National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory

2005



# McPherson Square

National Mall & Memorial Parks - L'Enfant Plan Reservations

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# Inventory Unit Summary & Site Plan

## Inventory Summary

### The Cultural Landscapes Inventory Overview:

### CLI General Information:

Purpose and Goals of the CLI

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI), a comprehensive inventory of all cultural landscapes in the national park system, is one of the most ambitious initiatives of the National Park Service (NPS) Park Cultural Landscapes Program. The CLI is an evaluated inventory of all landscapes having historical significance that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, or are otherwise managed as cultural resources through a public planning process and in which the NPS has or plans to acquire any legal interest. The CLI identifies and documents each landscape's location, size, physical development, condition, landscape characteristics, character-defining features, as well as other valuable information useful to park management. Cultural landscapes become approved CLIs when concurrence with the findings is obtained from the park superintendent and all required data fields are entered into a national database. In addition, for landscapes that are not currently listed on the National Register and/or do not have adequate documentation, concurrence is required from the State Historic Preservation Officer or the Keeper of the National Register.

The CLI, like the List of Classified Structures, assists the NPS in its efforts to fulfill the identification and management requirements associated with Section 110(a) of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Park Service Management Policies (2006), and Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management. Since launching the CLI nationwide, the NPS, in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), is required to report information that respond to NPS strategic plan accomplishments. Two GPRA goals are associated with the CLI: bringing certified cultural landscapes into good condition (Goal 1a7) and increasing the number of CLI records that have complete, accurate, and reliable information (Goal 1b2B).

Scope of the CLI

The information contained within the CLI is gathered from existing secondary sources found in park libraries and archives and at NPS regional offices and centers, as well as through on-site reconnaissance of the existing landscape. The baseline information collected provides a comprehensive look at the historical development and significance of the landscape, placing it in context of the site's overall significance. Documentation and analysis of the existing landscape identifies character-defining characteristics and features, and allows for an evaluation of the landscape's overall integrity and an assessment of the landscape's overall condition. The CLI also provides an illustrative site plan that indicates major features within the inventory unit. Unlike cultural landscape reports, the CLI does not provide management recommendations or

treatment guidelines for the cultural landscape.

**Inventory Unit Description:**

McPherson Square is a 1.66-acre park lying in the heart of Washington, D.C.'s central business district. It occupies an entire city square surrounded by K Street to the north, I Street to the south, and 15th Street to the east and west. The park is located within the corridor of Vermont Avenue, which extends to the northeast and southwest. In plan, McPherson Square is a mirror image of Farragut Square, one block to the west.

The buildings surrounding the park are, for the most part, twelve-story commercial and institutional buildings dating from the mid-twentieth century. The circulation system, built in 1930-31, determines the way space is organized within the park, and comprises a pair of parallel walks along the Vermont Avenue axis, a single walk on the opposite axis, and two narrow curving walks on the east and west sides. The parallel walks divide the park into two triangular areas with a central oval. All walks lead to the center, where a small, circular paved area surrounds the statue of the Civil War hero, Union Brigadier General James B. McPherson. Large deciduous trees line the boundaries of the park and are placed more randomly along the major walks, emphasizing the spatial pattern. Concrete sidewalks maintained by the District government surround the park.

Owing to its location, McPherson Square is heavily used by local residents, office workers, and tourists. Thousands of commuters pass through daily, many heading to and from the McPherson Square Metro (subway) stop south of the square. Others gather in the park for lunch. Indigent people frequent the park and participate in an evening food service program supported by a local charity, which parks a van along the west side of the park.

The sculpture depicts Gen. McPherson mounted on a horse and turning in the saddle to face west, surveying a field of battle. The twelve-foot-high bronze statue stands on a fifteen-foot-high granite pedestal, placed on an earthen mound (that hides the bottom step of the three-stepped pedestal base). The pedestal is composed of moldings made up of numerous symbolic decorative elements.

Granite curbs line the outer edges of the park's grass panels on the west, north, and east sides (the curved sections at the entrances to park walks are concrete, and the curb at the south is concrete). Sections of modern post-and-chain fencing line the outer corners of the triangular grass panels and the entrances to the park walks. A decorative cast-iron fence, with scrollwork in the fascia and balusters topped by finials, surrounds the earthen mound on which the statue stands.

All lights in the park are Washington Globe lamps made of Lexan (a thermoplastic resin) mounted on modern posts that are octagonal in cross-section (rather than the classical Washington Standard post more typically used in the downtown area). The lights are placed around the statue plaza and along the main loop walk.

The benches staggered along the park's walks are all are of a standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks in the 1930s and installed here some time between 1957 and 1963. Cast-iron frames support wood-slat backs and seats. Curved struts join front and back legs, and the struts terminate in simple scrolls. The benches stand on concrete pads set into the lawns. Two varieties of

trash receptacles are used in the park: the so-called “tulip style,” with cylindrical wood-slat containers holding steel cans and supported on single posts; and an older type, with open wire-mesh barrels containing separate trash barrels. A third type, a steel-slat cylindrical container with a flared top, was placed by the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) on the sidewalks around the park. (Cigarette receptacles that are a smaller version of this design are paired with some of these receptacles.)

A single cast-concrete Art Deco-style drinking fountain, probably dating from 1930-31, stands southeast of the statue. In the corresponding location to the northwest is a modern handicap-accessible fountain. A steel-and-Plexiglas bus shelter located at the southwest end of the park serves several busy bus routes.

Planting in McPherson Square consists primarily of large deciduous trees placed on six grass panels, whose shape is determined by the walk system. The park is symmetrical along the diagonal, northeast-southwest axis of the former Vermont Avenue corridor (removed in 1876). On this axis, two parallel walks create two half-oval grass panels; together, walks and panels form a loop, or oval, whose centerpoint is the McPherson statue (for convenience, this form is referred to as an “oval” even though both ends are somewhat squared). There is a pair of identical triangular panels to the north and south, and another pair to the east and west, on the park’s long sides; these longer triangles are bisected by the narrow mid-block walks.

Trees are placed along the boundaries and at the corners of panels. Most trees are native deciduous species; a few are exotics, such as the large Chinese elm that intrudes into the walk south of the statue and the three Japanese sophoras. The only tree that actually stands in the center of a panel rather than near an edge is the huge red oak in the southern triangular panel; this tree probably dates from the late nineteenth century and was likely one of the first trees planted. A large gingko near the sidewalk in this triangle may also date from before 1920. In 1981, magnolias and crabapples were planted around the statue plaza.

Red oaks and American lindens border the park on the east and west. Only one elm remains along the east, street side of Fifteenth Street, where a line of elms formerly provided a continuous canopy. Several oaks of different varieties have been planted south of this elm. No street trees remain on the north and south sides.

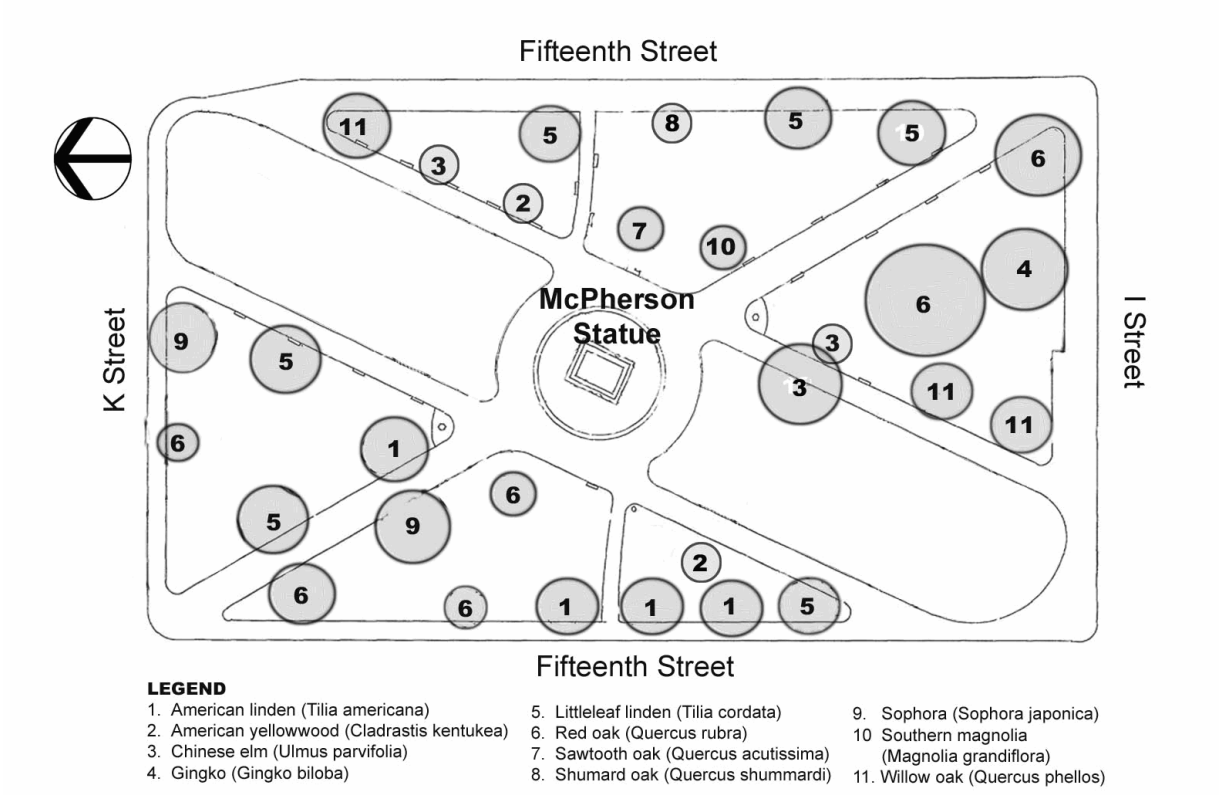
Hedges and annual beds at the ends and near the statue, situated on the two half-oval panels along the diagonal axis, were recently removed. The earth mound around the statue’s base, formerly planted with azaleas, is now covered with grass.

The primary vistas from McPherson Square are along the parallel walks that follow the line of Vermont Avenue through the park. Looking southwest along this axis provides a vista of the northeast corner of Lafayette Park, one block away. The bus shelter obstructs this vista. Looking northeast affords a vista of Thomas Circle, at the intersection of Vermont Avenue with 15th Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Also significant are the reciprocal views between McPherson Square and the surrounding

mid-twentieth-century buildings.

Overall, McPherson Square maintains a medium level of integrity. The statue remains in its original location. The circulation system dating to 1930-31 is intact, though the paving – which may be more recent – is deteriorating. Spatial organization and land use have not changed greatly, except for increasing numbers of pedestrians. Vegetation retains medium integrity to the 1930-31 planting plan; though there have been removals and replacements of trees, both trees and lawns have kept essentially the same layout. The hedges that formerly surrounded the major grass panels have been removed, as have several trees added in the 1980s that partly blocked the vistas along the Vermont Avenue corridor. Most small-scale features date from the 1960s or later, with the exception of the concrete drinking fountain, which does not function.

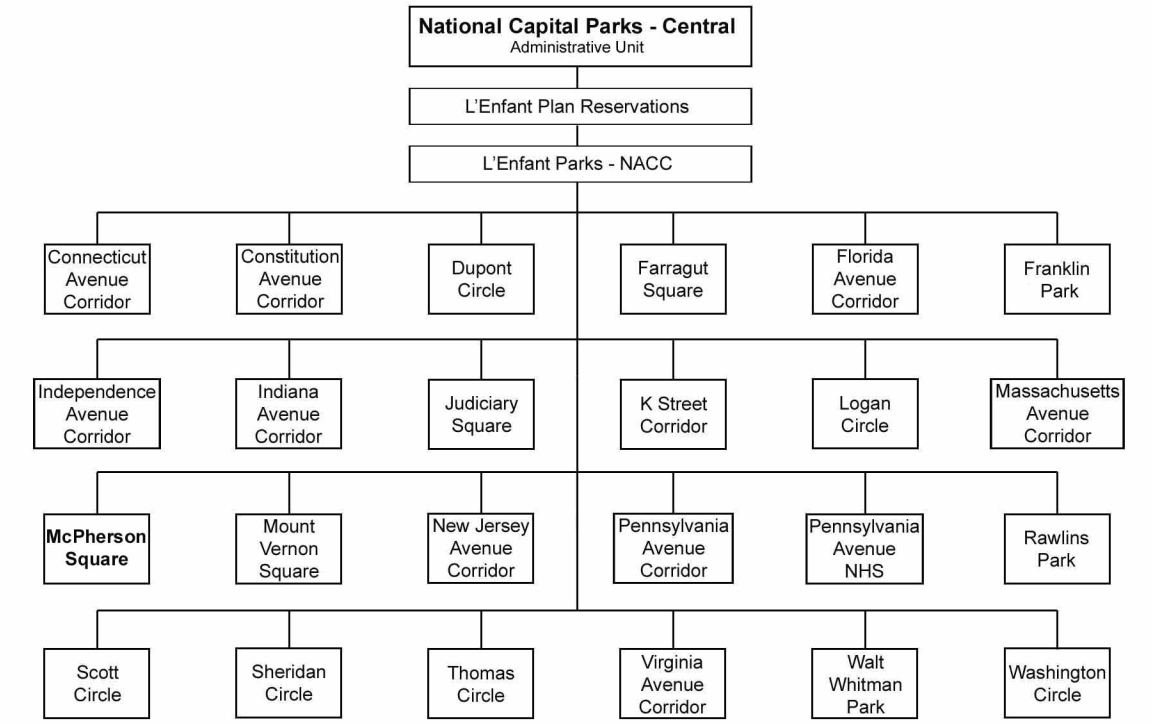
## Site Plan




*Site plan showing existing vegetation and circulation in McPherson Square. (final site plan July 19 flat)*

## CLI Hierarchy Description

McPherson Square is a component landscape of National Mall & Memorial Parks (formerly National Capital Parks-Central) and a part of the L'Enfant Plan for the City of Washington. The landscape consists of all of Reservation 11.




