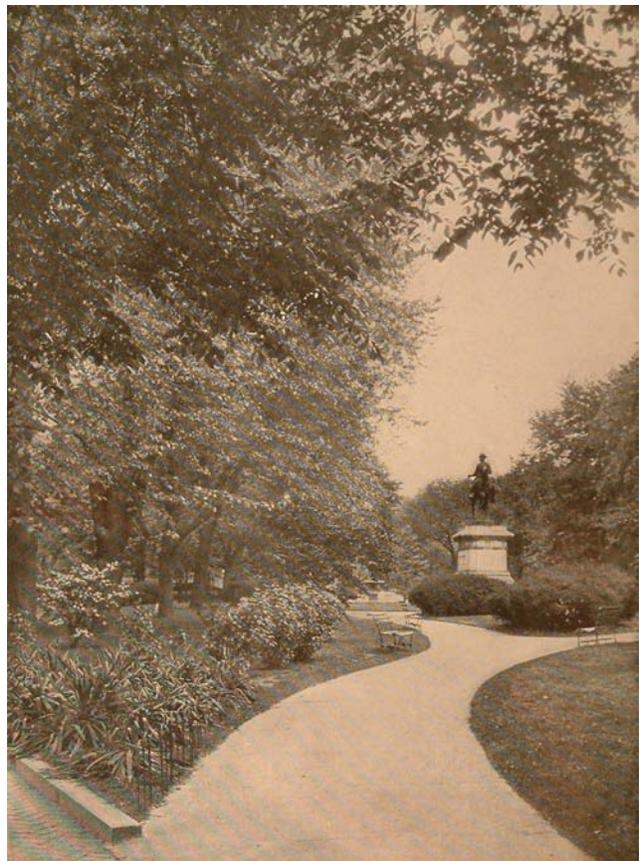

National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
2004
Revised 2005



McPherson Square
National Capital Parks-Central

Contents

Executive Summary

Component Landscape Description

CLI Hierarchy Description

Location Map

Boundary Description

Regional Context

Site Plan

Chronology

Statement Of Significance

History

Analysis And Evaluation

Management Information

Appendix

Executive Summary

General Introduction to the CLI

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) is a comprehensive inventory of all historically significant landscapes within the National Park System. This evaluated inventory identifies and documents each landscape's location, physical development, significance, National Register of Historic Places eligibility, condition, as well as other valuable information for park management. Inventoried landscapes are listed on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places, or otherwise treated as cultural resources. To automate the inventory, the Cultural Landscapes Automated Inventory Management System (CLAIMS) database was created in 1996. CLAIMS provides an analytical tool for querying information associated with the CLI.

The CLI, like the List of Classified Structures (LCS), assists the National Park Service (NPS) in its efforts to fulfill the identification and management requirements associated with Section 110(a) of the National Historic Preservation Act, NPS Management Policies (2001), and Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management (1998). Since launching the CLI nationwide, the NPS, in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), is required to report on an annual performance plan that is tied to 6-year strategic plan. The NPS strategic plan has two goals related to cultural landscapes: condition (1a7) and progress on the CLI (1b2b). Because the CLI is the baseline of cultural landscapes in the National Park System, it serves as the vehicle for tracking these goals.

For these reasons, the Park Cultural Landscapes Program considers the completion of the CLI to be a servicewide priority. The information in the CLI is useful at all levels of the park service. At the national and regional levels it is used to inform planning efforts and budget decisions. At the park level, the CLI assists managers to plan, program, and prioritize funds. It is a record of cultural landscape treatment and management decisions and the physical narrative may be used to enhance interpretation programs.

Implementation of the CLI is coordinated on the Region/Support Office level. Each Region/Support Office creates a priority list for CLI work based on park planning needs, proposed development projects, lack of landscape documentation (which adversely affects the preservation or management of the resource), baseline information needs and Region/Support office priorities. This list is updated annually to respond to changing needs and priorities. Completed CLI records are uploaded at the end of the fiscal year to the National Center for Cultural Resources, Park Cultural Landscapes Program in Washington, DC. Only data officially entered into the National Center's CLI database is considered "certified data" for GPRA reporting.

The CLI is completed in a multi-level process with each level corresponding to a specific degree of effort and detail. From Level 0: Park Reconnaissance Survey through Level II: Landscape Analysis and Evaluation, additional information is collected, prior information is refined, and decisions are made regarding if and how to proceed. The relationship between Level 0, I, and II is direct and the CLI for a landscape or component landscape inventory unit is not considered finished until Level II is complete.

