



THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

WINTER

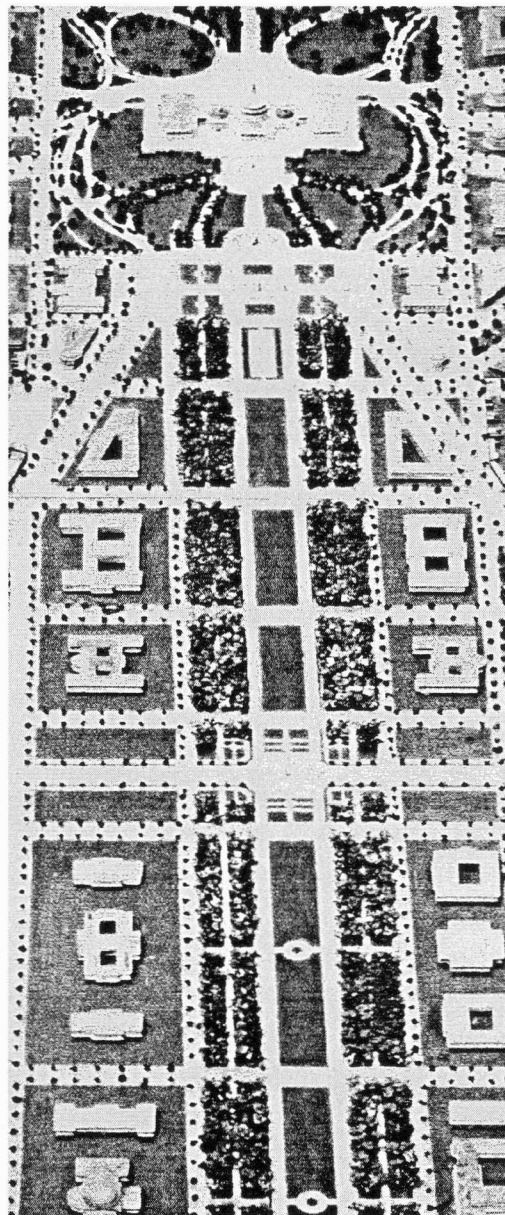
1995

DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

THE MALL:

Our Front Yard

The Mall as we know it was designed and built entirely in the twentieth century. Yet the mall concept was introduced with the city plan drawn by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791-92. L'Enfant's Mall was a grand boulevard, 400 feet wide, lined by buildings whose lawns sloped down to the central avenue. The Mall, intended as a center for the social and intellectual life of the city according to architectural historian Pamela Scott, was one part of an interconnected four part public center. Major public buildings, the Capitol and the President's House each with extensive public grounds and the monument to Washington with the Monument Gardens, were to be connected by the Mall. L'Enfant drew his design from the French baroque tradition of planning developed in the court of Louis XIV. His inspiration was to turn the royalist plan into a democratic diagram, physically and



Senate Park Commission model of the Mall, 1901-1902

symbolically linking the equal powers of Congress and the President.

Neither L'Enfant's Mall nor the elegant ambassadorial residences lining it were ever built. With the construction of the colorful Smithsonian Building and the initiation of the bucolic Downing plan for the public grounds, a new concept was introduced, locating large public buildings along a Victorian pleasure garden. Downing's Mall was a setting for, rather than an extension of, the public functions of government. At the same time, as Therese O'Malley has said in *The Mall in Washington*, "Downing's design was a physical expression of his belief in American democracy because his gardens would be instruments of public education and edification." An outdoor museum of trees of North America,

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appropriately labeled, was to be created. The design emphasized the national nature of this public park where citizens could experience model landscape planning which Downing found suitable for the United States. After his death in 1852, only a fraction of Downing's ambition for the Mall was realized. (see *Smithsonian Pleasure Grounds*, in this issue). In its identity as the front yard of the Smithsonian Institution, Downing's idea of the Mall as an educational place lived on.

By the late 19th Century, the heart of Washington had neither the clarity of L'Enfant's conception nor the character of Downing's. At the beginning of the 20th century, the American Institute of Architects proposed the improvement of Washington, soliciting and publishing plans. Their leadership influenced the creation by Senator James McMillan, chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia, of a commission for the improvement of the public grounds of the city. Under the leadership of architect Daniel Hudson Burnham, the group took as their goal the redesign of the entire city by addressing all areas adjacent to the continuous circular park system they proposed to create.

