

WEST POTOMAC PARK
(Reservation No. 332)
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-693

HABS
DC
WASH
647-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WEST POTOMAC PARK
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Location: West Potomac Park is bounded by Constitution Avenue on the north, the Potomac River on the west, and the Monument Grounds on the northeast. The elevated railroad bridge forms the southeast boundary between West and East Potomac parks.

Owner/Manager: U.S. government, National Park Service

Present Use: In addition to its recreational and ceremonial uses, the park property is also traversed by some of the city's busiest roadways and bridges.

Significance: The land comprising East and West Potomac parks was created as a means of disposing of muck dredged to clear shipping channels in the Potomac River. Dedicated as park land around the turn of the century, West Potomac Park now comprises an integral portion of Washington's central ceremonial core and includes some of Washington's most significant landmarks; the Lincoln, Jefferson, and Vietnam Veterans memorials, Constitution Gardens and the cherry-tree-lined Tidal Basin. The Korean War Memorial, now under construction is scheduled for completion

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of plan:** The land was reclaimed from the Potomac River according to a plan devised in 1882. Its development as an extension of the Mall axis is largely according to the McMillan Senate Park Commission plan of 1902.
2. **Original and subsequent owners:** When the land for the city was acquired by the federal government in the 1790s, most of the area that now comprises West Potomac Park was covered by the waters of the Potomac River. The land mass formed here in the late nineteenth century by the Army Corps of Engineers became the property of the U.S. government.
3. **Improvements, alterations and additions:**
 - 1882-90s: Land mass formed through dredging and the construction of retaining walls.
 - 1904: Long Bridge over the Potomac River replaced with a new span known as the Highway Bridge.
 - 1913-22: Lincoln Memorial constructed at the west end of the park on axis with the Capitol and Washington Monument.
 - 1918: Bathhouse and bathing beach constructed on the Tidal Basin. Temporary War and Navy Department buildings erected along Constitution Avenue west of 17th Street.
 - 1921-22: Reflecting pool constructed between the Washington and Lincoln memorials.

- 1925: Nine-hole golf course installed south of the Lincoln Memorial.
- 1926-32: Arlington Memorial Bridge constructed to link the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Cemetery.
- 1931: District of Columbia World War I Memorial bandstand erected south of the Reflecting Pool.
- 1938-43: Thomas Jefferson Memorial constructed.
- ca. 1943: Temporary buildings erected south of the reflecting pool. Independence Avenue extended through the south side of the Monument Grounds and on a bridge over north bay of the Tidal Basin.
- 1947-50: Rochambeau Memorial Bridge erected to carry northbound traffic over the Potomac River.
- 1960-67: George Mason Bridge erected to carry southbound traffic over the Potomac River.
- 1967: Old 1904 Highway Bridge demolished.
- 1970-71: World War I tempos demolished.
- 1980s: Constitution Gardens laid out north of the reflecting pool with a monument honoring the signers of the Declaration of Independence.
- 1982-84: Vietnam Veteran's Memorial erected in Constitution Gardens.
- 1993-94: Korean War Veteran's Memorial erected south of the Reflecting Pool.

B. Historical Context:

The huge landmass comprising East and West Potomac Parks is notably absent from early maps of the city (See also East Potomac Park, HABS No. DC-692). West Potomac Park was created as the result of a massive project in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to clear navigable channels in the Potomac River. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, regional commerce depended on the river, but its depth and flow fluctuated frequently. North of Easby's Point, near the east end of today's Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, the Potomac River was a narrow mountain creek with a deep, rocky bottom fed by fresh water from about 20,000 square miles of territory. As it flowed along the west side of the City of Washington, the approximately 900'-wide river expanded to about 5,000', spreading across a soft, shallow river bed of mud, sand, and decaying vegetation. From this point, the river continued south as a slow, shallow tidewater.

to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay.¹ This shift in the river's constitution was one of the features that prompted George Washington to select the area as the federal capital. Access to the ocean had already encouraged commerce and settlement in the thriving ports of Georgetown and Alexandria, and George Washington envisioned that a canal constructed alongside the river as it continued northwest of the city would provide an ideal trading route into the nation's interior.

As the Potomac abruptly transformed from deep, narrow, and fast to shallow, wide, and sluggish, the soft bottom south of Easby's Point shifted with the currents and tides. Increasing regional population exacerbated the sandbars and stagnation that periodically blocked channels in the early 1800s. As land was cleared and cultivated north of the city, runoff and erosion added debris and silt to the stream that collected and settled in the river as it slowly flowed past the new city.

