

1866-1900 Park Landscape & Planning

During the 1866-1900 post-Civil War period, numerous features were added to and removed from the National Mall and Union Square landscape. Some features were relatively small in scale, such as fences and gas lights. Other features, like the network of drives and paths and the Armory Hospital complex were much larger. In order to establish individual features and better realize the vision of the National Mall and Union Square as a picturesque pleasure ground, considerable ground disturbance was required. Laying out of water pipes and sewers required trenching beneath the finished grade. Construction of buildings and circulation features brought fill materials into the National Mall. It is probable that additional fill materials were placed on top of areas filled previously with a variety of fill materials imported from building sites. Both the National Mall and Union Square landscapes were changed during this era, as indicated by the layout outline drawing (page 8). The key source document presented for this period is the 1891 “Street Pavements, City of Washington” plan (page 8), by which date the National Mall and Union Square are developed as a park landscape in the naturalistic style for strolling along curving walks and traversing circuitous drives, reminiscent of A. J. Downing’s 1851 design (page 7).

After the Civil War, the District of Columbia embarked on a range of improvements to city parks and other public spaces. Improvements to the National Mall and Union Square areas received particular attention during this period, as the landscape was shaped into a stylistically unified park landscape under the direction of the newly-created Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The landscape was divided into a series of reservations, from west to east: Monument Grounds, Agricultural Grounds, Smithsonian Grounds, Armory Square, Public Gardens, Botanic Garden, and Capitol Grounds. Streets marked the divisions between the reservations at 14th, 12th, 7th, 6th, 4½, 3rd, and 1st Streets.

In the 1866-1900 period, the naturalistic landscape of informal plantings and curving routes that characterized the Smithsonian Grounds was expanded with variations to cover the length of the National Mall. The Botanic Garden was developed at the Union Square site with informal tree plantings and gardens organized around the greenhouse complex and, later, the Bartholdi Fountain, installed in 1877. Beginning in the late 1860s, the Agricultural Grounds developed in both formal and informal styles as gardens between 12th and 14th Streets. Features added to the landscape here included drives, walks, trees, shrubs, flower beds, pavilions, and greenhouses. The Smithsonian Grounds were continuously improved with similar landscape features. Separated by the railroad lines, Armory Square Grounds and the Public Gardens, labeled on the 1891 map (page 8), are laid out and planted as a naturalistic parkland. The Public Gardens are bounded by the diagonal Missouri and Maine Avenues.