A number of steps are involved in completing a Level II inventory record. The process begins when the CLI team meets with park management and staff to clarify the purpose of the CLI and is followed by historical research, documentation, and fieldwork. Information is derived from two efforts: secondary sources that are usually available in the park's or regions' files, libraries, and archives and on-site landscape investigation(s). This information is entered into CLI database as text or graphics. A park report is generated from the database and becomes the vehicle for consultation with the park and the

SHPO/TPO.

Level III: Feature Inventory and Assessment is a distinct inventory level in the CLI and is optional. This level provides an opportunity to inventory and evaluate important landscape features identified at Level II as contributing to the significance of a landscape or component landscape, not listed on the LCS. This level allows for an individual landscape feature to be assessed and the costs associated with treatment recorded.

The ultimate goal of the Park Cultural Landscapes Program is a complete inventory of landscapes, component landscapes, and where appropriate, associated landscape features in the National Park System. The end result, when combined with the LCS, will be an inventory of all physical aspects of any given property.

Relationship between the CLI and a CLR

While there are some similarities, the CLI Level II is not the same as a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). Using secondary sources, the CLI Level II provides information to establish historic significance by determining whether there are sufficient extant features to convey the property's historic appearance and function. The CLI includes the preliminary identification and analysis to define contributing features, but does not provide the more definitive detail contained within a CLR, which involves more in-depth research, using primary rather than secondary source material.

The CLR is a treatment document and presents recommendations on how to preserve, restore, or rehabilitate the significant landscape and its contributing features based on historical documentation, analysis of existing conditions, and the Secretary of the Interior's standards and guidelines as they apply to the treatment of historic landscapes. The CLI, on the other hand, records impacts to the landscape and condition (good, fair, poor) in consultation with park management. Stabilization costs associated with mitigating impacts may be recorded in the CLI and therefore the CLI may advise on simple and appropriate stabilization measures associated with these costs if that information is not provided elsewhere.

When the park decides to manage and treat an identified cultural landscape, a CLR may be necessary to work through the treatment options and set priorities. A historical landscape architect can assist the park in deciding the appropriate scope of work and an approach for accomplishing the CLR. When minor actions are necessary, a CLI Level II park report may provide sufficient documentation to support the Section 106 compliance process.

Park Information

Park Name: National Capital Parks-Central
Administrative Unit: National Capital Parks-Central
Park Organization Code: 3400
Park Alpha Code: NACC
Subunit/District Name: National Capital Parks-Central - L'Enfant Plan Reservations
Subunit/District Organization Code: 340A
Subunit/District Alpha Code: NACC

Property Level And CLI Number

Property Level: Component Landscape
Name: McPherson Square
CLI Identification Number: 600230
Parent Landscape CLI ID Number: 600215

Inventory Summary

Inventory Level: Level II

Completion Status:

Level 0

Date Data Collected - Level 0: 9/29/1999
Level 0 Recorder: Maureen D. Joseph
Date Level 0 Entered: 9/29/1999
Level 0 Data Entry Recorder: Maureen D. Joseph
Level 0 Site Visit: No

Level I

Date Level I Data Collected: 9/29/1999
Level I Data Collection: Maureen D. Joseph
Date Level I Entered: 9/29/1999
Level I Data Entry Recorder: Maureen D. Joseph
Level I Site Visit: Yes

Level II

Date Level II Data Collected: 8/25/2004

Date Level II Entered: 8/25/2004
Level II Data Entry Recorder: Kay Fanning
Level II Site Visit: Yes
Date of Concurrence 9/19/2005

Explanatory Narrative:

The Level II Cultural Landscapes Inventory for McPherson Square was written in 2004 by Kay Fanning, Ph.D., Landscape Historian for the Cultural Landscapes Program, National Capital Region, working from a draft and notes prepared by National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) intern Stephanie Ryberg during the fall of 2003. The initial meeting with the park was held in June 2003. Assistance was given by other staff of the Cultural Landscapes Program. Stephanie Ryberg gathered most of the information.

Research was conducted at the NPS-NCR headquarters (maps, reports, historic photos and digital maps from TIC), NCR Maintenance Division, the Washington Historical Society of the City Museum (historic photos), the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Branch of the Washington, D.C., Public Library (historic photos), and the National Archives and Records Administration (maps).

