and providing access to the Capitol, the segment of the center leg leading to Massachusetts Avenue was completed in the early 1970s; it was extended north three more blocks to New York Avenue by 1987. Construction of this sunken freeway between Second and Third streets interrupted F, G, and I streets, thereby dividing the neighborhood between E Street and Massachusetts Avenue with a canyon three blocks long. It also obliterated nine city squares. Most of the squares and buildings that had been demolished for the Southeast/Southwest Freeway and center leg had been designated as blighted, so the construction served as a form of slum clearance. In the two southern quadrants of the city, the impassible band of the Southeast/Southwest Freeway formed a greater barricade than had the canal or railroad tracks in the past, further fragmenting these distressed regions. Plans were made to build recreation centers underneath the elevated roadways to give something back to the splintered neighborhoods, but all that was actually constructed were some basketball courts south of Garfield Park under the dark and noisy freeway. The segments of the freeway that remain unbuilt would slice through more established neighborhoods and historic areas, two of the more positive elements of Washington's urban fabric that were beginning to draw public notice. Citizen outcry impeded completion of the project, as D.C. Engineer Commissioner Frederick Clarke observed:

The city had embarked on an extensive highway program, had much of it planned, quite a bit of it underway. But it was beginning to run into trouble in 1960 and 1961. I always said it was when we began putting the bulldozers in the bedroom. The previous highway planning and execution had been tied in with the urban renewal programs of the southwest. So the area had been decimated anyway, and it was easy to get the highways through there. Now the extension of the highway beyond that began to involve relocation of people and businesses. That is when the real problems of building highways within the District began.²⁰⁵

In what Clark described as "total community concern," citizens fiercely fought against the proposed roads, and construction of the rest of the inner loop was abandoned.

²⁰⁵ Engineer Memoirs: Interviews with Lieutenant General Frederick J. Clark, Historical Division, Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1977, 145.

Redevelopment Plans for Virginia and Pennsylvania Avenues

While planners of 1940 may have seen the L'Enfant Plan as "no longer well-fitted to a modern city" and "lack[ing] the basic physical requirements of a democratic city,"²⁰⁶ planners of the 1960s were returning to it for inspiration, as had the McMillan Commission several generations before.

According to National Capital Planning Commission officials, the "Year 2000" plan, issued in 1961, "suggested a renewal of the spirit of L'Enfant, and an application of his ideas as far as is practicable in the light of the complicated problems imposed on the contemporary planner by the hard facts of twentieth-century urban life."²⁰⁷ Looking ahead forty years, the plan aimed to accommodate the metropolitan population of 5 million forecasted for the year 2000. To preserve open space beyond the historic city, the plan's framers charted a system of populated corridors buffered by low-density wedges fanning out from the city.²⁰⁸ The major objective of the Year 2000 Plan was to assert the historic city, or "Metro-Center," as the most desirable and accessible focus of the region. Just as L'Enfant had intended his avenues to create direct communication between significant sites, the 1961 plan included a map delineating certain streets to be developed as links to connect important foci throughout the city. Although the map still features the doomed inner-loop freeway, it also highlights many of L'Enfant's critical avenues as corridors for special development.²⁰⁹ But although this scheme recognized the significance of the L'Enfant Plan, it was not designed to protect its historic integrity, and did not--as the CFA wished--identify "the essential aesthetic elements of Washington, the streets, plazas, parks and structures that should be considered inviolate to any but the most necessary and generally improved changes."²¹⁰ Along the tenets set out by the Year 2000 Plan, Pennsylvania Avenue studies began in 1962, and in 1965 plans were made to redevelop Virginia Avenue.

The Year 2000 Plan was issued the same year John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inaugural parade followed the Pennsylvania Avenue route from the Capitol to the White House taken by every president since Thomas Jefferson. What Kennedy saw from his car was not a magnificent thoroughfare, but a run-down and derelict main street. Reacting to this disappointing observation, the president initiated a study of the avenue and appointed an advisory council to oversee its improvement.

This prominent segment of Pennsylvania Avenue had developed in the nineteenth century as the city's main commercial strip, skirted by private homes, hotels, boardinghouses, saloons, and stores. Despite special programs for paving and planting street trees along the avenue, it never

²⁰⁶ "Washington Analyzed," House and Garden (July 1940), 40; Alfred Kastner, "The Plan," House and Garden (July 1940), 41, cited in Colyer, 144-46.

²⁰⁷ Special Streets: Plan for Virginia Avenue, National Capital Planning Commission, 4.

²⁰⁸ William E. Finley, "A Plan for the National Capital Region in the Year 2000," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (January 1963), 39-42.

²⁰⁹ Morton Hoppenfeld, "A Metro-Center for the Year 2000," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (January 1963), 43-48.

²¹⁰ Finley, 1952.

reached its potential as a grand boulevard. This was due in part to intrusions such as the Treasury Building blocking the vista to the White House, and the market between Seventh and Ninth streets that cluttered the avenue with carts and refuse from 1802 until 1931. Fault also lay with the interpretation of the plan. Despite L'Enfant's plans for three squares, including one to feature a grand fountain, this segment of road was developed without any of the ornamental spaces that punctuated Massachusetts or Connecticut avenues. That Pennsylvania Avenue continued uninterrupted between the White House and the Capitol, and the rectangular open spaces were fragmented into small triangular reservations, was perhaps due to the streetcar tracks built down its center in 1862 .

While the McMillan Commission sought to change the character of the avenue by creating a continuous facade of impressive buildings along its south side, little was done improve the roadway's parks or streetscape. As early as 1937, the condition of Pennsylvania Avenue was bemoaned:

Poor old Pennsylvania Avenue . . . A vast open space, largely to remain open, weakens its eastern end; Constitution Avenue crashes across it; the plaza at Eighth Street is maimed; vast walls of stone weigh down one side of the Avenue while parking lots cut gaps in the other . . . finally, the plaza between 13th and 14th streets has been ruined by an open space yawning wide toward the west.²¹¹

Further, the Federal Triangle's usurpment of saloons, stores, and the thriving Center Market with government office buildings shops leached the area of much of its vitality. As commercial activity moved northwest during the 1950s-60s, America's Main Street featured increasingly derelict buildings on its north side and a huge office complex on its south flank that was deserted each evening by the civil servants.