*This graphic depicts the 24 L'Enfant parks and street corridors administered by National Capital Parks - Central. (CLP digital photofile "McPherson Square/CLI/other/revised McPherson hierarchy Oct. 2004)"*

## Concurrence Status

**Inventory Status:** Complete

**Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:**

The Level II Cultural Landscapes Inventory for McPherson Square was written in 2004 by Kay Fanning, Ph.D., Landscape Historian for the Cultural Landscapes Program, National Capital Region, working from a draft and notes prepared by National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) intern Stephanie Ryberg during the fall of 2003. The initial meeting with the park was held in June 2003. Assistance was given by other staff of the Cultural Landscapes Program. Stephanie Ryberg gathered most of the information.

Research was conducted at the NPS-NCR headquarters (maps, reports, historic photos and digital maps from TIC), NCR Maintenance Division, the Washington Historical Society of the City Museum (historic photos), the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Branch of the Washington, D.C., Public Library (historic photos), and the National Archives and Records Administration (maps).

Further information on McPherson Square is available in the cultural resource files of National Mall & Memorial Parks (formerly National Capital Parks - Central). Cultural Landscapes Program staff was not aware these files existed and did not use them in preparing this document.

In April 2005, the name of National Capital Parks - Central was changed to National Mall & Memorial Parks. This change has not yet been made to the database.

**Concurrence Status:**

**Park Superintendent Concurrence:** Yes

**Park Superintendent Date of Concurrence:** 09/19/2011

**National Register Concurrence:** Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination

**Date of Concurrence Determination:** 09/09/2005

**National Register Concurrence Narrative:**

The State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia concurred with the findings of the McPherson Square CLI on 9/9/05, in accordance with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. It should be noted that the Date of Eligibility Determination refers to this Section 110 Concurrence and not the date of National Register Eligibility, since that is not the purview of the Cultural Landscapes Inventory.

**Concurrence Graphic Information:**

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20242

August 22, 2011

Memorandum:

To: Cultural Landscape Inventory Coordinator, National Capital Region

From: Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks

Subject: Statement of Concurrence, McPherson Square Cultural Landscape Condition Reassessment

I, Robert Vogel, Superintendent of National Mall and Memorial Parks, concur with the condition reassessment for the McPherson Square cultural landscape:

CONDITION REASSESSMENT: Good

**Good:** indicates the inventory unit shows no clear evidence of major negative disturbance and deterioration by natural and/or human forces. The inventory unit's cultural and natural values are as well preserved as can be expected under the given environmental conditions. No immediate corrective action is required to maintain its current condition.

**Fair:** indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values. If left to continue without the appropriate corrective action, the cumulative effect of the deterioration of many of the character defining elements, will cause the inventory unit to degrade to a poor condition.

**Poor:** indicates the inventory unit shows clear evidence of major disturbance and rapid deterioration by natural and/or human forces. Immediate corrective action is required to protect and preserve the remaining historical and natural values.

The cultural landscape condition reassessment for McPherson Square is hereby approved and accepted.

Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks — Date 9/19/11

*Condition reassessment concurrence signed by the NAMA supeintendent on 9/19/2011.*

# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
National Capital Region
Office of Lands, Resources and Planning
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

August 17, 2005

Memorandum

To: Cultural Landscapes Inventory Coordinator, National Capital Region

From: State Historic Preservation Officer, District of Columbia

Subject: Statement of Concurrence, McPherson Square Cultural Landscape Inven

I, Lisa Burcham, District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, concur with t
the McPherson Square Cultural Landscape Inventory as submitted on August 17, 2005.

Lisa Burcham
District of Columbia
State Historic Preservation Officer

Date 9/9/05

*Concurrence memo for FY005 signed by the DC SHPO on 9/9/2005.*

**Revisions Impacting Change in Concurrence:**

Change in Condition

**Revision Date:** 09/19/2011

**Revision Narrative:**

Condition reassessment done in FY2011. Condition changed from Fair to Good. See Condition chapter for details.

**Revision Date:** 06/21/2005

**Revision Narrative:**

Final revisions and comments by park staff were incorporated into the document.

## Geographic Information & Location Map

**Inventory Unit Boundary Description:**

McPherson Square occupies an entire city block bounded by K Street on the north, 15th Street on the east and west, and I Street on the south.

**State and County:**

**State:** DC

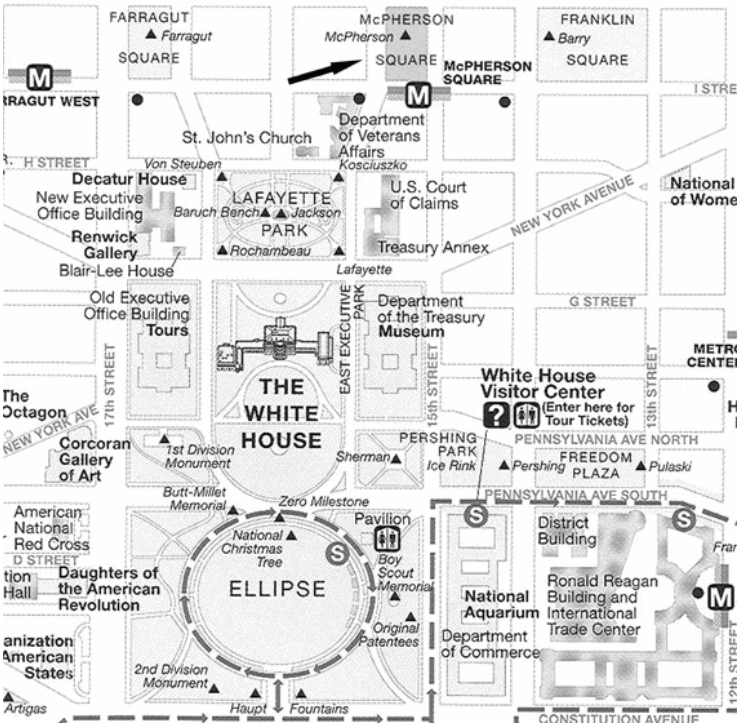
**County:** District of Columbia

**Size (Acres):** 1.65

**Boundary UTMS:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Source:** | GPS-Differentially Corrected |
| **Type of Point:** | Point |
| **Datum:** | NAD 83 |
| **UTM Zone:** | 18 |
| **UTM Easting:** | 323,582 |
| **UTM Northing:** | 4,307,809 |
| **Source:** | GPS-Differentially Corrected |
| **Type of Point:** | Point |
| **Datum:** | NAD 83 |
| **UTM Zone:** | 18 |
| **UTM Easting:** | 323,639 |
| **UTM Northing:** | 4,307,811 |
| **Source:** | GPS-Differentially Corrected |
| **Type of Point:** | Point |
| **Datum:** | NAD 83 |
| **UTM Zone:** | 18 |
| **UTM Easting:** | 323,642 |
| **UTM Northing:** | 4,307,912 |
| **Source:** | GPS-Differentially Corrected |
| **Type of Point:** | Point |
| **Datum:** | NAD 83 |
| **UTM Zone:** | 18 |
| **UTM Easting:** | 323,583 |
| **UTM Northing:** | 4,307,913 |

**Location Map:**




*Map depicting McPherson Square in relation to Farragut Square, Franklin Park, and White House. (CLP digital photofile "MS/CLI/other/basic location map, Dec. 28," from "Washington: The Nation's Capital," map produced by DOI/NPS, Wash.: GPO, 2000)*

**Management Unit:** National Mall & Memorial Parks

**Tract Numbers:** Reservation 11

## Management Information

### General Management Information

**Management Category:** Must be Preserved and Maintained

**Management Category Date:** 09/19/2005

**Management Category Explanatory Narrative:**

The Management Category Date is the date the CLI was first approved by the park superintendent.

**NPS Legal Interest:**

**Type of Interest:** Fee Simple

**Public Access:**

**Type of Access:** Unrestricted

**Explanatory Narrative:**

McPherson Square is open to the public at all hours.

## Adjacent Lands Information

**Do Adjacent Lands Contribute?** Yes

**Adjacent Lands Description:**

In a small urban park like McPherson Square, the surrounding architecture plays a large role in the visitor's experience, providing a visual framework. The buildings facing McPherson Square lend the park a different character than found at Farragut Square or Franklin Park. Though there are some recent structures, a majority of the buildings date from the early or mid-twentieth century. These Beaux-Arts and simple Art Deco structures display an array of architectural styles, a variety of materials, and a fine level of detail that is missing from the modern, post-1960s structures that face the other two parks. Most of the buildings around McPherson Square are constructed to the twelve-story height limit of downtown Washington, but they have maintained a consistent first-floor cornice line, which gives a sense of human scale.

## National Register Information

**Existing NRIS Information:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **NRIS Number:** | 97000332 |
| **Primary Certification:** | Listed In The National Register |
| **Primary Certification Date:** | 04/24/1997 |
| **Other Certifications and Date:** | Date Received/Pending Nomination - 3/19/1997 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Significance Criteria:** | A - Associated with events significant to broad patterns of our history |
| **Significance Criteria:** | B - Associated with lives of persons significant in our past |
| **Significance Criteria:** | C - Embodies distinctive construction, work of master, or high artistic values |

**Period of Significance:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Time Period:** | AD 1867 - 1933 |
| **Historic Context Theme:** | Expressing Cultural Values |
| **Subtheme:** | Landscape Architecture |
| **Facet:** | The City Beautiful Movement |
| **Other Facet:** | None |

**Area of Significance:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Area of Significance Category:** | Landscape Architecture |
| **Area of Significance Subcategory:** | None |

**Statement of Significance:**

McPherson Square is a contributing resource for the National Register of Historic Places multiple property nomination, “The L’Enfant Plan for the City of Washington, D.C.” (1997); the 1876 statue of Brig. Gen. McPherson is listed in another multiple property nomination, “Civil War Statuary in the District of Columbia” (1978). This Cultural Landscape Inventory defines two periods of significance for McPherson Square. The first is the single year 1791, when the tract appeared on the L’Enfant Plan as one of the sites set aside for ceremonial government use. The second is 1867 to 1933, extending

from the year the downtown parks and reservations were transferred to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (which then began to make comprehensive improvements to their landscapes) to the year these parcels were transferred from the OPBG to the National Park Service. This second period includes all the major design changes.

McPherson Square is eligible under National Register Criteria A, B, and C. As stated in the L'Enfant Plan nomination:

"The historic plan of Washington, District of Columbia – the nation's capital – designed by Pierre L' Enfant in 1791 as the site of the Federal City, represents the sole American example of a comprehensive Baroque city plan with a coordinated system of radiating avenues, parks and vistas laid over an orthogonal system. . . . 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 1997:Section 8, pp. 1, 2)

These factors applying to the plan as a whole are also relevant to its constituent parts, including McPherson Square. With Farragut Square and Lafayette Park, and the three major streets of Connecticut Avenue, Sixteenth Street, and Vermont Avenue on which they are situated, McPherson Square forms a "patte d'oie," or goose foot. This was a standard feature of Baroque planning that served to focus attention on sites of outstanding importance, and to open up axial views. The park is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for its 1930s design, which was based on McMillan Plan precepts.

The park's design features, most prominently the walk system, have always been focused on the centrally located McPherson statue. As it exists today, McPherson Square retains a design implemented in 1930-31, when its current circulation system was built to replace the two curving S-shaped walks that had defined its circulation since 1890-91. The designer was Irving W. Payne, a landscape architect with the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (and later with National Capital Parks). The 1930-31 walk system essentially reintroduced the circulation that had existed in the park from 1876-1890. During the 1930s redesign, a few trees were retained or moved within the park, but the overall planting pattern of lawns and trees was altered in accordance with the new walk system. As in other downtown parks, the shape of the grass panels results from the walks, and the trees are placed primarily along sidewalks and interior walks, reinforcing the pattern of circulation. Most alterations made to the park since 1931 have involved changes to the site furnishings, and alterations to the planting plan, including the addition and removal of trees and flower beds, and of hedges around the major grass panels – the two panels forming an oval along the Vermont Avenue axis.

The blocks surrounding McPherson Square comprise a largely intact early-twentieth-century commercial district. Most buildings fronting the park were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s. They replaced smaller-scale structures dating from the 1850s-1890s, including freestanding mansions to the

north and south and a church to the east.

The changes made to the park's walk system in the 1930s not only revived an older, historic pattern, but were harmonious with contemporary notions of what constituted appropriate pedestrian circulation in city parks. Why the rehabilitation of the McPherson Square walks was undertaken in 1930-31 is not known. It was similar to work implemented in other major downtown parks several years later, including Lafayette Park, Franklin Park, and Lincoln Park; these were projects funded by programs under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, most likely the Public Works Administration. In all these parks, curvilinear walk systems were replaced by symmetrical systems based on regular geometric figures, such as circles, ovals, and rectangles, that placed walks on relatively direct axial routes connecting with sidewalks and streets.

