



Overgrown plantings of yew and boxwood probably date from the Olmsted planting, installed in 1935. These screen views of traffic from within Union Square, and help direct views to the Grant Memorial from 1st Street. (CLP file "hedge to S 6" Feb. 24 2006)



Lawns curve symmetrically north and south of the Grant Memorial, helping to frame the composition. Tourists have worn broad social trails across these lawns. (CLP file "lawn area S of GM" Feb. 24 2006)

## Views and Vistas

The vista west from Union Square is of the central Mall landscape, with its flanking museums, elm trees, lawn panels, and, most importantly, the Washington Monument. The vista to the east is of the Capitol and the Capitol Grounds. Union Square forms part of the vista between the Capitol and the Monument, acting as foreground when looking from the Capitol and as a base or transitional element when seen from the Monument. Formerly, in the Olmsted design, the lines of elms and the new and transplanted historic trees, deployed in irregular lines to the north and south sides of Union Square, effected a gradual transition between the formal ranks of elms on the Mall itself and the looser groupings of trees on the Capitol Grounds, helping channel the vista. The lines of elms along the roads also affected views to the surrounding buildings on the north and south. The loss of trees and lawn and of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street when the Capitol Reflecting Pool was built has lessened but not destroyed this effect, still conveyed by the remaining clusters of trees at the site's northwest and southwest corners, and by the groups of trees framing the corners of the Grant Memorial.

The view north of the square is of large, modern office and governmental buildings, including the Department of Labor. To the northeast, the Taft Carillon is visible above the trees of the Capitol Grounds extension to the north. To the southeast, the Botanic Garden conservatory dominates the view, and, beyond it, the huge Rayburn House Office Building. Southwest of the conservatory is a fenced-off staging area and, across Independence Avenue, the massive concrete 1960s Health and Human Services Building. These buildings create a framework for the square that is similar, except in architectural style, to the surroundings envisioned by the McMillan Commission. The loss of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and of the inner Mall drives between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets, and of elm trees along the roads, creates an openness on the site similar to the conditions that would have resulted from the original McMillan Plan scheme for the square. However, the character of the views to the site's surroundings would have been quite different after Olmsted's design, with its lines of elms and dense clusters of other trees, was installed. Since Olmsted's landscape was the design that was built, and since it has been compromised, it must be considered the character of the views to the north and south from the site has also been compromised, and their integrity has been mostly lost.

While Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues lie outside the study boundaries for this inventory, they are so critical in defining the square, and Pennsylvania Avenue is of such historical importance, that their current conditions should be noted. The parking lots along Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues occupy the foreground of the views to north and south. The major vista down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, an essential feature of the L'Enfant Plan, was lost when the south wing of the Treasury Building was constructed in the 1850s. However, the vista from the Capitol down the avenue to the Treasury remains one of the most important vistas in the city, if not the country, and it is severely compromised by the discordant visual clutter of the parking lot that occupies the avenue for its entire extent between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. The narrower parking lot on Maryland Avenue is also unsightly, but this vista is of lesser importance.

### List of contributing features:

Vista from Union Square to Washington Monument  
Vista from Union Square to Capitol

Views from within Union Square to Grant Memorial  
Vista to Botanic Garden

**List of non-contributing features:**

Views from within Union Square to Capitol Reflecting Pool  
Views to governmental buildings to north  
Views to governmental buildings to south  
View of staging or work areas adjacent to Botanic Garden  
View of parking lots on Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues



Union Square and the Grant Monument form a transitional or foreground landscape feature in the view from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. (CLP file "View from Capitol Terrace to W BW" c. 1991)



Large institutional buildings create a visual framework for Union Square. The center building in this view to the north houses the Department of Labor. (CLP file "view N across pool" Feb. 10 2006)



This parking lot detracts from the historic vista down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol towards the White House.  
(CLP file "view down PA Ave from Peace, zoom" Feb. 24 2006)

## Small-Scale Features

Union Square has only a few types of small-scale features. Contributing features include benches, street lights, and curbs. Except for the curbs, these features conform to the standards published in the *Streetscape Manual: Interagency Initiative for National Mall Road Improvement Program* (1993). The manual covers several types of small-scale features for the greater Mall area: benches, trash receptacles, light standards, drinking fountains, fire hydrants, post-and-chain fencing, and bike racks. It also discusses standards for features mentioned under Circulation: curbs, sidewalks, and wheelchair ramps.