The special committee formed at the request of the president and chaired by Nathaniel Owings, published a preliminary report in 1964 that defined project objectives and introduced ideas for the improvement of the avenue and its immediate neighborhood. In support of the effort, this segment of Pennsylvania Avenue and some of the neighboring streets were designated a National Historic Site in 1965.²¹² A revised scheme published in 1967 further honed the project's goals, summarized as follows:

Nearly half a century after the building of the impressively unified facades of the Federal Triangle, a more varied but equally unified north side of Pennsylvania Avenue will look south into the sunlight of a new day. Ornamental paving, special street furniture and lighting, street graphics, fountains and sculpture, arcaded buildings of uniform setback and height but for varying purposes announced in their architectures--these will create a richly designed special street whose excitement will be communicated as a strong image even to those who may never see it.²¹³

The plan's major emphasis was "to restore the Avenue and the Mall for use by the people,"

²¹¹ Paul Spreiregen, On the Art of Designing Cities: Selected Essays by Elbert Peets, 71, cited in The Pennsylvania Avenue Plan 1974 (Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, October 1974), 9th printing, June 1986, VII.

²¹² The authority for this designation is the Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act of 1935, which has as its policy the preservation for public use of historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance, for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.

²¹³ Pennsylvania Avenue, Report of the President's Temporary Commission on Pennsylvania Avenue (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 7.

by controlling "the automobile traffic that has degraded the capital for either efficient or pleasurable use by people."²¹⁴ Like the Southwest redevelopment program, the report proposed significant changes to L'Enfant's street plan, recommending an underpass at Constitution Avenue and the construction of a sunken E Street expressway that would link up with the inner-loop freeway. A raised pedestrian shelf above the expressway would assign "different levels to separate the various uses now competing for a single space: walking, driving, parking and shopping."²¹⁵

Some of the proposals from the 1964 plan were already under construction when the revised version was published, such as the large reflecting pool at the foot of the Capitol Grounds, built over the tunnelled center leg of the freeway. As in the New Southwest, some of this construction would block or cross over L'Enfant's streets. The massive modern Federal Bureau of Investigation building erected between Ninth and Eleventh streets, for instance, eliminated the 900 block of D Street. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Labor building being erected over the right-of-way of the center leg freeway was constructed such that it also intrudes upon the rights-of-way of Second and Third streets. One of the most controversial aspects of the 1967 plan was not a violation of L'Enfant's scheme, however, but the demolition of two historic buildings. The Willard and Washington hotels were located on one of the city squares that was to have been merged with two adjacent squares and the open space between 13th and 14th streets to form a grand terminus for Pennsylvania Avenue. Called National Square, this large plaza was planned with patterned paving and fountains.

In its review of the design, the Commission of Fine Arts objected to the demolition of the hotels and to the large, unrelieved expanse of concrete. In view of these objections, as well as the fact that the presidentially initiated plan lacked the sanction of Congress or the District of Columbia, Congress enacted a law in 1972 creating the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC).²¹⁶ A corporation wholly owned by the federal government, PADC oversees public and private development along this historic corridor. By the end of 1991, \$1.4 billion in private money had been invested in the avenue, and twenty-three buildings had been constructed or reconstructed.²¹⁷ The two historic hotels and the Old Post Office, also originally slated for demolition were renovated; in place of the proposed National Square between 14th and 15th streets, Western Plaza (renamed Freedom Plaza in 1988) was constructed between 13th and 14th streets.

Originally the site of three triangular reservations designated by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1894, Pennsylvania Avenue was diverted to form a large rectangular plaza. Western Plaza and the U.S. Navy Memorial, built by PADC near the site of the old market, both exhibit public art underfoot. At the former, a segment of L'Enfant's plan is delineated on the floor with different colors of granite with grass insets representing the Mall and Ellipse; floor plans of the White House and Capital are rendered at their respective sites in inlaid brass. Similarly, the central patio of the Navy Memorial shows a 100'-diameter engraved map of the Earth that invites visitors to walk

²¹⁴ Pennsylvania Avenue, 1967, 9.

²¹⁵ Pennsylvania Avenue, 1967, 22.

²¹⁶ Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, The Pennsylvania Avenue Plan (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986), x.

²¹⁷ Sarah Booth Conroy, "Pennsylvania Past and Present," Washington Post (January 31, 1992), 9-11.

across the continents and seas.

Simultaneous with the Pennsylvania Avenue studies, the coordination committee of the National Capital Planning Commission examined possibilities for developing the segment of Virginia Avenue leading from Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to the Washington Monument. Major changes were already taking place in the surrounding neighborhood when the committee published its 1966 report. The 1960 Theodore Roosevelt Bridge linking Foggy Bottom with Northern Virginia had introduced new traffic patterns to the area. This, combined with a number of new office buildings, necessitated widening the avenue. Meanwhile, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, designed by Edward Durrell Stone, was under construction at the base of New Hampshire Avenue near the shores of the Potomac River, and its setting would require special treatment befitting its monumental and cultural significance.

As early as the 1930s, the Foggy Bottom area had been earmarked as a future enclave of government offices, similar to Federal Triangle, to be called the Northwest Rectangle. But growing acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the Federal Triangle led planners to look for a new strategy for developing Virginia Avenue. Federal Triangle had come to be seen as a barrier between the northwest quadrant and the Mall, as well as a dangerously desolate place at night. When considering ways to develop Virginia Avenue, "the spine" of the Northwest Rectangle, planners advocated mixed-use buildings arguing that, "An area that combines different kinds of buildings will not become a black and lonely island after dark, there will be lights and movement. It will be safer."²¹⁸

The goal for Virginia Avenue was to create variety in the streetscape while establishing uniformity in the whole composition. A system of parks running the length of the avenue would achieve this uniformity amid diversity. Although the small triangular parks were a "happy byproduct of the L'Enfant Plan," after the avenue was widened the existing triangles would have been too small to produce this effect. Many of the triangles were therefore expanded, with their landscape plans often flowing with no recognizable boundary into the property of abutting federal buildings. While the Federal Triangle project focused on the massive Neoclassical buildings, the structures planned for Virginia Avenue were to look outward onto the open spaces along the avenue, which would direct attention to the impressive vista of the Washington Monument.

