

PART 1

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

This section of the report documents and describes the appearance and condition of the site and its landscape characteristics that comprise the cultural landscape surrounding the D.C. War Memorial. On June 30 and July 1, 2005, Elmore Design Collaborative, Inc., Historical Landscape Architects, visited the site with John G. Waite Associates Architects to assess and photographically document existing conditions. This site visit was conducted prior to the identification and delivery of detailed site maps that extended beyond the immediate limits east and west of the flagstone walkways represented on the map prepared for the HABS report. As a result, identification and verification of specific vegetation beyond the limits of this map was not possible. However, a detailed list of existing vegetation within the project area was established.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

The D.C. War Memorial is located in the southwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. in West Potomac Park, north of the Tidal Basin. The wooded site lies between Independence Avenue to the south and the service drive along the Reflecting Pool to the north. The horse stables for the United States Park Police (Horse Mounted Patrol Division) separate the Memorial from the Korean War Veterans Memorial further to the west. The site's context has evolved since its inception with the development of additional war memorials.

For purposes of this assessment, the site directly associated with the D.C. War Memorial, or core landscape, measures approximately 5.3 acres (378 feet deep and 600± feet wide), which is the area represented on the updated 1990 surveys.¹ In reality, the site extends west to the police stables and east to the public restrooms. The project area is wooded with trees ranging in size between 2" and 57" in diameter. Shrubs, herbaceous plants, and vines add to the setting. The vegetation has grown, matured, and changed over time. The site is organized around the Memorial with wooded areas to the east and west. The overall spatial organization has remained the same since inception.

Contributing features: The spacial organization of the memorial and the north and south walks, with the wooded areas to the east and west, is a contributing feature.

CIRCULATION

The only means of designated access is by foot from the sidewalk along Independence Avenue and from the service drive running south of the Reflecting Pool. The arrival sequence has not changed since its inception. No vehicular access or circulation is provided. However, service and maintenance vehicles do approach the Memorial by driving on the walks.

Pedestrian Access

Flagstone walks provide the designated pedestrian access into the site. Dirt trails have developed and provide access from the wooded areas to the east and west of the Memorial; these trails are unacceptable and visually intrusive.

Flagstone Walks

The flagstone walks are designed in a boulevard-type layout with two parallel walks separated by a central panel of turf. This design prevents a direct, axial approach to the Memorial. The walks are paved with cut, uniformly colored Pennsylvania flagstone laid in a random pattern, except where some repairs have been made. Individual stones vary in size from 5 ½" x 5 ½" to 33 ½" x 47 ½". Many stones are broken and colored concrete has been used in several locations to replace missing stones. Many of the joints are filled with concrete.

From the south, the exposed aggregate sidewalk along Independence Avenue intersects a flagstone "terrace" that enables visitors to stand and view the Memorial while providing sufficient room for others to pass. A continuous grass strip follows Independence Avenue between the north curb and the sidewalk and terrace. This terrace measures 52'-7" wide by 20'-10" and 21'-9" deep. The joints between the stones are even and filled with concrete. Roots from a large elm tree at the northeast corner are causing the pavement to shift and crack. From the terrace, visitors walk north along the flagstone walks, which measure between 7'-8 ½" wide and 7'-11" wide and 133' long. Weeds are infiltrating the concrete-filled joints between the stones, causing the joints to expand and the walks to deteriorate. Archival research indicates that the flagstones on the parallel walks are laid over a gravel base.²

A broad walk encircles the Memorial and provides access between the approach walks, to the marble stairs on the north and south sides, and around the Memorial. This walk consist of two walks: an outer loop that measures 21' wide and the inner loop that is approximately 8'-4" wide. The outer loop is paved with random rectangular stones set on a gravel base, while the inner loop has an ornate design with diamond, rectangular, and trapezoid shaped stones, all set on a concrete base. Previous repairs are evident because the pattern of cut stone varies. In July 1937, a map was created that shows the inner walk is concrete and the outer walk does not exist.³ An August 1939 map graphically shows the inner walk with its intricate pattern of cut flagstone and an outer loop to be paved with 2" random flagstone and 2" wide joints filled with topsoil placed between the stones.⁴ The layout remains the same, but the joints are now filled with concrete. Currently, a definite edge between the inner and outer loops of flagstone paving is seen. Weed infiltration exists throughout the outer loop with gravel base. Few to no weeds exist on the inner loop with its concrete base. Several areas of the older paving have heaved and are uneven with the adjacent paving.