The City Canal contributed more solid mass to the waterway, and bridges built across the river from Washington to Virginia further impeded its rate of flow. The canal, included on L'Enfant's original city plan, was chartered in 1815 to provide a shortcut for boats through the city to the Anacostia River. Sewage and silt runoff from newly cleared streets soon filled the canal, however, and drained back into the river creating noxious mud flats near the canal mouth south of the White House. As these flats expanded, they threatened commerce in the Washington Channel along the city's southwest shore. The almost 5,000' span of the Long Bridge, built in 1808-09 to carry traffic from the southwest terminus of Maryland Avenue to Virginia, stood on thirty-nine broad piers that slowed the water enough for silt to collect to its north, and portions of the bridge were repeatedly damaged and carried away by floods and ice floes. A new bridge built in 1835 was extended from a causeway over the shoals that by then covered half the river's original width.² In 1863, during the Civil War, another crossing was erected 75' downstream from the Long Bridge to carry the Georgetown and Alexandria Railroad, further impeding the river's flow.

The mud flats south of the White House were so virulent during the war that President Abraham Lincoln spent nights at the Soldiers Home north of the city to avoid their stench and "miasmatic influences." President Andrew Johnson's poor health was blamed in part on the bad air wafting over the White House, so Army Corps engineer Nathaniel Michler was assigned to seek a new site for the executive mansion far from the "pestilent flat on which a large portion of the sewerage of the city [was] cast to fester in the sun."³

Perhaps to legitimize Michler's 1867 survey results, control of the federal land in the city was transferred the same year from the Department of the Interior to the Department of War, with Michler assigned as chief of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G). The White House relocation effort fell by the wayside after Ulysses S. Grant's election in 1868, but Michler, well acquainted with the city's plan and geography after his survey, addressed the problems posed by the erratic river. Armed with soundings performed by the Coast Survey, Michler recommended narrowing the river bed to increase its rate of flow by

¹ Chappell, 1.

² Chappell, 8.

³ Cowdrey, 24.

dredging a deep channel near the Washington shore depositing the muck from the river's bottom on the marshy flats west and south of the Monument Grounds. The benefits of such a project were threefold: a clear channel for ships, the elimination of the malarial flats, and the enhancement of "the extent and beauty of the public grounds about the monument which is being erected to the memory of Washington."⁴

Although no definitive reclamation strategy was developed during Michler's term, he did oversee repeated piecemeal projects to clear the river. During his three-year tenure the flats expanded noticeably, and the river grew shallower, proving his point that random dredging was futile. After responsibility for the river transferred to Maj. William P. Craighill in the early 1870s, Congress created a Board of Survey to prepare a permanent plan for the improvement of the Washington and Georgetown harbors. Despite the study, no funds were allocated for its implementation, and arbitrary dredging efforts continued throughout the next decade. River dredgers deposited the hauled muck and soil in two designated places; the Harbor Flats, which included the region south of the railroad bridge between the Washington Channel and the central Potomac Channel (later to become East Potomac Park), and the Potomac Flats described as "any locality below the city . . . sufficiently removed from the channel and otherwise suitable for dumping which the bidder might be able to find."⁵ Since there were no retaining walls, the soil eventually slipped back into the channel meeting new deposits brought down the river by floods or "freshets."

Sylvanius T. Abert oversaw river improvements in the late 1870s and affirmed the need for a systematic reclamation plan; his supervisor, Engineer Commissioner William J. Twining, recommended ending the Washington Channel at Long Bridge and constructing a tidal basin at its head equipped with floodgates that would release a strong flow of water with the receding tide and naturally flush debris from the channel. By creating high and firm land over the mud flats, Twining envisioned that the government would be more than recompensed for reclamation costs when the new property was sold for private development.

It was a major flood on February 12, 1881, that ultimately prompted congressional action. When the ice that had formed on the river during an unusually cold winter began to break apart and float downstream, it stacked up around the piers of Long Bridge, forming a dam in the river. Within hours the river rose dramatically, putting about 254 acres of the city under water. The flood submerged most of the area south of Pennsylvania Avenue, reaching the foot of Capitol Hill and surging dangerously close to the White House. Less than a month later, on March 3, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act to provide a survey "with reference to the improvement of navigation, the establishment of a harbor line, and the raising of the flats so far as their improvement may be necessary to the improvement of navigation and the establishment of the harbor line."⁶

The survey board, led by Lt. Col. Quincy A. Gillmore of the Corps of Engineers, derived its plan from the 1872 survey, Twining's and Abert's revisions of 1879 and 1881, and reports of similar projects undertaken in Holland. On

⁴ Annual Report . . ., 1867, 525.

⁵ Chappell, 22.

⁶ Annual Report . . ., 1882, 978.

August 2, 1882, Congress allocated \$400,000 to begin the reclamation process outlined in the Gillmore Report. Peter Conover Hains, appointed to oversee the project, divided the area to be reclaimed into three parts. Section I due south of the White House between Easby's Point and 17th Street was the most noxious and was where the reclamation project began.