After L'Enfant's circles had been pared down, tunneled under, or completely eliminated throughout the city, the Virginia Avenue plan introduced a new solution to the traffic circle dilemma, the divided-plaza intersection. By shading the intersection of Virginia and New Hampshire avenues yellow, L'Enfant placed it among the fifteen intersections to be assigned to the various states for embellishment. Despite L'Enfant's intentions, since the citywide improvements of the 1870s, the open space at this juncture only featured two insignificant triangles. The intersection had been in the center of an industrial area throughout the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century massive cylindrical gas containers stood adjacent to the triangular parks. Although the parks were surrounded with post-and-chain fences and maintained by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, the site hardly merited a landscaped circle with statuary or a fountain.

²¹⁸ Special Streets, . . . , 7.

As part of the 1966 Special Streets plan, the intersection had to be rebuilt because the Potomac River Freeway, the west leg of the inner-loop freeway, was to run underneath it. After roadway construction was completed, the small triangular parks were replaced by a sodded ellipse. Unlike traffic circles elsewhere in the city, however, Virginia Avenue continues uninterrupted through the space while the other roadways branch off in a curved sweep. Every street leading away from the plaza was intended to frame a vista of a landmark: the National Cathedral, Washington Monument, Washington Circle, and Kennedy Center. Planners intended for the largest portion of the circle to have a focus, such as a statue. They also recommended construction of a building in the air-rights space above the opening of the Potomac River Freeway tunnel on the northwest side of the intersection. Such a structure would shield the park from the noise of the freeway and would further define the urban space by creating a sense of enclosure.²¹⁹ Although the air-rights building was never built, in 1969 a statue of Benito Juarez was erected in the circle to provide the needed focus. Because the Pan American Building and Organization of American States are both located on Virginia Avenue, many of the parks along the route feature monuments to Latin American leaders.

While the solution for Virginia Avenue created a modernistic vision combining architecture and landscape designs, there was a definite trend beginning in the 1960s to restore and retain Washington's historic fabric. As early as 1950, Congress declared all of Georgetown an historic district--the first such district to be named in the city and among the first in the nation. With the creation of the National Register for Historic Places in 1966, many more districts were identified as having historic merit, and by 1992 the Washington properties listed on the National Register include 230 individual buildings, and forty historic districts composed of 16,718 contributing structures.

It was this growing popularity of historic preservation that prevented the McMillan-planned conversion of the Lafayette Square neighborhood into an enclave of official-looking office buildings. Although the area is now entirely occupied by office and government agencies, its redevelopment plan emphasized the retention of extant historic structures, as well as its residential character. McMillan Plan designers envisioned the square surrounded by executive offices facing onto the park with uniform, classically columned facades. Cass Gilbert's Chamber of Commerce and the Treasury Annex were the only buildings actually built here in accordance with the McMillan Plan, however, due to a combination of citizen resistance and a lack of funds.

The site was threatened again in the 1960s when Congress secured the authority to claim and demolish buildings around Lafayette Square and replace them with new executive offices much needed in the vicinity of the White House. In an effort to save the historic structures, the 1819 Decatur House and the 1816 St. John's Episcopal Church were listed as National Historic Landmarks in 1960. These designations thwarted plans to some extent by compelling the architects to incorporate the facade of the Decatur House in the design the new federal office building slated for the block west of Jackson Place. While this scheme was still under consideration, President John F. Kennedy and the preservation-minded first lady stepped in once again in 1962, by observing that they would prefer the White House remain in a residential area, rather than among an assembly of official buildings. With the help of architect John Carl Warnecke, the new office building was designed such that it would not interfere with the historic residential character of the park. His solution set the high-rise offices back

²¹⁹ Special Streets . . . , passim.

from the three- and four-story historic homes. The park itself was refurbished with new fountains and chessboard-top tables for passive recreation as part of the redevelopment program.

The Lafayette Square redevelopment came at the end of a downtown building boom that left portions of K Street, Connecticut Avenue, and the squares around the parks lined with rows of modern glass-and-steel offices. These minimally ornamented, boxlike buildings were designed for maximal square footage; they filled all of the area permissible within legal street rights-of-way and height limitations.

While this increase in office space generated increased traffic congestion, it also precipitated a shortage of parking spaces. As new edifices replaced the vacant lots that had been used for parking, the number of vehicles increased and parking options shrunk. The Pennsylvania Avenue plan of 1964 addressed the parking crisis by proposing underground parking beneath the proposed E Street distributor and the huge National Square. Several of the city's parks were also envisioned as large subterranean parking lots with the historic parks on their roofs. Between 1955 and 1960, an estimated twenty-nine new commercial buildings had been built in the vicinity of Farragut Park, and a parking lot under the square was advanced as a viable answer to parking problem.²²⁰ In response to this proposal, the Committee of 100 and the National Park Service came definitively to the defense of the reservations:

Conversion of historic Farragut Square into the roof of a parking garage is, the Committee thinks, completely unjustified, and would establish a precedent for the desecration of other irreplaceable downtown parks.²²¹

As a result of the controversy, builders were encouraged to include parking underneath all new office buildings. Although parking places remain in short supply today, the installation of an underground transit system in the late 1970s gave commuters and tourists alike the option to enter the city without their automobiles.

WMATA and the Development of Regionwide Public Transportation

Rail transit had served Washington commuters since 1862 when a horse-drawn street railway was installed on Pennsylvania Avenue to carry passengers from Georgetown to the Navy Yard. By 1889, electricity had largely replaced horse power and animal traction was soon outlawed in the downtown area. Private trolley companies began substituting streetcars with buses as early as 1921, preferring the flexibility of "free-wheeling" vehicles. By 1962, exactly 100 years after the first trolley tracks were laid, Washington's last streetcar made its final trip, manifesting the city's complete conversion from electricity to gasoline and diesel. After reaching its peak during World War II, public transportation began to lose popularity as commuters opted for private automobiles. Decreased ridership, combined with escalating fuel prices and inflation in the 1950s-60s, caused many local private transit companies to falter and yield their routes to larger firms.

²²⁰ Laurence Stern and Leslie H. Whitten, "Farragut Square Underground Plan Torpedoed by Private Operators," Washington Post (August 31, 1962), A1, A14.