Transitional paving between the straight approach walks and the circular walk include square corners adjacent to where the walks meet one another. The southwest and northeast corners were widened 3' to accept pedestal mounted interpretive waysides.

The walks leading north toward the service drive and the Reflecting Pool are the same design and style as their southern counterparts. These walks measure 8' wide and 134'

long. Several previous repairs in this flagstone are noticeable because different sizes of stones were used. Hereto, concrete was used to in-fill several missing pieces of stone. The northern terminus of these walks is a narrow concrete pad that abuts the bituminous asphalt paving of the service drive; while drawings indicate that the northern terminus may have been designed in a similar manner to that of the southern terminus, there is currently no information available that confirms if this feature was ever constructed.

Contributing features: The alignment and location of all of the flagstone walks and southern terrace are contributing features. The material in the joints is non-contributing.

Wear Trails

Wear trails are unimproved pedestrian dirt paths that are created because the existing walks do not provide the desired route. Deterioration occurs when these trails become wider and more heavily used. The character and quality of the landscape diminishes as wear trails develop, which is a problem at the D.C. War Memorial.

Several wear trails exist that provide access through the plantings to and from the east and west and one major north/south trail west of the Memorial. The latter is a combination trail used by both pedestrians and vehicles. Two trails from the west approach the flagstone walks - one trail on the south approach walk and one on the north walk. The combination trail begins at the crosswalk on Independence Avenue, directly north of West Basin Drive, where a map and several directional signs help direct pedestrians in this area. Another trail provides a sweeping link between the Memorial and the restrooms to the northeast. All of the trails cut through the woods and detract from the Memorial's natural setting.

Contributing features: The wear trails are not contributing features.

TOPOGRAPHY

The topography around the Memorial is relatively level, with the area to the north being slightly higher than the area to its south. Visual and graphic evidence indicates that the Memorial sits at elevation 12.55 and is slightly higher than the surrounding terrain. The elevation at the top of the curb along Independence Avenue varies between 10.02 and 10.28, and finished grades at the service drive to the north are approximately 12.5 feet in elevation. The southern walks slope to the south and their panel of turf is crowned in the middle and slopes east and west. The northern walk and panel of turf have a low area about three-quarters of the way to the service drive. This depression is visible in both the lawn and the eastern walk, which is raised slightly above grade to maintain accessibility. The walk on either side of the depression has been rebuilt, with the eastern side on a concrete base and the western side with smaller stones set in a similar, but not the same, pattern.

The topography in the woods east and west of the Memorial is generally level. Most areas have positive overland flow but not all. These areas seem to permit water to pond if sufficient rain falls.

Contributing features: The topography is a contributing feature.

LAND USE PATTERNS

Existing land use patterns are consistent with the originally intended land use patterns, with the exception that concerts are no longer performed here. The Memorial and flagstone walks survive in tact, albeit in a deteriorated condition. This axis or corridor is the main physical and visual link to the Memorial. The wooded grove with its tall trees and high canopy to the east and west also survive and provide the desired shade that was originally intended. Tall shrubs and small ornamental trees along the walks and roads restrict views and limit pedestrian access between the woods and the Memorial.

This site originally was intended as a memorial and outdoor concert facility for the United States Marine Band. Plantings of shrubs have removed the seating area around the Memorial, and it is no longer used as a bandstand.

Today, much larger and grandiose memorials located on The Mall dwarf the D.C. War Memorial. This site has become a pass through space between Independence Avenue and the service drive along the Reflecting Pool. Pedestrians walking along Independence Avenue and the service drive may pause momentarily to inquire about the marble monument, but they do not stay long. Other visitors walk along wear trails to expedite their route between desired locations, such as to and from the public restrooms and West Basin Drive. Nonetheless, the wooded areas to the east and west provide a shady respite that is directly counter to the open and sunny axis created as part of the original design.

Contributing features: The existing land use patterns are contributing features. The former use as a bandstand should be restored.