Private contractors dredged the river bottom with scows equipped with clam diggers and dippers. Laborers then loaded the muck on rail cars traversing the flats on a network of wood trestles, to spread it evenly over the marshy land. As the channel was dredged, a retaining wall was erected to keep the reclaimed land from slipping back into the river. To build these walls, contractors excavated trenches and lined them with mattresses of woven brush floated into place then submerged by loads of rocks and riprap piled on top.⁷ By 1883, 8,000 linear feet of retaining wall was in place, and dredgers began digging immediately outside the barriers, and dumping the fill behind them to form a firm and continuous embankment. By August 1884, contractors began forming an embankment along the Washington Channel in Section III, the Harbor Flats region south of the railroad bridge that would later be known as East Potomac Park.

In 1884 new contractors Benson and McNee introduced an hydraulic dredger that sucked muck from the river bottom and sprayed it over the areas being reclaimed. By this method the fill material was suspended in water, so small channels had to be formed to drain the water after the solid matter had precipitated to the bottom. Although more complex than earlier methods the McNee dredge was more efficient, spreading the fill more evenly across the flats, and less expensive, eliminating the need for extensive trestle networks.⁸

By 1885 work had progressed into Section II--the area between the Washington Monument Grounds and the region set aside for a tidal basin. Twining envisioned a tidal basin with an inlet gate on the river that would open inward, allowing the basin to fill in high tide. An outlet gate at the head of the Washington Channel would open with the falling tide and flush the channel of debris. In 1887 contractors began dredging out the basin and building cofferdams for the outlet gate. After the last cofferdam was removed in 1890 and the gates were set in action, Hains commented that they worked "very satisfactorily."⁹

By the time Hains was transferred from his post in 1891, the groundwork for East and West Potomac parks was firmly in place. His successors continued work at an unsteady pace subject to varying annual congressional allocations and frequent setbacks from floods, freezing, and equipment failures. By 1893 the commissioner in charge asked for additional funds to clear the prolific growth of weeds, willows, and underbrush in the fertile reclaimed soil--the first indication that the flats resembled dry land. He also requested police patrols of the unimproved area.¹⁰ By 1896 the tidal basin was surrounded by a seawall, except at the place set aside for the inlet gates and at the "beach" where Washingtonians had begun bathing in the new man-made swimming hole.

⁷ Chappell, 34-36.

⁸ Chappell, 39.

⁹ Chappell, 51.

¹⁰ Chappell, 50.

As the project progressed, landowners sued for ownership of the reclaimed land, until finally the *Martin F. Morris et al. v. United States*, or the Potomac Flats case, was resolved by the Supreme Court in 1898 in favor of the U.S. government. Even before federal ownership was assured, discussion arose over use of the reclaimed land. Twining and Michler recommended selling it for private development, as was done in Boston's Back Bay. Washington banker and financier Charles Carroll Glover advocated its development as a large riverside park. Glover prevailed in 1897 when Congress passed Senate Bill 3307, establishing that the "entire area formerly known as the Potomac Flats, and now being reclaimed, together with the tidal reservoirs be, and the same are hereby, made and declared a public park, under the name of the Potomac Park, and to be forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people."¹¹

Amid the land reclamation and the accompanying debates about its ownership and use, a greater aesthetic and social movement was afoot in Washington and across the nation. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago solidified the City Beautiful movement promoted by architects and landscape architects such as Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The fair featured gleaming white, classically inspired buildings arranged in a formal landscaped setting of sparkling fountains and lagoons. As Washington celebrated its centennial, these designers and their colleagues at the American Institute of Architects envisioned Washington as the White City on the Potomac--a permanent manifestation of the ideals exhibited temporarily on the shores of Lake Michigan. To derive a new park plan for the city, Michigan Sen. James McMillan introduced a bill creating the Senate Park Commission, which was composed of Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, sculptor Auguste St. Gaudens, and Charles Moore as secretary. The committee's final report, published in 1902 after extensive studies of cities in America and abroad, incorporated the newly reclaimed land in its grand scheme for Washington's central core.

The commission lauded Pierre L'Enfant's original plan and was inspired by its formal aesthetic of grand promenades and impressive vistas. According to the McMillan plan, L'Enfant's Mall would be restored as a formal greensward lined with elms and Neoclassical buildings; the reclaimed land west of the Washington Monument would extend this grand axis and terminate at a Neoclassical monument to Abraham Lincoln on the shores of the Potomac River. Roads fanning out from a traffic circle or rond-point around this monument would lead to riverside drives and to a grand bridge to Arlington House in Virginia. A long reflecting pool, or canal, would provide a formal water element connecting the Lincoln and Washington monuments. Likewise, the vista from the White House would be extended along the land reclaimed south of the Washington Monument and would terminate at another monument, such as a pantheon honoring the signers of the Constitution.