## Chronology & Physical History

### Cultural Landscape Type and Use

**Cultural Landscape Type:** Designed

| Other Use/Function | Other Type of Use or Function |
|---|---|
| Leisure-Passive (Park) | Both Current And Historic |
| Outdoor Sculpture (Statuary) | Both Current And Historic |
| Urban Park | Both Current And Historic |

**Current and Historic Names:**

| Name | Type of Name |
|---|---|
| McPherson Square | Both Current And Historic |
| Scott Square | Historic |

**Ethnographic Study Conducted:** No Survey Conducted

**Chronology:**

| Year | Event | Annotation |
|---|---|---|
| AD 1791 | Established | The land comprising McPherson Square was set aside for federal government use under the L'Enfant Plan. |
| | | Pierre Charles L'Enfant |
| | Land Transfer | The land was donated to the United States by Edward Peerce as part of the land required for streets and avenues. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Edward Peerce |
| | | Samuel Davidson |
| AD 1867 | Land Transfer | McPherson Square, along with the other reservations, was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPBG), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, War Department. |
| AD 1868 | Built | Vermont Avenue was cut diagonally through the square. The square was enclosed with a cast-iron post-and-chain fence. Walks were paved, grasses were seeded, and a combination gas lamp and drinking fountain was installed. |
| | Memorialized | The square was officially named "Scott Square" in honor of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. |
| | | Winfield Scott |
| AD 1872 | Built | Other improvements were made to the park: more paving of walks, additional post-and-chain fencing, and the introduction of water for irrigation and drinking. |
| | Altered | Orville E. Babcock, Chief Engineer of the OPBG, re-opened Vermont Avenue, causing the square to be once more divided into two triangular sections. |
| | | Orville E. Babcock |
| AD 1873 | Planted | Grading and planting of Scott Square began. |
| AD 1876 | Altered | The OPBG removed the section of Vermont Avenue that passed through the park, filling and sodding the excavation. A pair of diagonal walks was built along the former road alignment, crossed in the center by a single walk set along the opposite diagonal. |
| | Memorialized | An equestrian statue of Brigadier General James Birdseye McPherson was erected in the center of the park, and the name was changed to McPherson Square. |
| | | James B. McPherson |
| | | Louis T. Rebisso |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| AD 1877 | Planted | Four new trees were planted. Four semicircular flower beds with vases were installed at the base of the McPherson statue. |
| AD 1891 | Rehabilitated | The walks in the park were redesigned in a symmetrical curving layout and paved with bituminous asphalt. The post-and-chain fence was removed. |
| AD 1911 | Altered | The flower beds at the base of the statue were changed from semicircular to triangular. |
| AD 1920 | Planned | Plans were developed for a new, more formal circulation system recalling the original layout of diagonal walks. |
| AD 1931 | Rehabilitated | The plan of 1920 was revised and implemented. New trees were planted and new benches installed. |
| AD 1933 | Land Transfer | McPherson Square and the other reservations were transferred to the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. |
| AD 1972 | Built | The McPherson Square Metro station was opened southwest of the park. |
| AD 1687 | Platted | The tract named Port Royal was patented to John Peerce. |
| AD 1877 | Rehabilitated | Concrete walks were built (probably replacing asphalt) and new or additional water and gas lines were installed. |
| AD 1993 | Rehabilitated | New lights were installed: Washington Globe lights replaced 1960s-vintage "mushroom" lights." |
| AD 1960 | Rehabilitated | Probably in the 1960s, "mushroom" lamps were installed in the park, replacing the glass globe fixtures on classical posts that had probably been in use there since the early 20th century. |
| AD 1905 | Rehabilitated | New water pipes were laid, and existing pipes were extended. |
| AD 1913 | Rehabilitated | Two new gas lights were added, bringing the number of gas lights in the park to four. |
| AD 1919 | Planted | Twenty-two new shrubs and 250 perennials were planted (300 more perennials were planted in 1920). |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| AD 1930 | Planted | Four American elms were planted on D.C. property along 15th Street, on the park's eastern side. |
| AD 1790 - 1802 | Land Transfer | The three city commissioners appointed by President George Washington had jurisdiction over the reservations. |
| AD 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. |
| AD 1816 - 1849 | Land Transfer | The Superintendent of Public Buildings was replaced by a Commissioner of Public Buildings. |
| AD 1849 - 1867 | Land Transfer | The office of the Commissioner of Public Buildings, which had jurisdiction over the city reservations, was transferred from the authority of the president to the new Department of the Interior. |
| AD 1925 | Land Transfer | The name of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was changed to the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, and it was transferred from the authority of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the president. |

**Physical History:**

1791-1866: An Empty Square of Unknown Use

The land now occupied by McPherson Square appears on Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C., as a rectangular open space reserved for ceremonial government use. Part of a tract of land known as "Port Royal," first patented to John Peerce in 1687, in 1791 the land was owned by Peerce's grandson, Edward Peerce. (Port Royal also included the site of Farragut Square.) Edward Peerce donated the western portion of the tract to the federal government and three months later sold the remainder to Samuel Davidson: "because it was considered too small for private development, the area was included with the land donated to the federal government for streets and avenues". (HABS:1).

On his plan, L'Enfant identified by number fifteen sites as state squares. His expectation was that these could be developed by private investors from their respective states and they would then act as nodes spurring further development throughout the city. In addition to the state squares, the L'Enfant Plan "includes more than two dozen additional open spaces in the form of squares, circles, triangles, and other shapes. Nearly all of these can be found at the multiple intersections of radial and grid streets." (Reps 1991:8)

The spaces that would later become McPherson and Farragut Squares appear as unnumbered open areas within the street system, located respectively on Vermont and Connecticut Avenues, near Lafayette Square and the White House. (Reps 1991:23, detail of 1887 facsimile of L' Enfant Plan) Together, the two spaces form a "patte d'oie," or "goose foot," a typical device of Baroque urban plans, in which two angled axes are placed at equal distances on either side of a dominant main axis; the side axes open up secondary views and focus attention on important sites. For decades, both spaces continued to be treated as mere openings within the street grid, as shown in the Ellicott Plan of 1792 and in maps of the city produced over the next fifty years.

The future McPherson Square site was managed under several different jurisdictions from the establishment of Washington, D.C., in 1790 up through the 1930s and its transfer to the National Park Service. Under the Congressional Act of July 16, 1790, President George Washington appointed three commissioners to lay out a district for the permanent seat of government of the United States. Only twelve years later these positions were eliminated, their duties transferred to a Superintendent of Public Buildings, also appointed by the president. In 1816, the Superintendent of Public Buildings was replaced by a Commissioner of Public Buildings, at first acting under the authority of the president and then, after its creation in 1849, the Department of the Interior.

The capital city grew slowly in its first decades. As major public buildings rose in isolated splendor near the National Mall, individual clusters of mostly wooden houses developed to its north: "Here and there, smaller groups of buildings floated in a sea of vacant blocks and empty streets. Not until after the Civil War would these intervening spaces be filled and a more conventional urban development pattern at last emerge." (Reps 1991:57)

An 1802 map for travelers shows small buildings beginning to appear along Connecticut and Vermont Avenues. (Moore and Jones, "Washington City," in Reps 1991:60-61) A British visitor described the scene he encountered in 1806:

"After enumerating the public buildings, the private dwellinghouses of the officers of government, the accommodations set apart for the members of the legislature, and the temporary tenements of those dependent on them, the remainder of this boasted city is a mere wilderness of wood and stunted shrubs . . . In some parts, purchasers have cleared the wood from their grounds, and erected temporary wooden buildings: others have fenced in their lots, and attempted to cultivate them; but the sterility of the land laid out for the city is such, that this plan has also failed. The country adjoining consists of woods in a state of nature, and in some places of more swamps, which give the scene a curious patchwork appearance." (Janson, "The Stranger in America," p. 202ff, quoted in Reps 1991:60, 64)

Even by 1817, almost thirty years after the District was established, the broad avenues envisioned by L'Enfant barely existed. Cattle, sheep, and pigs wandered freely over the dirt roads and weedy reservations. Roaming livestock constituted such a public nuisance that many of the squares and reservations were enclosed with wooden fences.

McPherson and Farragut remained empty squares within the roadbeds of Vermont and Connecticut Avenues until after the Civil War. The roads themselves were probably no more than wide dirt tracks. By the 1830s, the blocks surrounding the two squares had begun to be built up. ("City of Washington," from Tanner, "A New Universal Atlas," 1836, in Reps 1991:79) From the city's early years, prominent citizens built mansions facing Lafayette Square, immediately north of the White House. At mid-century, the isolated clusters of buildings "north of Pennsylvania Avenue had become a single linear community . . ." (Reps 1991:113) By 1851, a "colored" Presbyterian church had been built facing the site of McPherson Square on the east, in the center of the block. This was the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, founded by former slave John F. Cook, who became Washington's first black Presbyterian pastor. (The congregation was located here until 1918; the famed Francis J. Grimke became pastor in 1877 and served over fifty years, preaching for civil rights and against racism. See Keily, "Map of the City of Washington, D.C.," 1851, in Reps 1991:125. Information was also taken from the website of "Cultural Tourism DC – African American Heritage Trail," Aug. 4, 2004; this gives the church's construction date as 1853.)

Steady urban growth continued around these squares through the 1850s until the Civil War. A man named Hoover, the D.C. Marshall and later the chief usher at the White House, built a house on I Street facing McPherson Square in 1860. The Hoover house was later occupied by Hamilton Fish, Senator and Governor of New York, and U.S. Grant's Secretary of State. The Boschke map, surveyed in the years immediately preceding the war, shows the density of development in the downtown area, and the large number of buildings that had been built facing the squares. (Albert Boschke, "Topographic Map of the District of Columbia," 1861, in Reps 1991:138-139.)

A California journalist described the city he found at the beginning of the war: "Before the war

the city was as drowsy and as grass-grown as any old New England town. . . . the general aspect of things was truly rural. The war changed all that in a very few weeks." He also observed:

" . . . the city of Washington . . . is probably the dirtiest and most ill-kept borough in the United States. It is impossible to describe the truly fearful condition of the streets. They are seas or canals of liquid mud, ranging in depth from one to three feet . . ." (Noah Brooks, "Washington in Lincoln's Time," c. p. 4, in Reps 1991:156; Brooks, Dispatch to the "Sacramento Daily Union," Feb. 28, 1863, in Staudenraus, "Mr. Lincoln's Washington," p. 116, in Reps 1991:156.)

It is not known how the McPherson Square site was used during the war. Farragut Square, to the west, and Franklin Park, to the east, were home to Union encampments and barracks, but Vermont Avenue still ran through the McPherson Square land, perhaps obviating its use for any military purpose.

1867-1890: First Improvements

In the decade after the war, several changes occurred concerning the administration of public lands in the District of Columbia. Cumulatively, these had a profound effect on the public reservations and led to the development of McPherson and Farragut Squares as city parks.

In 1867, responsibility for the city's avenues and public grounds was transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPBG) of the Army Corps of Engineers in the War Department. A succession of Chief Engineers served as Officers in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, and produced annual reports that contain invaluable details concerning the construction, planting, and maintenance of the downtown parks. (The reports were usually published at the end of the fiscal year, then occurring in June, but were dated the previous year; it is therefore not always clear in which calendar year a certain action occurred.)

In his initial report, the first Officer in Charge, Nathaniel Michler, offered praise for the

"many public places . . . consisting of circles, triangles, and squares . . . set apart as reservations for the benefit of citizens. . . . Many of these have already been beautified [and add] so much to the appearance of the city [and] at the same time largely contribute to the health, pleasure, and recreation of its inhabitants." (quoted in Reps 1991:152)

By 1868, the park had been named "Scott Square" in honor of the late Lieutenant General Winfield Scott (1786-1866). Scott had served under every president from Jackson to Lincoln and, in spite of his advanced age, at the outset of the war had been named commander-in-chief of all Union forces.

In 1868, Vermont Avenue was cut through Scott Square. The new roadway was graded, paved with concrete, flanked with sidewalks, and lined by a row of silver maple trees. The grounds extended for twenty feet on K Street and for twelve feet on the other three sides. Other improvements included the grading and paving of walks, the installation of water lines for

irrigation and drinking, and the enclosure of the square with a low cast-iron post-and-chain fence. Light was supplied by a single combination gas lamp and drinking fountain. (Annual Report 1868). Within a few years, the park was planted with grass, and had two elm trees and a catalpa, along with several shrubs – two forsythia, two spireas, and thirteen euonymus. (Annual Report 1874)

In the early 1870s, fundamental changes to the urban fabric were undertaken by the District's Territorial Government. Though lasting only three years from its institution in 1871, the Territorial Government and its Board of Public Works under Alexander "Boss" Shepherd nonetheless radically altered the city, embarking upon a vast program of projects. Almost 200 miles of new streets were paved in stone, concrete, and wood; thousands of miles of sewer, water, and gas lines were laid; thousands of street trees were planted; and thousands of gas street lamps were installed, entirely changing the city's nocturnal aspect. From a primitive, backwater town, Washington was suddenly transformed into a modern city. With the exception of the broad avenue of K Street, which was surfaced with wood, the streets surrounding both McPherson and Farragut squares were paved with concrete. ("Exhibit Chart Showing Streets and Avenues – Pavements," from Board of Public Works, "Report," Nov. 1, 1873, in Reps 1991:189)

The overall improvement to the city following the Territorial Government's work was striking:

"Not only were the streets of the capital covered with the most noiseless and perfect pavements in the world, and embowered in the greenest borders of grass-plots, inclosed with panels of post and chain or graceful paling, and planted with trees, but at all points of juncture new squares and circles appeared, their verdure relieved with flashing fountains, or bits of statuary . . . The public grounds, swept of their cemetery-like palings and wholly rejuvenated, lay open to equestrian and urchin." (Townsend, "New Washington," in "Harper's Monthly" 1875, 313-22, in Reps 1991:188)

Scott Square was chosen in 1876 as the site for a statue honoring the Civil War hero, Major General James Birdseye McPherson. The former Chief Engineer for General U.S. Grant, and Commander of the Army of the Tennessee, McPherson had been killed during the Battle of Atlanta. At war's end, his comrades from the Army of the Tennessee formed a monument commission to develop a plan for a suitable memorial. Originally this was intended for his hometown of Clyde, Ohio, but Washington was soon selected as a more appropriate location. The commission hired an Italian-American sculptor from Cincinnati, Louis T. Rebisso, who spent three years creating a model for a monumental bronze equestrian statue.

The unveiling took place on October 18th, 1876, during the eleventh annual reunion of the Army of the Tennessee. The celebration included a military parade led by Generals William Tecumseh Sherman and David Hunter. Senator John A. Logan of Ohio – a former Union Major General who had served with McPherson – delivered the oration, attended by President Rutherford B. Hayes and members of his cabinet.

In preparation for the statue, the OPBG had removed the asphalt bed of Vermont Avenue and

filled in the land with soil and sod. The curbing along I and K Streets was replaced, and the site became a unified rectangular park. After the statue's erection, four semicircular flower beds were laid out at its base. In each stood an ornamental vase containing an assortment of foliage and flowering plants. Four new trees were planted (their species is not known). Scott Square was renamed "McPherson Square," and a traffic circle at 16th Street and Massachusetts Avenue was named for Scott instead.

Though Vermont Avenue had been removed, the silver maple trees remained in the park, forming two diagonal lines extending from the northeast to the southwest corner. The 1877 Annual Report observed:

" . . . until removed, [the maples] will effectually prevent the accomplishment of any systematic ornamental planting of the reservation. The line of maples should be broken, and the planting of ornamental trees suitable for a park of this character, commenced some time ago by disposing groups of evergreens and shrubs at the open ends of the park, should be continued."