²²¹ George J. Olszewski, Farragut Square (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1968), 34.

Meanwhile, city planners began considering a regionwide subway system to carry commuters under the congested streets and ease downtown parking shortages. Although the study by Greiner and DeLeuw in 1946 recommended the installation of a subway system, definitive construction plans were delayed for two more decades. In 1960 Congress passed the National Capital Transportation Act that created an agency to study the problem and make proposals for a subway and highway program. In the ensuing years, plans were drawn and redrawn for a rapid-transit system that would serve major employment and residential centers in Washington and neighboring jurisdictions, two counties each in Maryland and Virginia, and three independent Virginia cities. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) was formed February 20, 1967, by a compact between Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia to construct, finance, and operate a transit rail system. In 1968 WMATA approved the much-revised route plan, and Congress began funding its construction. The system that was adopted covered almost 100 miles and included eighty-six stations. Early phases of construction were to begin within L'Enfant's boundaries, and on December 9, 1969, ground was broken for the first Metro station at Judiciary Square.²²² Although perhaps only coincidentally, it was built within one of the seventeen parcels purchased by the federal government in 1792 for public use.

Locating the rail lines under established rights-of-way was one of the main guidelines for subway system planners. Within the historic city, this meant that L'Enfant's wide streets and large parks would form the above-ground framework for the underground network. Just as the canal, railroads, and streetcars had been inscribed within the corridors he designed, so would this new form of urban transport. As L'Enfant had intended, many of his circles and squares had become points of reference throughout the city. This, combined with the fact that the property was already owned by the federal government, made them practical sites for Metro stations. Building stations under parks alleviated the need to disturb existing buildings, and when the stations were complete, the parks defined the entrances that pedestrians would use to approach the underground rails. Of the twenty-one Metro stations within the L'Enfant Plan's boundaries, more than half are built under open spaces designated in the L'Enfant or McMillan plans. Many stations, such as Farragut West, Farragut North, McPherson Square, and Dupont Circle, have been named after the parks near their entrances.

While this appears as somewhat of a tribute to the L'Enfant Plan, it has altered park usage and has placed an extra burden on the National Park Service, which is charged with park maintenance. Construction of the stations in and under the parks destroyed much of the existing plant material and precluded their use throughout the duration of the work, which lasted in some cases for more than two years. After the stations were built, the functions of the reservations also changed. Metro station entries in parks, such as Eastern Market, Smithsonian, National Archives/Navy Memorial, and Judiciary Square have necessitated new landscape designs that can withstand the large volume of pedestrians. The train-to-bus rider pattern established by WMATA also requires bus-transfer points near the Metro stations.²²³ These transportation hubs in or near many of the parks not only introduce more foot traffic, but also the related street furniture such as benches, bus shelters, newspaper racks, and vendors.

²²² "Planning Metro: Starting from Scratch," and "America's Subway" Requires a Special Look," *M. Magazine of Metro* 1 (Fall 1989), 5-8.

²²³ The four private bus companies were integrated under the WMATA umbrella in 1973; "Metrobus: The First Fifteen Years," Pamphlet distributed by the Metro Office of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1988.

The impact of the construction boom and introduction of mass transit reflected a steady increase in the density of the city's indoor office and residential spaces, as well as outdoor parks and thoroughfares. Tradition flirted briefly with modern tenets and space needs when, in 1965, the NCPC asked architect Chloethiel Woodward Smith to make suggestions for correcting what was called Washington's "dull" skyline. Her solution, a series of well-placed concentrations of skyscrapers as tall as 260', was greeted with unanimous disapproval:

This latter-day veneration of Washington's non-profile has become so solidly entrenched that it is virtually impossible to find anyone in an official or quasi-official position in Washington who is willing to discuss even the hypothetical merits of adding verticality to the cityscape.²²⁴

The Fine Arts Commission boasted its response, "We happen to believe in the L'Enfant plan. It is the finest example of urban planning in the Western Hemisphere, and we intend to keep it that way."²²⁵

Significance of L'Enfant's City Today

As urban renewal and changing transportation modes brought about significant revisions to L'Enfant's plan in the middle decades of the twentieth century, drastic social movements altered the public perceptions of the city's streets, avenues, and parks. At a time when American soldiers were fighting a war in Vietnam, First Lady Ladybird Johnson pushed an initiative on the home front to beautify the parks in the nation's capital, perhaps in an effort reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln's continued construction of the U.S. Capitol during the Civil War. President Johnson, who envisioned the Mall as a "historic heartland" that should be developed for pleasure and relaxation, supported the 1965 Mall redevelopment study overseen by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill.²²⁶ Although the 1936 Works Progress Administration restoration of the Mall had eliminated some of the tempos marring the greensward, a number of the stuccoed concrete buildings still stood on the public land in the 1960s. In 1962 the U.S. Department of the Interior was authorized to demolish two of the dozens of World War II tempos to make way for the Smithsonian Museum of American History, and in 1964 a massive clearing project began to rid the area of tempos still standing at the foot of the Washington Monument and on each side of the reflecting pool.²²⁷

But while patriotic supporters of the war effort flocked to the city during World War II, the Vietnam conflict attracted protesters who found in Washington's streets and public parks a perfect public forum for demonstrating dissenting views. The federal government has sanctioned processions along the city's streets and avenues for inaugurations, funerals, and military victories since the early 1800s. Dissidents also have a history of using the federal property to gain official notice. A march and demonstration by the Know-Nothing Party in 1857 resulted in a bloody riot in Mount Vernon

²²⁴ James Bailey, "Does Washington Need a Skyline? An Affirmative Study Receives a Unanimously Negative Reaction," Architectural Forum (May 1965): 32.

²²⁵ Cited in James Bailey, "Does Washington Need a Skyline? An Affirmative Study Receives a Unanimously Negative Reaction," Architectural Forum (May 1965): 32-35.

²²⁶ George J. Olszewski, History of the Mall (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1970), 102-3.

²²⁷ T. Sutton Jett, "Renaissance of the "Grand Mall," Parks and Recreation 1 (April 1966), 234-35.

Square that left six dead and twenty-one wounded. Later, marches by the suffragists contributed to the 1920 passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote.

