
**National Park Service
Cultural Landscape Inventory
2006**



**National Mall & Memorial Parks
Union Square**

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Park Information

Inventory Number: 975261
Park Name: National Mall
Park Alpha Code: NAMA
Park Organization Code: 3408
Inventory Status: Complete

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

The Union Square Cultural Landscape Inventory was written by Kay Fanning, Ph.D., Landscape Historian with the Cultural Landscapes Program of the National Capital Region. Research material was gathered from the following collections and repositories: Annual Reports of the Chief Engineer, Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPBG), Main Interior Library, Department of Interior; Cultural Resource Files, National Mall & Memorial Parks (NAMA); Beautification Files, National Capital Region (NCR), Cultural Landscapes Program (CLP); Cultural Resource Program (CRP) files, NCR; National Capital Parks (NCP) files on the Mall and Union Square, 1930s-1960s, from the Federal Records Center (FRC); maps and plans from the Technical Information Center (TIC) and Land Resources Program Center (LRPC), NCR; Mall photos, NCR Museum Resource Center (MRCE); Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) minutes from the National Archives & Records Center (NARA); and National Capital Park & Planning Commission (NCP) minutes from the National Capital Planning Commission (NCP). Interviews were conducted with John Parsons, Associate Regional Director for Lands, Resources and Planning, NCR; Gary Scott, Regional Historian, NCR; James Sherald, Chief of Natural Resources and Science, NCR; and James Goode and Peter Penczer of B.F. Saul Co. Many other professionals within the NPS reviewed the document and provided information and corrections.

Date Data Collected: 02/01/2006
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Data Recorder: Kay Fanning
Park Superintendent Concurrence: yes
Park Superintendent's Date of Concurrence: 08/04/2006

National Register Concurrence:

Eligible – SHPO Consensus
Determination

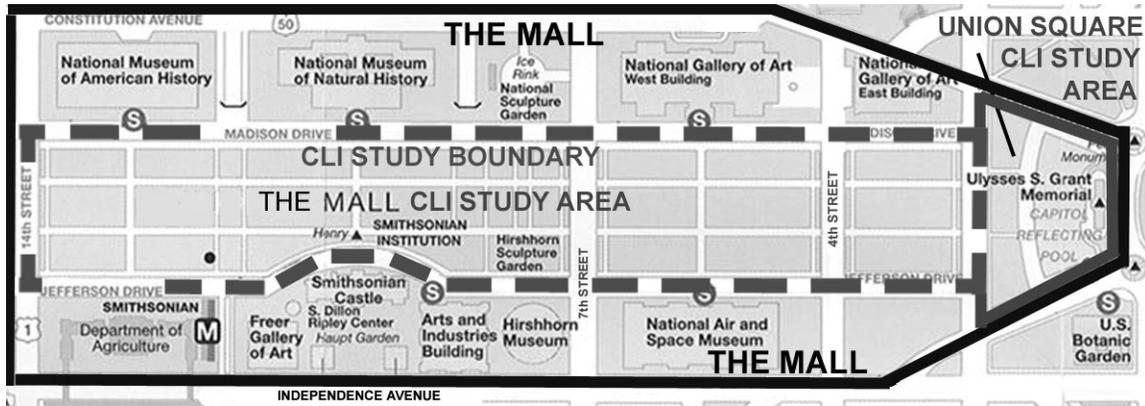
National Register Concurrence Date:

09/05/2006

Explanatory Narrative: The State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia concurred with the findings of the Union Square CLI on September 5, 2006, in accordance with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. It should be noted that the “National Register Concurrence Date” refers to this Section 110 Concurrence and not the actual date of listing on the National Register.

While Union Square is not currently a National Historic Landmark, as part of the Mall, not to mention the L’Enfant and McMillan Plans, it is clearly of national significance. A draft National Historic Landmarks nomination has been prepared for the Mall, presumably including Union Square, and the DC SHPO is currently reviewing this document.

Hierarchy Graphic



Hierarchy Description

This graphic depicts the overall boundaries of the Mall, and the study boundaries used for both the Union Square and the Mall Cultural Landscape Inventories. (CLP file “Mall hierarchy map 1 flat”)

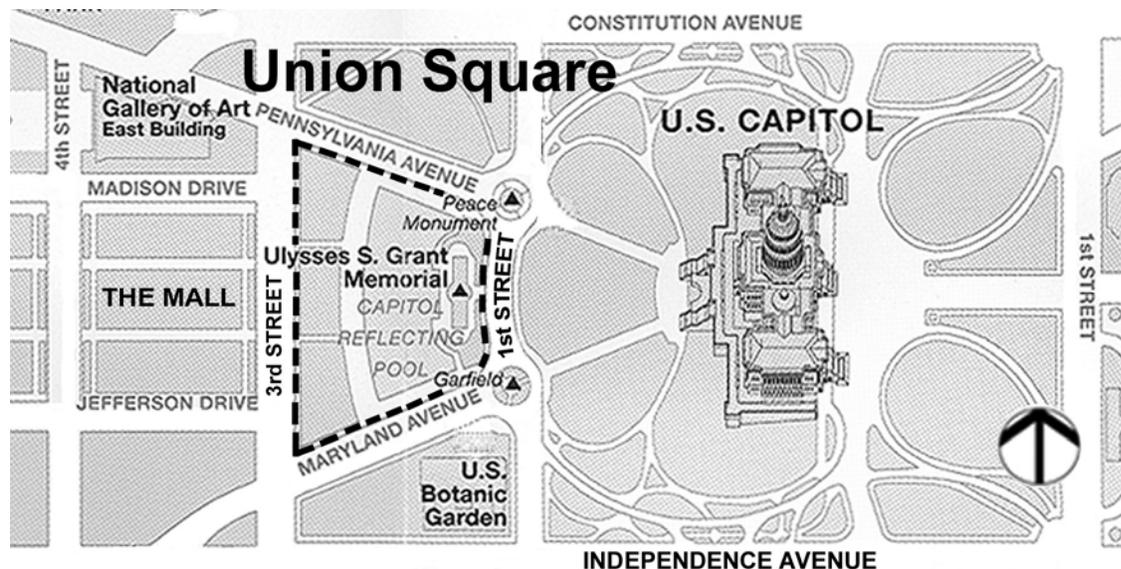
Landscape Description

Union Square is the section of the Mall located between 1st and 3rd Streets, N.W. and S.W., Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., and Maryland Avenue, S.W. The wedge-shaped site lies at the foot of Capitol Hill and functions as an intermediate landscape between the central landscape of the Mall and the Capitol Grounds. The enormous memorial to Ulysses S. Grant (installed 1922) extends for 252 feet across the site's east end, parallel to and a short distance from 1st Street. The memorial comprises a raised marble platform with balustraded ends at north and south and long flights of stairs to east and west. The bronze figure of Grant sitting quietly on his horse occupies the center. The figure, on a high marble pedestal, is flanked at the north and south ends by bronze groups of men and horses, representing Cavalry and Artillery, respectively. In contrast to the still figure of Grant, these depict violent action.

Planting beds at the ends of the platform help tie it visually to the ground. Tall hedges of yew and a few boxwood also anchor the sculpture group and screen views of the traffic along 1st Street. Groups of trees beyond the hedges in the park's northeast and southeast corners help frame the composition; several of these trees are remnants of the nineteenth-century Botanic Garden plantings.

A six-acre wedge-shaped pool, with a broad, simple limestone coping, occupies the central third of the site and is set slightly below ground level. The pool and its circulation system were designed by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and installed in 1969-1971. Stairs lead down to the pool and its surrounding pavement on three sides. West of the pool is a large limestone and concrete plaza, demarcated by tall concrete bollards and Bacon "Twin-Twenty" lights at the west end. Union Square's western end is occupied by a grass panel, crossed by two asphalt walks parallel to the diagonal lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, which divide the panel into three sections. Large old trees, including more remnants of the Botanic Garden planting, and a number of younger trees occupy the sections to the north and south; the groupings themselves are remnants of the trees which landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. used in his design for Union Square. Sidewalks surround the square on all four sides.

Location Map



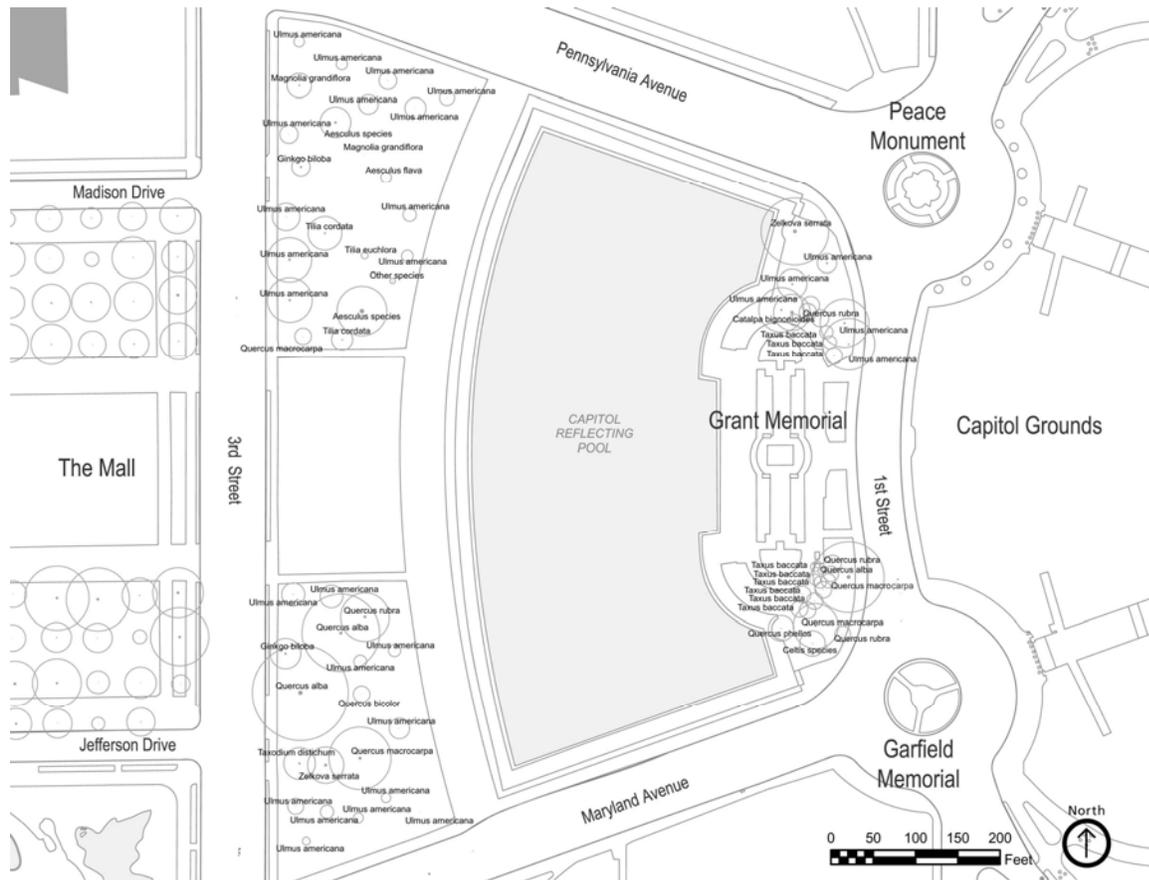
This location map shows Union Square in relation to the Capitol Grounds and the Mall. (adapted from NPS map, "Washington: The Nation's Capital," GPO: 2000)

Boundary Description

Union Square is bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. on the north, 1st Street N.W. and S.W. on the east, Maryland Avenue S.W. on the south, and 3rd Street N.W. and S.W. on the west. The National Park Service has jurisdiction over the area from the back edge of the perimeter sidewalks on the east, north, and south and to the curb line on the west.

Union Square is part of the Mall, which extends from Constitution Avenue, N.W., and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., on the north to Independence Avenue, S.W., and Maryland Avenue, S.W., on the south, and from 1st to 14th Streets, N.W. and S.W. The central landscape of the Mall, bounded by Madison and Jefferson Drives and 3rd and 14th Streets, is analyzed in a separate CLI because this area was designed and developed as a single landscape. Union Square was also developed as a separate, though closely related, landscape design, and has therefore been analyzed in an individual Cultural Landscape Inventory.

Site Plan



Site Plan of Union Square. (CLP file “draft site plan copy revised,” adapted from a graphic supplied by Brad Conway, NAMA)

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| AF – Aesculus flava | QM – Quercus macrocarpa |
| AS – Aesculus sp. | QR – Quercus rubra |
| C – Celtis species | TB – Taxus baccata |
| CB – Catalpa bignoniodes | TC – Tilia cordata |
| GB – Ginkgo biloba | TD - Taxodium distichum |
| MG – Magnolia grandiflora | TE – Tilia euchlora |
| OS – other species | UA – Ulmus americana |
| QA – Quercus alba | ZC – Zelkova carpinifolia |
| QB – Quercus bicolor | ZS – Zelkova serrata |

Legend, Trees and Shrubs, Union Square site plan.