The guiding principle for the McMillan Commission members was to restore the city to the vision of the Republic's founders. In order to understand the formulative ideas of the L'Enfant Plan, Burnham and his colleagues travelled to American sites such as Williamsburg (unrestored) and to European examples of Baroque planning in France such as Versailles. Delving even further into L'Enfant's sources, they visited the

Renaissance gardens of Italy from which the French landscape tradition had grown. Their plan for the Mall greatly enlarged the scale of L'Enfant's Mall. Burnham's advice, as delivered to the London Town Planning Conference of 1910, was to create comprehensive plans on the theory that, if only part of the vision were to be realized, the city would still be greatly improved.

The plan, more formally known as the Senate Park Commission Plan, restored the symbolic and visual connection between Congress and the White House by redesigning the Mall and creating a new landscape plan for the Washington Monument (never executed). In the middle was a greenward flanked by four rows of American Elms and lined with grandiose public buildings in the neo classical style of the present day National Gallery.

Ironically, it was the McMillan Commission plan which turned the Mall into a site for museum buildings, creating the educational character envisioned by Downing, while entirely changing its visual character. It was their hope that the old Smithsonian Building, which for so long had represented this vision of the Mall as a place for "education and edification", would be replaced by a dignified temple-like structure along the model of the Museum of Natural History building. Although the Smithsonian Building remained, the McMillan Commission's unique Edwardian combination of 18th and 19th century ideas about the Mall was so compelling that it, alone among the great plans of the past, was finally realized.

CRF

SMITHSONIAN PLEASURE GROUNDS

The construction of the Smithsonian Institution Building compelled several prominent Washingtonians to urge federal improvement of the National Mall. The Commissioner of Public Buildings, Ignatius Mudd, reminded Congress that "These public grounds are the property of the nation, and were reserved at the founding of the city as a means of beautifying and adorning the national capital." Smithsonian Secretary Joseph Henry thought the Mall could be "one of the finest drives in the world," and, together with the Mayor of Washington and W. W. Corcoran, convinced President Fillmore to invite Andrew Jackson Downing to prepare a plan for planting and finishing the Mall. Downing was the nation's premier horticulturalist and landscape architect, and he thought his design would be the first "good example of a real park in the United States."

On 27 February 1850, he presented his plan to the approving Smithsonian Board of Regents and explained his three-fold goal: to "form a national Park, which should be an ornament to the Capital of the United States;" to "give an example of the natural style of Landscape Gardening;" and to "form a public museum of living trees and shrubs."

The plan as a whole was meant to represent the Union—an agrarian and civic Utopia—in a time of profound political and social unrest; and Downing hoped that the beauty of the Mall would exert

an "enchancing influence, by which the excitement of our commercial cities will be happily counterbalanced by the more elegant and quiet enjoyments of country life." To protect the integrity of the landscape, Downing proposed screens of trees along the major thorough-

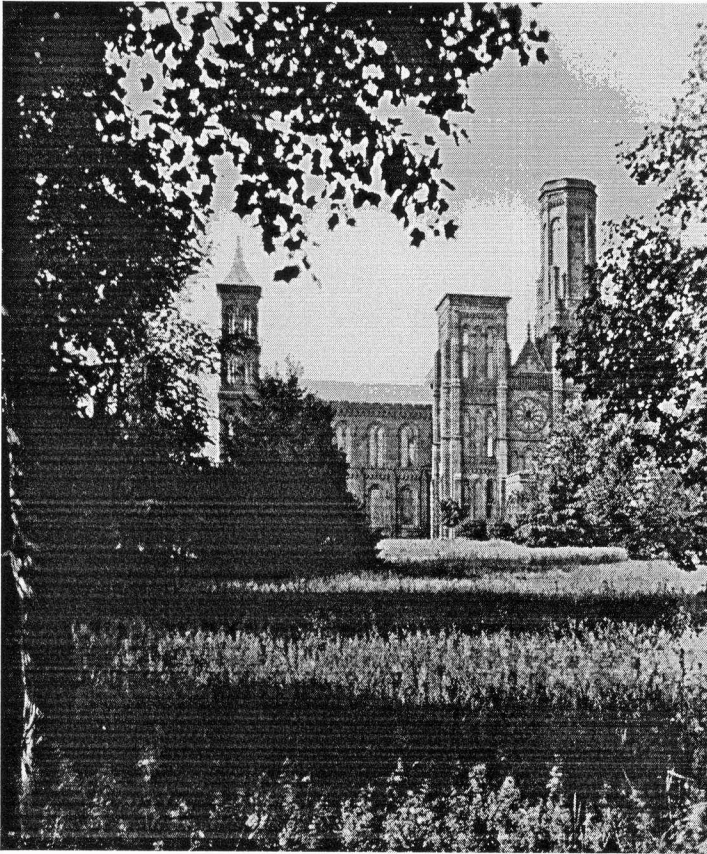
Downing spent too little time in Washington, but President Fillmore later increased Downing's authority to include all public spaces in the capital city.