The Senate Park Plan provided the model that guided the development of West Potomac Park into the 1940s. Like the plans of Michler, Twining, and Abert for the improvement of the Potomac River, this plan was also revised and altered during the decades that passed before its completion. The first step toward the development of West Potomac Park was the August 12, 1901, transfer of 31 acres of new land south of the Washington Monument--known as Section II in Hain's model--to the OPB&G. By late 1903, this area featured a speedway along the

¹¹ Chappell, 66.

northeast side of the tidal basin reserved for "speeding" on Saturday evenings. The roadway became known for its vistas of the city, the river and the hills of Virginia, and a widely distributed postcard of the era professed that "Any day in fine weather one may see the president of the U. S., foreign ambassadors and ministers, judges of the U. S. Supreme Court, army and navy officers, and senators and representatives with their families enjoying a spin over its surface."

One of the main entrances into West Potomac Park was from Constitution Avenue (then called B Street) at 17th Street. Although the canal along the north side of the Mall had been converted into B Street in the 1870s, the old canal house, formerly at the mouth of the canal, remained near the 17th Street park entrance. In 1902 the OPB&G evicted the family that had been squatting in the building and restored the interior to serve as lodge for a watchman assigned to guard the park.¹² The OPB&G then concentrated on providing access to the park by constructing a network of park roads for pedestrians, equestrians, carriages, and automobiles. In 1906 a road was built around north and east sides of the tidal basin, and another was begun the following year along the river between the inlet bridge and the foot of 26th Street. When the inlet gate was finally finished in 1909, this roadway was completed along the entire length of the west shore of park. The inlet gate featured a steel curtain that could be mechanically lowered to keep the water out when the river was too turbid. The 184'-long bridge over the gates included a 25'-wide roadway flanked by sidewalks. To allow boats to enter the tidal basin for repairs and dredging, this bridge was equipped with a removable floor.

While the completion of the inlet gates was technically complex, legal complications slowed the construction of Constitution Avenue along the north border of West Potomac Park. Since it was planned slightly north of the original shoreline, fourteen different parties owned the land in the roadway's path. After condemning the land, Congress allocated the funds to construct the road in 1908. It was to eventually connect with the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, a recreational drive that would run along the Rock Creek valley to form a scenic connection between the central core Mall area and Rock Creek Park, a large natural tract of land purchased by the federal government around the turn of the century. Such a parkway was envisioned by planners of the nineteenth century and was affirmed by the McMillan Commission. Acquisition of the land necessary to build the connection, however, did not begin until 1915.

As these roadways improved access to the recreation area, parkland was sacrificed to ease travel between Washington and Virginia. Long Bridge, for many years seen as a safety hazard, was replaced with a new structure in 1901-06, and a new approach to the bridge was begun over the Washington Channel in 1905. Called the Highway Bridge, the structure opened to traffic in 1906. In 1908 on an average day the bridge was opened for vessels around fifteen times and was crossed by fifty-two single trolley cars, 201 trains of two cars each, 103 automobiles, 780 double teams, 369 single teams, 543 travelers on foot, and nine on horseback.¹³

East and West Potomac parks were reclaimed during a time of rapid urban growth, and as residential and commercial development flourished, Washingtonians demanded more space for recreation and leisure. The OPB&G equipped the huge

¹² In 1915 the canal lock house was moved 49' west and 6' north, since it was blocking a planned roadway.

¹³ Myer, 32.

new expanse for a variety of active and passive pastimes almost as soon as it was reclaimed from the river. A polo field was laid out west of the Tidal Basin in 1908, and an oblong athletic field was graded near the site where the Jefferson Memorial stands today. A bandstand was erected near the polo field in 1909 to entertain large crowds with military band music. The OPB&G used the land for its own needs as well, forming a nursery and propagating garden in 50 acres acquired in 1903 between the railroad embankment and Tidal Basin. By 1909, the reclamation of Sections I and II was declared complete, and the entire area of West Potomac Park was transferred to the OPB&G and added to the system of federal reservations as Reservation No. 332. The railroad embankment marked the division between the improved and unimproved areas and became the official boundary between East and West Potomac parks.

As residents and visitors flocked to the park on foot, horseback, or in the increasingly popular automobile, the OPB&G continued its embellishment. When the city of Tokyo presented 3,000 Japanese cherry trees to the United States they were planted in the vicinity of the Tidal Basin. First Lady Mrs. William Howard Taft and Viscountess Chinda of Japan ceremonially planted the first two trees in early April 1912. Later that month, West Potomac Park received its first permanent memorial, a statue of Revolutionary War hero Commodore John Paul Jones. The statue was erected north of the Tidal Basin at the foot of 17th Street to commemorate Jones' celebrated interment at the Naval Academy in 1905. Facing north toward the White House, the statue stands in front of a marble pylon with spouts for a fountain at its base. Clipped linden trees were planted as a backdrop to the sculpture soon after its erection.