CHRONOLOGY

Year	Event	Description
1790-1802	Land Transfer	The three city commissioners appointed by President George Washington had jurisdiction over the reservations in the District of Columbia.
1791-1792	Planned	Charles Pierre (Peter) L'Enfant created the plan for the City of Washington. The Mall was called the "Grand Avenue" on L'Enfant's so-called "Manuscript Plan." The plan was somewhat modified by surveyor Andrew Ellicott. Planner: Charles Pierre L'Enfant Planner: Andrew Ellicott
1802-1816	Land Transfer	Responsibility for the reservations was transferred from the three commissioners to a Superintendent of Public Buildings, also appointed by the president.
1815	Engineered	The Washington City Canal was begun, following the route of Tiber Creek and crossing over the Union Square site. Engineer: Benjamin Henry Latrobe
1816-1849	Land Transfer	The Superintendent of Public Buildings was replaced by a Commissioner of Public Buildings, also under the president.
1820-1837	Established	The Botanic Garden was founded and placed under the oversight of the Columbian Institution.
1842	Established	The Botanic Garden was reinstated and moved to the a new greenhouse at the Patent Office.
1849	Established	The Botanic Garden was moved back to the Mall site.
1850	Built	A new octagonal greenhouse was built in the Botanic Garden.
1855	Built	Congress authorized the Alexandria and Washington Railroad to lay tracks across the Mall along 1 st Street, next to the Botanic Garden, leading north to the Baltimore & Ohio Depot at New Jersey Avenue and C Street.
1856	Land Transfer	The Botanic Garden was transferred from the authority of the Commissioner of Public Buildings to the congressional Joint Committee on the Library. Construction was overseen by the Architect of the Capitol, also under the Joint Committee on the Library.
1867	Built	An iron fence was erected around the Botanic Garden.
c. 1872	Destroyed	The Washington City Canal was filled in.
1870	Built	The greenhouse in the Botanic Garden was enlarged by the Architect of the Capitol. Architect: Edward Clark

1877	Moved	The Bartholdi Fountain, built as an exhibit for the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, was moved to the Botanic Garden. Sculptor: Auguste Bartholdi
1879-1882	Planted	Trees and shrubs were planted in the reservations extending from Armory Square (6 th to 7 th Streets, N.W. and S.W.) to the Botanic Garden.
1885-1886	Developed	A road lined by cobblestone gutters was built through Seaton Park (6 th to 3 rd Streets, N.W. and S.W.), from the 6 th Street bridge to the Botanic Garden.
1901-1902	Planned	The Senate Park, or McMillan, Commission developed a landmark plan for the city. Focusing on the Mall area, the plan sought to recapture the spirit of the L'Enfant Plan through the elimination of discordant elements while allowing for the development of new buildings and parks designed on City Beautiful principles. It envisioned the construction of a "Union Square" on the Botanic Garden site. Architects: Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim Landscape Architect: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. Sculptor: Augustus Saint-Gaudens
1908	Built	The marble platform for the Grant Memorial was built in the Botanic Garden, at the east end of the Mall, along 1 st Street. Architect: Edward Casey
1922	Built	The Grant Memorial was completed in the Botanic Garden at the east end of the Mall. It was dedicated on April 27, the centennial of Grant's birth. Sculptor: Henry Merwin Shrady
1927	Built	The Major General George Gordon Meade Memorial was erected in the Botanic Garden near the intersection of 3 rd Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., and dedicated on October 19, 1927. Sculptor: Charles Grafly
1927	Removed	The Bartholdi Fountain was removed from the Botanic Garden and placed in storage. In 1932 it was relocated outside Union Square, to a site two blocks south, at Independence and Maryland Avenues, S.W.
1932	Demolished	Demolition of the structures on the Botanic Garden site began in the fall of 1933; the last demolitions probably occurred in 1937. A new Botanic Garden conservatory was built in 1937 immediately south of Union Square, and was designed by the architectural firm Bennett, Parsons, and Frost.
1933	Land Transfer	Under Executive Order #6166, June 10, 1933, all public lands and buildings were transferred to the Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations, Dept. of the Interior. On March 2, 1934, the name was changed to the National Park Service. The Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks became National Capital Parks.

1934	Land Transfer	Transfer of the Botanic Garden property to the National Park Service was arranged with the Treasury Department and the Joint Committee on the Library. (Nolen to Cammerer 10/13/33 p. 2 FRC3) The transfer was made under Land Transfer Order No. 69, April 6, 1934, for Union Square.
1934-1935	Designed	Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. prepared a new landscape plan for Union Square. Landscape architect: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.
1934	Planted	Trees were removed and transplanted within Union Square in the summer (see p. 29).
1934	Removed	The sidewalks of the old Botanic Garden were removed in August.
1935	Removed	Trees were cut in Union Square in April.
1935	Planted	Tree moving was completed in the fall.
1935	Built	Road construction was completed in the fall.
1936	Planted	More yews (<i>Taxus cuspidata</i>) were installed, completing the plantings at the ends of the Grant Memorial.
1945	Planted	Additional landscape planting was carried out in Union Square in the summer. The nature of this work is not known.
1966	Removed	The Meade Memorial was removed from Union Square and placed in storage (in 1969 it was moved to a new location on Pennsylvania Avenue, outside of Union Square).
1969-1971	Built	Because of construction of the Inner Loop Freeway, the Capitol Reflecting Pool and its surrounding walks were built in Union Square, requiring the removal of much of the Olmsted landscape design. Architects: Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Statement of Significance

Located at the foot of Capitol Hill, Union Square is the easternmost section of the Mall. It was formerly the site of the historic Botanic Garden, in existence from 1849 until 1934, when the garden was moved and the site was wholly given over to commemoration of the Civil War. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. designed the Union Square landscape in 1934-35, based generally on the McMillan Plan's interpretation of the L'Enfant Plan for this site. This construction was authorized by an Act of Congress passed in March 1929, and funded by the Public Works Administration in the early years of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Much of the Olmsted design was lost in the 1960s, when the plan by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill for the Capitol Reflecting Pool was constructed. However, the main commemorative feature of the site, the Grant Memorial (1908-1922), remained, along with the site's association with honoring the preservation of the Union through memorials to Union generals. The Grant Memorial and Union Square form a complement to the Lincoln Memorial at the National Mall's west end, the key feature of the McMillan Plan. The Period of Significance for Union Square includes two separate periods: 1791-1792, encompassing the year the L'Enfant Plan was created, and the subsequent year, when changes were made to the plan by L'Enfant's successor, Andrew Ellicott; and 1901-1936, extending from the formation of the McMillan Commission to the completion of Olmsted's landscape design for the square.

As part of the Mall, Union Square is listed on the National Register under the nomination, "The L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia" (listed April 24, 1997) and "The National Mall" (listed May 19, 1981). It was probably also included within the Mall boundaries when the Mall was listed individually by name only on the National Register on October 15, 1966. Union Square has national significance.

The L'Enfant Plan as a whole and its constituent parts, including Union Square, are significant under Criteria A, B, and C:

"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, Section 8, page 2)

However, the L'Enfant Plan nomination only identifies Union Square by its boundaries. It does not discuss its historical development or describe its historic or current landscape. The earlier nomination of "The National Mall" only briefly describes the origin and development of the site.

The L'Enfant Plan National Register nomination was used as the basis for a draft National Historic Landmark nomination, "The Plan of the City of Washington," completed in 2000. Since the NHL is still a draft, assessment of the Mall's significance must follow the listed National Register nomination, but nonetheless the NHL draft nomination offers additional analysis clarifying Criterion C:

The historic plan of the City of Washington is the foremost example in the United States of two combined nationally significant planning styles – the Baroque and the City Beautiful. . . . the design and evolution of the two combined plans is

even more outstanding as a unified entity that has no parallel in American city planning. (“The Plan of the City of Washington,” National Historic Landmark Nomination, draft, July 14, 2000)

This Cultural Landscapes Inventory maintains that Union Square gained its significance not only from being part of the L’Enfant Plan, but also from its inclusion in the central area of the McMillan Plan, and from Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.’s adaptation of the McMillan Plan design for this square.

Olmsted Jr. designed the landscape to act as a transitional element between the rectilinear grass panels defined by straight lines of elms on the Mall’s central landscape (3rd to 14th Streets) and the less formal massings of trees on the west lawn of the Capitol. These massings were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. to gradually narrow the focus of the vista to the Capitol building, following the converging lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. Olmsted Jr.’s arrangement of trees, therefore, acted as a bridge from the formal landscape of the Mall to the more informal plan of the Capitol Grounds. Olmsted Jr. also used the landscape to strengthen the square’s thematic significance as a site memorializing key Union generals.

Following the intention, if not the precise form, outlined in the McMillan Plan, the Grant Memorial had been erected here in 1922 (on a marble platform built in 1908) as a strong linear element extending north to south across the central Mall axis, with the large equestrian figure of Grant placed directly on the axis. Olmsted Jr. laid out the site so that the Maj. Gen. George G. Meade Monument, which had been installed in 1927, occupied a clearly subordinate location in regard to the Grant Memorial; another site for a future military sculpture was established in a corresponding position south of Meade. As built, the Olmsted Jr. plan adapted the McMillan Plan’s design for Union Square to current conditions.

The large reflecting pool of the Skidmore, Owings and Merrill design, installed 1969-1971, destroyed a large part of the Olmsted landscape plan. The Meade Memorial was removed and the pool was built because of construction of the highway tunnel that runs beneath the square. The loss of this memorial weakened the Union victory theme that was to have been carried through the site. Olmsted’s lines of trees to north and south were disrupted when dozens of trees were removed from the center of the site, leaving isolated groups in the four corners. The function of the trees as linear elements guiding the vista virtually without interruption from the Capitol to the Washington Monument was disrupted. Also, historic trees remaining from the Botanic Garden were removed, undermining the sense of historic continuity that Olmsted apparently hoped to retain.

Therefore Union Square, in its current condition, retains significance from the L’Enfant, Ellicott, and McMillan Plans, and from the Grant Memorial. Though the Olmsted Jr. Plan remains only in part, it retains significance, but has low integrity.

Physical History

1791-1819: The L'Enfant Plan and Years of Inaction

In late 1790 or early 1791, George Washington hired the French engineer and architect Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Enfant to prepare a design for the new federal capital that was to be built at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. In only a few months, by March 1791, L'Enfant had created a unique city plan that forcefully symbolized the establishment and expectations of the American democracy using European, specifically French Baroque models. (see Scott 1991:43) His plan combined a rectangular street grid with diagonal ceremonial boulevards connecting important sites and structures. The focus of the plan was the visual relationship between the Capitol and the "president's house," joined by an avenue named for Pennsylvania, and also by a "grand avenue," an extension of the axes of the two buildings to the west and south.

Union Square did not exist as such on the L'Enfant Plan. Instead, this area between to the Capitol Grounds and the Mall was embellished with a pool and cascade fed by the waters of the Tiber Creek. As historian Pamela Scott writes:

"The eastern end of the Mall was terminated by the Capitol, raised high on Jenkin's Hill, the famous 'pedestal awaiting its monument.' Emerging from beneath the Capitol was a hundred-foot-wide cascade dropping forty feet to a basin in the canal below. Allegorical statues of great American rivers – the Delaware and the Hudson – situated on the terraces of the Capitol would be the apparent source of this cascade, according to the 1795 Essai. At the foot of Capitol Hill, facing the Mall, L'Enfant called for a sculpture group entitled 'Liberty hailing nature out of its Slumber,' to have been executed by an 'eminent Italian sculptor.' Liberty Hailing Nature out of Its Slumber was the iconography of the city: liberty brought the federal city into being, and the city physically and symbolically embodied the country and the history of its founding. The federal government was the agent of civilization, expressed by the federal city carved out of a near wilderness. . . ." (Scott 1991:42-43)

L'Enfant's successor, surveyor Andrew Ellicott, simplified but retained this scheme in his 1792 plan.

Almost nothing of L'Enfant's vision for the Mall was realized in the nineteenth century. No federal funds were allotted for development, and there was little impetus for construction. Buildings began to rise around the Capitol, the White House, and other structures which served as nodes of development, as well as on Pennsylvania Avenue. The view along Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and White House – one of the two critical views in the L'Enfant Plan – was soon blocked by the construction of the south wing of the Treasury Building (1855-60).

The Tiber Creek ran along the north edge of the Mall's open area. To aid commerce, the creek was transformed into the Washington Canal by the private Washington Canal Company, chartered on May 1, 1802. Architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe completed drawings for the structure in February 1804. Begun in 1815, it was first built as far as 15th Street, and later extended to 17th Street and connected with the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. A bridge crossed the canal at 12th Street. In May, 1822, the city was authorized to build one or more additional bridges across the canal between 2nd and 6th Streets (Statutes at Large, 3:391-392).

The city government bought the canal in 1831, and the following year it was widened, from 80 to 150 feet (Act of Congress, May 31, 1832), further cutting into the Mall. (Scott 1991:47, note 58) This act also stipulated that an eighty-foot-wide street should be laid out along its south side. This resulted in a strip of land seventy-foot wide being removed from the north edge of the Mall for this distance, and it skewed the Mall's center line off the axis of the Capitol. (Scott 1991:47; Olszewski Mall:7-8)

1820-1900: The Botanic Garden, Memorial Trees, and Commemorative Statues

Botanic Garden

Building a botanic garden on the Mall, an idea first proposed by George Washington in 1796, received widespread public support. The Botanic Garden was founded in 1820 by the private Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences (part of an organization known as the Metropolitan Society, chartered by Congress on April 20, 1818; 1937 Annual Report, Architect of the Capitol). The Institute was given the use of the east end of the Mall for a greenhouse and gardens. The society's president, Edward Cutbush, "believed that such a facility would stimulate the cultivation of private gardens within the city, serve to promote botanical studies, and exert a moral and didactic influence on society." (Scott 46, note 51) Five acres of land were fenced in, and in 1821, two oval ponds were constructed. In 1823, the ground was drained and partly leveled, and gravel walks were laid out, "perhaps in response to Charles Bulfinch's 1822 design for enclosing and landscaping the Capitol grounds." (see Scott 1991:46 and note 52)

The Columbian Institute was dissolved in 1837, but five years later the Botanic Garden was reinstated to provide a home for the botanical collections gathered by the U.S. Exploring Expedition, which, under Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, had traveled among the South Seas islands from 1838-1842. William D. Brackenridge, the expedition's horticulturist and assistant botanist, helped Wilkes care for the collections. (1937 AR/Cap, Goode 2003:357) A federal appropriation at this time transferred authority for the garden to the Joint Committee of the Library, and the garden with its new collection was then moved north of the Mall to the Patent Office Building, which occupied the block defined by 7th, 9th, G and F Streets, N.W. The collections were housed in a new greenhouse at 8th and G Streets. (Goode 2003 357) Seven years later, in 1849, the Botanic Garden was moved back to its previous site at the east end of the Mall, and in 1850 a new octagonal greenhouse was built, with \$5000 in funding authorized by the deficiency bill of May 15, 1850.

The garden was run by the Commissioner of Public Buildings until 1856, when it was placed once more under the Joint Committee on the Library. New construction was overseen by the Architect of Capitol, whose office was also under the Library Committee.

Brackenridge was replaced as gardener by William R. Smith in 1853. In 1863 or 1864, Smith's title was changed to superintendent.

The octagonal greenhouse was enlarged in 1867 (Goode says 1870; Goode 2003:357) by Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark. Clark built an identical greenhouse east of the original, and joined both by wings to a large central Palm House, forming a single 300-foot-long complex

that occupied the northwest corner of Maryland Avenue and 1st Street, S.W. Red brick walls surrounded the site.