Further information on McPherson Square is available in the cultural resource files of National Mall & Memorial Parks (formerly National Capital Parks - Central). Cultural Landscapes Program staff was not aware these files existed and did not use them in preparing this document.

In April 2005, the name of National Capital Parks - Central was changed to National Mall & Memorial Parks. This change has not yet been made to the database.

Revisions:

Revision Date: 6/21/2005
Recorder: Kay Fanning

Explanatory Narrative:

Final revisions and comments by park staff were incorporated into the document.

Component Landscape Description

McPherson Square is a 1.66-acre park lying in the heart of Washington, D.C.'s central business district. It occupies an entire city square surrounded by K Street to the north, I Street to the south, and 15th Street to the east and west. The park is located within the corridor of Vermont Avenue, which extends to the northeast and southwest. In plan, McPherson Square is a mirror image of Farragut Square, one block to the west.

The buildings surrounding the park are, for the most part, twelve-story commercial and institutional buildings dating from the mid-twentieth century. The circulation system, built in 1930-31, determines the way space is organized within the park, and comprises a pair of parallel walks along the Vermont Avenue axis, a single walk on the opposite axis, and two narrow curving walks on the east and west sides. The parallel walks divide the park into two triangular areas with a central oval. All walks lead to the center, where a small, circular paved area surrounds the statue of the Civil War hero, Union Brigadier General James B. McPherson. Large deciduous trees line the boundaries of the park and are placed more randomly along the major walks, emphasizing the spatial pattern. Concrete sidewalks maintained by the District government surround the park.

Owing to its location, McPherson Square is heavily used by local residents, office workers, and tourists. Thousands of commuters pass through daily, many heading to and from the McPherson Square Metro (subway) stop south of the square. Others gather in the park for lunch. Indigent people frequent the park and participate in an evening food service program supported by a local charity, which parks a van along the west side of the park.

The sculpture depicts Gen. McPherson mounted on a horse and turning in the saddle to face west, surveying a field of battle. The twelve-foot-high bronze statue stands on a fifteen-foot-high granite pedestal, placed on an earthen mound (that hides the bottom step of the three-stepped pedestal base). The pedestal is composed of moldings made up of numerous symbolic decorative elements.

Granite curbs line the outer edges of the park's grass panels on the west, north, and east sides (the curved sections at the entrances to park walks are concrete, and the curb at the south is concrete). Sections of modern post-and-chain fencing line the outer corners of the triangular grass panels and the entrances to the park walks. A decorative cast-iron fence, with scrollwork in the fascia and balusters topped by finials, surrounds the earthen mound on which the statue stands.

All lights in the park are Washington Globe lamps made of Lexan (a thermoplastic resin) mounted on modern posts that are octagonal in cross-section (rather than the classical Washington Standard post more typically used in the downtown area). The lights are placed around the statue plaza and along the main loop walk.

The benches staggered along the park's walks are all are of a standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks in the 1930s and installed here some time between 1957 and 1963. Cast-iron frames support wood-slat backs and seats. Curved struts join front and back legs, and the struts terminate in simple scrolls. The benches stand on concrete pads set into the lawns. Two varieties of trash receptacles are used in the park: the so-called "tulip style," with cylindrical wood-slat containers holding steel cans and supported on single posts; and an older type, with open wire-mesh barrels containing separate trash barrels. A third type, a steel-slat cylindrical container with a flared top, was placed by the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) on the sidewalks around the park. (Cigarette receptacles that are a smaller version of this design are paired with some of these receptacles.)

A single cast-concrete Art Deco-style drinking fountain, probably dating from 1930-31, stands southeast of the statue. In the corresponding location to the northwest is a modern handicap-accessible fountain. A steel-and-Plexiglas bus shelter located at the southwest end of the park serves several busy bus routes.

Planting in McPherson Square consists primarily of large deciduous trees placed on six grass panels, whose shape is determined by the walk system. The park is symmetrical along the diagonal, northeast-southwest axis of the former Vermont Avenue corridor (removed in 1876). On this axis, two parallel walks create two half-oval grass panels; together, walks and panels form a loop, or oval, whose centerpoint is the McPherson statue (for convenience, this form is referred to as an “oval” even though both ends are somewhat squared). There is a pair of identical triangular panels to the north and south, and another pair to the east and west, on the park’s long sides; these longer triangles are bisected by the narrow mid-block walks.