Citizens of the television age realized that visibility on federal property in the national capital could help spread their messages around the nation and the world. Lafayette Square, Dupont Circle, and the Mall were used frequently by anti-war and civil-rights demonstrators in the 1960s, and when residents and business owners complained to the National Park Service about protesters and "hippies" in Dupont Circle in 1967, the Secretary of the Interior officially proclaimed that no particular group would be barred from the peaceful use of the parks.²²⁸ Since then, protest permits and police supervision are required in an attempt to ensure that the trampled grass and interrupted traffic flow are the only harm precipitated by protesters. Civil disobedience turned to violence, however, when the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., provoked riots in the city that lasted several days and left blocks of buildings burned beyond repair. Among other things, this unrest clearly displayed that despite all attempts at popular city beautification in the 1940s-60s, the African-American majority in the District of Columbia had little input in planning their hometown and had been largely disenfranchised by a city where a tradition of segregated parks had only begun to be broken down in the mid 1950s.

The Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, and White House still commonly serve as a backdrop for parades, protests, and rallies, and the National Park Service grants permits for use of the public lands to advocates of causes ranging from animal rights to the Ku Klux Klan. During large demonstrations, Metrorail and Metrobus run on special schedules to handle the hundreds of thousands of persons who come to be counted, while the National Park Service, protesting organizations, and media debate over attendance numbers. In 1991 alone, the National Park Service granted more than 2,000 permits for demonstrations, exhibits, or festivals.²²⁹

In addition to large scheduled protests and parades, Washington parks are also home to full-time protesters who keep constant vigil in full view of the White House, sleeping alongside their placards in Lafayette Square. Signs displayed by these dedicated dissidents were so large and numerous in the late 1970s that residents and visitors complained that they blocked views of the White House and gave the park a "landfill-like quality." Park Service officials responded to these complaints by limiting the size and number of signs permissible for each protester. Undaunted, protesters of many causes continue to use the park on a daily and permanent basis. Through the duration of the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf, peace advocates pounded out a round-the-clock reminder of the devastation wrought by Desert Storm with a single constant drumbeat.

While special-interest groups congregate in Washington's open spaces to assert their First Amendment rights, thousands of tourists from the United States and abroad seek the culture and history represented in this small urban core. L'Enfant planned a city that would merit international regard, and throughout the city's first century the Army Corps of Engineers struggled with meager funds to create a city that would serve as an example to the rest of the nation and world. Washington

²²⁸ Olszewski, *Lincoln Park*, ii.

²²⁹ Meg Bryant, "Nightmare for Elm Trees, Part II," *Washington City Paper* (September 13, 1991), 24.

lost to Chicago its bid to hold the World's Columbian Exposition on the land newly reclaimed from the Potomac River in 1892, but over the next century, the stretch of land between the U.S. Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial has become a monument to American achievement.

The primary consideration of the Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill 1965 plan for the Mall was the fact that tourism had become Washington's third-largest industry with approximately 12.8 million visitors to the Mall area that year.²³⁰ Robert Smithson's 1838 bequest began a tradition of scientific and cultural inquiry that has left the greensward lined with world-class museums. These public halls of science, technology, and the arts are joined by monuments to civilians and soldiers scattered throughout the city on the public federal lands set aside for that use in 1791-92. On the Mall, the celebration of culture extends from museums and monuments to the open space itself, where thousands gather for cultural events such as the annual Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife and the African-American Family Reunion. In 1979 Pope John Paul II celebrated a Mass on the Mall.

By turning L'Enfant's grand promenade into a formal *tapis vert*, the McMillan Commission unknowingly transformed the Mall from a pleasure ground to a political and social forum. And although the McMillan Commission members were labelled as tree-butchers for advocating the removal of thousands of trees, National Park Service officials now fear for the neat rows of elms because the eager feet of the masses have packed the earth so compact that water cannot reach their roots.²³¹

The avenue and park revitalization schemes of the 1960s also encompassed minor streets and many of the smaller parks lining the avenues. In the same philosophy as the proposed Pennsylvania Avenue pedestrian shelf of 1964, the "streets for people" concept introduced in the late 1960s recommended closing certain routes to traffic and attracting pedestrians by installing fountains and varied street furniture. This pedestrian-mall concept was adopted in the block of F Street south of the National Portrait Gallery, and on G Street south of Mies van der Rohe's Martin Luther King D.C. Public Library. Specially paved plazas with trees, benches, and modernistic fountains have replaced the former roadbeds, but instead of luring strollers, both areas have attracted crime and vagrancy, and will most likely be opened to traffic once again.²³²

Modern, asymmetrical park designs supplanted formal McMillan-inspired plans in numerous smaller parks in the 1960s, including two parks flanking Logan Circle that still feature round aggregate benches and planters recalling 1960s taste. Smaller triangular parks in residential areas such as Capitol Hill were converted to playgrounds, while in several of the large ornamental parks--including Lincoln, Stanton and Marion--special sections were partitioned off and equipped for children's play. Features have also been installed for adult recreation, such as a soft wood-chip jogging path encircling the residential Lincoln Park, and special exercise units on the south side of the Mall near Maryland Avenue.

²³⁰ Olszewski, History of the Mall, 97-98.

²³¹ Bryant, 24-26.

²³² PADC is currently undertaking a master plan redesign of the "Arts District," which encompasses F Street Plaza, 7th, and 8th streets.

The downtown building boom of the 1950-60s generated a large workforce that spills into the neighboring parks on warm days. Park plantings there were refurbished during the Johnson administration for noontime picnickers, and the chess tables installed in Dupont Circle and Lafayette Square continue to gather small crowds of players and spectators. Just as military bands entertained crowds in the Victorian era, twentieth-century park visitors hear march, rock and jazz music in the parks during lunch hour. Noontime concerts, for instance, are included among the several hundred yearly events PADC sponsors in Freedom Plaza, Pershing Park, Indiana Plaza, and John Marshall Park. Similar performances are also funded by private organizations, such as the McPherson and Franklin Park associations, formed in the 1980s by merchants and occupants of neighboring buildings. Just as William W. Corcoran donated some of his exotic plants for the landscaping of Lafayette Square in the 1850s, the people who own and use private property adjacent to the public parkland still want a voice in park design, use, and maintenance. In the early 1990s, the Franklin Square group financed the repaving of the park and is currently working with the National Park Service to restore the fountain. It has also worked with the District police to reduce crime, drugs, and prostitution-related businesses rampant in the area for the last several decades.