In 1867, oversight of the city's reservations passed to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPBG) under the Army Corps of Engineers in the War Department. The OPBG carried out its functions under a succession of Engineer Officers. The first two men to serve in that role, Nathaniel Michler (1867-71) and Orville Babcock (1871-77), were particularly influential in developing Washington's reservations, including the Mall. Improvements to the parks began in 1868. Michler wrote about the Botanic Garden in his first Annual Report:

"This garden, one of the most delightful features about Washington, and particularly to strangers, has become a great point of attraction; the many rare exotics, the great variety of our own climatic plants, and especially the handsome collection being made of the several varieties of the many species of trees which adorn our own native soil, will ever engage the attention of both the curious and the cultured." (AR 1868:8)

A sewer "of the finest materials and most permanent construction" was begun in the Botanic Garden in 1864/1865-1867, probably to carry the flow of the Washington Canal, the former Tiber Creek. An iron fence was constructed, beginning in 1866/67, around the north half of the garden, all that appropriations allowed. (AR 1865, 1867; it is not known whether the iron fence supplemented or replaced the brick wall.) Reference is made in the 1868 Annual Report to the imminent completion of a canal through the garden.

Memorial Trees

The Botanic Garden became known for its collection of memorial trees, planted under the authority of Superintendent Smith. These were chosen by, or were planted in memory of, particular individuals. Most honored politicians – congressman, senators, and a few presidents. Others commemorated a miscellaneous assortment of prominent men, ranging from the Scottish poet Allen Ramsey (1685-1758) to the chief of the District of Columbia's Territorial Government of 1871-74, Alexander Shepherd. The trees do not seem to have been planted following any particular plan. No contemporary written records were made of these trees; knowledge of them was passed down orally. Some were recorded in Erle Kauffman's 1932 book, "Trees of Washington." Another list was compiled for the Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in 1904. In 1932, as preparation for the rebuilding of the site, a survey was conducted and checked against the 1904 list.

Some of the trees planted were common native trees. Others thought to be rare included a winged elm, a "Lea oak," a European "cut-leaf" linden, two species of zelkovas (a novelty then), buckeyes, Japanese walnuts, and a Crimean fir. (Kauffman 1932:84-87) One oak, known as the Oak of Confucius, was grown from an acorn taken from a tree near Confucius's grave.

William Smith remained head of the garden for over fifty years, until his death in 1912 (almost sixty years after he had been appointed gardener in 1863). His successor, C. Leslie Reynolds, was appointed in July 1912 and died in December of the following year, at which time George W. Hess became superintendent, serving until his retirement in June 1934. The title of superintendent was changed to director in 1920. In July 1934, the Architect of the Capitol, David Lynn, was appointed Acting Director of the Botanic Garden, and administration has continued under that office until the present day. (1932 AR/Cap)

Commemorative Statues

In the 1870s, three sculptural monuments were placed in or near the Botanic Garden. All are now under the jurisdiction of the Architect of the Capitol rather than the National Park Service, but each influenced the development of the garden. The Bartholdi Fountain stood north of the conservatory in the garden, but was moved two blocks south in the 1930s.

Peace Monument

The Peace (formerly Naval) Monument of 1877 stands at Pennsylvania Avenue and 1st Street, N.W. The four female allegorical figures, the pedestal, and other features were sculpted of Carrara marble by Franklin Simmons after a sketch by Admiral David Dixon Porter; Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark designed the granite basin. Funding came from Congress (authorizing legislation was 19 Stat. 114, July 31, 1876) and contributions by naval personnel.

The forty-foot-high monument features a tall pedestal rising from the center of a quatrefoil basin. On the pedestal stand two female figures representing “America weeping on the shoulders of History” over the loss of Union sailors in the Civil War. (Goode 1974:242) Standing in front of the pedestal, on the side facing the Capitol, a figure of Peace bears an olive branch. On the opposite side, facing Pennsylvania Avenue, Victory holds an oak branch in one hand and a laurel wreath aloft in the other. Other ornamentation symbolizes agriculture, progress, war, and the sea.

Writing about the merits of the view down Pennsylvania Avenue in 1934, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. said approvingly that the Peace Memorial was “so distant that its unfortunate details are imperceptible”. (FRC4 “Statement” 4/19/34 p. 6) The Peace Memorial is listed on the National Register under the multiple-property nomination, “Civil War Monuments in Washington, D.C.” (1978). (See Barsoum, National Register nomination “Memorials in Washington, D.C.,” 2006; Goode 1974:242; Jacob 51-54)

Garfield Memorial

Born in Ohio in 1831, James A. Garfield had served as president of Hiram College, as major general in the Civil War with the Army of the Cumberland, and as congressman and senator before being elected the twentieth President of the United States in 1880. In July 1881, only a few months after taking office, Garfield was shot by a “deranged office seeker” in the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Depot, on the Mall at 6th Street. (Jacob 33) He lingered for weeks before dying on September 19th.

A nine-foot-tall bronze memorial statue of Garfield by sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward stands at the intersection of 1st Street and Maryland Avenue, S.W., corresponding to the position of the Peace Memorial to the north. Garfield is depicted as an orator, holding his inaugural address in his left hand, with his right hand resting on a book opened upon a draped pedestal. The figure looks west. Male allegorical figures representing the three stages of Garfield’s life, as scholar, soldier, and statesman, are placed around the cylindrical granite pedestal, which was designed by Richard Morris Hunt, one of the leading American architects of the post-war period. (Hunt also designed the monumental base of the Statue of Liberty.) Ornamenting the base above each figure is a bas-relief depicting appropriate attributes.

The Garfield Memorial was created under Congressional Acts of March 11, 1882 (22 Stat. 28) and July 7, 1884 (23 Stat. 216), and funded by Congress and the Society of the Army of the Cumberland. It was erected on this spot on May 12, 1887, before an illustrious audience that included President Grover Cleveland. (See Goode 1974:249-50 and Jacob 33-36. The statue is listed on the National Register under “Civil War Monuments in Washington, D.C.” [1978] and also the Capitol Grounds nomination).

Bartholdi Fountain

In 1877, the Bartholdi Fountain was installed on the center line of the Mall in front of the conservatory in the Botanic Garden. Designed by Auguste Bartholdi, sculptor of the Statue of Liberty, the fountain had been shown at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. It was purchased by the federal government for \$6000 under an act of March 3, 1877 (U.S. Stat., vol. 19, 44th Cong., p. 356).

The thirty-foot-high bronzed-iron fountain was “intended to embody an allegorical representation of the elements Water and Light.” (Philadelphia International Exhibition Official Catalogue, 2nd & Rev. Ed., Philadelphia, 1876; quoted in Goode 2003:357) On a triangular pedestal set within the thirty-foot-wide basin, aquatic monsters spouting water support a classical pedestal on which stand three graceful eleven-foot-tall caryatids draped in flowing robes. The caryatids support a thirteen-foot-wide basin in their upraised hands. From the basin’s rim hang twelve electric lights, “one of the earliest displays of electric lights” in Washington. (Goode 1974:250) The top basin, held by three young Tritons, is surmounted by a crown through which water flows.

Placed in storage in 1927 (probably because of the installation of the Meade Memorial), the Bartholdi Fountain was re-erected on its new site across Independence Avenue from the relocated Botanic Garden in 1932.

Development of the Mall Landscape

In the later nineteenth century, the Mall, from 1st to 14th Streets, was developed into six separate parks or reservations: the Botanic Garden, from 1st to 3rd Streets, and Pennsylvania to Maryland Avenues; two reservations, between 3rd and 4½ Streets and between 4½ and 6th Streets, designated in reports by their bounding streets until 1885, when they were renamed Seaton Parks East and West (Seaton Park East was bounded on the north by Maine Avenue and on the south by Missouri Avenue, while Seaton Park West was bounded by B Street North and B Street South – today Constitution and Independence Avenues); Armory Square, from 6th to 7th Streets and B Street North to B Street South (named after the Washington Armory, which stood at its southeast corner); the Smithsonian Grounds, from 7th to 12th Streets and B Street North to B Street South; and the Department of Agriculture Grounds, between 12th and 14th Streets and B Streets North and South. (The street between 3rd and 5th Streets was called 4½ rather than 4th Street. It was renamed “4th Street” in the twentieth century.)

Improvements were made by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, the precursor of the National Park Service’s National Capital Region. For all reservations except the Botanic Garden, the most extensive improvements were made in the 1870s and 1880s. Work included, first, extensive grading; the laying of drainage and sewer pipes and then topsoil, the sowing of grass and laying of sod; the construction of fences, walks, and drives in gravel and, later,

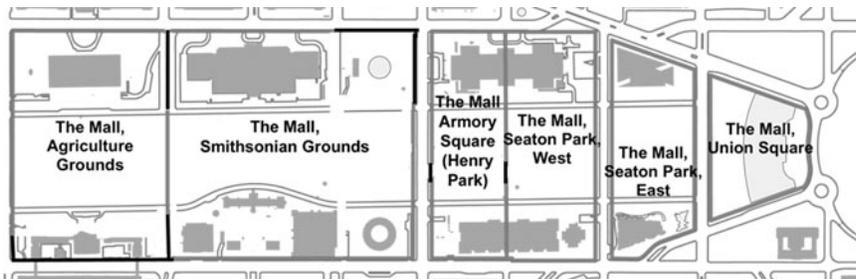
asphalt; the planting of numerous varieties of trees and shrubs; and the installation of gas lamps, benches, drinking fountains, and sometimes decorative fountains.



The Peace Monument occupies a small traffic island west of the Capitol, northeast of Union Square. Feb. 24, 2006. (CLP file "Peace Mon in setting from w")



The Garfield Memorial also occupies a small traffic island west of the Capitol, southeast of Union Square. Feb. 24, 2006. (CLP file "Garfield Memorial BW")



An overlay of the nineteenth-century reservations on the current Mall grounds. (CLP file "Mall res overlay final")

1901-1933: The Transformation of the Botanic Garden into Union Square

The Senate Park (McMillan) Commission Plan

In the 1890s, both private citizens and the government developed plans for the improvement of central Washington. These plans were of varying degrees of sophistication, but they fired the ambition of architect Glenn Brown, appointed Secretary of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1898, to arrange for the AIA to devote its annual meeting in December 1900 to the issue of Washington's redesign. The talks included an address by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. that was "one of the first attempts by an American designer to define the role of landscape architecture in the planning and improvement of cities." (Reps 1966:89; Olmsted, "Landscape in Connection with Public Buildings in Washington," in Glenn Brown, *Papers*, pp. 25+.) The meeting resulted in the formation of an AIA committee on legislation, which lobbied Congress to undertake serious examination of the city's design problems. With the aid of Senator James McMillan, chairman of the Senate District Committee, the AIA committee helped bring about the formation of the Senate Park Commission in 1901. (Reps 1967:Chapter 3. For more details on the workings of the McMillan Commission, see Moore, *Senate Park Report*, 1902; Reps, *Monumental Washington*; Gutheim, *Worthy of the Nation*; and *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Longstreth.)

A joint resolution introduced by McMillan in December 1900 had proposed the creation of a committee to study the arrangement of public buildings and the development of a comprehensive park system. This was defeated, apparently because of the opposition of the powerful, conservative Republican Speaker of the House, Joseph "Uncle Joe" Cannon of Illinois, a vehement opponent of using federal funds for the aesthetic improvement of the District of Columbia.

McMillan sidestepped this obstacle by having a Senate Resolution passed in executive session in March 1901, which mandated the use of Senate funds for a redesign of the park system only, though McMillan clearly intended to include public architecture. (Reps 1967:92-93) McMillan succeeded in establishing the Senate Park Commission, but his political maneuvering, particularly the bypassing of House approval, led to continuing problems in getting specific portions of the plan enacted.

Congress appointed the Senate Park Commission – popularly known as the McMillan Commission – that month. Its members included architects Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. All the commission members had been involved in the creation of the 1893 Columbian World's Exposition in Chicago, a landmark of City Beautiful design. They were assisted by Charles Moore, McMillan's secretary and Clerk of the District Committee.

The term "City Beautiful" refers to a broad set of progressive beliefs and practices espoused in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning ways to improve urban communities – from the creation of new municipal centers to the installation of neighborhood playgrounds. City Beautiful architectural design relied on the principles taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which was attended by many of the era's leading architects and wielded enormous influence. Beaux-Arts architecture focused on the planning of monumental civic buildings that embodied hierarchical and symmetrical arrangements of spaces and structures, using dominant axes and subordinate cross-axes. The buildings were commonly designed in

classical styles, and often employed all the traditional visual arts: architecture, sculpture, and painting.

The McMillan Commission applied City Beautiful precepts to the redesign of Washington's central core. As laid out in a report published in 1902, their plan attempted to recapture the fundamental principles of the original L'Enfant plan for the National Mall; to establish and maintain design standards for this area; and to extend the District of Columbia's park system to protect views, natural and scenic qualities, and the city water supply.

The Commission began meeting in April 1901. That summer, the members (with the exception of Saint-Gaudens) took a seven-week journey to Virginia and then Europe for the intensive study of the greatest classical urban ensembles of the Western tradition, the American estates and cities that would have been familiar to Washington and Jefferson, and the European sources on which L'Enfant may have based his plan. (Reps 1967:94-98; Streatfield 1991:123) Among the European cities they visited were Paris, Rome, London, Vienna, and Frankfurt. Designs that proved particularly influential in their conception of the Mall were the grounds of Hatfield House and Bushy Park in England, and the great seventeenth-century landscapes by Andre le Notre at Vaux-le-Vicomte and Versailles. The Place de la Concorde specifically provided inspiration for the design of Union Square.

On their return, the commission members set to work in their respective cities. They arranged an extensive publicity campaign and sought the backing of important political figures. They prepared large-format color renderings and three enormous models, which were exhibited in Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art in December 1901. McMillan presented the commission's report to Congress on January 15, 1902. (Reps 1967:103-108)

One critical victory won by the commission was securing the removal of the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad from the Mall at 6th Street and the construction of a new Union Station, shared with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, on a site north of the Capitol. (Reps 1967:97-100) On the Mall, key sites were reserved for memorials to Grant, at the east, and Lincoln, at the west. McKim redesigned the Washington Monument grounds with walled terraces ornamented by small temples and pools to emphasize the intersection of the two controlling axes and to highlight the fundamental relations between the legislative and executive branches of government. (Reps 1967:97)

The McMillan Commission used monumental classical buildings to house the offices of congressmen and to serve as a frame for the Capitol, and provided a new building for the Supreme Court. They widened the Mall to 1600 feet, almost 200 feet more than previously, and realigned its east-west axis twenty-five feet to the south to conform with the deviation caused by the placement of the Washington Monument. The Mall was to be transformed into a grassy lawn bordered by carriage drives and ranks of elm trees, dotted with fountains and places to sit, rest, and enjoy the view.