After the war, the city grew exponentially. But even during the boom decades, Washington's typical sporadic development pattern seems to have continued:

"The new buildings have clustered about the Scott [McPherson] Square and Dupont Circle, and the other little squares and circles, forming small settlements, separated from each other by long distances of vacant fields, unbroken except by the asphalt roads and the lines of trees. This scattering of the new building forces has given a very incongruous and ludicrous appearance to some of the most handsome avenues." ("The New Washington" in "Century Magazine" [1884]:651, in Reps 1991:212.)

As McPherson Square was taking shape, the surrounding neighborhood grew rapidly. In 1868, the luxurious Arlington Hotel was built facing Vermont Avenue, immediately southwest of the park. Real estate developer Archibald H. Lowery, in 1875, constructed a Second Empire mansion facing the park's northwest corner. The compact yet massive two-story brick structure had bold, heavy details and richly articulated surfaces. The house was usually rented, and tenants included Wayne McVeagh, attorney general under Presidents Garfield and Arthur; Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, mother of William Randolph Hearst; and the Cornelius Vanderbilt family. (Goode 2003:100-101)

By late in the century, surrounding development had made McPherson Square the center of an elite and fashionable community. The background of a photograph taken between 1876 and 1891 shows a mix of residential structures along K Street facing the park. A small two-story, three-bay clapboarded frame house is overshadowed on the east by a brick-and-stone Second Empire mansion, crowned by a massive balustraded mansard roof. (photocopy in National Mall & Memorial Parks files, no identifying information) A finely detailed view of the city in the mid-1880s appears in a map produced by Adolph Sachse, showing McPherson Square enclosed by the post and chain fencing, lined by regular rows of street trees, and surrounded by houses. The African American church still faced the park on the east, and a couple of large mansarded houses had been built to the north. The line of ornate Second Empire-style rowhouses known

as Franklin Terrace are clearly visible, extending along the north side of K Street between 14th and 15th. ("The National Capital Washington City D.C.," c. 1884, in Reps 1991:213-214)

Improvements to McPherson Square continued to be made throughout the late 1800s. Site furnishings of the types used for other downtown reservations – benches, urns, the combination gas lamps and drinking fountain – were installed. Six new benches were added in 1884. The OPBG requested $500 to build a lodge and pay a watchman's salary, but this money does not seem to have ever been allocated.

1891-1924: Second Park Design and Neighborhood Growth

The Park

In 1891 or 1892, McPherson Square was almost entirely redesigned. While the McPherson statue remained as the focal point, the post-and-chain fencing and the asphalt walks were removed, and the grade of the entire square was raised. Two curving S-shaped asphalt walks replaced the diagonal walks. Near the park's center, each walk divided into a pair of narrower walks that led to a central diamond-shaped plaza around the McPherson statue. Around the statue's base, earth was mounded and covered with sod. Twenty-one large shade trees and seventy shrubs were removed to allow room for the improvements. (Whether any of these were replanted within the park is not known; Annual Report 1892)

Other changes soon followed. The combination drinking fountain and gas lamp was moved to Seaton Park – the east section of the National Mall, between Third and Sixth streets, N.W. In turn, two such structures in Seaton Park were moved to McPherson Square and placed north and south of the statue at walk intersections. Nine-hundred and sixty linear feet of granite curbs, taken from reservations along Pennsylvania Avenue, were redressed and used along the outside edges of the grass panels in place of the post-and-chain fencing.

In 1892, the Washington "Evening Star" compared the current state of the city's reservations with their condition before the war:

"The reservations and parking, then neglected and unkempt, the browsing place of the cow and the wallowing place of the hog, have been improved and adorned, and now in a number of them the statues of men who were then struggling to save the Union and the capital . . . stand out in marble or bronze in a picturesque setting of flowers and rich foliage." (Theodore W. Noyes, Washington "Evening Star," Sept. 19, 1892, in Reps 1991, p. 226)

In 1894, the park totaled 29,216 square feet and was deemed "highly improved". A pair of large, ornamental iron vases containing "stable" summer-flowering plants stood on the lawns. The park was lit by gas lamps "around and throughout". (Annual Report 1894)

The Neighborhood

According to historian James Goode, by 1900, K Street was "considered the Park Avenue of Washington". Wealthy men and women flocked to Washington after election to Congress or to

take part in the winter social season, and they began building imposing houses in the neighborhoods along K Street and Connecticut Avenue. Soon a line of mansions designed by some of the nation's leading architects ran along K Street, displaying a richly eclectic array of innovative historical styles.

The four-story Georgian Revival Elkins House stood at 1626 K Street (c. 1892/96-1937, architect Paul J. Pelz), between Farragut and McPherson Squares. Built by Senator Stephen B. Elkins, a former Secretary of War under President Benjamin Harrison who had amassed a fortune from real estate, railroad, mining, and timber interests, the house was designed for entertaining. Next door, at 16th and K streets, the Hale House was built in 1891 by a senator's wife as a wedding present for her daughter (architects Tilden and Rotch). The seven-bay-wide, three-story-high Italian Renaissance villa, in buff brick with limestone trim, served as a "social center . . . for 50 years". Destroyed in 1941, the site is now occupied by the Capital Hilton. Next to the Hale house on K Street stood a large French Renaissance-inspired residence, designed in 1894 by the famed Philadelphia architect Frank Furness for a wealthy widow, Mrs. George W. Childs, who had moved to Washington to enjoy the "social whirl" of the capital. The Childs House was destroyed in 1930 to allow room for a parking lot, and its former location now also forms part of the Capital Hilton site (Goode 2003:142-144.) Beyond the Childs House stood the Second Empire Lowery House.

Further east on K Street, between McPherson Square and Franklin Park, stretched the thirteen Second Empire rowhouses known as Franklin Terrace. The terrace was built in two sections. The three-story mansarded houses of the east row, with their succession of projecting bays and dormers, were built by the prominent German-American architect Adolph Cluss in c. 1875 and were destroyed gradually over the years between 1890 and 1934. The west row, attributed to the firm of Starkweather and Plowman, featured their characteristic Romanesque Revival towers, mansard roofs supported on bold Italianate brackets, and windows covered by heavy hood moldings. Also built about 1875, this row was demolished between 1916 and 1934. (Goode 2003:186)

The McPherson Square neighborhood also was home to many of the city's leading hotels, including the Shoreham, at 15th and H Streets (1887, 1890, 1892; destroyed 1929) and the chateauesque Richmond Hotel, 17th and H Streets (1883, 1887, torn down 1922; Goode 2003:214-215). Foremost among these was the Arlington Hotel, which occupied much of the block southwest of the park, along Vermont Avenue and extending onto I Street. Built in 1868 by banking magnate William Wilson Corcoran, the mansarded Renaissance Revival structure, with its projecting pavilions topped by curved mansard roofs, somewhat resembled the Louvre, and incorporated the exterior walls of three earlier Greek Revival mansions. A wing at the corner of I Street and Vermont Avenue was added in 1889, and replicated the façade's design. The Arlington Hotel was "home to dozens of senators"; financier J.P. Morgan maintained a suite there, and it was the favored lodging for royalty from Europe, Russia, and South America. Its celebrated manager, Theophile E. Roessle, "supervised the laying of the first asphalt in the city, on Vermont avenue in front of the hotel, to ensure quiet for his guests." (Goode 2003:209; Goode does not mention the year this was done.)

The distinguished structure was demolished in 1912 with the expectation that a new, larger hotel would be built in its place, but funding never came through. Instead, the federal government purchased the land in 1918 for $4.2 million as the site for the headquarters of the Veterans Administration. The massive stripped classical building of 1921 still occupies the site. (Goode 2003:209)

A watershed event in the planning history of the District of Columbia occurred in 1902, with the publication of the Senate Park Commission Report, commonly known as the "McMillan Plan." This landmark comprehensive planning document set forth an overall park system for the city, and may have provided some impetus for across-the-board improvements made to the downtown parks in these years. However, their only specific recommendations for the existing small L'Enfant parks was that they be continually adapted to the needs of their neighborhoods. It is not known if the McMillan Plan had any direct effect on the design of McPherson Square.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, regular maintenance was performed in McPherson Square – asphalt repairs, resodding, and repainting of iron drinking fountains, lamp posts, benches, and vases. Small alterations continued to be made. New water pipes were laid in 1905, expanding the existing system. (Annual Report 1905) In 1911, the shape of the four flower beds around the statue were changed from circular to triangular. (The Annual Report for 1912 clearly states that this action occurred in the previous fiscal year; however, a park plan reproduced in the 1905 report shows the beds as already triangular. The reason for the discrepancy is not known.) Twelve boxwood shrubs were planted at the corners of these beds the following year. In 1919, twenty-two deciduous shrubs and 250 perennials were planted, and 300 more perennials were added in 1920.

By 1907, the community surrounding McPherson Square was changing from an upscale residential enclave to a bustling commercial district. The former house of Senator Palmer was sold and converted to a hotel in 1887. This building was subsequently demolished in 1924, and the Rust office building was constructed in its place. The Justice Department purchased the Lowery House around the turn of the century and converted it into office space. The house was ultimately razed in 1936 for a parking lot.

Perhaps the most notable house near McPherson Square was the McLean House, which occupied the entire block of I Street south of the park. The McLean House incorporated the 1860 Hoover House, purchased in the 1880s by the notorious financier, John McLean, who made additions in 1886, 1891, 1894, and 1896. Finally, in 1907, McLean hired architect John Russell Pope to completely alter the structure into an Arts and Crafts fantasy of a Florentine Renaissance palazzo. (Still at the beginning of his professional career, Pope would be responsible for some of the grandest mansions in Washington, as well as the National Gallery of Art West Building and the Jefferson Memorial in the 1940s.) In the McLean House, Pope created a mansion for life in high society: the interiors were designed by the fashionable Elsie de Wolfe and all the first-floor rooms were "used for entertaining" (Goode 2003:153). When McLean died in 1916, he left the mansion to his alcoholic son Ned, married to the socialite Evalyn Walsh McLean. The house became the scene for functions attended by President Warren G. Harding and his cronies, many of whom, like Ned, became embroiled in the Teapot

Dome scandal.

The University Club (architect George Oakley Totten, Jr.), a small, five-story Renaissance palazzo, was built across from the park's southwest corner in 1911. The restrained Art Deco Southern Railway Building (begun in 1928) and the Coal Miner's Union Building were built on the west side of the square. (HABS, 4-5)

Alterations made to McPherson Square in the early decades of the twentieth century reflected the changing nature of the community. Throughout the downtown parks, straight walks were replacing meandering, curvilinear walks, probably because it was believed businessmen would only walk through a park if it provided a shortcut to a destination (HABS:5). Such design concepts had been promoted by George Burnap, a landscape architect with the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds from 1910-c. 1917, in his 1916 book, "Parks, Their Design, Equipment, and Use."

In 1920, many of the silver maples that had lined Vermont Avenue remained in the park. Four American elms, a gift from a citizen, were planted along the east side of the park in 1930. Hedges were planted on the borders of the grass panels, and rectangular flower beds were installed along their inside edges, emphasizing the linearity of the parallel walks.

1925-2004: Transfer to the National Park Service and Third Park Design

The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds had developed a plan for the redesign of McPherson Square's circulation in 1920. However, it was not implemented, with changes, until 1930 or 1931, by the OPBG's successor, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks. The new design featured a parallel set of walks on line with the axis of Vermont Avenue, running southwest-northeast, essentially replicating the park's first plan of 1876. The central panel was sixty-two feet wide, rather than the fifty feet specified ten years earlier; the width was increased to allow existing trees to remain. The new walks were paved with concrete instead of bituminous asphalt. A cast-iron fence identical to ones built in Farragut Square and Franklin Park in 1936 was placed around the McPherson statue. A plan to install terrazzo paving around the statue was probably never carried out.

Following this work, McPherson Square was nearly the mirror image of Farragut Square. Few major changes have been made to the park since the 1930-31 redesign. Its surroundings have been transformed, however, as the last mansions were destroyed for commercial and institutional buildings.



*View into park from southwest, 1913. Note curvilinear asphalt walk, brick sidewalk along 15th Street, shrubs, perennials, and variety of benches. (CLP digital photofile MS/CLI/history/DSCF004)*

## Analysis & Evaluation of Integrity

### Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity Narrative Summary:

Within the plan of Washington, D.C., McPherson Square and Farragut Square occupy important locations along two major diagonal streets – Vermont and Connecticut Avenues, respectively – that are located an equal distance from Sixteenth Street (the White House axis) and Lafayette Park. The parks and the three streets form a "patte d'oie" or "goose foot," a standard element of Baroque city planning that served to focus attention on important sites and open views out into the landscape.

The park is a rectangular parcel bounded by major city streets and surrounded primarily by mid-twentieth-century twelve-story commercial buildings. The circulation system, installed in 1930-31, determines the way space is organized within the park, comprising a pair of parallel walks along the Vermont Avenue axis, a single walk on the opposite axis, and two narrow curving walks on the east and west sides. The parallel loop walks divide the park into two triangular areas with roughly equivalent elements. All park walks lead to the circular paved area around the central feature of the statue. Large deciduous trees line the boundaries of the park and are placed along the major walks, emphasizing the spatial pattern.

Surrounded by government offices, commercial buildings, hotels, restaurants, and apartment buildings, McPherson Square is heavily used by local residents, office workers, and tourists. Commuters walk through during rush hour. During lunch hours, office workers picnic and sunbathe on the lawns and benches, and listen to concerts in the summer.

The only structure in McPherson Square is the statue representing Brigadier General James B. McPherson mounted on a horse and surveying a field of battle. The twelve-foot-high bronze statue stands on a fifteen-foot-high granite pedestal. McPherson is shown sharply reining in his horse while turning to face west, holding field glasses in one hand. The finely rendered horse stands checked in mid-stride, neck arched and foreleg raised. Presumably Smithmeyer and Pelz, architects of the original Library of Congress building, designed the pedestal, which is composed of moldings incorporating numerous symbolic decorative elements. The pedestal bears simple dedicatory inscriptions on the east and west sides. The statue stands in the center of a circular earthen mound that partially covers the three-step stylobate base.