John Paul Jones' monument was soon overshadowed by the most significant addition to West Potomac Park to date, the Lincoln Memorial. Although the McMillan Commission had picked this site for a great memorial to the sixteenth president, the residual reputation of the area as a malarial swamp roused early resistance. One opponent stated that a memorial there would surely "shake itself down with loneliness and ague."¹⁴ The site was favored, however, by the Commission of Fine Arts, a review board set up in 1910 by McMillan plan advocate Theodore Roosevelt basically to oversee the implementation of the 1901-02 plan. Ground was broken for the memorial in 1915, and as the building was erected according to architect Henry Bacon's design, the surrounding land was prepared as an appropriate setting. Beginning in 1917 the land west of the memorial was extended farther out into the Potomac River to accommodate the rond point planned around the memorial's base. In 1916, 250 English elms were planted to form a border for the Reflecting Pool that stretched eastward to the Washington Monument. Planted before the pool was excavated, the elm roots soon suffocated in the marshy ground and the stunted trees toppled easily in storms.¹⁵

As the Lincoln Memorial was being completed, another massive building project undertaken in West Potomac Park was certainly unforeseen by the McMillan Commission. When the United States entered World War I, a dire need for additional office space led President Woodrow Wilson to authorize construction of temporary buildings in the new federal property. In 1918, sprawling multicorridorred stucco structures were thrown up west of 17th Street between the

¹⁴ Kohler, 8.

¹⁵ CFA, Ninth Annual Report..., 12S-27.

planned reflecting pool and Constitution Avenue to house the War and Navy departments. The McMillan Commission plan called for a cross-shaped lagoon, but the "tempos" stood where the north cross arm was to be excavated. Rather than wait for the buildings to be razed at the end of the war, the pool was redesigned as a simple oblong--a wise decision considering that the "tempos" remained in place until 1970. The Reflecting Pool was complete by the time the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated with great ceremony in 1922.

Throughout the war, hot, weary war-time workers could find refreshment in the Tidal Basin. A sandy beach and bathhouse were built in 1917 near the site of today's Jefferson Memorial, and a liquid chlorine plant was installed under the inlet bridge in an effort to sanitize the swimming facility. In its first year of operation in 1919, the Tidal Basin accommodated 46,000 swimmers. As Washingtonians increasingly enjoyed the facilities in East and West Potomac parks, OPB&G chief Col. William W. Harts sought to recognize the OPB&G officers who oversaw their development. In 1917 he named the tidal basin Twining Lake in recognition of the man who first envisioned the flushing reservoir. Likewise, the tip of East Potomac Park was named Hains Point in honor of the engineer who oversaw its construction. Hains Point retains this name today, but Twining Lake was never adopted in common usage, and the reservoir continues to be referred to simply as the Tidal Basin.

The war inflated the inner-city population and increased the need for recreation areas. The OPB&G responded by providing more active recreation facilities in the parks of the central core. Although the bulk of recreation facilities were located in East Potomac Park, West Potomac Park was equipped with an archery field and a nine-hole practice golf course on the grounds south of the Lincoln Memorial. After the bathing beach was eliminated in 1925 the wall around the Tidal Basin was finally completed. Although swimming was prohibited, the Tidal Basin was a popular place for sailing model boats, and a boathouse with a covered porch, storage area, and lunchroom was built in 1928 near the foot of 17th Street.

West Potomac Park received a number of new memorials in the 1920s. John Ericsson, inventor and builder of the ironclad ship the Monitor, was honored with an allegorical statue on the river drive due south of the Lincoln Memorial. Although the granite statue group was not completed until 1927, a plaster model was set in place for the dedication ceremony in 1926 attended by President Calvin Coolidge and the crown prince of Sweden. A marble urn was erected in a rose garden northwest of the Lincoln Memorial in 1928. The urn was carved from a column that stood in Havana, Cuba, to honor the victims of the Maine, blown up in 1898, and was presented to Calvin Coolidge at the Pan American Congress in Cuba. The wooded region south of the reflecting pool was selected as the site for a memorial band shell to honor the citizens of the District of Columbia who fought in World War I. The temple-like structure, inscribed with the names of the 435 District residents killed in the war, was dedicated on Armistice Day in 1931. Also that year a memorial was dedicated to the victims of the 1912 wreck of the Titanic. The memorial was erected north of West Potomac Park along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, still under construction along the waterfront. In 1934, a statue of William Jennings Bryan was erected in the park near Easby's Point.¹⁶

As these smaller memorials were set in place, the massive Arlington

¹⁶ Goode, Outdoor Sculpture, 400, 539, 391, 540-41.