Despite the fact that Lafayette Park was recently the site of a well-publicized drug bust, Washington's parks may be safer than those in other cities due to the inherent nature of their locations on busy thoroughfares. Crime plagued the park watchmen of the nineteenth century, but progressively sparse plantings, begun in the 1930s, give today's parks high visibility to the nearby busy streets. Parks were used as campsites during the Civil War, and again in the 1930s when park planners installed bathrooms there for people who lived there during the Depression. This trend continues today for the homeless whose only beds are the park standard metal-frame and wood-slat benches scattered throughout the reservations. The presence of the homeless in the parks has become so commonplace in the last decade that food trucks from local charity agencies routinely stop alongside several reservations, and the National Park Service regularly disinfects the park benches.

Whether places for processions, picnics, or protests, the open spaces set out by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 figure prominently in the public perception of Washington, D.C. Despite the uniformity of the standard benches, tulip-type trash cans and, of course, the ubiquitous mounted generals, each park has a distinct character defined by the neighborhood around it and the people who use it. As L'Enfant planned, the parks have become the focus of different neighborhoods, and the avenues that connect them are the major thoroughfares for day-to-day and ceremonial use. The parks are seen daily by thousands, whether from prominent Capitol Hill residences or tall downtown offices, or by motorists who either curse or admire as they drive around, under, or through them. On a more abstract level, this network of open space, bounded by a coherent pattern of streets and avenues, reinforces the form of the federal government by placing buildings--whether federal, municipal, or commercial--in a visibly ordered diagram.

Home Rule

Amid all the clamor of tourists, protestors, politicians, and press, Washington, D.C., remains a hometown, and those who live here reap the benefits and suffer the inconvenience of living in the seat of the international spotlight. Since the downfall of the Shepherd administration in 1874, residents of the city lacked the rights of self rule for almost a century. President Richard Nixon signed the Home Rule Act in December 1973, and the new government, including the first elected mayor and city council, began early in 1975. Following this reorganization, the role of the National Capital

Planning Commission was limited to the review of policies generated in the mayor's office, thereby significantly diminishing its power in shaping the future of the urban framework.

The effects of the last fifteen years of home rule on the plan of Washington, D.C., remain largely to be seen, considering that the federal government has been responsible for numerous violations to the plan, from the U.S. Treasury Building of the 1830s to the Southeast/Southwest Freeway. One early and controversial project undertaken by the new administration was the Washington Convention Center located between H, Ninth, and Eleventh streets and New York Avenue. Built in an effort to revive the economy of the sagging downtown area, it followed the completion of the Metro Center subway station that serves three of Metro's five lines. When the mammoth structure opened in 1982, it covered four city squares, thereby eliminating several blocks of the original urban fabric, closing streets, blocking the view up Tenth Street, and displacing numerous residents in the predominantly Chinese neighborhood. A small but symbolic concession in Convention Center site plan is the open space of Reservation No. 174, a former triangular park between Tenth and Eleventh streets below New York Avenue, which survives as a paved cutout at the corner of the massive building.

The Convention Center spawned myriad new hotels and office buildings in the neighboring blocks including, perhaps, the most contentious construction of the decade--Techworld. Designed to attract technical industries and international trade to downtown D.C., this mirrored-glass structure built between Seventh and Ninth streets, NW, south of Mount Vernon Square, features an enclosed pedestrian bridge crossing over the Eighth Street axis. Realizing that the proposed bridge would violate the planned vista between Mount Vernon Square and one of the original seventeen reservations set aside in 1792, preservationists took the developers to court, but lost. Construction of the building was supported by D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and the D.C. Zoning Commission. Its opponents included the two ex officio members of the D.C. Board of Commissioners representing the interests of Congress and the National Park Service, the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission and a variety of preservation groups. In an extensive analysis of the case written in 1987, planner George Colyer warned that, "from the perspective of the L'Enfant system of streets and open spaces, the Techworld controversy should ring alarm bells," and he recommended the "political balancing of the national interest in protecting the integrity of the plan versus the District's interest in protecting its Home Rule power."²³³

Clearly there are many interests at stake in directing Washington's future, and since the initiation of home rule, numerous plans and studies have been issued by a variety of agencies to guide the city's development. The number of voices clamoring to be heard includes federal agencies such as the Commission of Fine Arts, NCPC, National Park Service, General Services Administration, PADC, and the Architect of the Capitol; District agencies such as the D.C. Department of Transportation and the Municipal Planning Office; and citizen groups such as the Greater Washington Board of Trade, the D.C. Preservation League and the Committee of 100.

The District government has had jurisdiction over the streets and avenues since 1878, and has

²³³ Colyer, 268, 283. Techworld Development Corp. v. D.C. Preservation League, et al., U.S. District Court of District of Columbia, 1986.

since gained control of many reservations--such as those along Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Kentucky, and Tennessee avenues--when they were transferred from the National Park Service in the 1970s. Yet despite the city's claims of jurisdiction, the fee-simple title of all the streets, avenues, and reservations at their junctures, has belonged to the federal government since 1792. The transfers of parkland have fragmented what was devised by L'Enfant and established by the Army Corps of Engineers as a unified system of open spaces. For both the Corps of Engineers, which oversaw roads, bridges and public buildings, and the National Park Service, responsible for numerous museums, monuments and historic sites, maintenance of the small parks throughout the city is an added burden. Of those once described by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds as occupied "in violation of the law," many continue to be maintained--or neglected--by neighboring landowners. In light of this fact, many of the District-managed parks have been turned over to the community for maintenance through its Adopt-A-Park program.

Amid the inner-loop freeway controversy, the chairman of the American Institute of Architect's committee on the national capital predicted a limit to modifications: "L'Enfant's plan has withstood 200 years of abuse, but it cannot absorb forever an unrelated system of cuts and fills, overpasses and underpasses, cloverleaves, and access ramps and accompanying high-speed traffic."²³⁴ Threatened by road construction, the plan is further imperiled by the development of multi-block megastructures that could annihilate planned vistas and cut off planned streets.