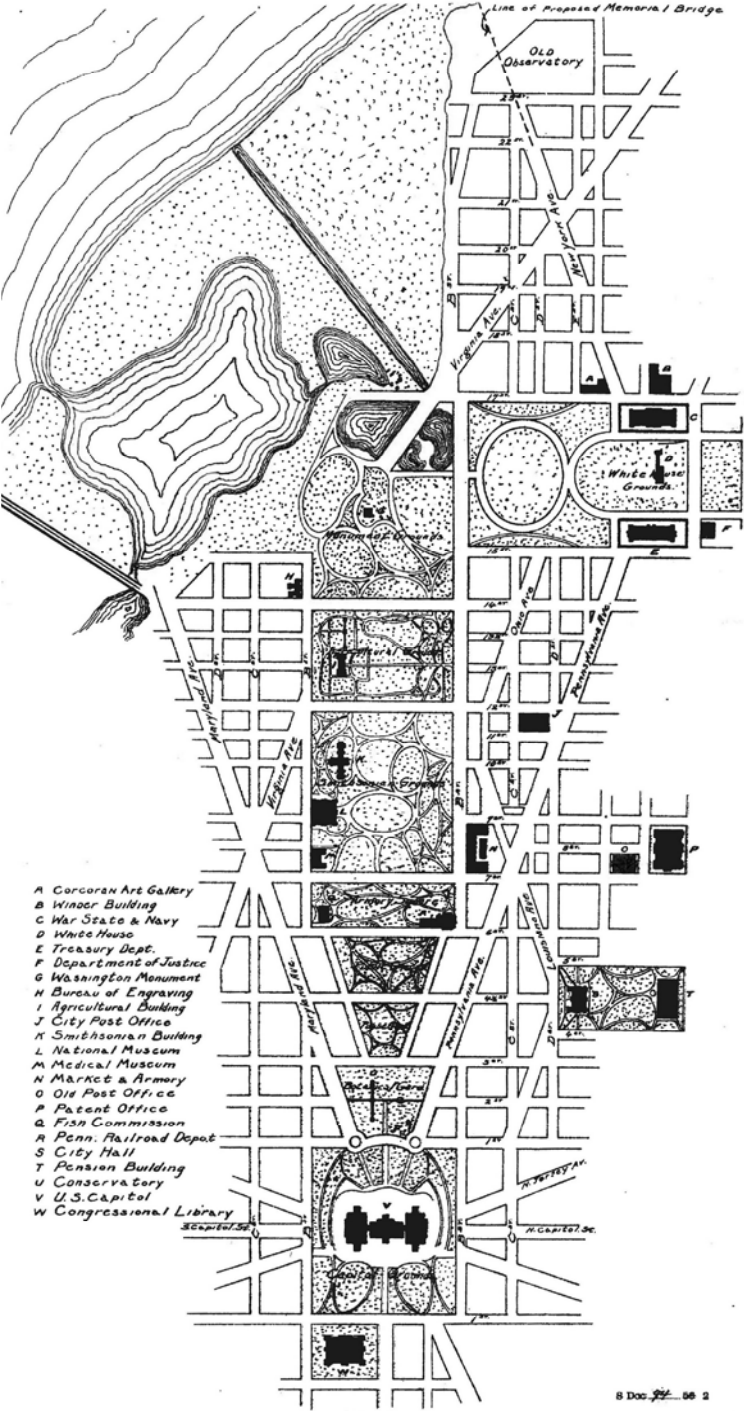
Until the 1870s, when the canal bed was filled in, the Washington Canal bisected the National Mall between 3rd and 6th Streets. By 1871, the removal of Civil War temporary hospital facilities and the filling in of the Washington City Canal created additional space for picturesque pleasure grounds on the National Mall at Armory Square, east of the Smithsonian. Within a few years, the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad extended rail lines along 6th Street with a depot and station constructed to the north. In 1887, a stone wall was erected along the west edge of the rail yard, separating these service uses from the park grounds to the west. Later an earthen berm was filled and graded to further obscure views of railroad activity. Following the construction of the rail depot, water pipes were laid through Armory Square. After grading, walks and drives were excavated and paved in gravel, which was often taken from nearby Reservation 17 (Garfield Park).

East of Armory Square, in the Public Gardens, additional grading was also undertaken. Fill materials were brought in, raising the grade of the ground plane to meet the bordering public streets that were filled when constructed. Following grading efforts, drives and curving walks were built throughout the grounds, akin to the walks and drives established within the Smithsonian Grounds, Agricultural Grounds, and Armory Square. As seen in historic photographs, brick or cobblestone gutters were installed along walks and drives, and post and chain fences were placed throughout the National Mall. In addition, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds installed benches, gas lamps, and drinking fountains for the users of these public grounds.

To the east, at Union Square, the Botanic Garden was enlarged and improved. Beginning in 1866 or 1867 an iron fence was constructed around the north half of the garden. The existing greenhouse was enlarged circa 1870, and an identical greenhouse was erected east of the original, joined by wings to a large central Palm House. Symmetrical walks, both curved and axial, were installed to provide access through the site. In addition to the construction of circulation elements, landscape features, and structures, a number of monuments were erected within the Union Square. In 1877, the Bartholdi Fountain was moved to the Botanic Garden grounds from the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. In 1877, the Peace Monument was erected in a circular area at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and 1st Street. Ten years later, the Garfield Memorial was constructed at the corresponding intersection to the south, at Maryland Avenue and 1st Street. During the late 19th century, the National Mall and Union Square landscape underwent changes and improvements and the cumulative construction activity resulted in additional fill and ground disturbance.