### Benches

All benches used in Union Square and on the Mall are designed in a standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks in 1934/35 with Public Works Administration funds. What proportion of the current benches in Union Square are original, or are replacements in kind, or include replaced materials, is not known; if any are original, probably most of their wood slats have been replaced over the years.

The benches have cast-iron frames and wood slat backs and seats. Curved struts join front and back legs, and the struts terminate in simple scrolls. The iron frameworks are painted black, and the slats are stained black.

At Union Square, a dozen or so of these benches are placed along the 1<sup>st</sup> Street sidewalk, facing the road and interspersed with trash receptacles, which are more numerous. Three benches are set in a corner of the hexagonal paved area that lies at the square's northeast corner. Most benches are in good condition.

Marble benches are built into the parapet ends of the Grant Memorial, on the platform level. The coping of the reflecting pool also serves as a bench.

### Streetlights

While a special style of street light was developed for the Mall by the General Electric Company in the 1930s, all of the lights used in Union Square are the double lamp designed by Henry Bacon (architect of the Lincoln Memorial) in 1923 to provide a standard street light for the city and known as the Bacon Twin or Twin-Twenty. The *Streetscape Manual* designates these lights for major thoroughfares in the District. The Bacon Twin-Twenty lights are placed around the entire perimeter of the paved area in Union Square. (They also line the edges of the two parking lots on Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, whose inner edges correspond with the boundaries of Union Square).

The lampposts are stylized classical columns with Doric fluting (the intersection between the channels is flat, not sharp). The posts support a pair of the typical Washington Globe lamps, which are shaped like classical urns. All globes are made of Lexan, a thermoplastic resin which resists shattering but yellows with age and exposure. The capital of the post, inspired by the capital of the Ionic order, has two volutes supporting a horizontal member in the form of an entablature. This member and the volutes support two torch-shaped lamp bases with moldings and varied profiles. The volutes are ornamented with leaves. The post, or column, base is articulated with a series of moldings and a row of acanthus leaves. The finial at the top of the

pole and the pendants at the bottom of the torches are in the form of acorns or buds. Most of the lights are in good condition.

Traffic lights at street crossings are D.C. property.

### Trash Receptacles

All trash receptacles in Union Square are the "tulip" type, with a wood-slat cylinder supported on a steel post and containing a plastic trash can. Most are placed along the perimeter of the grass panel behind the Grant Memorial; several are located at the corners and intersections of walks in the square. Most are in fair condition.

### Bollards, Walls, and Curbs

A row of concrete bollards lines the west end of the broad plaza that extends west of the reflecting pool. Bacon Twin-Twenty light standards stand to the inside of every third bollard. Single bollards are located at the northeast and southeast corners of the pool at the top of the steps. Measuring about three-and-a-half feet high, the bollards are cylindrical, with sides that slope slightly inward. The sides are cut back to form a rim, then rise into a rounded, domical top. Each stands on a square concrete platform. Except for some staining of the concrete, the bollards are in good condition.

Two low semicircular retaining walls are located northwest and southwest of the Grant Memorial, where the low rise in the ground is cut back for the walk along the east side of the pool. The walls curve from the steps on one side into the sloping ground on the other. They were probably built as part of the SOM design for the pool and its surroundings. The walls, about a foot high, are constructed of three courses of limestone blocks. The top two courses are darker and larger than the base course, and extend out slightly farther. A few blocks have shifted, and many are stained; some mortar is missing, and weeds grow from the mortar in places. Overall, the walls are in fair condition.

Low, flat curbs of both granite and concrete with square end blocks surround the Grant Memorial plaza. The planting beds at the ends of the memorial have curved concrete copings with corner blocks. First Street has granite curbs and brick gutters.

### Signs

The only signage in Union Square is a tall locational map, situated at the park's northeast corner, that shows the entire Mall. The sign is in the form of a large narrow box on four legs, which have scrolled brackets. The map is repeated on the front and back faces. The structure rises above head height and is covered with a pyramidal roof.

### Other

Round metal (probably cast iron) drainage grates are set in the paving in front of the pool's coping. Each grate is embossed with a stylized flower head.