Planting in McPherson Square consists primarily of large deciduous trees placed on six grass panels, whose shape is determined by the walk system. The park is symmetrical along the diagonal, northeast-southwest axis of the former Vermont Avenue corridor (removed in 1876). On this axis, two parallel walks create two half-oval grass panels; together, walks and panels form a sixty-two-foot-wide loop, or oval, whose centerpoint is the McPherson statue (for convenience, this form is referred to as an "oval" even though both ends are somewhat squared). There is a pair of identical equilateral triangular panels to the north and south, and another pair of triangles to the east and west, on the park's long sides; these longer triangles are bisected by the narrow mid-block walks.

Trees are placed along the park's boundaries and at the corners of panels. Most trees are native

deciduous species; a few are exotics, such as the large Chinese elm that intrudes into the walk south of the statue, and the three Sophora japonica. The only tree that actually stands within a panel rather than near an edge is the huge red oak in the southern triangular panel; this tree probably dates from the 1870s. Another old tree at the south is a gingko which stands near the sidewalk. A hackberry that may have dated from before 1930 and a diseased elm that may have dated from the 1920s or 1930s were removed from the park's northwest corner in late 2004, along with several Southern magnolias and red oaks, most from the center panels.

Presumably, tree planting was carried out following the walk redesign of 1930-31. Some existing trees may have been moved, judging by plans prepared ten years earlier, when the park's redesign was first considered. The date of most other extant trees is not certain. Some have grown to be very large specimens, particularly on the west side of the park.

In 1981, magnolias and crabapples were planted around the statue plaza. Some of the new specimens replaced earlier trees.

Red oaks and American lindens border the park on the east and west. On Fifteenth Street along the east side, where a line of elms formerly provided a continuous canopy, only one elm remains. Several oaks of different varieties have been planted along the street to its south. No street trees remain on the north and south sides.

Hedges were formerly located at the inner ends of the two half-oval panels, the ends near the statue, and at the outer ends, along the sidewalks. All hedges have recently been removed to give the park a cleaner, crisper appearance, and to simplify maintenance. The earth mound around the statue's base, formerly planted with azaleas, now is planted with grass.

Granite curbs line the outer edges of the park's grass panels on the west, north, and east sides (the curved sections at the entrances to walks are concrete, and the curb at the south is concrete). Installed in 1891 or 1892, these curbs were taken from Pennsylvania Avenue. Sections of modern post-and-chain fencing line the outer corners of the triangular grass panels, and the entrances to the park walks from the sidewalks. The fencing is a type currently used in downtown parks, composed of simple steel posts surmounted by finials known as "acorn caps," with chains attached to steel loops just below the post tops. A decorative cast-iron fence, with scrollwork in the fascia and balusters topped by finials, surrounds the McPherson statue. This was probably installed in the 1930s at the time identical fencing was placed in Farragut Square and Franklin Park.

All light fixtures in the park are Washington Globe lamps made of Lexan (a thermoplastic resin) mounted on modern posts, octagonal in cross section, instead of the typical, classical Washington Standard posts. The lights are placed around the statue plaza and along the main loop walk.

The benches staggered along the park's walks are all designed in a standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks and installed here between 1957 and 1963. The benches have cast-iron frames and wood-slat backs and seats. Curved struts join front and back legs, terminating in simple

scrolls. The benches stand on concrete pads butted against the walks. Two kinds of trash receptacles are used in the park. Some are the standard type used in the National Capital Region parks, the so-called "tulip style," with cylindrical wood-slat containers holding steel cans and supported on single posts. These probably date from the 1960s, and most are in poor condition. There are also several receptacles that are probably a much older, moveable variety; these have open wire-mesh barrels with separate trash barrels inserted inside.

A single remaining cast-concrete Art Deco-style drinking fountain stands southeast of the statue. A type developed for use in the National Capital Parks, probably in the 1920s, it is in the form of a short octagonal cylinder rising in four tiers, with battered sides. This fountain likely dates from the 1930-31 rehabilitation. Northwest of the statue is modern handicap accessible fountain, which has a dish-shaped basin on a wedge-shaped arm extending from a cylindrical post. A single modern steel-and-Plexiglas bus shelter located at the southwest end of the park serves several busy bus routes. Steel utility boxes are located on the peripheral sidewalks (D.C. jurisdiction), and a variety of regulatory signs stand in and around the park.

The primary vistas from McPherson Square are along the parallel walks following the line of Vermont Avenue, extending diagonally through the park from the northeast to the southwest. Looking southwest along this axis provides a vista of the northeast corner of Lafayette Park, one block away. Looking northeast affords a vista of Thomas Circle, at the intersection of Vermont Avenue with 15th Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The bus shelter obstructs the vista to the south. Also significant are the reciprocal views between McPherson Square and the surrounding buildings.

McPherson Square retains a high level of integrity to 1931, the year it was rebuilt by the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks. Of the seven characteristics used by the National Register of Historic Places to determine the integrity of structures and sites – location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association – the first six are relevant to McPherson Square.

The park's location has not changed. The design remains the same as in 1931, except for alterations to some of the small-scale features, such as lighting. The setting has changed, though not as drastically as at other downtown parks. Some of the surrounding buildings had been constructed by 1931, including at least one twelve-story structure; others have been built in recent decades. Overall, the park is surrounded by many more tall office structures today.

The materials used to construct walks and other features have not changed. The statue, its base and pedestal, and surrounding fence retain their original fabric. The walks are still made of concrete; it is not known if this has been relaid since 1931. The granite curbs remain, though in some places they have been replaced by concrete curbs of the same square shape. In spite of floral display beds and hedges that have been added and removed over the decades, today the plant palette is much the same as it was in the 1930s, with the exception of hedges that surrounded the grass panels along the diagonal axis: these have been removed. Many trees remain from the 1930s; a few apparently date from the 1870s or 1880s.

Workmanship is good overall. The category of workmanship is relevant to the statue and base, walks, and curbing. The feeling conveyed by the park in 1931 and now is of a green oasis in a dense urban neighborhood.

**Landscape Characteristic:**

### Spatial Organization

Within the L'Enfant Plan, McPherson Square and its twin park, Farragut Square, occupy important locations along two major diagonal streets, Vermont and Connecticut Avenues, that are located an equal distance from Sixteenth Street, which runs due north from the White House and Lafayette Square. The three streets, together with the parks, form a "patte d'oie" or "goose foot." Such features were standard elements of Baroque planning, used, for example, at the grounds of Versailles, which influenced the plan of Washington. The symmetry of the patte d'oie arrangement of avenues focused attention on singularly important sites; in Washington, it was chiefly used near the White House and the Capitol building.

The small parks and reservations of the L'Enfant Plan, located at the intersections of various diagonal and gridded streets, provide valuable open space within the intensely developed central business district and nearby residential neighborhoods. These civic spaces give Washington, D.C., much of its distinctive character.

The circulation system largely determines the way space is organized within McPherson Square. At its most basic, the park is a rectangular parcel bounded by major city streets and surrounded by mostly mid-twentieth-century twelve-story commercial buildings. Formerly, between 1868 and 1876, Vermont Avenue divided the land into two right triangles. In 1876 the McPherson statue was erected and the roadbed filled. Trees lined the pair of walks constructed along this diagonal and also lined the edges of the park. The spatial arrangement was altered in 1891-92, when the walk system was changed to a pair of intersecting S-shaped walks built along both long diagonals.

In 1930-31, the circulation was changed once again, to a system more or less replicating the original, with a pair of parallel walks along the Vermont Avenue axis, a single walk on the opposite diagonal axis, and two narrow curving walks on the east and west sides. The statue provides a central focus, and all park walks lead to the small paved area circling around the statue. The major diagonal axis, the parallel loop walk along the alignment of Vermont Avenue, divides the park into two triangular halves with roughly equivalent elements. Large deciduous trees line the boundaries of the park and are placed along the major walks, emphasizing the spatial pattern defined by the circulation.

### Land Use

McPherson Square has been used as a public park since it was first landscaped in 1868. Local residents, office workers, and tourists are the primary users. Typical activities include sunning and picnicking on lawns and benches, feeding the birds, and, in recent years, enjoying summer concerts and other programs presented on a stage set up at the park's southern end. Indigent people frequent the park, and participate in an evening food serviced program supported by a

local charity, which parks a van along the west side of the park. Their presence offers challenging issues for park management. Street parking surrounds the park, and motorcycle parking is provided along the southwest side.

The park lies in the heart of Washington's central business district, surrounded by office buildings and hotels. Hundreds, if not thousands, of commuters walk through in the mornings and evenings, many on their way to and from the Metro station or one of the bus stops around the perimeter. In recent years, dozens of new high-rise apartment and condominium buildings have been built downtown, so that today McPherson Square is beginning to serve as a neighborhood park again.

**Landscape Characteristic Graphics:**



*Looking north up 15th Street from the southwest. Along the 15th Street sidewalk, indigent men and women line up to receive free meals each evening. Hedges and flower beds have been removed. (2004; CLP digital photofile "MS/CLI/Laund Use/homeless meal)"*

**Circulation**

Introduction

The first walk system in McPherson Square (1868-1876) was the pair of sidewalks built along either side of Vermont Avenue. The second pattern (1876 through 1890/91), created after the roadbed was removed, had double parallel walks forming a loop along the former road axis, with a single diagonal walk crossing in the opposite direction. In the third system (1891through 1930/31), two curving, S-shaped walks were built on the two long diagonals. The fourth and

final system (1930/31 to the present) recreated the second pattern: the loop walk along the route of Vermont Avenue was rebuilt, along with the opposite diagonal walk and with the addition of narrow mid-block walks on the east and west. This system acknowledges the importance of the Vermont Avenue axis and provides a simple geometric framework for the circulation.

First Design, 1868-1873

McPherson Square originally formed part of Vermont Avenue. It is not known whether there was any demarcation of the avenue's route through the square in the decades before 1868; in this year, this section of Vermont Avenue was graded, paved, and lined with curbs. Parallel walks were built flanking the street, and were intersected by a single walk laid out along the opposite, northwest-southeast diagonal. The intersection of the avenue and the walk resulted in four triangular areas, which were planted with grass.

Second Design, 1876-1891/92

This section of Vermont Avenue existed for only eight years before the erection of the statue to General James B. McPherson in 1876 necessitated its removal. The statue was located in the center of the rectangular site. A parallel pair of walks was constructed along the former road alignment, connecting the northeast and southwest corners and intersecting with the single walk on the opposite diagonal, which was retained. Two grass panels were installed between the parallel walks. At the east and west sides were four triangular grass panels – two different pairs of identical triangles.

Third Design, 1891/92-1930/31

The park's circulation was again changed in 1891 or 1892. The reason is unknown; perhaps it was to accord with the fashion for curvilinear walks in picturesque landscapes evident in such prominent parks as Lafayette and Franklin.

The new system is recorded in a plan dated 1905, published that year in the Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The linear diagonal walks were replaced by two long S-curved walks. Near the park's center, these divided into Ys that then joined to form a diamond-shaped plaza, oriented north-south, around the McPherson statue. The walk system created two pairs of grass panels: four large grass panels at north, east, south, and west, each having one flat and one curved edge; and four small triangular panels in the park's interior, grouped around the center plaza. A 1913 photo of McPherson Square depicts the view looking from the southwest corner towards the statue, and shows a portion of this curvilinear walk system. At this time the sidewalk along Fifteenth Street was still made of brick, laid in a herringbone pattern. ("A Corner in McPherson Square" in "National Geographic," June 1913; copy in MLK Library, Washingtoniana Div., Circles and Squares - McPherson Square, #2859)

Fourth Design, 1930/31-Present

The final design for McPherson Square, dating from the early 1930s, reflects contemporary notions of city park planning. Landscape architect George Burnap worked for the Office of Public Buildings and Public Grounds from 1910 to about 1917. In 1916, he published "Parks: Their Design, Equipment, and Use." (Philadelphia: Lippincott) This volume of observations and recommendations regarding urban park design drew heavily on Burnap's experience working for the OPBG, and he used many of his Washington park projects as illustrations. It is not known if Burnap had any direct influence on the management of McPherson Square in these years, but many of his general comments seem applicable to the park. It is presumed that his work and writings may have exerted some influence on design decisions, or, at the least, reflected prevailing ideas concerning the layout of walks, the placement of vegetation, and so on.

Burnap distinguished between what he termed "passing-through parks" and "passing-around parks." Passing-through parks are smaller, and "their design and composition should be such that the quick impression given may be a forceful and expressive one." (Burnap 80) Commuters should be able to hurry through them following direct lines of circulation to surrounding streets. Their design should be formal and regular, like the architecture that surrounds them, and simple, so that such features as plants and statues can be observed quickly. (Burnap 80) Passing-around parks, on the other hand, are located at street intersections. As focal points, passing-around parks are better suited as locations for statues, fountains, or architectural features. (Burnap 92) McPherson Square appears to be a good example of what Burnap meant by a passing-through park.

In the 1920s, a plan had been developed to eliminate McPherson Square's curving walks and return to the more direct routes of the earlier system. This plan was not implemented, with modifications, until 1930 or 1931. Once again, a pair of parallel walks formed a looping route along the Vermont Avenue corridor, crossed at the center by a single corresponding diagonal walk. The north end of the north grass panel was not curved, but angled to follow the line of the street curb. The south end of the south panel was somewhat more rounded, but still had an awkward, irregular curve to allow for existing trees, which have since died.

The only feature of the new plan which had not appeared previously was the two narrow curving walks located at mid-block on the east and west sides. These cut across the centers of the triangular grass panels to join the paved statue plaza with the perimeter sidewalks. They may have been constructed to replace, or to avoid the creation of, social trails in these locations.

McPherson Square still retains the 1930-31 circulation system. Concrete sidewalks surround the park on all four sides. These are very narrow along the north side and at the northeast corner, where they have been cut back for street widening.

