

1901-1933 Park & Monument Landscape

During the 1901-1933 era, the naturalistic park remained and was continued. This time was an interim period between the publication of the McMillian Plan and the implementation of a major landscape effort on the National Mall and Union Square which utilized the plan as a guiding vision. While the approved McMillian Plan was not implemented during this period, the National Mall and Union Square landscape witnessed substantial change. Nineteenth century patterns and features were removed, and large-scale structures were erected to aid in the war effort. The layout outline (page 11) reflects both the continuity and change that characterized this period. All of these undertakings resulted in varying levels of disturbance through the National Mall and Union Square landscape. The key source documents presented for the 1901-1933 period are the 1927 planimetric aerial photograph of the National Mall (page 11) and the 1933 plan titled "Historic Trees-Union Square" (pages 11 and 12). These images document the character of the National Mall landscape prior to a shift in direction to a linear, axial organization in the mid-1930s.

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) planning effort in 1900 helped bring about formation of the Senate Park Commission, better known as the McMillian Commission, in 1901 under the leadership of Senator James McMillan with Secretary Charles Moore. In March 1901, Congress appointed the Commission, whose members included Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Though McMillian Commission published their report on the design of Washington, DC in 1902, implementation of the plan was slow to gather momentum. The McMillian Commission sought to recapture the fundamental nature of the L'Enfant Plan through elimination of discordant elements. "Although [the National Mall] has been cut into pieces," noted the Commission, "still the L'Enfant idea of treating the entire space as a unit has never been entirely lost sight of." The Commission emphasized the notion of the National Mall as a composed entity. In order to realize the L'Enfant vision, the report outlined the necessity of establishing axial relations between the legislative and executive branches of government.

The 1902 McMillian Plan rearticulated the promenade and *topis verts* arrangement developed by L'Enfant in 1791, and elaborated on a more specific planting plan. The McMillian Plan specified an open, scenic vista along the axis between the Washington Monument and the Capitol, but replaced the central traffic avenue from the L'Enfant Plan with "an expanse of undulating green a mile and a half long and three hundred feet broad, walled on either side by elms, planted in formal procession four abreast." The roadways were moved to the outer edges of the central, green carpet, overhung by trees. In the plan, north-south city streets traverse the National Mall at grade, bringing bustling city traffic through the National Mall landscape (page 13).

In 1910, Congress established the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), a panel of experts charged with advising the government on the location and design of statues, fountains, and monuments in the District of Columbia. The CFA, including original McMillian Commission members Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and secretary Charles Moore, encouraged implementation of the McMillian Plan. Charles Moore was appointed chair of the CFA in 1915 and acted for 22 years in this position, serving as an enduring link between the CFA and McMillian Plan. The McMillian planning effort was promoted over the course of several decades by the CFA, and a comprehensive plan for Washington, DC was eventually set into motion in the 1920s and 1930s.