The Smithsonian grounds (between 12th and 7th Streets) were planted in Downing's favorite "natural" style, in which "trees and shrubs are often planted closely together, and intricacy and variety as in wild nature are all indispensable." He proposed thick plantings of "the rarest trees and shrubs, to give greater seclusion and beauty" to the grounds of the "Castle," the exterior of which was completed in 1851. The Annual Report of that year noted, "In the midst of this variegated landscape the Smithsonian building will occupy a prominent position, and with its picturesque architecture will produce a harmonious effect." Only the Smithsonian grounds received Congressional funding before Downing's death in 1852. Several of his ideas were used or adapted in later development efforts, but the details of his plan were largely ignored. Thirty years later, Frederick Law Olmstead considered Downing's plan historically important, citing the Smithsonian gardens as

the only example of true beauty in the Capital region. In her chapter in *The National Mall, 1791-1991*, Therese O'Malley has written:

"Downing's design for the Mall combined art and science and, in so doing, embodied the goals of the Smithsonian Bequest: the promotion of arts and sciences and the education of citizens in the principles of landscape aesthetics and natural history."

MCH



The Castle as seen from across the Mall, ca.1900

fares crossing the Mall. The design, comprised of six distinct parks or "scenes," encouraged the individual to find respite in curving paths and drives, and edification in the labelled plantings.

The project began with the Smithsonian Pleasure Grounds, and the Institution's Annual Report of 1851 stated that the plan was "in the process of rapid execution under the direction of Mr. Downing." During this initial stage of rough work, some thought

sonian building will occupy a prominent position, and with its picturesque architecture will produce a harmonious effect." Only the Smithsonian grounds received Congressional funding before Downing's death in 1852. Several of his ideas were used or adapted in later development efforts, but the details of his plan were largely ignored. Thirty years later, Frederick Law Olmstead considered Downing's plan historically important, citing the Smithsonian gardens as

THE HENRY STATUE

About-Face

The bronze statue of the Smithsonian's first secretary, Joseph Henry by William Wetmore Story, looms larger than life on its pedestal centered in front of the Institution's first building. Most people would agree that there is probably no site on the Smithsonian's grounds more appropriate for this sculpture. Today, though, few are aware that the statue did not always reside in its present location. When first dedicated on April 19, 1883, it stood about 150 feet to the northwest of the Smithsonian Building and faced the west wing. The placement of Henry's statue was then thought appropriate so that, as Noah Porter, then President of Yale University, stated in his dedication oration:

"...here by day and night, in sunshine and in storm, our honored friend shall ever as in his lifetime keep watch and guard over the scene of his cares and labors, of his conflicts and triumphs..."

Phantoms of the Museum

The Henry statue has provided inspiration for at least one story about ghosts residing in the Smithsonian Building. In an example of creative writing at its best - or worst - an article in the May 13, 1900 edition of the *Washington Post* related one such story. The article stated that "guarded footsteps traverse the lonely corridors, made by unseen feet, and husky voices break the night stillness." An old guard was convinced that the ghost of Secretary Henry himself quietly walked the halls of the building "keeping watch over the treasures of the Smithsonian which he so loved." He was sure that in the early morning as he approached the statue of Henry it "wavered in the dawning light, as though just gaining his accustomed place upon his pedestal."