Of the 301 reservations designated by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1894, at least eighty have been formally transferred from the park system, disappearing altogether under buildings, freeways, or railroad tracks. About two-thirds of the remaining reservations are managed by the National Park Service. The majority of these are well-maintained, but at least twenty remain unimproved, are severely neglected, or have been paved over as concrete traffic islands. The reservations under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia are generally in more residential areas and are sporadically maintained by the District or adjacent landowners or community groups. Of the avenues and streets laid out according to the L'Enfant/Ellicott Plan, almost 200 city blocks have been closed to traffic by buildings, pedestrian malls, or railroad tracks while about forty have been bridged by overpasses, elevated walkways, roadways or railroad tracks. In each category, the elements that remain outweigh those that have been lost, but unless the layout of the city is protected in some manner, the next 200 years of development could erase the historic plan from the land.

Summary: Looking Ahead

On the verge of its third century, the historic national capital bears some scars--largely from the rapid transformation of the city during the twentieth century. The onslaught of automobiles is broadening roadways at the expense of parks. Ever more massive office buildings filling up the blocks--and sometimes streets and avenues, too--within the developable space that exists from ground zero to the legally mandated height limit. The density of the city threatens its history of open space dotted with green parkland. In town and in the distance--where other municipalities are building skyscrapers--and the monumental vistas that are a hallmark of the federal city are being blurred, obscured, and lost entirely.

²³⁴ Paul Thiry, "The Planning of Washington as a Capital," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (April 1974).

While the District of Columbia has managed to preserve the openness and density of the city through federal oversight and legislated height control, here and in neighboring jurisdictions developers have gradually eroded vertical and lateral aspects of the monumental plan. A major injury to one of the capital's oldest and most symbolic vistas--from the capital west past the Washington Monument to the Potomac River--was irretrievably blighted by the redevelopment of Rosslyn, Virginia.

Only a few degrees northwest of Arlington Memorial Bridge and Arlington National Cemetery, this Oz-like hub of glass and steel skyscrapers forms the indecorous terminus of primary east-west prospect from Washington. The importance of this view had been reinforced at the turn of the century by the McMillan Commission's placement of the Lincoln Memorial as a closure to the Mall, with "the area of Arlington Cemetery and Rosslyn as a significant backdrop to the national memorials and buildings."²³⁵ Within this viewshed are Theodore Roosevelt Island, the Iwo Jima Memorial, and the Arlington House mansion.

In the mid 1970s, nevertheless, a handful of buildings were slated to rise twenty-nine stories--more than double any downtown Washington building--with the permission of Arlington County, thanks to "one of the most flexible zoning ordinances in the country."²³⁶ Decried as a "common nuisance" and a "visual degradation,"²³⁷ "hurried and improvised" legal action ended less than a year later when the federal government's claim was rejected because the evidence--a visual-resource inventory and evaluation--was ruled as insufficient evidence.²³⁸

The evaluation was based on a definition of visual intrusion as any object which would interfere with the perception of the U.S. Capitol and its immediate area by the general observer in Washington. Such an intrusion would detract from the historic concept of Washington as a horizontal city whose height was determined and dominated by the Capitol dome. It would also detract from its use as the pilgrimage site of the nation's major monuments and memorials.²³⁹

This legal defeat signaled "the beginning of a more conscious attention to the District regional skyline and its symbolic implications."²⁴⁰ Within the city, there have been piecemeal wins and losses in the battle by public and private interests to transcend legal barriers to greater heights. In 1979, for instance, the D.C. City Council enacted legislation that allowed the construction of Metropolitan Square at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, across from the Treasury Building and White House.

²³⁵ Nancy Stewart, "Rosslyn: A Monumental Intrusion?" Environmental Comment (July 1980), 4.

²³⁶ Richard Collins, "Rosslyn: The Problem of the High Rise and the Nation's Capital," Modulus (1980-81): 79. (79-83)

²³⁷ Stewart, 4. In 1978 the U.S. Dept. of the Interior filed suit against the Arlington County Board and private developers based on the county's violation of its own twelve-story-limit zoning law and that "the high-rise buildings would create a visual intrusion on the various national monuments in the District of Columbia and Virginia to such an extent that it would constitute a common law nuisance."

²³⁸ U.S. V. the Board of Supervisors of Arlington County et al., No. 78-872; Collins, 80.

²³⁹ Stewart, 4.

²⁴⁰ Collins, 82.

The city action allowed Metropolitan Square to rise 160' instead of 95', despite complaints from several federal agencies, including the Secret Service, which found the height an " uncontrollable security problem" for the president, his family, and visiting officials. More recently, the city council again tried to increase the allowable height of a project, Market Square North at Eighth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, by 20'. In this case, Congress overturned the decision on the basis of the 1910 Height Act.²⁴¹

Currently, one of the tallest buildings in the city is One Franklin Square at 1301 K Street, NW, on the north side of Franklin Park, completed in 1991. This mammoth structure fills the block between 13th and 14th streets, the main block rising the allowed 130' from the ground, which is a good deal higher than local sea level. The building's visibility is further amplified by a pair of hexagonal towers that add another 90' from the roof to the top of its pinnacles; this was achieved because turrets, minarets, spires, etc., of any height are permitted as long as they are functionally useless.²⁴² The scale and height of One Franklin Square is new to Washington, and sets a new physical precedent for private spatial development--thanks to a loophole in the height-limit law--that could undermine the goal of preserving a low-lying baroque city plan.

²⁴¹ Nelson F. Rimensnyder, "A Look at 200 Years of Building Height Limits in the Nation's Capital," Washington Business Journal (2 December 1991), 30.

²⁴² Benjamin Forgey, "Classy Colossus at Franklin Square," Washington Post (16 February 1991).