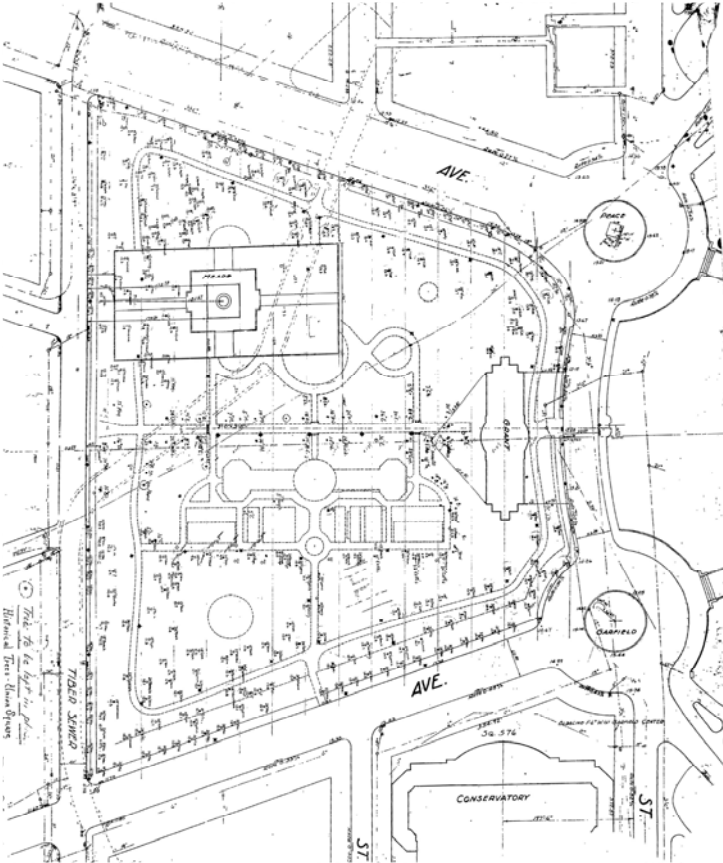
During the first few decades of the 20th century, changes were carried out within the Victorian park-like National Mall and Union Square landscape. In 1907, the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Depot was removed from Armory Square at the eastern end. The removal of the rail lines connected the park-like spaces to the east and west, creating a continuous swath from the elevated Capitol to the Washington Monument. Around this same time a new feature was added at the eastern edge of the National Mall at 1st Street: in 1908, construction began on the Grant Memorial. The impressive marble and bronze monument was completed in 1922. With this feature, Union Square became a formal space within the landscape. It also acted as a terminus that was at the same grade as the broader National Mall landscape. Shortly after the Grant Memorial was completed, the Meade Memorial was built to the west, north of the Botanic Garden building.

US involvement in World War I introduced considerable new uses and features into the National Mall landscape. Starting in 1918, a series of temporary buildings, or "Tempos", was constructed through the interior of the National Mall to provide office space for federal workers. A power plant was built between 6th and 7th Streets as part of the Tempo complex. While these buildings were considered temporary structures, they were considerably large in scale, requiring substantial concrete foundations and footings to be excavated into the ground plane.

World War I necessitated support facilities and this central axis with large open spaces nestled between the Capitol Building and the White House offered a prime location. At the end of the 1920s, the National Mall was still Victorian in character, with dense tree and shrub plantings and curving paths and roads built over preceding fifty years. World War I-era Tempos remained standing on the National Mall.

In the late 1920s, Congress charged the newly-created National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) with creating a comprehensive plan for the city. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was a NCPPC commissioner, facilitating coordinated efforts between the CFA and the NCPPC in support of the McMillian Plan. In the 1930s, Olmsted Jr., member of both the McMillian Commission and CFA, specified broad, open lawn panels flanked by tree panels. The curvilinear circulation system laid out in the 19th century would be removed and a simplified, rectilinear system created in its place. By 1931, removal of most of the structures and gardens from the National Mall interior had begun. The Bartholdi Fountain was removed in 1927, and demolition of the Botanic Garden site at Union Square began in 1933.

During the 1901-1933 period, a number of changes to adjacent areas affected the context of the National Mall and Union Square study area. In 1904, a new National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History) was built north of the National Mall between 9th and 12th Streets. Between 1904 and 1908, two new wings were constructed for the Department of Agriculture south of the original building. The Freer Gallery of Art was built on the south side of the National Mall north of Independence Avenue between 1913 and 1923. In 1930, the original Department of Agriculture building was removed, and a central pavilion was constructed on the site of the razed building and connected with the 1904-1908 wings.