Memorial Bridge was under construction across the Potomac River from southwest of the Lincoln Memorial. An integral part of the McMillan plan, this bridge was to link the Union leader's memorial with the home of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Arlington Cemetery. Intended as a symbolic link between North and South, by the time it was built in 1926-32, the bridge was also desperately needed to ease auto traffic between Washington and the growing suburb of Arlington. Designed by McKim, Mead, and White, the graceful bridge is comprised of nine segmental arch spans with a draw span at the center.

Memorial Bridge was erected as Neoclassical architecture reached its peak of popularity, whereas the third major memorial erected in West Potomac Park was constructed as modernism began its rise to prominence. Franklin Delano Roosevelt attended the December 1938 ceremony hailing the ground breaking for the Jefferson Memorial. Construction began on the Neoclassical rotunda on the south side of the Tidal Basin after rancorous disputes over its style and location. The tradition of hailing the blossoming of the cherry trees with a festival began in 1935. The trees had become such a beloved aspect of the capital city that many objected to the removal of any of them for a monument on the Tidal Basin. Additionally, John Russell Pope's design was ridiculed as ponderous and old-fashioned. Despite the controversies, the domed rotunda was erected on the south side of the Tidal Basin due south of the White House and was dedicated in 1943. Completion of the standing bronze portrait of Jefferson inside was delayed by World War II metal shortages and was not set in place until 1947.

Just as World War I tempos were built during the Lincoln Memorial's construction, World War II tempos were erected as builders completed the Jefferson Memorial. The 1918 War and Navy Department tempos still stood on the north side of the Reflecting Pool when a larger set of similar buildings were built on the south side. To house the great numbers of workers who had been enticed to the city with patriotic fervor and the promise of good salaries, barracks were built on the site of the small golf course south of Lincoln Memorial. To ease the commute around the long Reflecting Pool between the barracks and the northern tempos, two enclosed elevated walkways were built across the grand canal.

World War II also brought an increase in population and traffic congestion. More roads were cut through West Potomac Park to provide access to the 1906 Highway Bridge and ease travel to the Pentagon in Arlington. The eastbound access road (now an extension of Independence Avenue) was designed to span the north bay of the Tidal Basin over a granite-faced steel bridge completed in 1943; in 1954 it was named Kutz Bridge in honor of Charles W. Kutz, one of the District's engineer commissioners.

The 1906 Highway Bridge itself was becoming obsolete, and in 1947 Congress authorized a new crossing.¹⁷ The Rochambeau Memorial Bridge was erected in 1947-50 to carry northbound traffic over the Potomac River, the George Mason Bridge was erected in 1960-67 for southbound traffic, and in 1967 the old Highway Bridge was demolished. While the George Mason Bridge was under construction on the south side of West Potomac Park, approaches for yet another Potomac crossing sliced through the north side of the park. Construction of the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, begun in 1960 from the site of old Easby's Point, necessitated the removal of the Cuban Friendship Urn and the William Jennings

¹⁷ Myer, 32.

Bryan statue.¹⁸ The Titanic Memorial was also moved from its site on the river in 1966 to allow for the construction of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.¹⁹

The post-war years not only brought new traffic patterns to the park, but also brought a shift in visitor's perceptions of the public space. When Marian Anderson sang to a crowd of 75,000 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday 1939 after having been prohibited from singing on the stage at the Daughters of the American Revolution auditorium, she imbued Lincoln's memorial with new symbolism for African Americans.²⁰ Over the next decades, the steps became a stage for solemn ceremonies, while the park along the sides of the reflecting pool provided space for large gatherings. The sanctity of the space and the regulations of the National Park Service (which gained control of the public grounds from the OPB&G in 1933) limited these early gatherings to prayerful meetings, taking on more the character of "church picnics."²¹ Nevertheless, these orderly, if passive, displays of unity and dissent began the tradition that would generate more forthright protests of the 1960s. The Lincoln Memorial steps were the natural gathering place for the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that marked the centennial of emancipation in 1963. More than 200,000 protestors filled West Potomac Park for the event that culminated in a rousing speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King. This historic gathering endowed the site with a broader significance, making it a forum for a wide variety of groups demonstrating against or rallying for a myriad of issues.