RS



The Henry Statue by W.W. Story, ca.1883

Henry, who had served as secretary of the Smithsonian during its first 32 years, not only worked in the building but lived there as well. Ironically though, the building itself was the subject of one of Henry's first conflicts as secretary; in 1847, he tried repeatedly to halt construction of the large building believing that it was a "gross violation of the trust." Moreover, Henry found the style of the building objectionable. Commenting on the newly completed east wing he said: "...it is an example of the most striking kind of a failure of at-

tempting to adopt the architecture of the middle ages to the wants and usages of the 19th century." The building was in due time completed and the expense of maintaining it remained a source of displeasure to Henry throughout his term as secretary.

The original placement of the Henry statue, on a small triangle of grass formed by the intersection of three carriage paths, harmonized with the picturesque arrangement of A.J. Downing's *Smithsonian Pleasure Grounds*, as the Mall was then known. When the Mall was reconfigured in 1934 realizing the 1901 McMillan Commission design, the statue was moved to its present location. Although the Smithsonian had proposed that the statue face north away from the building, the Fine Arts Commission recommended it face south instead, "so as to give it proper lighting." The suggestion was accepted by then secretary Charles Greeley Abbot and there, for the next 42 years, it stood face to façade with the building Henry so disliked.

On May 24, 1965 Henry's statue was rotated to face outward to the Mall. The official reason for turning the statue was not, as Smithsonian lore has it, in deference to Henry's distaste for the building. Rather, Secretary S. Dillon Ripley noted that the statue of Henry had faced the "Institution's famed red castle," since 1883, when it was one of only two buildings under the Smithsonian's charge. By 1965, the Smithsonian had increased in size to include three more buildings on the Mall and Ripley decided that "it was high time for Henry to see them."

Incongruous as it seems for Henry's statue to face a building he disdained, it may be equally paradoxical for it to face the huge museum complex of the Smithsonian. From the beginning, Henry was opposed to the support of a museum on the grounds that it was "of local interest and did not comport with the cosmopolitan intentions of the bequest."

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MONUMENT TO TRUTH AND BEAUTY

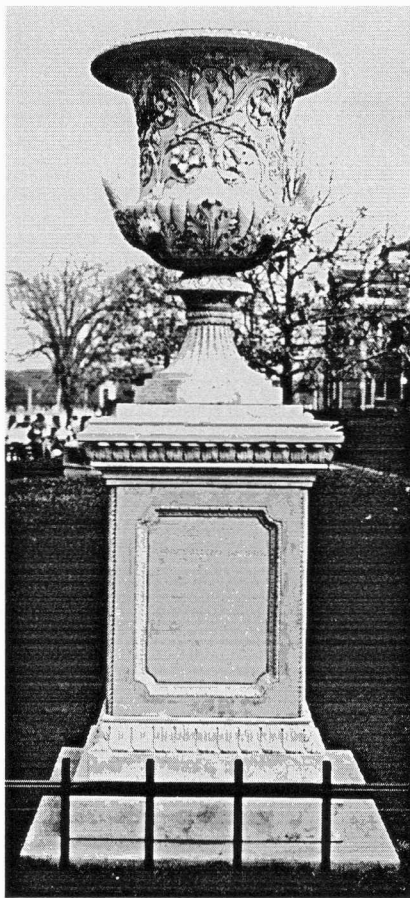
A lovely and serene Victorian memorial stands in the picturesque Enid Haupt Garden, south of the Smithsonian "Castle." Fashioned in the form of a Grecian urn, this memorial honors one of the most influential American landscape architects and aesthetic theorists of the nineteenth century. The "Downing Urn" was erected in 1856 to the memory of Andrew Jackson Downing, who had been commissioned to landscape the parks of Washington the year before his untimely death in 1852.

Andrew Jackson Downing became well known to Americans during the 1840s through his writings on horticulture and landscape. His ideas embraced a romantic vision of medieval forms that were derived from English garden theory and style. He eloquently advocated the emergence of a democratic, publicly accessible and popular aesthetic, while attempting to persuade Americans that wealth did not convey an exclusive entitlement to artistic sensibility.