Trees are placed along the boundaries and at the corners of panels. Most trees are native deciduous species; a few are exotics, such as the large Chinese elm that intrudes into the walk south of the statue and the three Japanese sophoras. The only tree that actually stands in the center of a panel rather than near an edge is the huge red oak in the southern triangular panel; this tree probably dates from the late nineteenth century and was likely one of the first trees planted. A large ginkgo near the sidewalk in this triangle may also date from before 1920. In 1981, magnolias and crabapples were planted around the statue plaza.

Red oaks and American lindens border the park on the east and west. Only one elm remains along the east, street side of Fifteenth Street, where a line of elms formerly provided a continuous canopy. Several oaks of different varieties have been planted south of this elm. No street trees remain on the north and south sides.

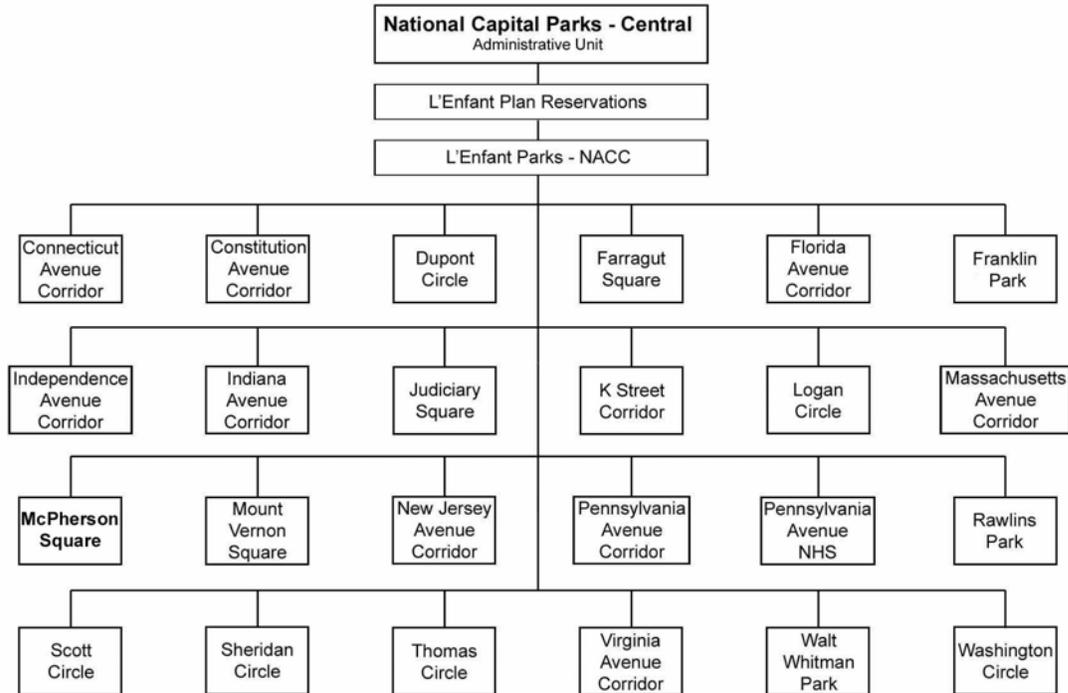
Hedges and annual beds at the ends and near the statue, situated on the two half-oval panels along the diagonal axis, were recently removed. The earth mound around the statue’s base, formerly planted with azaleas, is now covered with grass.

The primary vistas from McPherson Square are along the parallel walks that follow the line of Vermont Avenue through the park. Looking southwest along this axis provides a vista of the northeast corner of Lafayette Park, one block away. The bus shelter obstructs this vista. Looking northeast affords a vista of Thomas Circle, at the intersection of Vermont Avenue with 15th Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Also significant are the reciprocal views between McPherson Square and the surrounding mid-twentieth-century buildings.

Overall, McPherson Square maintains a medium level of integrity. The statue remains in its original location. The circulation system dating to 1930-31 is intact, though the paving – which may be more recent – is deteriorating. Spatial organization and land use have not changed greatly, except for increasing numbers of pedestrians. Vegetation retains medium integrity to the 1930-31 planting plan; though there have been removals and replacements of trees, both trees and lawns have kept essentially the same layout. The hedges that formerly surrounded the major grass panels have been removed, as have several trees added in the 1980s that partly blocked the vistas along the Vermont Avenue corridor. Most small-scale features date from the 1960s or later, with the exception of the concrete drinking fountain, which does not function.