The plan showed the western boundary of the Capitol Grounds as straight rather than curved. On the grounds themselves, a cascade or rectangular pool led to a transverse basin, recalling the L'Enfant Plan for the area.

Union Square, created on the site of the Botanic Garden, was an entirely symmetrical arrangement of six panels divided by broad walks or carriage drives. Each panel was

subdivided by narrow axial walks leading to a fountain in its center. The six panels surrounded a large, raised central platform on the line of 2nd Street, where stood three statues of mounted Union generals, each facing west on a separate high pedestal. The tallest figure was Grant, in the center, flanked by figures intended to represent Sherman and Sheridan. Buildings surrounding Union Square were H-plan classical revival structures with domed temple fronts on line with the 2nd Street axis. They were similar in their style and use of symmetry to other structures lining the Mall in the McMillan Plan.

At 3rd Street, the diagonal routes of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues were straightened to run directly east-west, and the streets were broadened into large plazas with circular fountains in the center. Beyond Union Square, from 3rd to 4 ½ Streets, a rectangular basin extended down the center grass panel between the elms. (Four-and-a-Half Street has since been renamed 4th Street.)

This plan was never carried out. However, it remained as the blueprint for the site's eventual development until it was reconfigured by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. in 1934 and 1935.

Grant Memorial

The Grant Memorial Commission, established in 1895, considered a few locations for a memorial statue to Grant, including a site on the Ellipse directly south of the White House. Olmsted and McKim opposed any site on the 16th Street axis, which they believed had to be kept open. The site finally chosen was in the Botanic Garden at the foot of Capitol Hill, the McMillan Commission's Union Square. (See "Analysis & Evaluation: Buildings & Structures". For a contemporary discussion of the competition and design, see Grant Memorial Commission, *The Grant Memorial in Washington*, Washington: GPO, 1924.)

Excavation of the memorial's foundation began in October 1907. The work threatened several memorial trees, and the ensuing controversy brought construction to a halt:

"The Superintendent of the Botanic Garden, William R. Smith, protested against their removal and appeals were also made by many citizens of Washington as well as Members of Congress to spare the trees. Court action was even resorted to in an effort to compel a change in the plans of the Memorial Commission. After Congressional hearing and investigation, the course of the commission was upheld and it was permitted to continue the plans as adopted. The historic trees were removed from the site of the memorial in April, 1908, by order of the commission. The so-called 'Crittenden Oak' and the 'Shepherd Elm' were replanted on the north side of the garden and the 'Beck Elm' on the south side, all between First and Second Streets. On May 18, 1908, work for constructing the foundation was resumed and completed in July." (From an undated, unattributed paper, "The Grant Memorial," in the Cultural Resource files of National Mall & Memorial Parks, folder "Grant Memorial – Description/Research")

The dedication of the Grant Memorial on the centennial of Grant's birth, April 27, 1922, was a hugely popular affair. Federal offices were closed, and throngs of visitors gathered to watch the military parade that processed from the White House down Pennsylvania Avenue to the site in the shadow of the Capitol. The thousands of military men in the parade included hundreds of Civil War veterans, among them even some Confederates.

The enormous classical ensemble of the Grant Memorial and the picturesque assemblage of the Botanic Garden coexisted uneasily for the next ten years. The palm house and its conservatories ran perpendicular to the Grant Memorial along the south side of garden. Behind them were clustered other structures: greenhouses, cold frames, and a building which may have served as an administrative headquarters or superintendent's residence. The garden's main walk ran due west from the Grant Memorial. Some cross-axial walks intersected with it, leading between buildings and flower beds or other features. A curving walk followed the perimeter of the site. This walk was lined with trees, so that the site itself was bordered by a double row of tall deciduous trees, along with an iron fence (it may have been built adjacent to or as a replacement for the brick wall referred to previously). A pair of brick-and-stone gateposts stood at the garden's main entrance on 1st Street. Evergreen trees and shrubs were interspersed with deciduous plantings, and round planting beds dotted the lawn.

Major General George Gordon Meade Memorial

In October 1927, a second statue of a Union general was placed in Union Square, west of the Grant Memorial and near the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and 3rd Street. Major General George Gordon Meade (1815-1872) commanded the Union Army in its victory at Gettysburg.

A gift from the people of Pennsylvania to the people of the United States, the statue was built with \$85,000 given by the Pennsylvania legislature. Congress authorized the original site in 1915. (Finnan "Union Square" FRC1 no date p. 6) Battles between the state memorial commission and the Commission of Fine Arts over appropriate design delayed creation of the sculpture for many years.

Sculptor Charles Grafly made a heroic nine-foot-tall figure of Meade the centerpiece of a circular composition of eight figures, which provides interest from all sides. Behind Meade stands a grim-visaged, winged figure of War. Linking the two are allegorical male and female figures representing the attributes of a successful general: Energy, Military Courage, Fame, Progress, Chivalry, and Loyalty. (Finnan 7; McClure, "Meade," no date) The marble statue stands on a granite base supported by a marble pedestal.

In his 1934-35 landscape plan for Union Square, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. reserved a corresponding site south of the statue for a future memorial to a naval hero. No statue was ever erected here, though, and the Meade memorial was removed from Union Square in 1966 due to construction of the center leg of the Inner Loop Freeway and the Capitol Reflecting Pool. Placed in storage by the D.C. Highway Department, a cooperative agreement dated November 1, 1966 between the National Park Service and the District government stipulated that the statue would be re-erected when a suitable location was found. Some attempt was made to secure a site on the Mall near 4th Street and Madison Drive, but this was rejected by the Joint Committee on Landmarks because it fell within a tree panel and they believed that "the original concept of Union Square is no longer valid and the selection of a suitable companion piece on the opposite side of the Mall to frame the U.S. Grant Memorial was highly unlikely." (Dickenson to Reifel 1/13/72 Meade file Beautification files) The Meade Memorial now occupies a site overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue between 3rd and 4th Streets in front of the federal courthouse, where it was re-erected by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation as part of their comprehensive plan for Pennsylvania Avenue. This site was off the Mall, but near the original location.

In one respect, the new site was entirely appropriate:

“Meade looks out onto Pennsylvania Avenue to the spot that marked one of his proudest days. At nine o’clock on the morning of May 23, 1865, Meade rode down the avenue on his garlanded horse at the head of the Army of the Potomac as the leader of the Grand Review of troops. As he passed, the enormous throng picked up the chant of the Pennsylvanians in the crowd, ‘Gettysburg, Gettysburg, Gettysburg!’” (Jacob 59)



The McMillan Plan concept for Union Square, a birdseye view from above the Capitol Grounds to the northeast. Statues of Grant, Sheridan, and Sherman face west down the Mall. (CLP file “McMillan Plan Union Square 300 dpi BW detail”)



The Grant Memorial at the time of its dedication, when it still shared the site with the Botanic Garden. The Garfield Memorial is visible at upper right. (MRCE, "Grant Memorial April 1922")

1934-1965: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Redevelopment of Union Square

(for a guide to the FRC records referenced in the notes, see Supplemental Information)

The Olmsted Design

On March 4, 1929, Congress passed Public No. 1036 (70th Cong., H.R. 13929), "An Act to provide for the enlarging of the Capitol Grounds." This provided authorization for a commission created by an earlier act (April 11, 1928) to carry out the plan for enlarging the grounds laid out in Scheme B of their report to Congress (House Document 252, 70th Cong., 1st Sess.). The work focused on new lands acquired north of the Capitol, between the Capitol and Union Station. Projects included: demolishing buildings, closing streets, constructing Louisiana Avenue, building an underground garage, and building terraces, fountains, and new landscaping. Section 5 of the act (added at the direction of Charles Moore, secretary of the McMillan Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts) addressed authorization for both the Mall and Union Square, and transfer of their jurisdiction:

"The Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital is hereby authorized and directed to proceed with the development of that part of the public grounds in the District of Columbia connecting the Capitol Grounds with the Washington Monument and known as the Mall parkway, in accordance with the plans of Major L'Enfant and the so-called McMillan Commission, with such modifications thereof as may be recommended by the National Capital

Park and Planning Commission and approved by the Commission for the Enlarging of the Capitol Grounds. Such development shall include the grounds now occupied by the Botanic Garden between Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues west of First Street, and, as to such grounds, the development shall be in accordance with the approved plans for enlarging the Capitol Grounds. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this section, jurisdiction over that part of the public grounds the development of which is herein authorized shall be transferred to the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital at such time as may be approved by the Joint Committee on the Library.”

The garden was moved to two squares immediately south of the old site, Reservations #576 and 578, bounded by Maryland Avenue, S.W., 1st Street, S.W., Independence Avenue, S.W., and 3rd Street, S.W.. The architectural firm of Bennett, Parsons and Frost of Chicago designed a new conservatory; partner William Parsons was the principal in charge. The conservatory, a one-story rusticated limestone Renaissance Revival structure, was begun in November 1931 and completed by January 1933. A series of arched doorways led into the conservatory, which was about 262 feet long and 183 feet wide, with an arched, domed roof sheathed in glass. (1937 AR/Cap; Nolen to Cammerer 10/13/33 FRC3)

Between 1928 and 1933, the Architect of the Capitol spent \$981,140.37 on the relocation of the garden, including razing and clearing, and \$633,585 for construction of the new conservatory. Moving the Bartholdi Fountain to its new site across from the new conservatory, at 1st Street and Independence Avenue, S.W., cost \$4837.

In 1931, A. H. Hanson, landscape architect with the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, prepared an elaborate new design for Union Square. A reflecting pool occupied the center panel, between the Meade Memorial and the future memorial site, to its south, and each statue site was surrounded by four planting beds, with a Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) placed in the center of each bed, surrounded by junipers. Nothing ever came of this plan and it does not appear to bear any relation to the McMillan Plan nor to have influenced Olmsted's plan of three years later.

Demolition of structures on the old site began in the fall of 1933. West of the Botanic Garden site, between 3rd and 4½ Streets, private residences and other structures occupied Reservations A, B, C, and D. The buildings were condemned and torn down and Missouri and Maine Avenues were closed.

Transfer of the Botanic Garden property was arranged with the Treasury Department and the Joint Committee on the Library. (Nolen to Cammerer 10/13/33 p. 2 FRC3) The transfer was made under Land Transfer Order No. 69, April 6, 1934, for Union Square. Money for rebuilding Union Square came from the National Industrial Recovery Act, Appropriation F.P. No. 373. The total cost of rebuilding was probably \$251,000. (“Plans” unsigned undated history of Mall FRC4)

The National Park Service hired Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. as a consultant to prepare the general design (not detailed working drawings) for Union Square in February 1934, on or about February 12. As well as being one of the original members of the McMillan Commission, Olmsted had served on the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) since its founding in 1926. As with the concurrent work on the Mall, the NCPPC coordinated and approved plans and acted as a liaison. General plans required the approval of the NCPPC, the

Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the Commission for the Enlargement of the Capitol Grounds (CECG). (Nolen to Cammerer 10/13/33 p. 1 FRC3)

The men most involved with the Union Square project included several from the National Park Service: Director Arno Cammerer, Superintendent of National Capital Parks C. Marshall Finnan, and landscape architects Malcolm Kirkpatrick (possibly employed by the Eastern Division of the NPS) and A.H. Hanson (with the Branch of Forestry); from NCPPC, director Frederic A. Delano (uncle of the president), member William A. Delano (the president's cousin), and city planner John Nolen (who had recently replaced the first NCPPC planner, Charles Eliot II); from the Commission of Fine Arts, chairman Charles Moore and landscape architect Gilmore Clarke; and David Lynn, Architect of the Capitol.

The National Park Service provided Olmsted with material on existing conditions in the Botanic Garden and proposed roads. The old Tiber Creek sewer presented a considerable obstacle to development. It came within a few feet of the ground surface, running along the line of 2nd Street and beneath the Meade Monument site, before turning west to 3rd Street which it followed south.

Olmsted had prepared the general plan for Union Square by April 19, 1934, when he presented it to the NCPPC, CFA, and CECG at separate meetings. Identified as "#2843 M.Un.492," it was accompanied by a statement spelling out his principles and procedures in detail. The statement included a series of historic diagrams of realized and unrealized plans for the Capitol Grounds and Union Square site: L'Enfant (1791), Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1803), the Capitol Grounds as they were in 1815 and 1830, Thomas U. Walter (1864), Olmsted Sr. (1885), and the McMillan Commission plan (1901/1902). (Olmsted "Statement" 4/19/34 FRC3 and FRC4; Gartside to Finnan 4/23/34 FRC3)

Olmsted specifically sought approval for the "ultimate removal of trees from the central open space" with the understanding that he would transplant all the trees he could to "other parts of the area". (NCPPC Minutes 4/19/34 FRC3) Recognizing that Union Square was part of a "much larger whole" – the Mall landscape from the Capitol to the Washington Monument and beyond, to the Lincoln Memorial – he identified as a fundamental design issue the changes that might be needed in adjacent blocks, such as the Capitol Grounds, and Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. (p. 1)

Olmsted reviewed the historic plans. The McMillan Commission studies, he said, had been based on a revision of the western boundary of the Capitol Grounds, which he now believed was not historically valid. The McMillan Plan had shown First Street straightened and "cutting back into the Capitol Grounds over 100 feet". Second Street was opened through the square, the circles in which the Peace Monument and Garfield Monument stood were removed, and Maryland and Pennsylvania Avenues were "deflected" ("deflection"), creating a rectangular precinct. But, Olmsted now wrote:

"This portion of the plan of 1901 received less mature and deliberate study by the Commission as a whole than the portions of the central composition further west, and was embodied in the report under pressure of time as a tentative solution in spite of expressed doubts within the Commission as to some of its features. My further study of the problem, especially since I have been called upon to prepare definitive plans for Union Square, has tended to reenforce [*sic*] these doubts . . ." (p. 1)

In the years since 1901, the Grant and Meade Monuments had been built, establishing “additional fixed points”. The position of the Meade statue suggested that Union Square should be extended west to 3rd Street and “this whole area [treated] in a much more unified way than in the studies of 1901”.