Downing was the author of three seminal books on gardening and architecture, founder of a journal of "rural art and taste," entitled *The Horticulturist*, and the American editor of three English books on the same topics. He advocated the superiority of the picturesque medieval style for rural architecture, from large country estates to small cottages. Downing believed that the style of a building should complement its environment and that country architecture should reflect

the picturesque qualities of its surroundings. His small Gothic Revival estate, *Highland Gardens*, on the western ridge of the Hudson River at Newburgh, New York, was a well known expression of his ideas.

More enduring still, he advocated that the picturesque be introduced into urban areas with the



The Downing Urn

creation of naturalistic parks. The idea of elevating popular taste through the aesthetic influence of beautiful public spaces was beginning to transform the American landscape during the mid-nineteenth century, and Downing was an influential force in this development.

Tragically, Andrew Jackson Downing died at the height of his influence, three months before his

thirty-seventh birthday. On the morning of July 28, 1852, he embarked on the steamboat *Henry Clay* at Newburgh, NY, traveling to inspect an architectural commission in Newport, Rhode Island, thence proceeding to Washington. Unbeknownst to the boarding passengers, the doomed *Henry Clay* had engaged another passenger steamboat, the *Armenia* in a contest of speed down the Hudson River, from Albany to New York City. As the *Henry Clay* steamed well ahead of its rival ship, the captain and crew assured their anxious passengers that no hazard could result from the over-stoked boilers. At about four in the afternoon the mid-section of the ship was suddenly engulfed in flames. Downing survived the explosion and fire, but drowned while attempting to help other victims of the disaster.

The memorial urn was erected by the Pomological Society, founded with Downing's assistance, for the scientific study of fruits and their propagation. Designed by Downing's architect partner Calvert Vaux, the urn was executed by New York sculptor Robert E. Launitz and unveiled in September, 1856. It stands four feet in height with a brim three feet in diameter, and is elevated upon a five-foot-tall pedestal of domestic white marble, with inscriptions on all sides.

The ornamental vase, a large classical urn of white Carrara marble, is the embodiment of an ethereal, nineteenth-century funerary art. The marble is carved in the antique manner with an arabesque of meandering vines and acanthus leaves. The handles spring from the body of the urn above the masks of satyrs, gods of the sylvan

forests. The naturalistic surface decoration is a reflection of A. J. Downing's artistic vision and love of nature. Therefore, it is a monument to both the man and his vision, harmonizing knowledge, art and nature.

Echoing the sentiments of James Smithson, Downing's words inscribed on the pedestal seem perfect justification for the repose of his memory in a Smithsonian public garden:

"Build halls where knowledge shall be freely diffused among men, and not shut up within the narrow walls of narrower institutions. Plant spacious parks in your cities, and unclose their gates as wide as the gates of morning to the whole people."

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AIR & SPACE IN THE SOUTHWEST:

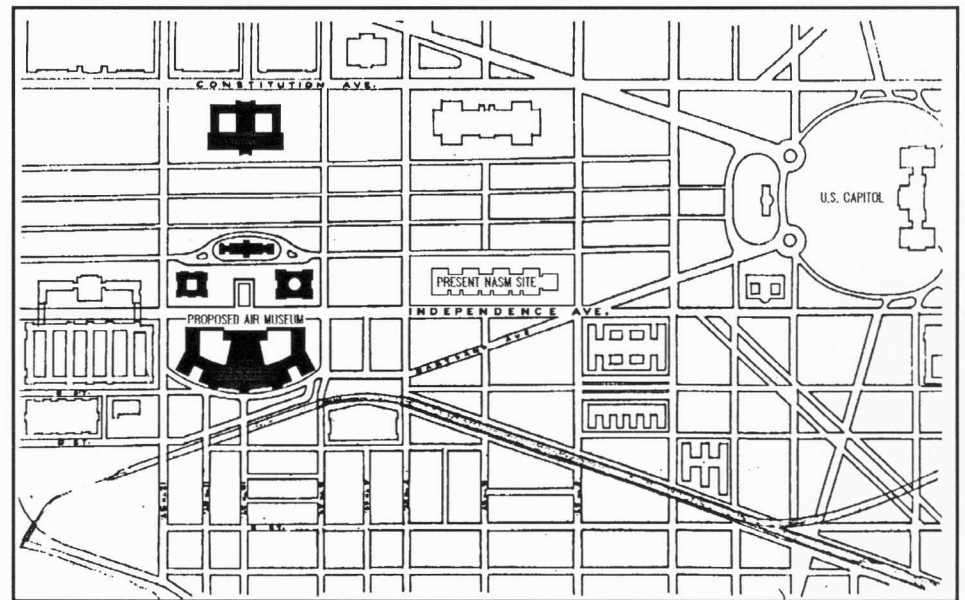
The Debate over a Tenth Street Mall

The Smithsonian Institution, as one of the preeminent presences on the National Mall, has always been effected by planning in downtown Washington. During one episode in the 1950s, this planning had a dramatic effect on the development of what became the Institution's most popular museum: the National Air and Space Museum (NASM).

The early history of the planning of the Air and Space museum involved the search for a suitable location for a museum building. After two unsuccessful bids for larger sites outside the downtown area, the National Air Museum Ad-

visory Board in 1953 selected a location behind the Smithsonian "Castle" Building (south of Independence Avenue between 9th and 12th street), later approved by the Smithsonian Board of Regents. In June of 1954, Secretary Leonard Carmichael commissioned an architectural firm to do a study of the air museum, including plans and a scale model of the proposed build-

tween downtown Washington and the Southwest, at that time a dilapidated neighborhood isolated from the rest of the city by intervening railroad tracks. The proposed axis made no allowance for the Air Museum building. Instead, the Independence Avenue terminus of the 10th street mall was planned as an open "portal" framed by two smaller public buildings. The



Proposed Air Museum site and present site of NASM

ing (a map showing the location of the proposed building is reproduced above). When Secretary Carmichael formally petitioned the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) for assignment of the site to the Smithsonian, the issue of the location of the building seemed resolved.

A real estate developer, William Zechendorf, however, had other plans for that same site south of Independence Avenue. His Southwest redevelopment proposal of 1955 hinged on the creation of a broad thoroughfare termed the *10th Street Mall*, running from Independence Avenue to the Potomac River. This mall was intended as a visual and physical link be-

NCPC gave tentative approval to Carmichael's plans in February of 1955 but delayed their final verdict until Zechendorf could formally submit his plan for Southwest redevelopment. On April 9, 1955, NCPC also gave "tentative approval" to his traffic scheme for the Southwest despite the fact that the proposed scheme would split the National Air Museum in half.

Anyone familiar with the present location of NASM will already realize the outcome of this conflict. After a series of attempted compromises, the Regents, though still in favor of the 10th street site, resolved that the Smithsonian should begin seeking out other alternatives. Not until September 1958,

however, did Congress finally approve a site for the museum: its present location on the National Mall, between 4th and 7th streets. These events became a turning point in the history of the creation of the Air and Space Museum. The new site forced the Smithsonian to redesign the building, a long process which eventually resulted in the popular museum we know today.

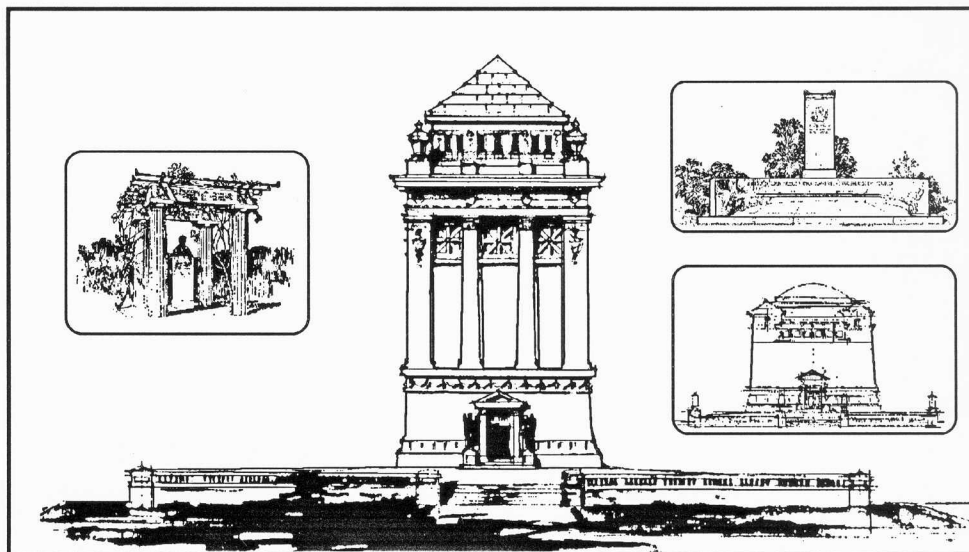
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MEMORIALS AND THE MALL