VIEWS AND VISTAS

On September 17, 1931, Architect Frederick H. Brooke wrote to William A. Delano and said, "We all want to make a grove about the Memorial which shall be entirely informal but since this is a public monument, we are convinced that it must be clearly seen from the adjacent roadways and easily approached by perhaps sizable crowds."⁵ In the early planning stages, much discussion and numerous letters, some of which were politely heated, discussed and argued for an appropriate setting for the Memorial. Some people argued to construct the Memorial in a wooded setting, while others argued for an open vista with woods on both sides. In the end, trees were removed between Independence Avenue and the service road to create a formal axis and to open up views to and from the Memorial along the 19th Street axis. It was decided that trees on both sides of the approach walks would reinforce and frame the views and vistas and that the trees adjacent to the Memorial would be intermittently planted with new trees to provide more shade for concert audiences. Unimpeded and restrictive views and vistas exist. Open north/south views are found along the axis between the Memorial and the roads to the north and south. Restrictive views and vistas exist within the wooded areas to the east and west because of tree trunks and the mature hollies and tall azaleas on either side of the flagstone walks.

Contributing features: The open north/south views and vistas are contributing features. The restricted views within the wooded areas are contributing, although the restrictions exceed the designer's original intent.

VEGETATION

While the Memorial is the visually enticing feature on the site, the vegetation plays an aesthetic and utilitarian role. Much discussion took place during the development of the original landscape plan for maintaining or removing existing trees to provide north and south views to and from the Memorial. In the end, trees were removed to accommodate the walks and views to the north and south. Archival research suggests that the woods to the east and west were to remain and to provide shade for audiences listening to open air band concerts in the Memorial. The wooded area also provided partial views to and from the Memorial. Today, the project area remains wooded except for the north/south axis with the Memorial and the boulevard-type walks and panels of lawn. The trees to the east and west provide shade and intermittent views to and from the Memorial.

During the site visit, a running list of existing plant material was created and includes trees, shrubs, herbaceous, and vines. See Appendix E for the complete list of identified plant material. Unfortunately, no map of the project area existed at the time of our visit that specifically identified and verified all of the existing vegetation. However, the trees and shrubs illustrated on the HABS drawing were verified and identified.

Historic Trees

A 1937 survey map documented the existing vegetation in the area immediately around the Memorial. Individual trees and their sizes were noted. This map was compared to the HABS map and the "Existing Conditions Survey" that was updated in December 1990.⁶ These maps show the existing trees and the 1990 map documents the names and size of each tree. It appears that 38 trees in the area documented by all three maps existed in 1937 and include Ailanthus, beech, elm, holly, oak, and Sweet Gum. See map entitled "Vegetation Assessment – Historic Trees, [L-1]" for the location of each historic tree.

Contributing features: The historic trees are contributing features.

Trees

The existing deciduous and evergreen trees identified include Ailanthus, beech, birch, dogwood, elm, holly, locust, maple, mulberry, oak, pine, Eastern Redbud, and Sweet Gum. This list differs a bit from the trees documented on the earlier maps. See map entitled "Vegetation Assessment – Existing Trees, [L-2]" for the location of each species as they existed in 1990 and along the axis as it existed during our site visit. Common problems were observed and include girdling roots, exposed roots, mechanical damage, and vandalism. Several of the larger trees are cabled to prevent storm damage and to retain their shape and large limbs. Newly planted trees include the Flowering Dogwoods along the walks to the Memorial, beech trees to the south of the stables, and several species planted throughout the project area to maintain and fill in the woods. Tree removal has been done, though for unknown reasons. A large diameter stump exists to the west of the Memorial. For the most part, the woods are open and have little underbrush.

The layout and placement of the existing trees was assessed and no definitive pattern was discovered. Rather, it appears that a random pattern and placement exists, which is consistent with the designer's original intentions. In 1931, all of the underbrush, which consisted mostly of dogwoods, was to be removed; later, in 1939, the Public Works Administration authorized planting dogwoods in the vicinity of the memorial.⁷ A still later planting of dogwoods in a formal alignment along the walks still exists; and azaleas exist in several locations. This formal planting of dogwoods and use of azaleas differs from the designer's original intentions.