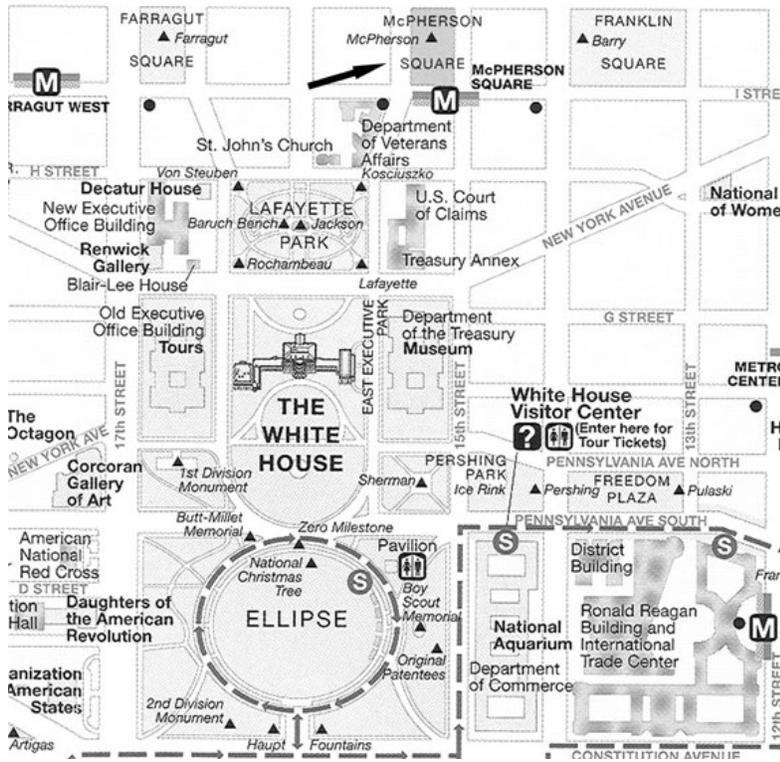
Cultural Landscapes Inventory Hierarchy Description

McPherson Square is a component landscape of National Mall & Memorial Parks (formerly National Capital Parks-Central) and a part of the L'Enfant Plan for the City of Washington. The landscape consists of all of Reservation 11.



This graphic depicts the 24 L'Enfant parks and street corridors administered by National Capital Parks - Central. (CLP digital photofile "McPherson Square/GLI/other/ revised McPherson hierarchy Oct. 2004")

Location Map



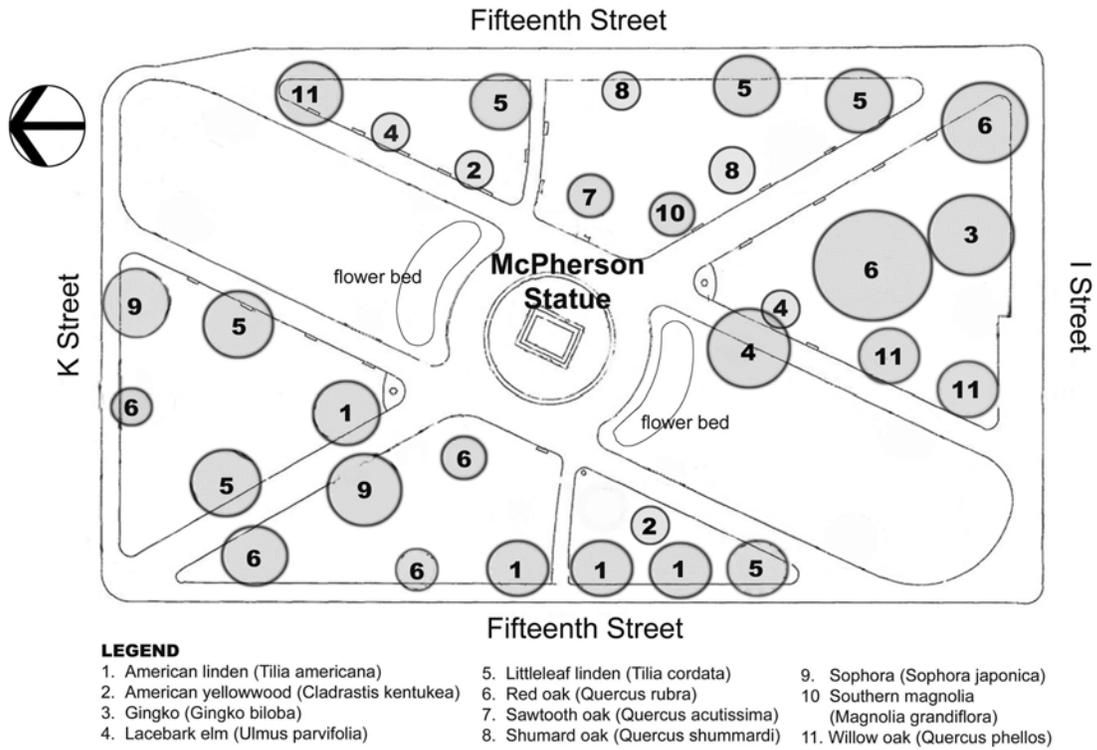
Map depicting McPherson Square in relation to Farragut Square, Franklin Park, and White House. (CLP digital photofile "MS/CL/other/basic location map, Dec. 28," from "Washington: The Nation's Capital," map produced by DOI/NPS, Wash.: GPO, 2000)