Olmsted had decided that straightening 1st Street had never been intended by previous designers and that it created a poor relation between the street and the terminations of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues:

“In practically all of the subsequent plans for the Capitol Grounds which I have examined, including Latrobe’s plan of 1803, there are shown curved lines either at the western boundary of the Capitol Grounds or within them or both, drawn exactly or very nearly normal to the lines of these two great converging avenues, and serving to receive them square with their own direction.” (p. 4)

Thomas U. Walter had created the curving west boundary line of the Capitol Grounds that had apparently been intended by L’Enfant, “although one block further east than shown by [L’Enfant].” (p. 5) After the Civil War, when the Peace and Garfield Monuments were erected, the wall was cut back behind both statues, creating what Olmsted referred to as “scallops” in this line. Olmsted noted:

“The present Commission for Enlarging the Capitol Grounds, in addition to the new land acquired toward the Union Station, is now at last re-acquiring for the Government the land between B Street and Pennsylvania Avenue east of First Street which L’Enfant had the foresight to reserve in 1791.” (p. 5)

Olmsted said he would not shorten the “length of the unbroken foreground unit of that vista within the present Capitol Grounds [which] is even now none too long . . . any shortening of it as in the studies of 1901 would be distinctly unfortunate.” (p. 5) Neither would he shorten the length of the vista down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol which terminated at the Peace Monument. (p. 6)

Moving on to his own design, Olmsted laid out six conditions he believed should “control” the “Union Square problem”. The lines of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues should be kept essentially as they were. Third Street should be “widened to correspond with the width between Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues.” The old Botanic Garden site should be treated as a unit, unbroken by any extension of 2nd Street, with its central axis forming an “integral” part of the Mall vista. Since the Grant Monument was longer than the Mall greensward was wide, the open space immediately west of the monument should be wider, “constituting a local expansion of the axial open ground in scale with the monument.” (p. 6) This would help make Union Square function as a transitional area between the Mall and the Capitol Grounds.

The last condition concerned the trees:

“The existing fine large trees in the old Botanic Garden north and south of the requisite central open space should be preserved, and should be reenforced [*sic*], where the mass of foliage is weak, by additional trees, obtainable in part by moving to those positions good trees which must be removed from the central open space.” (p. 7)

Olmsted enlarged on this subject:

“All of the trees which are known to have special historic interest, such as the memorial trees, and which cannot remain indefinitely in their present locations, it is proposed to move, except one small tree in such bad condition that it could hardly be expected to survive even if left undisturbed (noted as the Garfield Tree) and one very handsome oak (noted as the Stewart Tree) which is so close to the Grant Monument and has its roots so involved with the foundations thereof and is so large that it would be almost impossible to move it successfully without wrecking and reconstructing a considerable part of the monument. In addition to the Memorial Trees all other trees within the central open space which are in condition and of a size and kind to be worth moving should now be prepared for moving at the proper season.” (p. 8)

The plan Olmsted presented met these conditions. West of the Grant Memorial, on the main Mall axis, a north-south grass panel was flanked by two walks. The ground sloped from the memorial down to 3rd Street, and the grass panel was sunk about two feet below the grade of 3rd Street and the Meade statue. Across from the Meade Monument, on the site reserved for a future memorial, were “two panels of planting of very limited height.” (p. 7)

Concerning the unfortunate “close proximity of First Street to the back of the Grant Monument”, Olmsted wrote:

“The best means of meeting these difficulties appears to be the planting of two blocks or panels of clipped shrubs, of just sufficient height, behind the low parts of the base and between it and First Street. The monument is too long to be appreciated as a whole from so short a distance as First Street, and the arrangement proposed would permit separate effective views from the street of the central figure and of each of the sculptural groups at the two ends.” (p. 8)

The NCPPC and CECG both approved the plan on April 19. The CFA “took no formal action but appeared [to Olmsted] to be favorable.” (NCPPC 4/19/34 FRC3) The CFA appears to have believed that it would be better to keep 2nd Street open: “The Commission noted that it is not proposed to extend Second Street through Union Square, which they thought would be very much in the interest of the plan to develop the square.” (CFA Minutes 4/23/34:11-12 NARA) While they agreed with Olmsted’s intention to treat the square as the “head of the Mall” and to end the Mall drives at 3rd Street, members Gilmore Clarke, a landscape architect, and Egerton Swartwout, an architect, stated that they “felt that the plan is not sufficiently monumental. The general character of the treatment of the Plaza of the 1901 plan, designed by Mr. McKim, seems to be more appropriate.” (CFA 4/23/34:12)

The Committee on the Library tentatively approved the plan the same month. (NCPPC Minutes 4/19/34 FRC3) With minor modifications, as principal plan #511 Olmsted’s Union Square design was approved again by the NCPPC on June 9. Olmsted made further studies and began plans to remove structures and some trees. (Olmsted “Record” 9/29/34 FRC3)

However, the NCPPC Minutes for September state that at their meeting on June 19, the CFA informed Olmsted that they “radically disagreed with the plan submitted to it on April 23rd and with the statement of conclusions on which it was based”. The CFA “objected to the main Mall treatment terminating at 3rd Street. In substance, they felt that something approximating the

plan of 1901 was desirable.” (NCPPC Minutes 9/27-28/34 FRC3) The actual CFA minutes do not contain language this strong.

When Olmsted presented his revised plan to the CFA in June (it appears this was numbered 511), a lengthy discussion ensued. Swartwout stated emphatically that he preferred McKim’s original Union Square “composition” of 1901, and that “he considered this to be an architectural problem rather than a landscape problem”. Swartwout approved of the way the McMillan Plan had used a terrace as a transitional device along the west edge of the Capitol Grounds, and he discussed how the terrace could be made to relate to the square – it “need not be set back to form a perfect rectangle for the square, but it could project into the square somewhat with proper easements at the corners on the axis of the two converging avenues.” (CFA 6/19/34:13)

Olmsted disagreed, saying

“he had reached the conclusion that the Mall would not relate well to the Capitol Grounds if the 1901 scheme was adopted. He emphasized the fact that there is objection to encroachment upon the Capitol Grounds to create a plaza. Mr. Olmsted was of the opinion that it would be impossible to carry out the 1901 plan now.” (CFA 6/19/34:13)

Swartwout, however, maintained his position. Olmsted resisted restudying the 1901 plan, saying money was not available. He mentioned physical conditions that could make it difficult to build the 1901 plan – the presence of the Tiber Sewer so close to the surface, the widening of 3rd Street – and listed further difficulties:

- “1. Possible failure of the scheme to work out a satisfactory relation to the diagonals.
- “2. Possible interruption of the sweep of the vista.
- “3. A paved plaza might tend to dissipate the continuity of relation with the Mall.”

But the CFA insisted the 1901 plan

“would be the best treatment for Union Square and there is no compromise between that and the plan presented by Mr. Olmsted. The Capitol is the head of the Mall and Union Square should be properly designed to give it individuality rather than simply an end to the Mall planting.” (CFA 6/19/34:14-15)

Olmsted finally agreed to “give the plan further study to see whether it could be worked out on a different basis than his submitted study and as a plaza treatment.” (CFA 6/19/34:15. Another point on which Olmsted was questioned was whether he had considered including a reflecting pool or fountain; he replied “that the dome of the Capitol would be reflected with the top cut off, which would be unfortunate.” (CFA 6/19/34:12)

Over the next few months, while working on the new plans, Olmsted continued assessing what work could be done to prepare the site: building paths and planting vegetation in areas to the north and south; moving some small trees and shrubs; and preparing preliminary cost estimates and work schedules. (Olmsted to Cammerer 6/27/34 FRC3)

NPS Director Arno Cammerer discussed the problem over the Olmsted plan with CFA Chairman Charles Moore , telling him there was need for action on the site soon so the appropriated money could be used. Reporting this to Olmsted, Cammerer wrote:

“The President is particularly interested in the Union Square and Mall development and I want to show him some results too. Mr. Moore again told me that there was no question at all about the Fine Arts Commission’s unanimity of opinion but there was no chance to compromise to agree with your plan.” (Cammerer to Olmsted 7/3/34 p. 1 FRC3)

Cammerer noted that the delay was causing problems with funding. Money for the Mall roads could not be requested when so little had been spent on Union Square out of the appropriated funds, and so, Cammerer said, it might be necessary to transfer Union Square money to the Mall project and later ask the Public Works Administration for Union Square funding. Cammerer urged Olmsted to restudy the scheme “on the general lines submitted by you in item 3 of your letter of June 21.” (Cammerer to Olmsted 7/3/34 p. 2 FRC3; the Olmsted letter of June 21 has not been located.)

Two months later, in September, Olmsted presented his “revised sketches” using the 1901 plan as a basis, “which emphasized the plaza treatment”. (CFA 9/17/34:8) He noted, however, that the Capitol Grounds retaining wall would need to be fourteen feet high,

“thus separating the Capitol Grounds from the Mall development. . . . Mr. Olmsted said the plan for Union Square was made in 1901 simply as a plan and without sufficient consideration to prevailing conditions. It proposed to cut down the large trees in this locality so as to create a large open vista adjacent to Union Square. The Union Square Plaza was to be 500 by 1000 feet in size. There were to be three large statues in the center of the plaza at the intersection of Second Street, whereas by 1908 the site for the Grant Monument, 250 feet in length, was fixed at the extreme east end of Union Square. . . . It was not intended he said that various designs of the 1901 Plan should be depended upon for details as it could not be anticipated at the time when the 1901 Plan would be carried out.” (CFA 9/17/34:8-9)

Olmsted also pointed out that a plaza of this size “would be undesirable because of the climatic conditions in Washington during the summer.” (CFA 9/17:34:9)

The CFA expressed a clear preference for one of the Olmsted sketches. In this alternative, #523, the retaining wall had been removed, and the ground rose slightly from the Grant Monument to the Capitol Grounds. Additionally,

“instead of a large plaza the plan showed a comparatively small island with Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues converging toward the Capitol and the Mall vista in the center. Second Street is to be kept closed and Third Street is to be widened to 76 feet.” (CFA 9/17/34:9-10)

The commission suggested several changes:

- “1. End the outer Mall roads at Third Street.
- “2. Extend the vista drives of the Mall into Union Square.
- “3. Square up the parcels of land adjacent to the central panel.
- “4. Plant a row of trees on the Union Square side of Third Street.”

Olmsted agreed to these and the commission approved the plan. (CFA 9/17/34:10) The NCPPC approved version #529 of the plan, a development of #511, before the next meeting of the CFA. (Olmsted “Record” 9/29/34, NCPPC Minutes 9/27-28/34 FRC3)

Version #533 of the Olmsted plan was presented to the CFA in October. (Olmsted, Record, 10/6-18/34 FRC3) Olmsted had eliminated the sunken grass panel west of the Grant Monument, keeping the ground the same level as the Mall plane. He had also eliminated the reflecting pool. (Draft Memo to Lanham, no date, FRC3)

Several other elements had been removed: the Capitol Grounds wall, the scalloped recesses, and the Peace and Garfield Memorials. This version was signed off on by Frederic A. Delano for the NCPPC, John Nance Garner for the Commission for the Expansion of the Capitol Grounds, and Charles Moore of the Commission of Fine Arts. Except for the changes to the Capitol Grounds and 1st Street, which were never made, this plan apparently depicts the Olmsted landscape as it was built.

Second Street curved west of the Grant Memorial, creating an oval-shaped precinct for the Grant Memorial. The western half of the site was divided into three sections or panels by the extension of the two inner Mall roads to 2nd Street, with the Meade Memorial occupying the north panel, grass in the center panel, and the south panel reserved for the future Navy memorial. Trees were clustered thickly around the Meade Memorial and the empty statue site, and trees – mostly newly-planted American elms – lined the streets cut through the site. The result, in the Meade and Navy statue panels, was essentially an unbroken mass of trees. Most were existing or had been transplanted from elsewhere in the Botanic Garden.

In the oval area occupied by the Grant Memorial, trees were planted in informal massings that were disposed north and south of the statue, which visually continued into similar massings on the Capitol Grounds. Groups of trees were arranged at the northeast and southeast behind the Grant Memorial to frame the statue group, and shield it from traffic.

While making many changes, Olmsted kept some fundamental features of the McMillan Plan design. Perhaps foremost among these was the idea that the site would commemorate the Union victory through the honoring of its generals. This idea was continued thematically, if not in the precise manner laid out by the McMillan Plan; the Grant Memorial had been built in the interim to a different design (though the central figure of Grant resembled the sketch provided by the commission) and the Meade Monument had been erected instead of the Sherman and Sheridan figures.

Olmsted decided to keep the diagonal alignments of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, and to retain the curved Capitol Grounds boundary. These features were in accord with the L'Enfant design, and provided better sight lines and intersections between streets.

He also tried to preserve as many historic trees from the Botanic Garden as possible. The Union Square of the McMillan Plan had no trees at all, creating a break between the trees of the Capitol Grounds and those of the Mall. Olmsted sought greater continuity between the adjoining landscapes, creating a defined space and a directed vista.

Olmsted told the CFA that he had not been able to find a satisfactory way to square up the “island” around the Grant Monument, so he had settled on what he called a “lima bean shape” that was “about 700 feet in diameter”. This shape, he said, “carried the general contours of the Capitol Grounds into this area.” (10/19/34:7)

He then discussed one underlying problem with determining spatial relationships in Union Square:

“Mr. Olmsted said that the difficulty is that the Grant Monument was placed on a line drawn not from the dome of the Capitol but from the center of the west façade of the Capitol to the Washington Monument. If the dome is taken for the center, the divergence of the axis is quite apparent. He said everything built on the Mall since has been lined up on an axis with the dome, resulting in a discrepancy of about four feet. The inner Mall roads aim at the Cavalry and Artillery groups but do not hit them exactly. The design must start off symmetrically and somewhere lose four feet. [p. 8] Mr. Olmsted said that he, therefore, made a wide path at the base of the monument to receive the roads.” (10/19/34:7-8)

After Olmsted left, Gilmore Clarke spoke in the plan’s favor, saying

“the reason for a great plaza has been eliminated because of the placing of the Grant Monument at the head of the Mall. . . . at first he believed with Mr. Swartwout and Mr. Howells that Union Square should have a rigid, architectural, rectangular treatment but that Mr. Olmsted’s latest plan has good scale and carries the eye right to the Capitol.” (CFA 10/19/34:9) However, “he did not like the treatment of the area around the Grant Monument and thought it should be more architectural and not so gardenesque.”