Contributing features: The mature trees are contributing features. The recently planted trees in random locations are non-contributing, but in keeping with the original intent. The formal arrangement of dogwoods along the walks and the planting of azaleas is non-contributing.

Existing Shrubs

The inventoried shrubs located along the flagstone walks, Independence Avenue and in clusters beneath the tree canopy include azalea, Bottlebrush Buckeye, privet, Mockorange, and Cherry Laurel. This list varies a bit from the shrubs documented on earlier maps, which also included privet and Mahonia. See map entitled "Vegetation Assessment – Existing Shrub, [L-3]" for the location of each species as they existed in 1990. Most of the azaleas along the flagstone walks are several years old and many are in a declined state of condition owing to deferred maintenance, soil compaction, and increased shade from the overhanging tree canopy. It is reported that Lady Bird Johnson had these azaleas planted. However, no archival references have been found to confirm this oral history. Other groupings of azaleas with red and white flowers are located along Independence Avenue. These appear to be in better health owing in part to solar access and limited soil compaction caused by pedestrians. Archival research located a Planting Plan, dated March 1987, that includes 3,165 azaleas to be planted.⁸ Unfortunately, it is unclear how much or if any of this plan was implemented. Clusters of Bottlebrush Buckeye exist today and seem to thrive in the shade and were in flower during our visit.

Contributing features: There is insufficient information to determine if the existing shrubs are contributing features.

Existing Herbaceous

A variety of herbaceous plantings exist, of which most are weeds and volunteer introductions. However, many of these plants produce flowers that add seasonal interest and variety. None of these plants are identified in archival documentation. See Appendix E for the complete list of identified plant material.

Contributing features: There is insufficient information to determine if the existing herbaceous plantings are contributing features.

Vines

Eight different vines exist including Virginia Creeper, Trumpet Vine, Bittersweet, and Poison Ivy. All of these plants are healthy and appear to be volunteer species. None of

these plants are identified in archival documentation. See Appendix E for the complete list of identified plant material.

Contributing features: There is insufficient information to determine if the vines are contributing features.

Invasive Species

Several invasive species listed on the National Park Service's web site were identified. All of these plants have prolific spreading and reproduction capabilities. These plants typically dominate their location and crowd out more desirable species. Ailanthus is documented on the historic maps and did exist when the Memorial was built. None of the invasive perennials or vines is listed on the historic maps.

Contributing features: The Ailanthus is a contributing feature, but invasive. There is insufficient information to determine if the other invasive species are contributing.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

While the Memorial is the main building on this site, two other buildings exist on or adjacent to this site including the public restrooms and the horse stables for the United States Park Police (Horse Mounted Patrol Division). The restrooms are a modern building with public facilities. It sits along the south side of the service drive, northeast of the Memorial. It is one story high, tucked under existing trees, is ADA and universally accessible, and has benches and drinking fountains for additional visitor facilities. The horse stables, on the other hand, are not open to the public and are surrounded with a perimeter fence. Several buildings, paddocks, and parking areas comprise this facility. A planted buffer of White Pine trees stands immediately east of the fence. As White Pine trees mature they lose their lower branches, which is happening to these trees. As a result, their screening capability is weakening. Vehicular access is provided from the service drive. Security gates with signs deter public access.

Contributing features: The DC War Memorial is a contributing feature. The restrooms and stables are non-contributing features to this site.

SMALL-SCALE FEATURES

Small-scale features located about the site include drinking fountains, signs, a commemorative plaque, a small square marker, benches, trash receptacles, underground utilities, and above ground electrical transformers.

Drinking Fountains

A public drinking fountain exists along the exposed aggregate walkway adjacent to Independence Avenue and east of the flagstone walk. According to the 1937 survey, two water fountains existed - one to the north and south of the approach walks near Independence Avenue and the service drive. The existing fountain to the south appears to be in the same location as its predecessor. Archival research has not documented when

the early fountains were installed, removed, and when the present southern fountain was installed.

Contributing features: The drinking fountain is non-contributing, but consistent with the original intent.