Boundary Description

McPherson Square occupies an entire city block bounded by K Street on the north, 15th Street on the east and west, and I Street on the south.

Site Plan

Site plan showing existing vegetation and circulation in McPherson Square. (CLP digital file "final site plan REV Aug 15 2005 flat")



Chronology

Year	Event	Description
1687 AD	Platted	The tract named Port Royal was patented to John Peerce.
1790 - 1802 AD	Land Transfer	The three city commissioners appointed by President George Washington had jurisdiction over the reservations.
1791 AD	Established	The land comprising McPherson Square was set aside for federal government use under the L'Enfant Plan. Planner: Pierre Charles L'Enfant
1791 AD	Land Transfer	The land was donated to the United States by Edward Peerce as part of the land required for streets and avenues. Owner: Edward Peerce Samuel Davidson
1802 - 1816 AD	Land Transfer	Responsibility for the reservations was transferred from the three commissioners to a Superintendent of Public Buildings, also appointed by the president.
1816 - 1849 AD	Land Transfer	The Superintendent of Public Buildings was replaced by a Commissioner of Public Buildings.
1849 - 1867 AD	Land Transfer	The office of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, which had jurisdiction over the city reservations, was transferred from the authority of the president to the new Department of the Interior.
1867 AD	Land Transfer	McPherson Square, along with the other reservations, was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPBG), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, War Department.

1868 AD	Built	Vermont Avenue was cut diagonally through the square. The square was enclosed with a cast-iron post-and-chain fence. Walks were paved, grasses were seeded, and a combination gas lamp and drinking fountain was installed.
1868 AD	Memorialized	The square was officially named "Scott Square" in honor of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. memorialized: Winfield Scott
1872 AD	Built	Other improvements were made to the park: more paving of walks, additional post-and-chain fencing, and the introduction of water for irrigation and drinking.
1872 AD	Altered	Orville E. Babcock, Chief Engineer of the OPBG, re-opened Vermont Avenue, causing the square to be once more divided into two triangular sections. Engineer: Orville E. Babcock
1873 AD	Planted	Grading and planting of Scott Square began.
1876 AD	Altered	The OPBG removed the section of Vermont Avenue that passed through the park, filling and sodding the excavation. A pair of diagonal walks was built along the former road alignment, crossed in the center by a single walk set along the opposite diagonal.
1876 AD	Memorialized	An equestrian statue of Brigadier General James Birdseye McPherson was erected in the center of the park, and the name was changed to McPherson Square. Namesake: James B. McPherson Sculptor: Louis T. Rebisso
1877 AD	Planted	Four new trees were planted. Four semicircular flower beds with vases were installed at the base of the McPherson statue.
1877 AD	Rehabilitated	Concrete walks were built (probably replacing asphalt) and new or additional water and gas lines were installed.

1891 AD	Rehabilitated	The walks in the park were redesigned in a symmetrical curving layout and paved with bituminous asphalt. The post-and-chain fence was removed.
1905 AD	Rehabilitated	New water pipes were laid, and existing pipes were extended.
1911 AD	Altered	The flower beds at the base of the statue were changed from semicircular to triangular.
1913 AD	Rehabilitated	Two new gas lights were added, bringing the number of gas lights in the park to four.
1919 AD	Planted	Twenty-two new shrubs and 250 perennials were planted (300 more perennials were planted in 1920).
1920 AD	Planned	Plans were developed for a new, more formal circulation system recalling the original layout of diagonal walks.
1925 AD	Land Transfer	The name of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was changed to the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, and it was transferred from the authority of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the president.
1930 AD	Planted	Four American elms were planted on D.C. property along 15th Street, on the park's eastern side.
1931 AD	Rehabilitated	The plan of 1920 was revised and implemented. New trees were planted and new benches installed.
1933 AD	Land Transfer	McPherson Square and the other reservations were transferred to the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.
1960 AD	Rehabilitated	Probably in the 1960s, "mushroom" lamps were installed in the park, replacing the glass globe fixtures on classical posts that had probably been in use there since the early 20th century.