Until 1970, these events took place in the shadow of the bulky stucco templos. It is said that President Richard Nixon, tired of looking down on these templos during his frequent helicopter trips to the White House, recommended their removal and replacement with a garden. When the buildings were finally razed, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill designed Constitution Gardens in their place. In contrast to the stark, linear landscapes advocated by the McMillan report, the designers of Constitution Gardens were inspired by Andrew Jackson Downing's earlier landscapes of the Mall, that featured meandering paths, and undulating terrain.²² The amorphous lake and broad meadow were set in place in the 1970s, and in the 1980s, a monument was designed on an island in the lake to honor the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

When Congress authorized the erection of a memorial honoring the veterans of the Vietnam War in the park, the Commission of Fine Arts sought a design that would not significantly alter the landscape plan in place. The winning entry, by Yale architecture school student Maya Lin incorporated a striking memorial sunken in the grounds of the Constitution Gardens meadow that retained the openness of the landscape while making reference, through carefully engineered vistas to both the Lincoln and Washington monuments. As with every other major memorial in

¹⁸ The Cuban Friendship Urn is now in storage while the William Jennings Bryan statue is on infinite loan to the city of Salem, Illinois. Goode, Outdoor Sculpture, 539-40.

¹⁹ The Titanic Memorial was re-erected on its current site on the Washington Channel near Fourth and P streets, SW.

²⁰ Sandage, 135-36.

²¹ Sandage, 158-60.

²² J. Carter Brown, "The Mall and the Commission of Fine Arts," The Mall in Washington, 253.

the park, the memorial design engendered heated debate. Designed by Lin as "a long polished black stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth," it was criticized by opponents as "a black gash of shame and sorrow." As a compromise, the CFA authorized the addition of a figurative sculpture by Frederick Hart set in a grove south of the wall. The wall was dedicated November 11, 1982, and the sculpture and adjacent flag in 1984.²³ Another sculpture group designed by Glenna Goodacre depicting three women and a wounded soldier will be erected near the wall in 1994 to honor the women who participated in the Vietnam War.

Currently, a large memorial commemorating the Korean War is under construction on the south side of the Reflecting Pool. Scheduled for completion in 1994, the massive memorial designed by the architectural firm of Cooper-Lecky will feature 19 oversized combattant figures sculpted by Frank Gaylord.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Overall dimensions: West Potomac Park encompasses nearly 400 acres.
- B. Materials:
 - I. Roads, paths, paving: West Potomac Park is traversed by a number of asphalt automotive roadways. Constitution Avenue runs along the north side and Independence Avenue runs parallel to it to the south. Short roadways leading from Constitution and Independence avenues to the circle around the Lincoln Memorial are called Bacon and French drives, respectively, in honor of the architect and sculptor of the Lincoln Memorial. The roadway north of the Lincoln Memorial along the waterfront, forms the southern end of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. South of the memorial, the waterfront roadway called Ohio Drive extends into East Potomac Park. At the inlet bridge, Ohio Drive meets West Basin Drive which runs around the west border of the Tidal Basin to the Kutz Bridge where it becomes East Basin Drive, leading over the outlet bridge and to the Jefferson Memorial. Access roads to the three Potomac River crossings also traverse the park, as do 17th and 23rd streets.

West Potomac Park also features almost twenty miles of paved or graveled pedestrian walks. In addition to the walks along most of the roadways, there are several parallel gravel walks along the Reflecting Pool, a series of paved meandering walks through Constitution Gardens, and a 1.8-mile concrete walk around the perimeter of the Tidal Basin. The continuous walk along the Potomac waterfront also serves as a bicycle path.
 2. Vegetation: West Potomac Park's plantings are situated in accord with the various functions of the different parts of the park. Toward the northwest side of the park, a grove of trees lines the watergate area between the Lincoln Memorial and the Roosevelt Bridge. Sodded areas flanking 23rd street feature several baseball diamonds. The large expanse between 23rd and 17th streets south of Constitution Avenue features the large meadow and man-made lake of Constitution Gardens. Plantings in the central ceremonial stretch along the Reflecting Pool consist of grass and formal

²³ Kohler, 125-35.

rows of trees. A more densely planted area, known as Ash Woods, forms a grove in the long strip between the gravel path south of the Reflecting Pool and Independence Avenue. The region directly south of Independence Avenue is a simple sodded field used for polo games. The elliptical area surrounded by Ohio and West Basin drives is also sodded with trees lining the roadways. The most noted plantings in West Potomac Park are the hundreds of Japanese Cherry trees that are clustered along most of the perimeter of the Tidal Basin. Large clumps of trees and shrubs form the settings for both the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials.