Charles Moore explained that when the Grant Monument was sited “at the head of the Mall there were certain trees that had to be given consideration, hence the present location.” (CFA 10/19/34:8-9) The new plan was approved by the commission, “with the understanding that further study will be given to the treatment of the area around the Grant Monument.” (CFA 10/19/34:9)

Later that day, at a meeting of the NCPPC, Olmsted made a statement about the new version:

“It provides for carrying the inner drives of the Mall through Union Square and around the Grant Monument. . . . It will be possible to grade, move trees and do everything in accordance with this plan, except putting through those roads, pending negotiations with the Commission on the Enlargement of the Capitol Grounds. . . .”

He hoped that the NCPPC would agree that the National Park Service could begin the preliminary work of tree moving and grading while trying to secure the agreement of the CECG.

The NCPPC approved the revised general plan #533 also, and voted to give the Park Service authority to proceed with preliminary work, pending the approval of the CECG. (NCPPC Minutes 10/19/34 FRC3) Though the plan was sent to the CECG several days later, it was not possible to get approval before their next meeting, in January. (Lynn to Cammerer 11/6/34 FRC3)

The next revision of the Olmsted plan, numbered 556A, 556B, and 556C (the latter for “walks and pavement at the Grant Memorial”), was presented by a member of his office to the Commission of Fine Arts at their January 1935 meeting. Another plan, based on a sketch by Clarke, was offered by Malcolm Kirkpatrick of the National Park Service.

Instead of “harsh and glaring” concrete, Clarke recommended using hexagonal asphalt blocks of “compressed asphaltic concrete”. (CFA 1/16/35:4-5) It was suggested that the edge of the pavement west of the monument be straightened, that the entrance be from the east on center, and that “the openings on a line with Cavalry and Artillery Groups . . . be closed.” (5) The commission recommended that the area adjacent to the Grant Monument be paved with stone, with low plantings at each end. Plans #556A and #556B were found “acceptable” and were to be incorporated, with the CFA suggestions, into a single plan for a further submission. (CFA 1/16/34:5) (A letter to Howard of January 21 approved the walks plan, but suggested substituting grass for shrubs at the east side. CFA 1/16/35:Exhibit B)

The January 15 version of the General Plan (TIC 802/89057) revised the plan #533 submitted by Olmsted on October 19, 1934. It was explained that the “lima bean” shape of the Grant Memorial island resulted from the curving alignment of 2nd Street through Union Square, which mirrored the curve of 1st Street and of the west side of the Capitol Grounds. There were no “scallops” at the northeast and southeast ends of the island, as there had been previously; the road was wide enough to allow traffic flow around the two small traffic circles, and these were kept subordinate to the more important feature of Union Square, the Grant Memorial composition.

West of the Grant Memorial ran east-west walks on line with the Inner Mall Drives, flanking a central grass panel. Trees occupied the side panels, with irregular massings clustered near hedges that defined the ends of the monument plaza. A broken line of street trees surrounded the island’s perimeter.

The Inner Mall Drives continued through to 2nd Street, breaking the western half of the site into three panels, with the Meade Memorial to the north, an identical panel for the future memorial to the south, and, between them, a grass panel with east-west walks, on the Mall’s center line. The arrangement of trees differed on the north and south panels, though both had rows of trees, probably elms, placed around their perimeters. Within these panels, trees were placed evenly, if somewhat randomly, probably to accommodate existing trees. A clear visual relation was formed between the new street trees along Union Square and the Mall elms, and between the central grass panels of Union Square and the central panel of the Mall landscape to the west

A General Plan dated February 21, 1935 (TIC 802/89058) modified the January plan. The circulation system and the shapes of the panels remained the same, but slight modifications had been made to the shape of the plaza around the memorial, and changes had been made to the plantings. The hedges had been removed from the ends of the Grant Memorial plaza. There were fewer trees overall, but most were rendered as larger specimens. Primarily, there were fewer trees added along the boundaries; perhaps those shown on this plan were all existing or retained, rather than new additions.

The west panels also exhibited a difference in the placement of trees. Along the north and south boundaries, the lines of trees were more regular and closely spaced. Those to the north, in particular, were set so close together that it raises the question of whether they were existing trees. Along 3rd Street, at the northwest and southwest ends of Union Square, were added rows of four elms along the outer edge of the sidewalk, perhaps to establish a stronger relation to the trees across 3rd Street, north of Madison and south of Jefferson Drives. Trees within the statue panels were shown as smaller than previously, and were accompanied by notations about species, retention, and removal; perhaps this plan had been site checked for greater accuracy

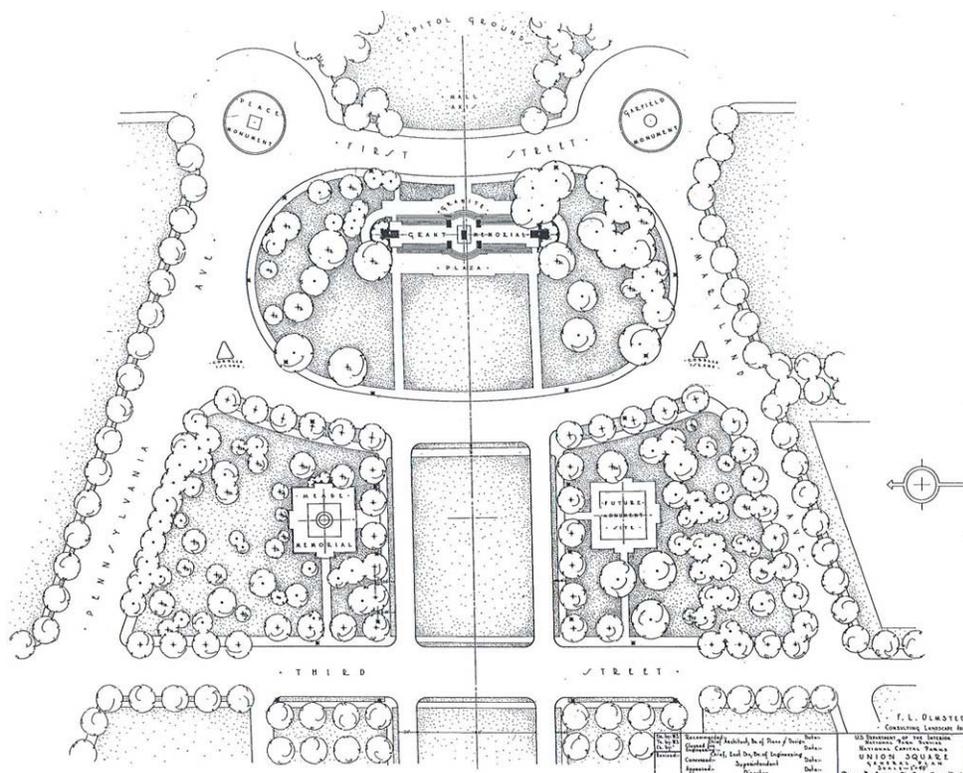
than shown on the January plan. Overall, the plan exhibits a more random pattern of trees within more defined boundaries formed by street trees.

Olmsted's revised plan for Union Square, #533, was finally approved by all three commissions on January 23, 1935. Two of the Mall roads were extended across 3rd Street into Union Square "so as to pass around the Grant Monument and its flanking trees on relatively easy curves connecting with the curved roads of the Capitol Grounds." This physically and visually integrated Union Square with the Capitol Grounds while maintaining its relation to the Mall. Where the revised plan #533 omitted the high stone walls, with their recesses behind the Peace and Garfield Memorials, and the gateposts around the Capitol Grounds, another version, #553A, shows them in place; this is the version that was followed. (Demaray to Lynn 10/24/54 p. 2 FRC3)

A planting plan dated February 27, 1935 (NCP 1585, drawn by the Branch of Plans and Design) shows the Olmsted plan overlaid on the existing planting of the former Botanic Garden. The garden site had been densely planted, especially in its western part. In the northwest were many horse chestnuts and buckeyes, along with "Chinese" scholar trees, hovenias, and locusts, among numerous other species. Zelkovas were scattered throughout the site. The main east-west walk, through the center of the garden, was flanked with paired horsechestnuts and a pair of zelkovas. Numerous oaks grew in the southwest corner, and a twenty-two-inch zelkova was noted as "to be transplanted" – this may be the existing Zelkova carpinifolia. A twenty-four-inch catalpa north of the Grant Memorial was to be retained; there is a catalpa in this location today. Five oaks immediately southeast of the Grant Memorial were to be retained in place, along with other oaks growing to the south and west along the site's boundary. The majority of trees were to be retained in place or transplanted within the vicinity.

In a report which may have been prepared by the staff of National Capital Parks, it was stated:

"In the preliminary study of this project, as expressed in his report to the Director of National Parks, the primary concern of Mr. Olmsted and of this office was the preservation of all authentic memorial trees, as well as all unusual specimen trees. On this account, in the final plan now being carried out, it was necessary to provide for the moving of over twenty-eight (28) trees, some as large as thirty-two inches in diameter, and to cut down only a comparatively few sound trees of mature growth." ("Plans" unsigned undated Mall history p. 6 FRC4)



Olmsted's approved general plan for Union Square. (CLP file "TIC 802/89058," Feb. 21, 1935)

Clearing of the Union Square Site

In 1904, the OPBG had recorded twenty-nine memorial trees in the Botanic Garden. An update of the survey in 1932 by naturalist I.N. Hoffman, probably for National Capital Parks, could only identify twelve remaining memorial trees. Of the others, six were known to be dead, and the remaining were assumed dead or "improperly recorded". ("Plans" unsigned undated history pp. 3-4 FRC4)

Both the National Park Service and Olmsted were concerned about showing progress in developing Union Square. By June 15, 1934, the Goldman Wrecking Company of Chicago had demolished and disposed of the conservatory, greenhouses, walks, fountains, and remaining houses on the site. Since the company got the salvage, they paid the federal government \$360.

(Memo re Goldman 6/15/34 FRC3) Westcott Nursery of Fairfax, Virginia, moved and transplanted trees. (Memo re Westcott 6/10/34 FRC3) A gas station facing Union Square at 3rd Street, S.W., between Maine and Missouri Avenues, was also removed, along with its underground gas storage tank. (Memo re Harris 8/10/34 FRC3) Sidewalks were removed in August. Their red sandstone curbs may have been reused in other parks, since they could be shifted in long sections without breaking.

The following work was planned for the summer of 1934, and was probably carried out then or soon thereafter by National Capital Parks: removing all trees and shrubs that were dead, dying, or misshapen and so could not be reused (though deciduous shrubs that could be transplanted were moved to other parks); clearing vegetation from the central vista; clearing underbrush throughout the site; and removing minor walks. The main east-west walk, and walks to the north and south, were probably left in place. The area south of the Meade Memorial that was reserved for a corresponding statue was to be graded and raised about five feet to the same level as Meade. (Finnan to Cammerer 7/7/34 & Demaray to Finnan 7/14/34 FRC3)

The NPS prepared Union Square planting plans, which they sent to the CFA in April 1935. One plan depicted the planting between the Grant Memorial and 1st Street. Malcolm Kirkpatrick, Resident Landscape Architect of the NPS Eastern Division, wrote that it showed

“sufficient additional planting to feather out at either end. The thought is that there will be provided a willowy mass of evergreen planting, somewhat of the nature of that on the east side of the Lincoln Memorial; of such size as to screen the traffic on First Street from observers west of the Grant Memorial.” (Kirkpatrick to Clarke 4/12/35 FRC6)

Olmsted Brothers approved this plan, with one exception:

“We believe the large plants of *Buxus suffruticosa* and *Taxus cuspidata* as indicated will make a fine and satisfactory mass without the filler of *Taxus cuspidata nana*. In other words, this filler seems to us to choke up the planting unnecessarily and in the end undesirably, and we do not think that it would look particularly well planted underneath and around the box bushes.”

They advised using *pachysandra* as a filler instead. (Whiting to Kirkpatrick 4/22/35 FRC6)

Great pains were taken to preserve trees. C. Marshall Finnan, Superintendent of National Capital Parks, outlined considerations for deciding whether trees should be transplanted. If trees were too large to move, it was better to cut them rather than have them transplanted only to die later. To balance the root and leaf structure of a tree for transplanting, it had sometimes been necessary to cut so much of the leaf area “that the tree appears ridiculous and could never be considered a thing of beauty.” (Finnan to Kirkpatrick et al. 7/19/34 pp. 1-2 FRC3) Finnan requested a report from the NCP Horticultural Department on how different tree varieties handled transplanting, and a report from the NCP Landscape Department “commenting upon the actual aesthetic value of each tree to be moved.” The NCP Branch of Forestry would then make recommendations for transplanting. The Branch of Forestry appears to have been responsible for the actual transplanting work, though Olmsted’s approval was required on each decision. (Finnan to Kirkpatrick et al., 7/19/34 p. 2 FRC3; Finnan to Hanson 6/25/35 FRC9)

Hearings on Union Square

Concern about the historic trees led to congressional hearings on the Union Square work, held May 28-29, 1935. Director Cammerer submitted a "Resolution" on the creation of Union Square to the House of Representatives, with a statement of costs to date and an estimate of total costs and funding sources, along with a statement on the legal authority by which

"mature, valuable, and historic trees were destroyed, the number and names of the various trees destroyed in the execution of said plans in said area, and the amount expended for such work; and The purchase cost and the cost of transplanting other trees and the number of same in the Government reservation known as 'The Mall' or upon the grounds connected with or adjacent to any public building on said reservation or contiguous thereto." (H. Res. 222. 74th Cong., 1st Sess. 5/14/35 FRC6)

In all, about forty-one trees were transplanted and 250 were cut. Most transplanted trees were moved to new positions within Union Square, but a few were moved to the grounds of the new Department of Agriculture building, between 12th and 14th Streets. Transplanted trees included the Hays Oak (a rare specimen known as a "Lea oak"), the Oak of Confucius, the Singleton "cut-leaf" linden, a giant zelkova, the Dan Voorhees memorial sycamore, an incense cedar, and a red horse chestnut. (Press release, c. 9/36, pp. 6-7, FRC1)

A number of historic trees were among those cut. (Howard to Finnan 3/13/35, p. 3 FRC6) The Forney and Forest bald cypresses were cut in April 1935 because they were too large to move. The Stewart tree, a red oak, was located north of the Grant Memorial, in the center of the walk near the bottom step; it had fractured a section of the marble. The Holman fir tree, already dead, was removed when the greenhouses were demolished. The two elms named for Justin Morrill and Lot Morrill were both removed. One of the Morrill elms had been planted over the Tiber sewer arch in less than eighteen inches of soil. Though it was root pruned for moving, it was found to have a "poorly developed root system and a decayed trunk" and was cut so the sewer could be rebuilt. The other Morrill elm may have been moved to a "new location visible from Pennsylvania Avenue." ("Plans" unsigned undated Mall history pp. 3-4 FRC4) Old street trees were removed, at least where they interfered with new road construction.