As the capital of the United States, Washington, D.C. is the most popular city for the erection of memorials to various individuals and events of importance in the history of the nation. Although memorials and statues abound throughout every quadrant of the city, by far the most requested site for memorials is the area surrounding the National Mall.

Where does one begin? Who oversees the memorials? Who selects them? In order to answer these questions, one must begin at the National Park Service, the steward of the National Mall and all National Capital Parks in Washington, D.C.

National Park Service staff members Gary Scott, Regional Historian, and Glenn DeMarr, Project Coordinator, Office of Land Use, recently provided answers to the many questions about memorials. According to Mr. DeMarr, the erection of a memorial is "a process, and one that requires great thought and attention. It's a very serious business."



Four proposals for a Smithsonian memorial on the Mall, 1904. None were built due to lack of funding.

Prior to 1986, the erection of memorials on Park Service land was virtually unregulated. The flood of applications to the Park Service increased dramatically after the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial. "There hadn't been all that many memorials erected before the Vietnam Memorial. It was a very popular memorial," says Gary Scott. "It was necessary to put into effect regulations, standards and guidelines for memorials." In 1986 the Commemorative Works Act (Public Law 99-652) was enacted "to provide standards for placement of commemorative works on certain Federal lands in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes." The law also established the National Capital Memorial Commission, whose membership advises the Secretary of the Interior on proposals to establish memorials in the Nation's Capital.

The National Park Service issues a twenty-four step guide to erecting memorials in Washington, D.C. The entire process, according to Mr. DeMarr, can take eight years or more. The first several steps involve drafting and introducing a

bill to Congress. After the bill is passed, the group sponsoring the memorial works with the National Capital Memorial Commission and the National Park Service's Office of Land Use Coordination to select an appropriate site. The site and the conceptual design must be approved by several regulatory agencies. The final steps include a review of the final drawings by the National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior prior to construction. After the memorial is dedicated, it is formally transferred to the National Park Service for management.

Funding for memorials varies from private to federal. In the case of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, due to be completed in April 1997, \$42 million was set aside by Congress when the legislation was passed in 1959 for its establishment. An additional \$10 million is needed for construction costs, which is now being raised by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Commission. The soon-to-be-completed memorial to the veterans of the Korean War is primarily funded by private donations with one percent from the federal gov-

ernment to cover administrative costs. The Korean War Memorial will be located in proximity to the Tidal Basin and will be dedicated on July 27, 1995.

Trends in the design of memorials have changed significantly in the last several years. Mr. Scott and Mr. DeMarr feel that the Vietnam Memorial was a turning point not only in the reemergence of the popularity of memorials, but also in the design treatment. "Instead of just a statue, there is more design expansion. Memorials since the Vietnam Memorial tend to have more landscape", says Mr. DeMarr.

Although Mr. DeMarr believes the number of applications

to erect memorials is down from previous years, dedicated groups continue to present their memorial proposals to Congress. At least ten memorials have been authorized by Congress to be erected near the Mall. These include memorials to George Mason, Thomas Paine, Japanese-American Patriots, United States Air Force, Victims of Communism, Black Civil War Soldiers, Black Revolutionary War Patriots, Women in Military Service, the National Peace Garden and World War II. The procedures established by the Commemorative Works Act will help to ensure that these memorials continue to enhance the National Mall area.

AB

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Your thoughts regarding the content of this publication are welcomed. Please call Amy Ballard at 357-2571, or E-Mail her at AHHPHIS1 with your comments.

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