Summary: LOOKING AHEAD

Removal of the freeway ramps
new convention center
status of football stadium ??
Rosslyn redevelopment
new river bridge(s)

Appendix A:
LIST OF RESERVATIONS/PARKS AND AVENUES DOCUMENTED BY HABS/HAER

PRIMARY NAME	SECONDARY NAME	3rd NAME	HABS No.
Plan of the City of Washington, D.C.	Federal City	n/a	DC-688
Dupont Circle	Reservations 59, 60, 61	Pacific Circle	DC-669
Eastern Market Metro Station	Reservations 44, 45, 44A, 46, 47, 47A, 48, 49	n/a	DC-670
Farragut Square	Reservation 12	n/a	DC-671
Folger Park	Reservation 16	n/a	DC-672
Franklin Park	Reservation 9	n/a	DC-673
Garfield Park	Reservation 17	Town House Square	DC-674
Samuel A. Gompers Park & Reservation 68	Reservations 68, 68A, 69, 69A	Burke Park	DC-675
Lafayette Park	Reservation 10	n/a	DC-676
Lincoln Park	Reservation 14	n/a	DC-677
Logan Circle (addendum)	Reservations 152, 153, 154, 163, 164	Iowa Circle	DC-339
National Mall & Monument Grounds	Reservations 2, 3, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6	n/a	DC-678
Marion Park	Reservation 18	n/a	DC-679
McPherson Square	Reservation 11	n/a	DC-680
Mount Vernon Square	Reservation 8	n/a	DC-682
Rawlins Park	Reservation 13	n/a	DC-683
Scott Circle	Reservations 62, 63, 64	n/a	DC-684
Seward Square	Reservations 38, 38A, 39, 40, 41, 41A, 41B, 42, 43	n/a	DC-685
Stanton Square	Reservation 15	n/a	DC-686
Thomas Circle	Reservation 66	n/a	DC-687
Washington Circle	Reservation 26	n/a	DC-688
White House Grounds & Ellipse	Reservation 1	n/a	DC-689

L'ENFANT-MCMILLAN PLAN OF WASHINGTON, DC
HABS No. DC-668 (Page 82)

Judiciary Square	Reservation 7	n/a	DC-690
Market Square	Reservations 35, 36, 36A	n/a	DC-691
East Potomac Park	Reservation 333	Hains Point	DC-692
West Potomac Park	Reservation 332	n/a	DC-693
Union Station Plaza	Reservation 334	n/a	DC-694
Pershing Park	Reservation 617	City Square No. 226	DC-695
Western Plaza (addendum)	Reservations 32, 33	n/a	DC-696
Connecticut Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-698
Delaware Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-699
Florida Avenue	Boundary Street	n/a	DC-700
Kentucky Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-701
Maryland Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-702
Massachusetts Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-703
New Hampshire Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-704
North Carolina Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-705
Pennsylvania Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-706
Potomac Avenue	Georgia Avenue	n/a	DC-707
Rhode Island Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-708
South Carolina Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-709
Tennessee Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-710
Vermont Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-711
Virginia Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-712
Indiana Avenue	Louisiana Avenue	n/a	DC-713
K Street	n/a	n/a	DC-714
New Jersey Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-715
New York Avenue	n/a	n/a	DC-716
16th Street	n/a	n/a	DC-717
8th Street	n/a	n/a	DC-718
East Capitol Street	n/a	n/a	DC-681
Rock Creek & Potomac Parkway	Reservation 360	n/a	DC-754

Appendix B:
PLANNED CAPITAL CITIES, AMERICAN CITIES, AND IDEALIZED CITIES
BEFORE AND AFTER WASHINGTON, D.C.

PLANNED CAPITAL CITIES

CITY	YEAR	PLANNER/INFLUENCE
<u>NO LONGER EXTANT</u>		
Tenochtitlan/Mexico City	1325/45-1519	Aztecs
<u>COLONIAL-FEDERAL AMERICA</u>		
Santa Fe	ca. 1609	Spaniards
Philadelphia	1662	Thomas Holme/William Penn
Annapolis	ca. 1695	Francis Nicholson
Williamsburg	ca. 1699	Francis Nicholson
Savannah	1733	James E. Oglethorpe
<i>Washington, D.C.</i>	<i>1791</i>	<i>Pierre L'Enfant</i>
<u>EUROPEAN ANTECEDENTS</u>		
Versailles	1660s	André Le Nôtre
Marly	1679-80	J. H. Mansart/André Le Nôtre
Bouchefort	1705	Germain Boffrand
St. Petersburg	1703-60s	Tsar Peter the Great
Place Stanislas, Nancy	1750-57	Germain Boffrand
<u>SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED</u>		
London	1660s	Christopher Wren/John Evelyn
Paris	1860-70s	Baron Georges Haussmann
Manila, Philippines	1905	Daniel Burnham
<u>20th CENTURY</u>		
New Delhi, India	1911-31	Sir Edwin L. Lutyens
Canberra, Australia	1912-	Walter Burley Griffin
Chandigarh, India	1950s	Le Corbusier et al.
Brasilia, Brazil	1956-60	Lucio Costa/Oscar Niemeyer
Nouakchott, Mauritania	1957	
Islamabad, Pakistan	1959	
Gaberone, Botswana	1961	
Lilongwe, Malawi	1965	
Belmopan, Belize	1970	
Dodoma, Tanzania	1973-	
Abuja, Nigeria	1976-	U.S./British consortium
Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast	1983-	
Pahang, Malaysia	1983-	
Patagonia (vic.), Argentina	1987-	

PLANNED AMERICAN CITIES

CITY	DATE	DESIGNER
Buffalo, NY	1804	Joseph Ellicott
Detroit, MI	1805	Augustus Woodward
Riverside, IL	1868	Olmsted and Vaux
Radburn, NJ	1928	Henry C. Wright & Clarence Stein
Greenbelt, MD	1935-38	Resettlement Administration & H. Walker, R. J. Woodward, T. P. Ellington
Levittown, NY	1947	Levitt & Sons
Reston, VA	1964+	Robert E. Simon Jr. & Reston Land Corporation
Columbia, MD	1965+	Rouse Company

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IDEALIZED CITIES

CITY	YEAR	DESIGNER
Ideal City	1st cent., BC	Vitruvius
Garden City	1898-1902	Ebenezer Howard
<i>Cité Industrielle</i>	1911-17	Tony Garnier
<i>Citta Nuova</i>	1914-18	Antoni Sant'Elia
<i>Une Ville Contemporaine</i>	1921-22	Le Corbusier
<i>Ville Radieuse</i>	1928-46	Le Corbusier
Broadacre City	1930s	Frank Lloyd Wright

Greenbelt Towns

1930s

Resettlement Administration

Unité d'Habitation

1940-50s

Le Corbusier

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National Mall & Memorial Parks
Washington
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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