The sum of \$14,690 was spent in cutting down trees and removing stumps in Union Square. Tree moving was completed by October or early November 1935, and planting seems to have been mostly completed in 1936. (Saunders to Finnan 11/9/35 FRC9)

In 1936, the purchase of eight more *Taxus cuspidata*, 48-54 inches high and 36-42 inches wide, was requested "to complete the planting" around the Grant Memorial. Yews were substituted for eight box shrubs: "left off original planting at Mr. O's suggestion, the 44 specimens recently ordered were not sufficient to complete the job." (Kirkpatrick to Gartside 11/12/36 FRC9)

(Few records have been found pertaining to later planting. In 1937, a list for new plantings in reservations A and C included nine varieties of yews, four of azaleas, four of cotoneaster, two of euonymus, four of holly, and one pyracantha. [Paolano to Gartside 4/1/37 FRC9] In summer 1945, some unspecified landscape planting was done by the Roman Landscape Contracting Company, awarded in a contract for \$11,367 that also included work at the Lincoln Memorial terrace and the Watergate steps. [Notice of contract 6/23/45 FRC9])

Construction of Union Square

Most drawings of plans and details for Union Square construction were prepared by the NCP Branch of Engineering. (Nagle to Finnan 4/29/35 FRC6) The Bureau of Public Roads oversaw road construction. New roads were said to be nearly complete by November 1935. (Finnan to Cammerer 11/30/35 FRC6)

Third Street was built on “a continuous straight grade from Maryland Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue. As a result, the originally proposed low points of the two outer Mall roads will be raised considerably. Obviously this will make necessary revisions on the proposed grading of the two areas adjacent to Third Street.” (Kirkpatrick to Olmsted Brothers 4/16/35 FRC6) At some point, the street car line along 1st Street was moved.

The Branch of Engineers prepared the final report on Union Square, with the comprehensive title of: “The Formal Development of Union Square, Including Preparations and/or Purchase of Special Plans and General Development in Accordance Therewith, Including Removal of Greenhouses and General Cleanup, and Opening and Paving of 2nd Street from Pennsylvania Avenue to Maryland Avenue – Federal Project No. 373.” This was transmitted to the Superintendent of NCP on May 13, 1937, with the note: “it is assumed the project has been completed.” If not, they were instructed to hold the report. (Cross and Taylor to Finnan 5/13/37 FRC6)

For sidewalks, it was intended to use the same “dark colored exposed aggregate concrete” that had been chosen for the Mall. (Kirkpatrick to Olmsted Brothers 4/18/35 p. 2 FRC6) Olmsted planned to use granite borders on the paved platform around the Grant Memorial. These would enclose “panels of brushed surface concrete, using an aggregate of suitable color and texture”, a savings of about \$15,000 (presumably over granite pavers) and conforming to the material used for sidewalks throughout Union Square, the rest of the Mall, and for new walks in the Capitol Grounds. The “artistic gain . . .,” Olmsted wrote, “would be an offset to any local diminution in the monumental qualities associated with a pavement entirely of granite.” Charles Moore of the CFA agreed. (Olmsted to Finnan 6/6/35 p. 1 FRC6) Olmsted further recommended making the concrete pavement in Union Square “closely similar in color and texture to that of the warm gray concrete paving parallel to and immediately north of Constitution Avenue on the north axis of the Capitol.” (Olmsted to Finnan 6/6/35 p. 2 FRC6)

Union Square in Subsequent Years

Few Union Square records from subsequent decades until the 1960s pertain to anything but trees and the maintenance of the Grant Memorial. In 1940, A.H. Hanson, landscape architect for the NCP Branch of Forestry, noted the locations of remaining trees from the Botanic Garden. Several Goldenrain trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) probably remained in the northeast section of the site near Pennsylvania Avenue. Horse chestnuts, including red horse chestnuts, and buckeyes stood around the Meade Memorial. West of this statue was a “cutleaf” linden and to its north were “cucumber” trees (probably *Magnolia acuminata*). Also west of the Meade Memorial was a slippery elm, near the sidewalk along 3rd Street. A Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*) remained near Pennsylvania Avenue, halfway between 2nd and 3rd Streets, and an Osage orange stood at the corner of Second Street and Adams Drive. A Cedar of Lebanon grew near Maryland Avenue, about 200 feet west of 2nd Street, and there were several hackberries, either *australis* (European) or *sinensis* (Chinese). A silverbell (*Halesia* species)

stood near Pennsylvania Avenue due west of the Grant Memorial, and a number of European beeches stood in the square's southeast corner. There were zelkovas: "Several specimens in two varieties including the huge multiple stemmed tree which was moved in 1936 can be found in the area just north of Maryland Avenue, S.W., between Second and Third Streets." (Hanson to Mattoon 11/11/40, pp. 1-3)

In 1952, NCP Plant Pathologist Horace V. Wester identified in Union Square two *Zelkova serrata*, both about thirty-five feet tall, and three *Zelkova carpinifolia*, all thirty-five to fifty-five feet tall. (Wester to Assoc. Sup. 1/31/52 CLP files) Six years later, T. Sutton Jett, Acting Superintendent of National Capital Parks, wrote about Union Square in response to an inquiry regarding historic trees in Washington:

"The two groups of very large trees at either end of the Grant Memorial contain a number of historic trees but cannot be specifically identified. Among them are the Conger memorial oak (*Quercus falcata*), the Torrey memorial oak (*Quercus bicolor*) south of the Grant Memorial, and two red oaks (*Quercus robur*) one to Secretary Bayard and the other, 'the British' oak, planted to commemorate the settlement of the Alabama claims.

"Transplanted to the north of the Meade Memorial is a Chinese or bristle-tooth oak (*Quercus serrata*), a very rare tree in this country. It was grown on the estate of Chas. A. Dana at Glen Cove, Long Island from an acorn picked up by the grave of Confucius many years ago. . . .

"One other exceptional tree that was transplanted is the O.R. Singleton Memorial tree, a European cut-leaved Linden (*Tilia vulgaris laciniata*) now growing near 3rd Street north of the Mall proper. It is a most unusual tree and unknown anywhere else in our parks." (Jett to Green, 8/4/58, CLP files)

1966-2006: Construction of the Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Plan

In 1966, the prominent modernist architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was retained by the National Park Service to prepare a master plan for the Mall, including Union Square. Firm principal Nathaniel Owings, along with consulting architect David Childs, were the chief designers. Landscape architect Dan Kiley and traffic engineer Wilbur Smith & associates also served as consultants. A subsequent version, *The Washington Mall Circulation Systems*, was delivered in October 1973.

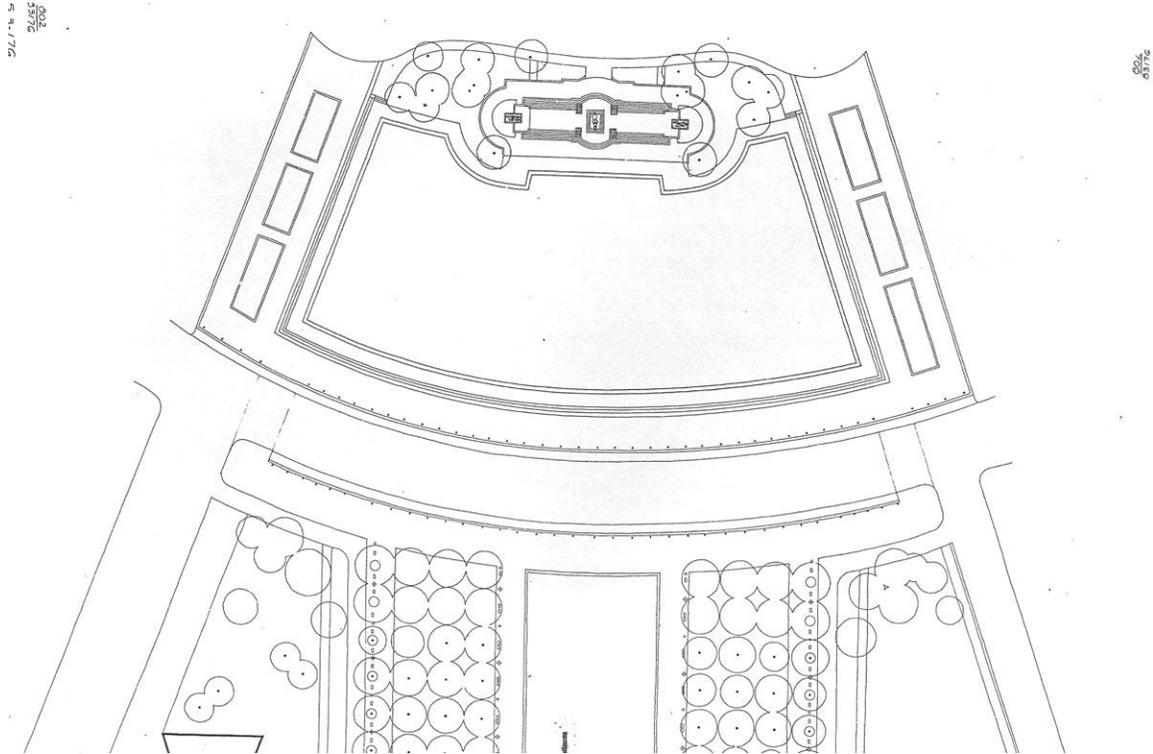
The 1966 *Washington Mall Plan* proposed declaring the entire Mall area, "from the Capitol grounds to the Potomac and from the White House to the Potomac," a National Monument under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. (SOM 1966:7) The report examined the "basic conflicts of types and volumes of circulation, lack of visitor amenities, fragmentation of land uses and unplanned future facilities." (SOM 1966:1) It presented the new plan as "a bolder and more comprehensive landscape structure" with "contrasting elements . . . which deny the monotony of slavish formality." (SOM 1966:8) Envisioning a greatly altered Mall, the designers presented comprehensive new designs not only for Union Square and the Mall proper, but also the Washington Monument Grounds, the Lincoln Memorial Grounds, and the Jefferson Memorial and Tidal Basin areas.

The key change was the removal of roads and roadway parking from these parks, and reliance instead on a system of shuttle and tour buses and an increased number of pedestrian walks. Parking was provided in underground lots beneath the Mall and at satellite lots some distance away. In the Mall area, pedestrian and automotive traffic were separated. The Mall roads – Jefferson, Adams, Washington, and Madison Drives – were removed and replaced by walks. Visitor centers were located at strategic points.

The 1966 plan recognized the importance of Union Square – called the “Grant Overlook Terrace” – as a foreground to the Mall, offering dramatic views of the Washington Monument. First, 2nd, and 3rd Streets were entirely removed, replaced by a reflecting pool near the monument and by a single, curving eight-lane road on the route of 2nd Street, “for ceremonial and everyday use”.

Between 1966 and 1971 SOM made numerous other studies of the Mall and Union Square. One of these was implemented in the redesign of Union Square, begun in 1969 and completed in about 1971. The work was spurred by construction of the Inner Loop Freeway by the D.C. Highway Department underneath the square. As planned, the freeway had a curved alignment, but Nathaniel Owings pointed out that if it were straightened, money would become available to build a Capitol Reflecting Pool. (interview with Penczer, 6/06) Second Street was closed while 3rd Street remained as it was; no Ceremonial Boulevard was built. The pool with its plaza to the west occupies about half of the site, and its construction resulted in the moving of the Meade Memorial; the loss of the Navy memorial site; the removal of dozens of trees, many of them historic; and the compromise of the Olmsted landscape plan’s integrity. Few changes have been made to the site since the SOM plan was completed in the early 1970s.

Union Square as built differs slightly from the version published in SOM’s second report. of October 1973, titled “The Washington Mall Circulation Systems.” This built on the principles of the 1966 study. Once again it was proposed to build a Ceremonial Drive, now replacing 3rd Street. With the removal of 3rd Street, the tree panels could be extended east by 100 feet, allowing for two additional rows of trees. Along the west side of Ceremonial Drive ran a forty-five-foot-wide walk made of “crushed compacted stone” (SOM 1973:14) and lined by bollards to discourage people from crossing except at Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. First Street was closed to all vehicles other than tourmobiles. These circulation changes have not been implemented.



The SOM plan for Union Square replaced much of the planting with the Capitol Reflecting Pool. This graphic, from 1974, shows the asymmetrical footprint of the pool. It also depicts the broad Ceremonial Drive, a feature eliminated in favor of grass panels and the retention of 3rd Street. (TIC 802/83176)

Analysis and Evaluation

Summary

The Union Square site has been thoroughly altered from its original condition and is now a completely constructed landscape. Its topography is almost entirely flat. There is the potential for archeological remains, but these have never been assessed. People visit Union Square to see the Grant Memorial, the Capitol Reflecting Pool, and the dramatic views of the Mall and the Capitol; many also traverse the site when walking between these sites and the Botanic Garden. The square is sometimes used as a gathering point for political demonstrations.

The space in Union Square is somewhat more diffuse around the edges than is the dramatic, sharply defined channel of space that characterizes the main Mall landscape to the west. Instead of regular ranks of elm trees, the trees of Union Square are placed in informal massings at the northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest corners.

The enormous bronze-and-marble sculpture group of the U.S. Grant Memorial, by sculptor Edwin M. Shady, demarcates the east end of Union Square and, by extension, the Mall. It complements the Lincoln Memorial at the Mall's west end, with the Union General facing his commander-in-chief, and underscores one of the chief symbolic themes of the Mall, the preservation of the Union.