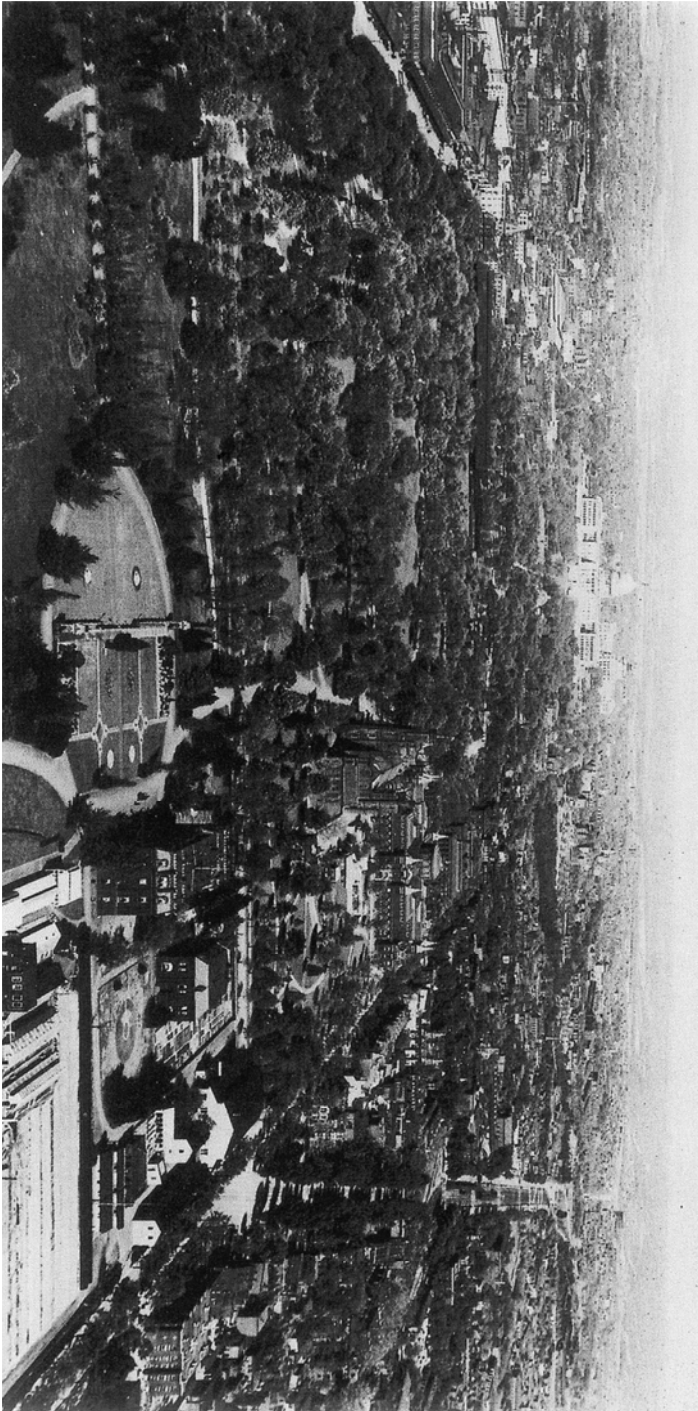
By 1900, the approach to the use and character of the National Mall was under scrutiny. A 1900 American Institute of Architects (AIA) meeting concerning the redesign of Washington, DC resulted in the formation of an AIA committee on legislation, which lobbied Congress to undertake serious examination of the city’s design problems with this core area at its center. The period closes with this initial AIA plan.

During the 1866-1900 period, several buildings and other structures were constructed adjacent to the National Mall and Union Square, within the Mall reservations between B Street to the north and Independence Avenue to the south. At the Agricultural Grounds, a three-story brick structure was erected in 1868 to house the Agriculture Department, and a large greenhouse was built to its west. Within the Smithsonian Grounds, the brick and iron National Museum (today the Arts and Industries Building) was constructed southeast of the Castle beginning in 1878 or 1879. The building and surrounding landscape was complete in 1880. In 1881, the Washington Armory became the headquarters of the U. S. Fish & Fisheries Commission, which adapted the building site for its use. In 1887, the brick Army Medical Museum was built east of the National Museum. Though outside the bounds of the National Mall and Union Square study area, these adjacencies provide valuable context to the development of this historic landscape.



1900 AIA EXISTING MALL PLAN

Source: “S. Doc 94, 56 2 [Existing Plan, c1900]”, Papers Relating to the Improvement of the City of Washington, AIA, G.Brown, ed., Washington: GPO, 1901. MMP–Brown–ExPlan–Fig31–1900



1901 PHOTO OF MALL, LOOKING EAST

Source: “The Mall, Looking East to the Capitol,” 1901. Courtesy Smithsonian Institute. MMP–Passeigneur–p34–Washington–1900–detail

 Heritage Landscapes LLC Preservation Landscape Architects & Planners Cheshire, VT 802.428.4330 Nashville, TN 615.982.9966 Nashville, TN 615.982.9966	TITLE OF SERIES MALL MAPPING		CONTRACT NO. 1443C2000091500	SHEET TITLE
	RECONSTRUCT TURF & SOIL ON THE NATIONAL MALL NATIONAL MALL & MEMORIAL PARKS WASHINGTON, DC		PMS/PRG NO. NAMA 151515	1866-1900 2
			DATE JUNE 2010	PAGE 9