Signs

Several types of signs exist including interpretive, caution, directional, and a map. Two pedestal-mounted interpretive signs are located at the southwest and northeast corners of the circular walk. The flagstone walks were widened 3' to accommodate these signs, which are recent additions to the landscape. One pole mounted caution sign is located adjacent to the service drive. This sign warns pedestrians that U.S. Park Police and maintenance vehicles use the service road. The directional signs and map are located southwest of the Memorial, directly across Independence Avenue from the West Basin Drive. A crosswalk is located here, as well as a wear trail through the west grounds of the Memorial site. The directional signs have a brown background with white letters and a white border. The map is mounted within a pressure treated wood frame that extends into the ground.

Contributing features: The signs are non-contributing, but are an expected part of historic/memorial sites today.

Commemorative Plaque

The 1990 updated survey indicates that a single commemorative plaque existed to the northeast of the Memorial. This plaque was not seen during our site visit. The Planting Plan, dated March 1987, indicates that this commemorative plaque was installed on May 19, 1968, the 50th anniversary of the American Legion.⁹

A small square marker was found beneath the trees to the southeast of the Memorial. This marker, whose purpose is unknown, measures 5" square and retains a small portion of its plaque. This marker and plaque appear similar to other markers used elsewhere in the city at the base of trees to memorialize World War I veterans.

Contributing features: The plaque, if it still existed, would be non-contributing. There is insufficient information to determine if the marker is a contributing feature.

Site Furniture

A 1939 photograph documents the use of movable benches, known as the "Washington Bench," during an evening concert (Fig. 19). None of these wood benches remain.

Two trash receptacles are located at the public restrooms. The receptacles are simple, topless, and have ornamental ribs around their circumference.

Contributing features: The trash receptacles are not contributing features.

Utilities

The existing on-site utilities include above and below ground services. The above ground utilities include electrical transformers, junction boxes along the service drive to the east and west of the Memorial, and hose bids. The below ground services, according to the 1990 survey, include a small network of potable water lines connecting to the drinking fountains, drainage structures, and drainage pipes for stormwater management. The drainage lines were installed to carry roof runoff away from the Memorial in the northeast and southwest directions. The 1937 survey documents three power poles with overhead wires, one electric manhole, one new manhole (purpose unknown), one telephone manhole, water valves but no pipes, and "Mueller's" in various locations. In September 1938, the original hose sprinklers (hose bibs) were installed.¹⁰

The electrical panel boxes to the northwest of the memorial, along the mall pathway, were not secured and locked at the time of this survey.

Contributing features: There is insufficient information to determine if the utilities are contributing features.

GENERAL

Based on the "Classified Structures user's Guide Condition Definitions," the landscape of the DC War Memorial is in fair condition. Problem issues in the landscape, such as the introduction of the formal dogwood plantings, the azalea bushes, and the lack of maintenance, are relatively easy to address. The changes required to bring the landscape to a good condition, and to a condition that will support the use of the Memorial as a bandstand, are subtractive.

NOTES

1. Maps entitled "Existing Conditions Survey" prepared by Dewberry and Davis, 8401 Arlington Boulevard, Fairfax, VA 22031, for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service – National Capital Region, Office of Design Services, Project Title – Ashwoods, located within the National Capital Park Central, updated December 1990, Drawing Number 801, 80953, Sheet 22A of 23 and Drawing Number 801, 83067, Sheet 23A of 37.
2. See map entitled "Construction Details – Proposed Rehabilitation of D.C. War Memorial" prepared by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Planning, National Capital Parks Office, Drawing Number N.C.P. 3027, Sheet 2 of 2, dated August 29, 1939, drawn by D.L.K. – C.Z.P.
3. This map is entitled "D.C. War Memorial", scale 1"=20', used datum, dated July 31, 1937. This map is numbered 65.45-26.
4. This map is entitled "Construction Details – Proposed Rehabilitation of D.C. War Memorial," by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Planning, prepared by National Capital Parks Office, and drawn by D.L.K. – C.Z.D., dated August 29, 1939.
5. Letter: Frederick H. Brooke to William A. Delano, September 18, 1931, National Archives, Record Group 79, Records of the National Park Service, Subject Files 1924-51, 1430, Box 35, File 1430/D.C. Memorial, May 27, 1927, to Aug. 31, 1939.