Two large bronze statues representing groups of cavalry and artillery are set at the north and south ends, respectively, of the 252-foot-long raised marble platform. The platform and the statue bases were designed by architect Edward P. Casey. Both statues feature large numbers of struggling men and plunging horses engaged in violent action. Their intensity and wild movement contrast sharply with the central figure of Grant, shown mounted on a standing horse, in characteristic garb and pose, quiet, still, and observant. Marble pedestals for the two statue groups and marble parapets define the ends of the platform. Four bronze lions recumbent on marble pedestals create a precinct around the Grant statue.

The Grant Memorial statues are often damaged, and many smaller features of the bronze statues have had to be repaired or replaced. The marble pedestals have been stained by the bronze. Some marble is cracked and chipped.

About half of the Union Square site is occupied by the Capitol Reflecting Pool, completed in 1971 to a design by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM). The McMillan Plan had included small pools in the square, and a large reflecting pool in the Mall's center panel west of 3rd Street. The SOM pool was built as part of the construction of the Center Leg of the Inner Loop Freeway, which passes underneath Union Square along the axis of 2nd Street.

The walk surrounding the wedge-shaped pool is sunk about a foot below ground level, and the pool's coping then rises to ground level. In plan view, the longer west end has a convex curve and the shorter east end has a concave curve that is broken by a rectangular recess in the center, on line with the Grant Memorial and the center line of the Mall. The angled sides parallel the axes of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. The pool's broad limestone coping is rounded like a bolster on the exterior; the interior slopes at a 90-degree angle, with a slight concave curve.

The shallow pool often collects dirt and trash. Because the pool is less than fifty years old, it is not a contributing feature.

The pool is a component of a larger plaza, which incorporates the Grant monument and includes slightly sunken walks along the north, west, and south sides of the pool and a wide plaza on the west side. Three broad steps lead down to the walks. North and south of the memorial are narrow flights of steps leading down to the pool and walk. At the main entrance off 1st Street, an asphalt apron leads to a small granite plaza on the east side of the Grant Memorial.

A simple grid, marked by changes in the color and texture of the masonry, defines the sunken pavement around the pool. Broad bands of white limestone divide the pavement into large rectangular panels, paved with an exposed pebble aggregate. These different tones and finishes provide some visual interest. Round metal (probably cast iron) drainage grates with a floral pattern are set regularly along the walk, just beneath the overhanging pool coping, aligned with the dividing strips of smooth concrete.

Along the west side of the pool is a wide plaza, simply paved in exposed rough aggregate concrete with a boundary strip on all four sides of the limestone. Sections of concrete are separated by expansion joints. Bollards line the north, west, and south sides of the plaza, with Bacon Twin-Twenty lights placed to the inside of every third bollard.

Two asphalt walks lead from the west end of the concrete plaza to the sidewalk along 3rd Street. The two walks have a splayed alignment, running parallel to the sides of park – that is, to Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues – and they divide the grass panel that occupies the western portion of Union Square into three sections. Both walks terminate at 3rd Street slightly outside of the alignment of the end of the Mall walks (the former Washington and Adams Drives).

The concrete walks around the pool are chipped, cracked, and crumbling. The limestone is in worse condition than the concrete.

Union Square has only a few types of small-scale features: benches, streetlights, bollards, trash receptacles, various types of curbing, and a single large sign; only lights, benches, and curbs are contributing. Benches placed along 1st Street facing the sidewalk are the standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks in 1934/35 with Public Works Administration funds. It is not known if any of the current benches in Union Square are original. They have cast-iron frames and wood slat backs and seats. Most are in good condition. Marble benches are built into the parapet ends of the Grant Memorial, on the platform level.

All streetlights in Union Square are the double lamp designed by Henry Bacon (architect of the Lincoln Memorial) known as the Bacon Twin or Twin-Twenty. They are placed around the entire perimeter of the paved area in Union Square. The posts are stylized classical columns which support a pair of the typical urn-shaped Washington Globe lamps. Most of the lights are in good condition.

A row of concrete bollards lines the west end of the broad plaza that extends west of the reflecting pool. Single bollards are located at the northeast and southeast corners of the pool at

the top of the steps. The cylindrical bollards have sloping sides and rounded tops. Except for some staining, they 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. Not part of the Olmsted design, 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 bottom course, and they extend out slightly further than this base course. A few blocks have shifted, and many are stained; some mortar is missing, and weeds grow from the mortar in places. The walls are in fair condition.

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.

The vista west from Union Square is of the central Mall landscape, with its flanking museums, elm trees, and, beyond, the Washington Monument. The vista to the east is of the Capitol and the Capitol Grounds. Union Square is 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 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, and the informal massings of trees on the Capitol Grounds, helping channel the vista. The loss of trees and lawn when the 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. Large office buildings to the north and south create a framework for the square that is similar, except in architectural style, to what was envisioned by the McMillan Commission.

Overall, the site has lost historic integrity but retains significance.

Location – The location of Union Square has not changed.

Design – The Olmsted landscape design for Union Square has been largely lost. Remnants include the Grant Memorial (completed in 1922 but incorporated as a key part of Olmsted’s composition), the plantings surrounding the memorial, and the groups of older trees at the four corners of the site.

Setting – The setting of Union Square has changed dramatically from the 1930s; however, the changes have been in line with those recommended by the 1901 McMillan Plan (which the 1930s Olmsted plan sought to revive). Large governmental and institutional buildings surround the square at some distance, beyond Constitution and Independence Avenues. While most of these are not classical revival structures, the style envisaged by the McMillan Commission, they are designed in modern architectural styles derived from the post-and-beam framework of classicism.

Workmanship – Though not quite the design envisioned by the McMillan Commission, the Grant Memorial displays a very high level of workmanship in the design and execution of the huge marble base, and the design and casting of the three large bronze groups. Otherwise, the category “workmanship” does not apply to any of the remaining features of the site, since the built Olmsted features have been lost and the SOM pool and surroundings are less than fifty years old and at this time lack significance.

Materials – The characteristic “materials” comprise the Grant Memorial, the Olmsted landscape, and the SOM pool and its surroundings. The Grant Memorial, significant under the rationale explained under “workmanship,” above, retains its original materials. Some of the vegetative material remains from the Olmsted landscape, but much was lost during construction of the SOM pool and plaza, which obliterated trees, walks, two statue locations, and much of the Olmsted composition.

Feeling – Because the design has mostly been lost, much of the feeling has been lost. The sense of an integral, organic connection to both the Mall and the Capitol Grounds has been greatly diminished.

Association – Union Square’s association with the Union victory in the Civil War remains. Responding to altered conditions, Olmsted Jr. strengthened the square’s expression of this theme, but it was weakened by the SOM work in the 1960s. When the Meade Monument was removed, and the site for its companion statue eliminated, the idea of memorializing Grant with his supporting generals was lost. The reflecting pool relates more to the Capitol than to the Civil War theme.

Natural Systems and Features

The Union Square site has been thoroughly altered from its original condition – marshy fields spreading out from the meandering course of the Tiber Creek. The transformation of the creek into the Washington Canal, built in the early nineteenth century, probably did little to alter this condition. Gradually, the Botanic Garden was subdrained, graded, and filled, with the canal channeled into a sewer. Today Union Square is an entirely constructed landscape. All the vegetation has been introduced. The only animals are typical urban fauna – squirrels, pigeons, ducks, and sea gulls.

Topography

The topography of Union Square is almost entirely flat. The small areas of lawn immediately north and south of the Grant Memorial slope slightly down to the north and south, respectively, and to the west.

Archeological Sites

Union Square has the potential for archeological remains, but these have never been assessed. It occupies the site of the old Botanic Garden, first established in 1820 and re-established in 1849, the first major scientific institution in the city. The Tiber Creek and later the Washington Canal ran across the site. The former Reservations A, B, C, and D, located at the west end of the site between Pennsylvania and Maine Avenues, to the north, and Maryland and Missouri Avenues, to the south, were densely developed with rowhouses and other structures. Maine and Missouri Avenues and all the buildings were removed when Union Square was developed. Much of the site would have been disturbed during construction of the Capitol Reflecting Pool in 1969-71.

Land Use

Much of the Union Square site is occupied by the Grant Memorial and the Capitol Reflecting Pool, and visitors come to see these features. Visitors also traverse Union Square to reach the U.S. Botanic Garden and when walking between the Mall and the Capitol. The Grant Memorial is particularly popular as a site for group photos; tour groups, school groups, and other large gatherings can pose here with the Capitol in the background. Often, because of its prime location next to the Capitol, the square serves as a site or gathering point for political demonstrations and rallies, for the crowds gathering to witness presidential inaugurations on the Capitol's West Terrace, or enjoying the July 4th concerts on the Capitol Grounds and fireworks on the Mall (the park also serves as a staging area for the Fourth of July). Processional routes for state funerals (including President Ronald Reagan's in 2004 and Rosa Parks's in 2005) often pass through Union Square.

Spatial Organization

The spatial organization of the Mall, including Union Square, is integral to the major vista from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. The Mall is a great channel of space, running between these two fixed points, and defined on each side between 3rd and 14th Streets by lines of elm trees, which form visual walls. This channel of space opens out at either end, in Union Square at the east in front of the Capitol and in the expansive slopes of the Washington Monument grounds at the west.

The space in Union Square is somewhat more diffuse around the edges than is the space on the rest of the Mall landscape. Instead of regular ranks of elm trees, the trees of Union Square are placed in informal massings at the northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest corners. Trees in the large central area of the square were removed when the pool was built in the 1960s, destroying the continuity between groups of trees that existed on the Olmsted plan.

Circulation

Union Square is defined by Pennsylvania Avenue, 1st Street, Maryland Avenue, and 3rd Street. Second Street across the square has been removed. The main features of the square are the Grant Memorial and the Capitol Reflecting Pool; the circulation system, greatly altered in 1969-71 with the construction of the pool by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, closely links these two features.

The long, raised marble platform that forms the base of the Grant Memorial is surrounded by a broad paved area, granite on the east and concrete on the other sides. An asphalt apron leads from the 1st Street sidewalk to the small granite entrance plaza on the memorial's east side. The granite plaza curves out to the east, following the curve of the stairs and platform at the rear of the Grant statue's pedestal. Within the granite paving are two tree planting squares where oak trees from the Botanic Garden were retained when the plaza was constructed, probably in the 1930s. The trees have since died.

The concrete plaza at the west side extends to the pool. This plaza has three types of paving, varying in color and texture: a large-scale grid of smooth white limestone and exposed aggregate concrete is used near the pool, with a smooth gray concrete used for the area leading to the statue. The gray concrete resembles granite in color, an effect recommended by Olmsted. Olmsted planned to use granite borders on the paved platform around the Grant Memorial: "panels of brushed surface concrete, using an aggregate of suitable color and texture", conforming to the material used for sidewalks throughout Union Square, the rest of the Mall, and for new walks in the Capitol Grounds. The "artistic gain . . .," Olmsted wrote, "would be an offset to any local diminution in the monumental qualities associated with a pavement entirely of granite." (Olmsted to Finnan 6/6/35 p. 1 FRC6) On this side, the pool is level with the plaza; on the pool's other three sides, three concrete steps lead down to a wide walk that circles the reflecting pool.

A simple grid pattern, defined by differences in the color and texture of the paving, defines the sunken pavement around the pool. Broad bands of white limestone divide the pavement into large rectangular panels that are paved with a rough exposed pebble aggregate, tan in color. The different tones and finishes provide visual interest. Round metal (probably cast iron) drainage grates are set regularly along the walk, just beneath the overhanging pool coping, aligned with the dividing strips of smooth concrete.

Along the west end of the pool is a wide plaza, simply paved in the exposed aggregate concrete with a boundary strip of the limestone on all four sides. Sections of concrete are separated by expansion joints. Bollards line the north, west, and south sides of the plaza, with Bacon Twin-Twenty lights placed to the inside of every third bollard. (See "Small-Scale Features.")

From the west end of the concrete plaza, two asphalt walks lead to the sidewalk along 3rd Street. The transition from the smooth limestone of the strip bordering the plaza to the dark gray asphalt is abrupt, and there is no edging between these walks and the lawn. The two walks are oriented east-west, and they divide the grass panel that occupies the western portion of Union Square into three sections. Both walks end slightly outside of the alignments of the Mall walks (the former Washington and Adams Drives).

The asphalt sidewalk along 1st Street has a linear patch of concrete running down the center, probably cut for utilities, and a concrete strip next to the curb. The sidewalk is also patched irregularly with concrete. These patches detract from the dignity of the memorial's entrance sequence. First Street has a granite curb and a brick gutter. A wide concrete sidewalk, patched in many areas with asphalt, runs along 3rd Street. Sidewalks come under District of Columbia jurisdiction.

The final two blocks of Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, flanking Union Square to the north and south, have been converted into parking lots. The Maryland Avenue lot passes between Union Square and the Botanic Garden conservatory, and has two rows of parking spaces diagonally striped for front-end parking. Pennsylvania Avenue has four rows of front-end parking. Pedestrians walk freely across these lots.

Along the northwest side of the pool are two anomalous granite steps; the lower step slants into the ground plane. This feature seems to be accommodating a slight grade change. From the corner of the west plaza, a short section of asphalt ramp leads to the sidewalk along Pennsylvania Avenue.

Another oddity in Union Square is a small, hexagonal area paved in concrete, just off the sidewalk northeast of the memorial, which probably once served as the platform for a Tourmobile kiosk. Three benches stand immediately next to each other at the southwest corner. The two corners of the lawns next to the sidewalk are paved in granite Durax block; a single trash receptacle stands in the center of each paved triangle.

Wide social trails have been worn into the lawns north and south of the Grant Memorial. Social trails also cross the lawns at the west end of the property, particularly the northernmost lawn. The walks around the pool are chipped, cracked, and crumbling. The limestone is in worse condition than the large aggregate.

List of contributing features:

granite plaza at east side of Grant Memorial
concrete plaza around north, west, and south sides of Grant Memorial

List of non-contributing features:

steps and sunken walk around pool
plaza at west side of pool
two asphalt walks
social trails



The formal entrance to the Grant Memorial, and to Union Square, is off 1st Street at the rear of the statue. Note the empty space in the granite paving where a historic oak tree formerly stood. (CLP file "GM entrance plaza 2" Feb. 24 2006)



Paving composed of limestone and concrete, contrasting in color and texture, articulates the wide sunken walk surrounding the reflecting pool. View looking west. (CLP file "plaza and walk along S side pool" Feb. 24 2006)