**Character-defining Features:**

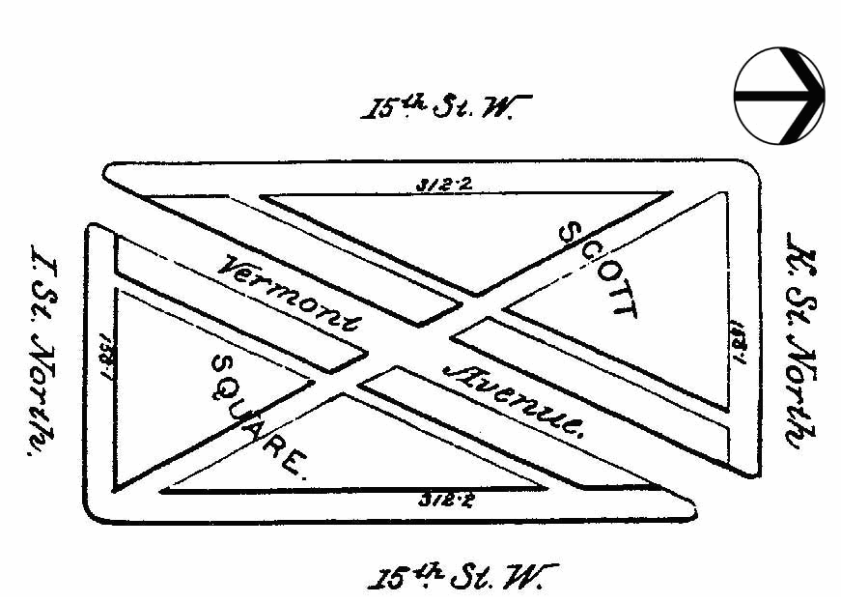
Feature: walk system

| | |
|---|---|
| Feature Identification Number: | 102332 |
| Type of Feature Contribution: | Contributing |
| IDLCS Number: | 046805 |
| LCS Structure Name: | McPherson (Gen. James B.) Square - Pathway-Res. 11 |
| LCS Structure Number: | 01110000 |

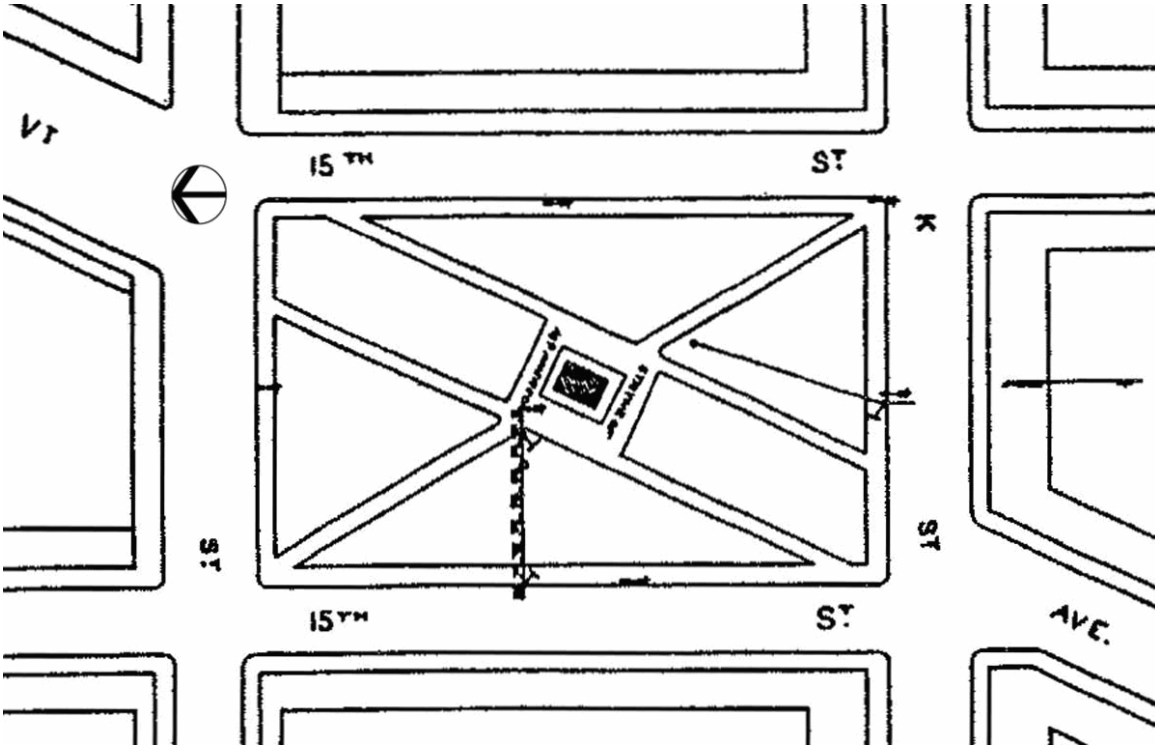
**Landscape Characteristic Graphics:**



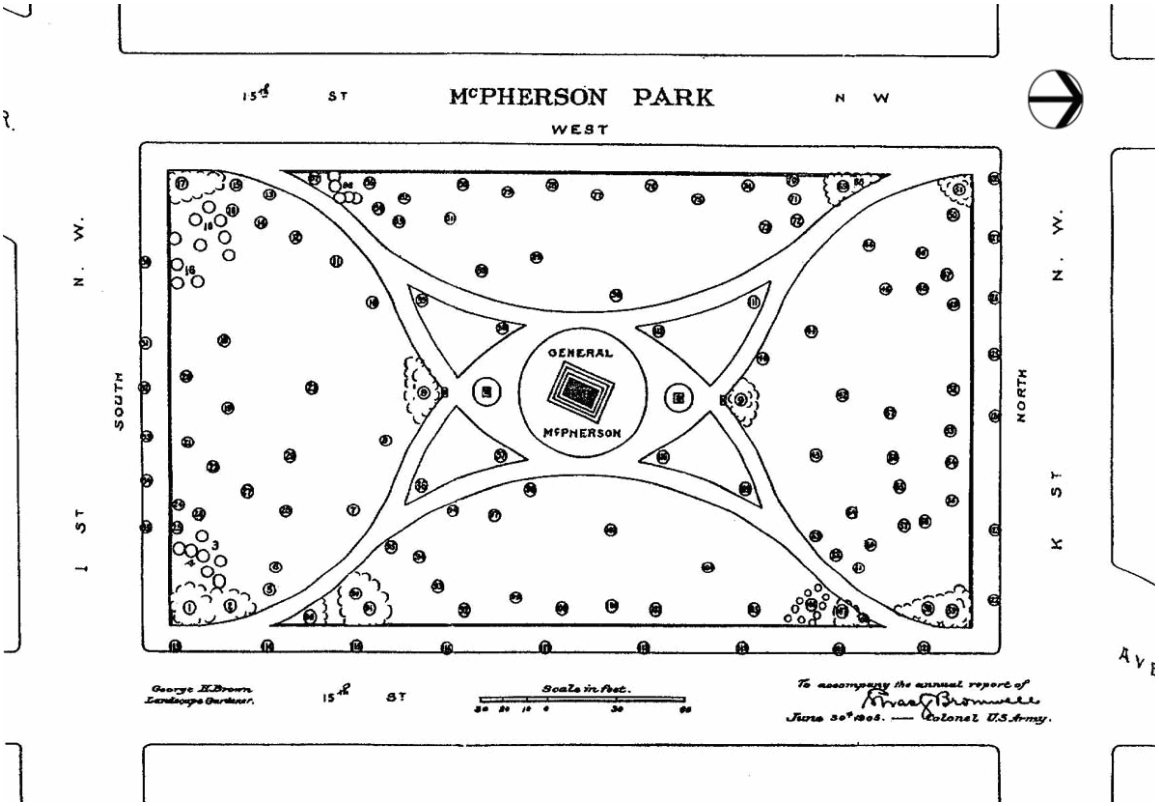
*One of the parallel walks along the central diagonal axis. On right, Chinese elm intrudes into walk. In distance, view of NE corner of Lafayette Park. (2004; CLP digital photofile 'MS/CLI/Circ/diagonal walk and tree)'*



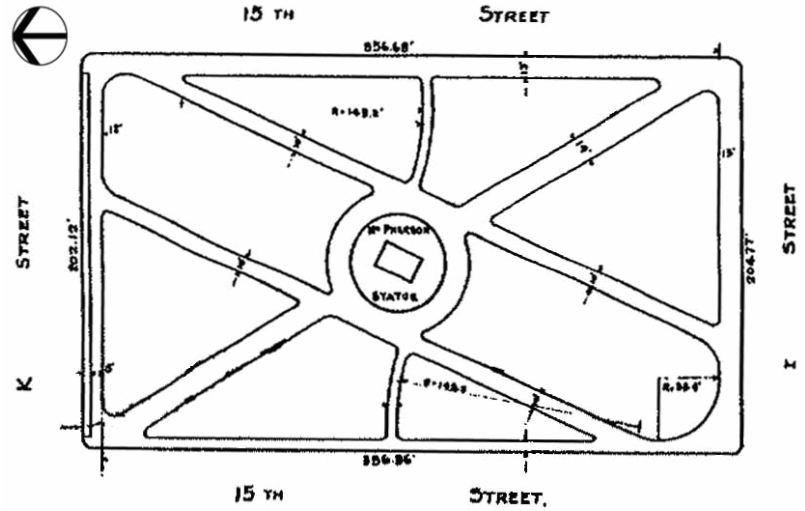

*For five years after McPherson (then Scott) Square was created in 1868, Vermont Avenue passed directly through it. (from HABS, p. 9)*




*When the Brig. Gen. McPherson equestrian statue was erected in 1876, the roadbed of Vermont Ave. was removed. The square was graded and planted in grass, and walks were laid out. (from HABS, p. 9)*




*The park's first design, installed in 1891 or 1892, reflected current taste for picturesque curving walks and lush plantings. (Annual Report 1905, and reproduced in HABS, p. 10)*




*The final plan of McPherson Square reinstated the parallel walks along the Vermont Ave. axis. Conceived in 1920 and installed, with revisions, in 1930/31, this plan still exists. (from HABS, p. 12)*

## Vegetation

Introduction

Planting in McPherson Square consists primarily of large deciduous trees placed on six grass panels, whose shape is determined by the walk system (the two large panels to the east and west are bisected by narrow walks, so it could be said that the park has eight panels). Though the roadbed of Vermont Avenue was removed from McPherson Square in 1876, its axis continues to be the main determining factor underlying the park's circulation pattern and spatial organization. The current walk system creates a park that is symmetrical along this diagonal, northeast-southwest axis. Two parallel walks create two half-oval grass panels; together, walks and panels form a loop, or oval, whose centerpoint is the McPherson statue. There is a pair of identical triangular panels to the north and south, and another, longer pair to the east and west, on the park's long sides; these longer triangles are bisected by the narrow mid-block walks. The outer edges of the six panels are lined by square granite curbs (concrete to the south and at curved ends), and their inner edges are flush with the walk pavement.

Landscape architect George Burnap was employed by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds from 1910 to c. 1917, and in 1916 published "Parks: Their Design, Equipment, and Use," drawing on his experience in Washington. Burnap's ideas may reflect the way vegetation was arranged in McPherson Square and other downtown parks in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Burnap stressed the importance of thinking of the overall composition rather than designing a collection of individual plants. He advised planting fewer varieties in masses, and noted the importance of the correct amount of shade: "Planting is done for two reasons: for shade and for ornamental interest. Shade is usually overdone. The visitor to a park in summer seeks the cool recesses of shady grove, but does not desire subterranean glory." (p. 226) Walks and seats should be shaded, but lawns are best kept free of trees so that they act as "breezeways . . . admit[ting] sunlight" into the park, providing a contrast of light and shade, and framing the green of the lawns. (p. 226) Concerning flower beds he wrote: "Undoubtedly the loveliest way to use flowers, at least the old-fashioned hardy perennials, is in riotous profusion along the edge of shrubbery borders, enlivening the depth of the shadows and accenting the points of high light." (p. 282) Flower beds are best designed in association with the more formal parts of park design, such as walks and lawns – to "repeat or parallel some dominant line . . . or . . . accentuate some existing feature." Flower beds "are particularly suitable for the smaller parks of a town or city, especially those near the center which have been classified as display parks." (p. 284)

Historic Vegetation

A plan published in the 1905 Annual Report, prepared by George Brown, public gardener for the D.C. reservations, records the plants then growing in the square. Trees and shrubs sporadically lined the boundaries, were placed at walk intersections, or were scattered randomly across the lawns. The emphasis was on flowering shrubs and small trees, which

seem to have been selected to provide a variety of color and form. A list accompanying the plan includes Japanese snowball shrub, Japanese maple, and Japanese quince; purple-flowered magnolia, purple-leaved plum, and purple hazel; and Spanish bayonet and mimosa, along with the silver maples (Acer saccharinum) and American elms (Ulmus Americana) that were among the predominant tree species.

A c. 1913 photo gives a hint of this profusion. The viewpoint is from the southwest corner of the park, looking up one of the curving walks towards the statue, almost hidden by heavy vegetation. Large shrubs grow on the small triangular panel near the statue; other shrubs are planted along the walk, along with a spiky-leaved plant where the walk meets the Fifteenth Street sidewalk. ("A Corner in McPherson Square," in "National Geographic," June 1913; copy in MLK Library, Washingtoniana Div., "Circles and Squares - McPherson Square, #2859")

In 1920, landscape architect Irving W. Payne, working for the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (and later employed by National Capital Parks), prepared two plans, dated May 14 and June 21, that showed a new walk system and planting plan for McPherson Square. One version ("Revised Plan," May 14) records the new plan on its own, with existing and proposed vegetation; the other ("Tree Plan Proposed for McPherson Square," June 21, 874/80010) shows it overlaid on the existing picturesque plan with its curving walks, constructed in 1890-91. Payne's plan was not implemented for another decade.

The "Revised Plan" shows hedges of California privet (Ligustrum ovalifolium) used as continuous border plantings along the two main grass panels. Single large shrubs of an unknown species were placed at the interior and exterior corners, at the point where the outer curve of the panel begins; there were to be eight of these large shrubs in all, four in each panel.