1972 AD	Built	The McPherson Square Metro station was opened southwest of the park.
1993 AD	Rehabilitated	New lights were installed: Washington Globe lights replaced 1960s-vintage "mushroom" lights."

Statement Of Significance

McPherson Square is a contributing resource for the National Register of Historic Places multiple property nomination, “The L’Enfant Plan for the City of Washington, D.C.” (1997); the 1876 statue of Brig. Gen. McPherson is listed in another multiple property nomination, “Civil War Statuary in the District of Columbia” (1978). This Cultural Landscape Inventory defines two periods of significance for McPherson Square. The first is the single year 1791, when the tract appeared on the L’Enfant Plan as one of the sites set aside for ceremonial government use. The second is 1867 to 1933, extending from the year the downtown parks and reservations were transferred to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (which then began to make comprehensive improvements to their landscapes) to the year these parcels were transferred from the OPBG to the National Park Service. This second period includes all the major design changes.

McPherson Square is eligible under National Register Criteria A, B, and C. As stated in the L’Enfant Plan nomination:

“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. . . . The plan meets National Register Criterion A for its relationship with the creation of the new United States of America and the creation of a capital city; it meets Criterion B because of its design by Pierre L’Enfant, and subsequent development and enhancement by numerous significant persons and groups responsible for the city’s landscape architecture and regional planning; and it meets Criterion C as a well-preserved, comprehensive, Baroque plan with Beaux-Arts modifications.” (“L’Enfant Plan” nomination 1997:Section 8, pp. 1, 2)

These factors applying to the plan as a whole are also relevant to its constituent parts, including McPherson Square. With Farragut Square and Lafayette Park, and the three major streets of Connecticut Avenue, Sixteenth Street, and Vermont Avenue on which they are situated, McPherson Square forms a “patte d’oie,” or goose foot. This was a standard feature of Baroque planning that served to focus attention on sites of outstanding importance, and to open up axial views. The park is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for its 1930s design, which was based on McMillan Plan precepts.

The park’s design features, most prominently the walk system, have always been focused on the centrally located McPherson statue. As it exists today, McPherson Square retains a design implemented in 1930-31, when its current circulation system was built to replace the two curving S-shaped walks that had defined its circulation since 1890-91. The designer was Irving W. Payne, a landscape architect with the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (and later with National Capital Parks). The 1930-31 walk system essentially reintroduced the circulation that had existed in the park from 1876-1890. During the 1930s redesign, a few trees were retained or moved within the park, but the overall planting pattern of lawns and trees was altered in accordance with the new walk system. As in other downtown parks, the shape of the grass panels results from the walks, and the trees are placed primarily along sidewalks and interior walks, reinforcing the pattern of circulation. Most alterations made to the park since 1931 have involved changes to the site furnishings, and alterations to the planting plan, including the addition and removal of trees and flower beds, and of hedges around the major grass panels – the two panels forming an oval along the Vermont Avenue axis.

The blocks surrounding McPherson Square comprise a largely intact early-twentieth-century commercial district. Most buildings fronting the park were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s. They replaced

smaller-scale structures dating from the 1850s-1890s, including freestanding mansions to the north and south and a church to the east.

The changes made to the park's walk system in the 1930s not only revived an older, historic pattern, but were harmonious with contemporary notions of what constituted appropriate pedestrian circulation in city parks. Why the rehabilitation of the McPherson Square walks was undertaken in 1930-31 is not known. It was similar to work implemented in other major downtown parks several years later, including Lafayette Park, Franklin Park, and Lincoln Park; these were projects funded by programs under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, most likely the Public Works Administration. In all these parks, curvilinear walk systems were replaced by symmetrical systems based on regular geometric figures, such as circles, ovals, and rectangles, that placed walks on relatively direct axial routes connecting with sidewalks and streets.