1933 UNION SQUARE HISTORIC TREES PLAN

Source: "Historic Trees – Union Square," 1933. Courtesy National Capital Region, NPS. MMP–NCR–802\_89084–1933–Historic–Trees–detail

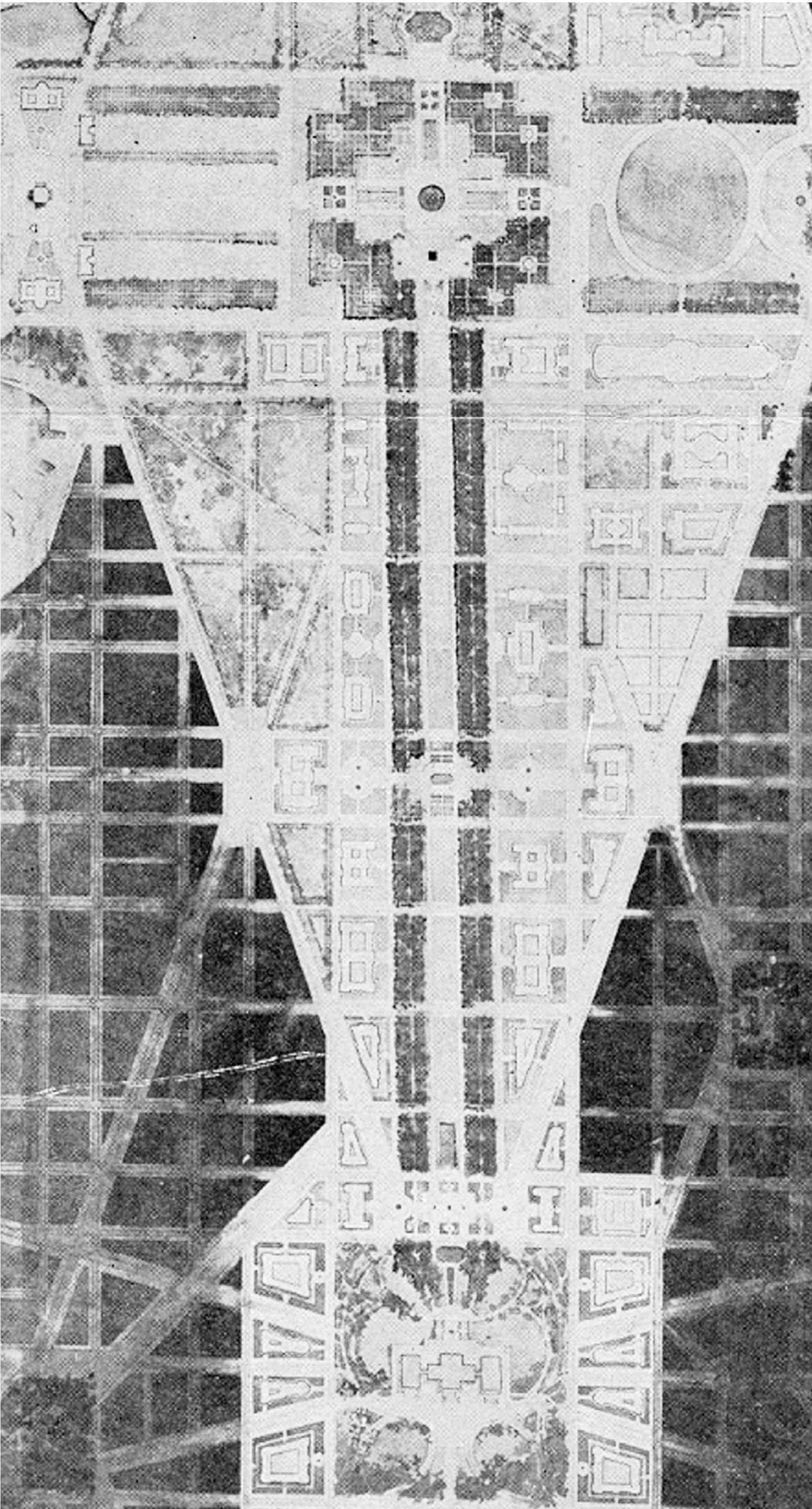


1931 OBLIQUE AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Source: National Mall Oblique Aerial, 1931. Courtesy National Archives. MMP–NALL–18–AA–151–52\_July1931

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1901 McMILLAN COMMISSION PLAN

Source: McMillan Commission, “No. 19 – Plan,” 1901. Courtesy National Capitol Region, NPS.  
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