Maples (Acer sp.) and lindens (Tilia sp.) had been planted along the park's west and east sides, and American elms were growing as street trees along the parking strip of the east side of Fifteenth Street. Norway maples (Acer platanoides) were used as street trees along K and I Streets. A red oak in the northeast panel is labeled "Daughters of Veterans Memorial Tree" (this is no longer extant). A six-inch-diameter American elm near the square's center is marked to be moved about twenty feet south; a beech (Fagus sp.) and two American elms are noted as being in poor condition.

The "Tree Plan" records details of the planting as it existed in 1920. The four small triangular panels arrayed around the statue plaza were bordered with dwarf box hedges (Buxus sp.), and had larger box shrubs planted at their corners. Growing within the triangles were quantities of Vinca minor and Hypericum moseriatum. The condition of certain trees is noted. Some are marked for cutting, and others for moving: a few Southern magnolias (Magnolia grandiflora) were to be transplanted to the Lincoln Memorial grounds. The circular bed around the statue base has been cut back to form an oval. There is no evidence of the Chinese elm (Ulmus parvifolia) that is now such a prominent feature of the south axial panel. This plan shows that

English oaks (Quercus robur, Q. pedunculata) were to be planted in the park along its east and west sides. This was never implemented, and ten years later, the plan was changed.

Nearly ten years later, in 1929, a new survey was made of the planting in McPherson Square ("Survey of Existing Plant Material for McPherson Square," OPBPP, Oct. 18, 1929, #37-22). None of the changes recommended in 1920 had been implemented. The curvilinear walk system remained in place.

The following year, Payne prepared a revision of his 1920 plan ("McPherson Square General Plan," approved June 6, 1930; the name of the "Office of Public Buildings and Grounds" had been changed to "Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks"). The grass panels are now much wider than before – a change probably made to accommodate existing trees, perhaps done on the recommendation of the Commission of Fine Arts. The plan depicts existing trees, noting those in poor condition and those to be cut. Only one tree, a three-inch-diameter hackberry (Celtis sp.), is shown as to be moved. The locations of proposed new trees, and new locations for moved trees, are also indicated.

The plan also shows hedges clipped to a width of three feet six inches and a height of two feet six inches surround the two main grass panels. The shrub species is not identified. Eight shrubs are placed at the corners of the central panels, as before, and twelve flower beds are created within these panels, along the lines of the hedges.

The 1930 plan still does not record the Chinese elm in the south axial panel, but the huge red oak that today dominates the south triangular panel is shown as having already achieved a diameter of thirty inches. Silver maples remaining from the period when Vermont Avenue ran through the square still line the parallel walks, with trunk diameters of twenty-four, thirty-six, and even forty inches. Silver maples and elms grow along the park boundary on K Street, elms stand along the street on the east, and both maples and lindens grow along the park's west side and I Street. Gas lamps are designated for removal. The bed around the statue remains circular, not oval, and is planted with over a thousand pachysandra surrounding clusters of Japanese yew (Taxus cuspidata 'Nana'), juniper (Juniperus sabina 'Tamariscifolia'), and euonymus (Euonymus radicans).

The Museum Resource Center of the National Capital Region has a series of photographs of McPherson Square taken during the years 1953-1969. These depict the hedges that surrounded the axial panels, the large corner shrubs, and the long, rectangular flower beds that were built within the hedges. The beds held seasonal floral displays; photographs from the mid-1960s depict a succession of spring tulips, summer petunias, and autumn chrysanthemums. The 1960s photos suggest that some alterations may have been made to the beds in size or configuration.

In 1981, several trees were added. Four red maples (Acer rubrum "October Glory") were planted at the southwest and northeast ends of this loop, marking the ends of the U-shaped

hedges. Southern magnolias were planted at the corresponding points at the inner edges of panels. All these trees partially blocked the important views along this axis and were removed in 2004/2005.

Existing Vegetation

Historic Trees
None of the silver maples that formerly lined the route of Vermont Avenue remain. American elms once lined the east section of Fifteenth Street, land under city jurisdiction; today, a single elm remains near the south end of the block. A couple of the elms to the north have been removed and not replaced, perhaps because of street widening at this corner. The three elms that were located south of the remaining specimen have been replaced by a linden, a pin oak (Quercus palustris), and a willow oak (Quercus phellos).

Two large trees in the south triangular panel may date from before 1920: the mammoth red oak in the center of the panel and a gingko near the sidewalk. The age of the large Chinese elm in the axial panel south of the statue is not known. Presumably, extensive tree planting was carried out following the walk redesign of 1930-31. Some existing trees may have been moved, judging by the plans prepared ten years earlier, and the Chinese elm may date from this time. Two older trees that stood in the northwest panel were removed in late 2004: a hackberry that may have predated 1920 (perhaps the hackberry designated for moving in 1930) and an American elm that may have been planted c. 1930.

Most other extant trees may date from the 1930s as well, though this is not certain. Some have grown to be very large specimens, particularly on the west side of the park, where a particularly large linden and red oak are situated. Another red oak at the park's southeast corner is also quite large. The enormous red oak in the south triangular panel may have been planted in the 1870s, when the park was first landscaped, since it had already attained a diameter of thirty inches by 1920.

Hedges
Formerly, hedges were located at the inner ends of the two axial panels, adjoining the statue and the plaza. These were composed of a U-shaped holly hedge (Ilex glabra compacta) along the outer edge, next to the plaza, fronted by a massing of azaleas. Floral display beds were in front of the azaleas. The plantings were removed in December 2004 and all the beds were sodded over. Similar plantings at the north and south ends of the axial panels were also eliminated (the south bed a few months previously). A planting bed on the earth mound around the statue's base that was formerly planted with azaleas is now planted with grass. The decision to take out the beds arose out of discussions in the 2003-2004 Downtown Parks Task Force (see History). Their removal is an attempt to simplify the park design and decrease maintenance.

**Character-defining Features:**

Feature: lawns

Feature Identification Number: 102345

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: trees dating from 1930s or earlier

Feature Identification Number: 102346

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: trees dating from later than 1930s that replace trees on 1930 plan in kind and location

Feature Identification Number: 102348

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: trees dating from later than 1930s that do not replace trees on 1930 plan in kind or location

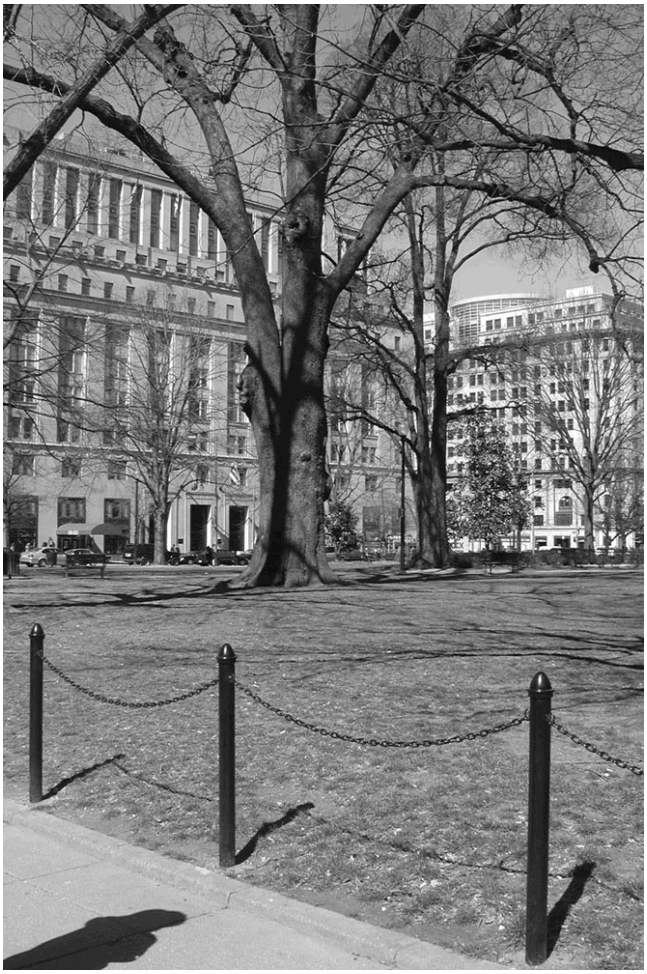
Feature Identification Number: 102347

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

**Landscape Characteristic Graphics:**



*Looking north up the central panel, showing the 1965 fall planting of chrysanthemums. Hedges (now removed) still border these panels. (1965; CLP digital photofile MS/CLI/Veg/MRCE 9060-80 1965)*



*View from southeast of the massive red oak in the south triangular panel, dating from c. 1870s, and the Chinese elm beyond. Note the concrete curbing and the post-and-chain fencing. (2004; CLP digital photofile "MS/CLI/Veg/two trees)"*

### Buildings And Structures

General James B. McPherson Statue

The only structure in McPherson Square is the statue representing Union Brigadier General James B. McPherson mounted on a horse and surveying a field of battle. A committee to erect a monument over the grave of the fallen leader, killed in action during the Battle of Atlanta, was established by Maj. Gen. John Logan, Commander of the Army of the Tennessee, on July 25, 1865, at the time the army was being disbanded. Washington was soon chosen as the more appropriate location over McPherson's burial place in his hometown of Clyde, Ohio.

Louis T. Rebisso of Cincinnati was selected as the sculptor after the first artist failed to meet the terms of the contract. Rebisso spent three years completing the model. Cast by Robert Wood & Co. of Philadelphia, the bronze came from Confederate cannon captured at the Battle of Atlanta. The granite for the pedestal came from the Westham Granite Company of

Richmond (suppliers of stone for the State War and Navy Building). Because the Society had run out of funds after paying about $25,500 for the statue itself, Congress appropriated the $25,000 cost of the pedestal.

The twelve-foot-high statue stands on a fifteen-foot-high granite pedestal. McPherson is shown sharply reining in his horse while turning in the saddle to face west, holding field glasses in one hand. His uniform is creased and blown by the wind. The finely rendered horse stands checked in mid-stride, neck arched and head tucked, with one foreleg raised.

It is frequently stated that the pedestal was designed by Engineer Officer General Orville E. Babcock, but an undated, unsigned typescript page of facts found in the files of National Capital Parks – Central, gives the names of architects Smithmeyer and Pelz, designers of the original Library of Congress building. Considering the artistic skill evinced by the pedestal, this attribution seems much more likely, though no further information has been located. (Babcock is also recorded as the designer of the pedestal for the statue of Admiral David G. Farragut, in Farragut Square, a work of very different character.)

Many of the molding bands ornamenting the pedestal are composed of symbolic decorative elements. For example, the plinth has a base molding comprising a continuous row of globes, probably representing cannonballs. In the cornice, laurel wreaths are carved in the metopes, and a band of fasces (bundled rods, a Roman symbol of authority) forms the cornice molding.

The west face of the pedestal bears the following inscription: " Major General [sic] James B. McPherson/Atlanta/July 24, 1884". On the east face is carved: "Erected by his comrades of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee". The pedestal includes empty space intended to serve as McPherson's tomb, but plans to reinter him from his grave in Ohio were blocked.

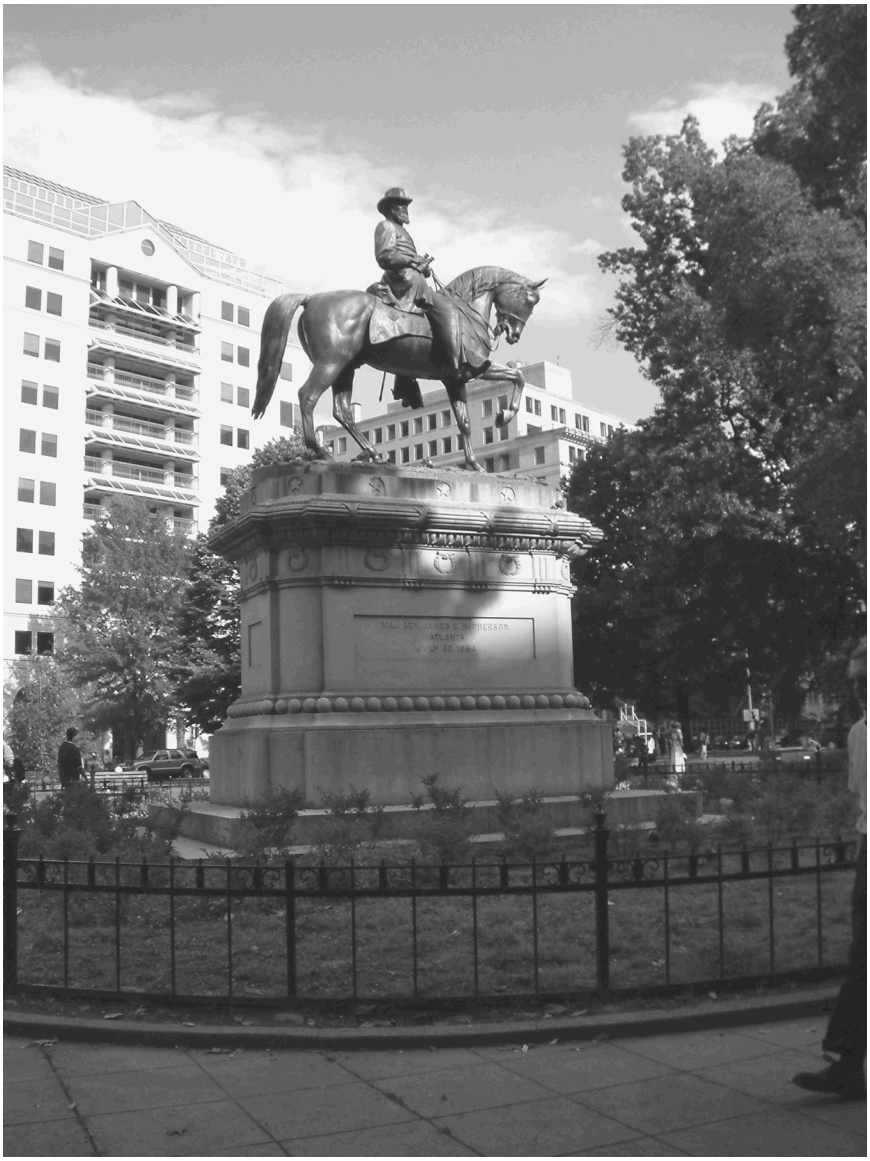
One night in the summer of 1962, a couple of boys vandalized the McPherson statue, stealing the sword and scabbard. The pieces were recovered the same night. The reins, damaged in the incident, were soon repaired.

(Information from "Evening Star," Oct. 18, 1876 [ts], "Washington Times," Nov. 22, 1922, and "Trio Held after Raid on Statue," in "Washington Post," June 28, 1962, all from NCP-C files, and Goode 1974: 281.)

**Character-defining Features:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Feature: | statue of Maj. Gen. McPherson, including pedestal and pedestal base |
| Feature Identification Number: | 102331 |
| Type of Feature Contribution: | Contributing |
| IDLCS Number: | 007306 |
| LCS Structure Name: | McPherson (Gen. James B.) Square - Statue - Res 11 |
| LCS Structure Number: | 01110001 |

**Landscape Characteristic Graphics:**



*A view of the General James B. McPherson statue from the west. The lowest step of the base is covered by earth. (Plantings on the mound were replaced by grass in late 2004.) (2004; CLP digital photofile 'MS/CLI/B&S/statue from west 2004 BW bc adj)'*

**Small Scale Features**

Curbing and Fencing

McPherson Square is an anomaly among the downtown parks and reservations, a distinctive feature of which is their use of concrete quarter-round curbing to define the outer edges of their grass panels. Such curbing was originally installed in 1904-1905 to replace the cast-iron or post-and-chain fences that had surrounded them for decades. Instead, McPherson Square has

granite curbs lining the outer edges of the grass panels on the west, north, and east sides (the curved sections at the entrances to park walks are concrete, and the curb at the south is concrete). These were installed in 1891 or 1892: "Nine hundred and sixty linear feet of granite curb, removed from the reservations at Pennsylvania Avenue, 14th and E Streets, NW., and Pennsylvania Avenue, 20th and I Streets, NW., were redressed and set in place around the square and a sod border laid on the inner side of the curb." (Annual Report 1892). Some sections of the granite curbs have sunk, so their height is irregular.

The post-and-chain fencing installed around McPherson Square in 1868 would almost certainly have been the standard type used by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. These had short heavy bollards in the form of fasces, or bundled rods, a classical Roman symbol of authority, and molded bases and capitals. Capitals either bore the initials of the "U.S. OPBG" or a finial. The post-and-chain fences were removed from McPherson Square in the early 1890s.

Sections of modern post-and-chain fencing line the outer corners of the triangular grass panels, and the entrances to the park walks from the sidewalks. The fencing, installed in 2002-2003, is a type currently used in downtown parks, composed of simple steel posts surmounted by finials, with chains attached to steel loops beneath the tops of the posts. The posts are coated with black vinyl, the chain is plastic-coated steel, and the caps are aluminum "acorn cap" style. (The concrete footers were too crude and had to be reworked.)

A decorative cast-iron fence surrounding the McPherson statue was probably installed in the mid-1930s, at the time identical fencing was placed in Farragut Square (around the Farragut statue) and in Franklin Park, in 1936 (behind the Barry statue and around the lodge). This type of fence still exists in many other reservations as well. The fence is composed of panels defined at both ends by relatively heavy posts, with thinner balusters in the center. Along the top runs a simple, open fascia element, containing scrollwork in some panels. Balusters are topped by finials. At least in the case of Franklin Park, the fencing is known to have been manufactured by the Anchor Fence Company of Baltimore.

Lighting

A photograph dating from between 1876 (the time the statue was erected) and 1891/92 (when the earth mound was created around its base) includes a detailed image of the elaborate combination gas lamp-drinking fountain fixture. This type of fixture was among the first furnishings used in the downtown parks and was installed when the parks were first laid out, which was usually in the 1870s. (Photocopy in National Mall & Memorial Parks files, no identifying information)

The short iron lamp post, in the form of a classical column, supported a large octagonal lantern crowned by a curving cap and a ball finial. The post stood on a high square pedestal, also probably made of iron. From the pedestal's south face projected what appears to be a lion's

head medallion, holding a spigot above a small basin. The fixture, standing perhaps twelve feet high, was located near the McPherson statue, at the intersection of the walk leading from the southeast with the plaza.

In Washington, as in other American cities, electric arc lights (in which a filament was suspended between two wires) began to be installed in the 1890s. Lights of the newer technology existed alongside the older gas lights for many years. In the type of arc light most commonly used in the District, a classical, fluted post was surmounted by a translucent glass globe. Several of these appear in twentieth-century photographs of McPherson Square, from as early as 1913 and as late as the 1960s (by which time another type of electric fixture would certainly have been used in the historic globe). Two of these lamps stood by the plaza east and west of the statue; others were placed along sidewalks (1913 photo "Twelve-story Office building on SE corner of K St. and Vermont Ave.," WHS, CHS 01247A). Photos from the 1960s show a double globe Bacon Washington streetlight on I Street (MRCE photos).

It does not appear that McPherson Square ever had the Washington Standard light, with its post shaped like a simple classical column, and its urn-shaped Washington Globe lamp. This light was developed in 1923 and is still the standard light used throughout the District. Modern so-called "mushroom" lights, simple fixtures with projecting diffusers, were installed in the 1960s and remained until at least the early 1990s (they were recorded by HABS in c. 1993).

All lights in the park today are composed of Washington Globe lamps made of Lexan, a thermoplastic resin, supported not on the typical Washington Standard posts, but on more modern posts that are octagonal in cross-section with concave faces. The lights are placed around the statue plaza and along the main loop walk.

Benches

Two bench types are visible in a photo of McPherson Square dating from about 1913, placed on the grass along the curving asphalt walk and near the fountain. One variety with a heavy iron brace connecting the legs and the other had a continuous seat and back made of wood slats arranged in a graceful S-curve. ("A Corner in McPherson Square," National Geographic, June 1913; copy in MLK Library, Washingtoniana Div., "Circles and Squares - McPherson Square, #2859.")

The benches staggered along the park's walks are all of a standard NPS style developed for the National Capital Parks and originally installed here between 1957 and 1963, judging by historic photos (MRCE 2850-IC 1957 j and MRCE 7832-B 1963 j).

What proportion of the current benches are replacements in-kind, or include replaced materials, is not known; probably at a minimum most of the wood slats have been replaced over the years. The benches have cast-iron frames and wood slat backs and seats. Curved struts join front and back legs, and the struts terminate in simple scrolls. The iron frameworks are painted

black, and the slats are stained dark brown. The benches stand on concrete pads set into the lawns along the walks.

Trash Receptacles

The park has two varieties of trash receptacles. Some are the standard style used in the National Capital Region parks, the so-called "tulip style," with cylindrical wood-slat containers holding plastic cans and supported on single posts. These probably date from the 1960s, and most are in poor condition. There are also several receptacles of a type that is a moveable, open wire-mesh barrel with a separate trash barrel inserted inside. Examples of this type appears in early twentieth-century photographs of other parks. These receptacles offer no protection from pests.

On the perimeter sidewalks, which are under city jurisdiction, stand trash receptacles supplied and maintained by the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID). These have an outer structure made of iron slats with a flared top and a removable inner can. Cigarette receptacles that are a smaller version of the same design are placed next to some of the trash receptacles.

Drinking fountains

McPherson Square has a single remaining cast-concrete Art Deco-style drinking fountain, in the form of a short octagonal cylinder rising in four tiers with battered sides. The fountain may date from the 1930-31 rehabilitation, since it appears on this plan and is a standard type that had been developed for use throughout the National Capital Parks. The spigot has been removed and the fountain no longer works.

Formerly, the same type of fountain stood in the corresponding location northwest of the statue. This has been replaced by an enameled steel handicap-accessible fountain, which has a dish-shaped basin on a wedge-shaped arm extending from a cylindrical post. Both fountains are located on concrete pads at the tips of triangular grass panels.

Other – Signs, Utility Boxes, Etc.

A single modern steel-and-Plexiglas bus shelter located at the southwest end of the park serves several busy bus routes. The shelter creates a major obstruction to the important vista southwest to Lafayette Square.

Steel utility boxes are located on the perimeter sidewalks. A variety of regulatory signs stand in and around the park. A large blue enameled sign, apparently supplied by the city, mounted on a heavy, but moveable, black post on the south sidewalk gives the park's name.

**Character-defining Features:**

Feature: benches

Feature Identification Number: 102333

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 046804

LCS Structure Name: McPherson (Gen. James B.) Square-Bench(37)-Res. 11

LCS Structure Number: 01110000

Feature: lights

Feature Identification Number: 102339

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

Feature: post-and-chain fencing

Feature Identification Number: 102340

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

Feature: cast-iron fence

Feature Identification Number: 102334

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 046803

LCS Structure Name: McPherson (Gen. James B.) Square - Fence -Res. 11

LCS Structure Number: 01110000

Feature: granite curbs

Feature Identification Number: 102337

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: concrete curbs

Feature Identification Number: 102335

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: trash receptacles - tulip type

Feature Identification Number: 102343

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

Feature: trash receptacles - open mesh

Feature Identification Number: 102342

Type of Feature Contribution: Undetermined

Feature: signs

Feature Identification Number: 102341

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

Feature: utility boxes

Feature Identification Number: 102344

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

Feature: concrete drinking fountain

Feature Identification Number: 102336

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: handicap accessible drinking fountain

Feature Identification Number: 102338

Type of Feature Contribution: Non-Contributing

**Landscape Characteristic Graphics:**



*A view of the statue from the southeast shows the concrete drinking fountain, cast-iron fence, and a tulip trash receptacle. (2004; CLP digital photofile "MS/CLI/SSF/statue from SE, historic drinking fountain 2004 BW)"*

### Views And Vistas

The primary vistas from McPherson Square are along the parallel walks following the line of Vermont Avenue, extending diagonally through the park from the northeast to the southwest. Looking southwest along this axis affords a vista of the northeast corner of Lafayette Park, one block away, which can be considered the beginning of President's Park and the White House grounds. Looking northeast along this axis provides a vista of Thomas Circle, at the intersection of Vermont Avenue with 15th Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The red sandstone tower of Luther Place Memorial Church (1870-1883) dominates this vista.

Formerly, red maples and Southern magnolias planted on the diagonal grass panels north and south of the statue obscured these vistas. These trees were removed in late 2004, and the only remaining impediment to this critical view is the busy bus shelter on the south sidewalk, placed squarely in the view zone towards Lafayette Park.

Also significant are the reciprocal views from McPherson Square to and from the surrounding buildings. Most of these date from the mid-twentieth century and give the park a different ambiance than found at Farragut Square or Franklin Park, where the majority of flanking buildings were constructed within the last thirty years.

### Character-defining Features:

Feature: view down Vermont Ave. corridor to southwest

Feature Identification Number: 102350

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: view up Vermont Avenue corridor to northeast

Feature Identification Number: 102351

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Feature: reciprocal views between park and surrounding sidewalks and streets

Feature Identification Number: 102349

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

### Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



*Looking northeast on the Vermont Avenue axis towards the McPherson statue. Magnolias and maples partially block the view to Thomas Circle. (2004; CLP digital photofile 'MS/CLI/V&V/view NE)'*

# Condition

## Condition Assessment and Impacts

**Condition Assessment:** Fair

**Assessment Date:** 09/19/2005

**Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:**

McPherson Square retains much of its historic fabric, dating to 1931 or earlier. Trees are in good condition. Lawns are eroded in many places. Some small-scale features, such as trash receptacles, are in need of repair.

The Assessment Date refers to the date that the park superintendent concurred with the Condition Assessment. The Date Recorded information refers to the date when condition was first assessed by the author of the report.

**Condition Assessment:** Good

**Assessment Date:** 09/19/2011

**Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:**

Since the 2005 assessment, the walks, which were in need of repair, have been repaved and new drinking fountains and trash receptacles installed. The vegetation is in good condition and erosion impacting the lawns, as noted during the previous assessment, was not found.

The assessment date refers to the date that the park superintendnet cocurred with the Condition Assessment. The Date Recorded information refers to the date when condition was first assessed by the author of the report.

### Impacts

**Type of Impact:** Deferred Maintenance

**External or Internal:** Internal

**Impact Description:** In 2005 the walks were noted as damaged. They have since been repaved.

The General McPherson statue, according to the 2011 List of Classified Structures assessment, is in fair condition. The LCS assessment noted some spalling and waxing was recommended to bring the structure into good condition. The pedestal has some minor chipping.

**Type of Impact:** Adjacent Lands

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| **External or Internal:** | External |
| **Impact Description:** | High-rise office buildings surround the park. Though these structures help define the urban square, they block sunlight. The shade created in certain areas may impede plant growth and may deter people from visiting the park. |
| **Type of Impact:** | Visitation |
| **External or Internal:** | Both Internal and External |
| **Impact Description:** | McPherson Square is located within the central business district, and thousands of office workers pass through the park daily. It also attracts a large number of visitors, lunchtime picnickers, and indigent persons.<br><br>At the time of the 2011 condition reassesment no social trails were present, but because of the square's heavy visitation social trails are a potential impact to the site. |

## Treatment

### Treatment

**Approved Treatment:** Rehabilitation

**Approved Treatment Document:** Other Document

**Document Date:** 04/13/2004

**Approved Treatment Document Explanatory Narrative:**

Cy Paumier, landscape architect with the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), developed these figures with the Downtown Parks Task Force (3/2003-4/2004). Estimates were given to the Task Force on April 13, 2004.

**Approved Treatment Completed:** No

### Approved Treatment Costs

**Cost Date:** 04/13/2004

**Level of Estimate:** C - Similar Facilities

**Landscape Approved Treatment Cost Explanatory Description:**

Phase 1 of this cost estimate includes costs for bench renovation ($2500), new trash receptacles ($7500), and new post-and-chain fencing ($18,000). Phase 2 includes installation of park curbing ($30,000), installation of a 42-inch-high railing ($15,000), and installation of brick paving ($165,000). A line item to widen the K Street sidewalk for $30,000 would not be the responsibility of the NPS (2004).

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