3. Structures:

- a. Recreational equipment: Baseball diamonds are located in the elliptical area between Ohio and West Basin drives and north of the Lincoln Memorial on both sides of 23rd Street. The grove northwest of the memorial west of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is equipped with courts and nets for volleyball.
- b. Benches: For the most part, seating in West Potomac Park consists of standard metal-frame, wood-slat benches interspersed along most of the pedestrian walks.
- c. Statues, markers, monuments:
 - i. Large, gilded equestrian allegories called the Arts of Peace face the Lincoln Memorial from large pedestals flanking the entrance to Rock Creek Parkway. Sculpted by James Earle Fraser, the pair was erected in 1951.
 - ii. Large, gilded equestrian allegories symbolizing the Arts of War, face the Lincoln Memorial from large pedestals flanking the entrance to Arlington Memorial Bridge. Sculpted by Leo Friedlander, the pair was erected in 1951.
 - iii. The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial at the west end of Constitution Gardens consists of a black stone wall designed by Maya Lin and erected in 1982. The three bronze soldiers in the sculpture group facing the wall from the south were designed by Frederick Hart and erected in 1984. East of the Hart Group, a bronze memorial to the women of the Vietnam War will be dedicated in 1994.
 - iv. The Korean War Veteran's Memorial, scheduled for completion in 1994 will be located on the south side of the Reflecting Pool on direct axis with the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. The memorial will feature 19 oversized figures sculpted by Frank Gaylord and a bas relief wall, which together will converge on a circular pool of remembrance.
 - v. The Signers of the Declaration of Independence memorial is located on the island in the lake in Constitution Gardens. It

was erected in the mid 1980s in a rustic landscape setting designed by Joseph E. Brown of EDAW.

- vi. The Commodore John Paul Jones memorial was erected in 1912 at the south end of 17th Street. The bronze statue designed by sculptor Charles Henry Niehaus and architect Thomas Hastings stands against a marble pylon.
 - vii. The Japanese Lantern on the northwest side of the Tidal Basin was erected in 1954. The lantern dates to the 1650s and was given to the United States by the governor of Tokyo.
 - viii. The Japanese Pagoda erected near the intersection of Ohio and West Basin drives in 1958 dates to the 1600s and was a gift from the Mayor of Yokohama.
 - ix. The John Ericsson Monument, designed by sculptor James Earle Fraser and architect Albert Ross was erected south of the Lincoln Memorial at the base of 23rd Street in 1926.
 - x. The District of Columbia World War I memorial band shell was erected south of the Reflecting Pool and west of 17th Street in 1931. The marble Greek Doric temple by architects Frederick H. Brooke, Horace Peaslee, and Nathan Wyeth is inscribed with names of District residents killed in World War I.
- d. Fountains, pools:
- i. The shape of the Tidal Basin between the Potomac River and Washington Monument was approved in 1882. It was entirely redredged in 1907. Encompassing 107 acres, it is an average of 6' deep.
 - ii. The Reflecting Pool completed between the Lincoln Memorial and Monument Grounds in 1921 measures 2,029' x 163' and is approximately 30" deep at the center.
 - iii. The rainbow pool at the east end of the reflecting pool is 221' x 160' and is 3' deep. Its water display uses 142 jets.
 - iv. The Constitution Gardens Lake is amorphous in shape with a circumference of 2,625' covering 7.14 acres, and it is approximately 2' deep.
- e. Buildings:
- i. The Lock Keepers House (See HABS No. DC-36) was erected along the City Canal in 1837. It was renovated as a guard house in 1903.

- ii. The Lincoln Memorial (See HABS No. DC-3) was completed at the west end of West Potomac Park in 1922. The building was designed by Henry Bacon and the statue is by Daniel Chester French.
 - iii. The Jefferson Memorial (See HABS No. DC-4) completed on the south side of the Tidal Basin in 1943 was designed by architect John Russell Pope and the sculpture within was designed by Rudolph Evans.
- f. Bridges
- i. The Theodore Roosevelt Bridge was built from the north west side of West Potomac Park across the Potomac River to Rosslyn in the 1960s.
 - ii. The Arlington Memorial Bridge (See HABS No. DC-7) was built in 1926-32 to span the Potomac River from the Lincoln Memorial to Arlington Cemetery.
 - iii. The Kutz Bridge was erected in 1943 to carry eastbound Independence Avenue traffic over the north bay of the Tidal Basin.
 - iv. The Inlet Bridge (See HABS No. DC-9-A) was completed in 1909 between the south bay of the Tidal Basin and the Potomac River. The 184'-long and 25'-wide roadway over the inlet is flanked by 7'3"-wide sidewalks and has a removable floor to allow boats in for repairs and dredging.
 - v. The Outlet Bridge (See HABS No. DC-9-B) was built in 1887-90 between the Tidal Basin and the Washington Channel.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Army Corps of Engineers. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations." 1884, 1887, 1894.

National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design. "Master Plan: National Capital Parks The Central Area." 1936.

- #### B. Park plans and early views: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans and early views. Additional plans and views are located at the Office of Land Use, National Capital Region.

C. Bibliography:

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- U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia. ed. by Charles Moore. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1902.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
1993

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

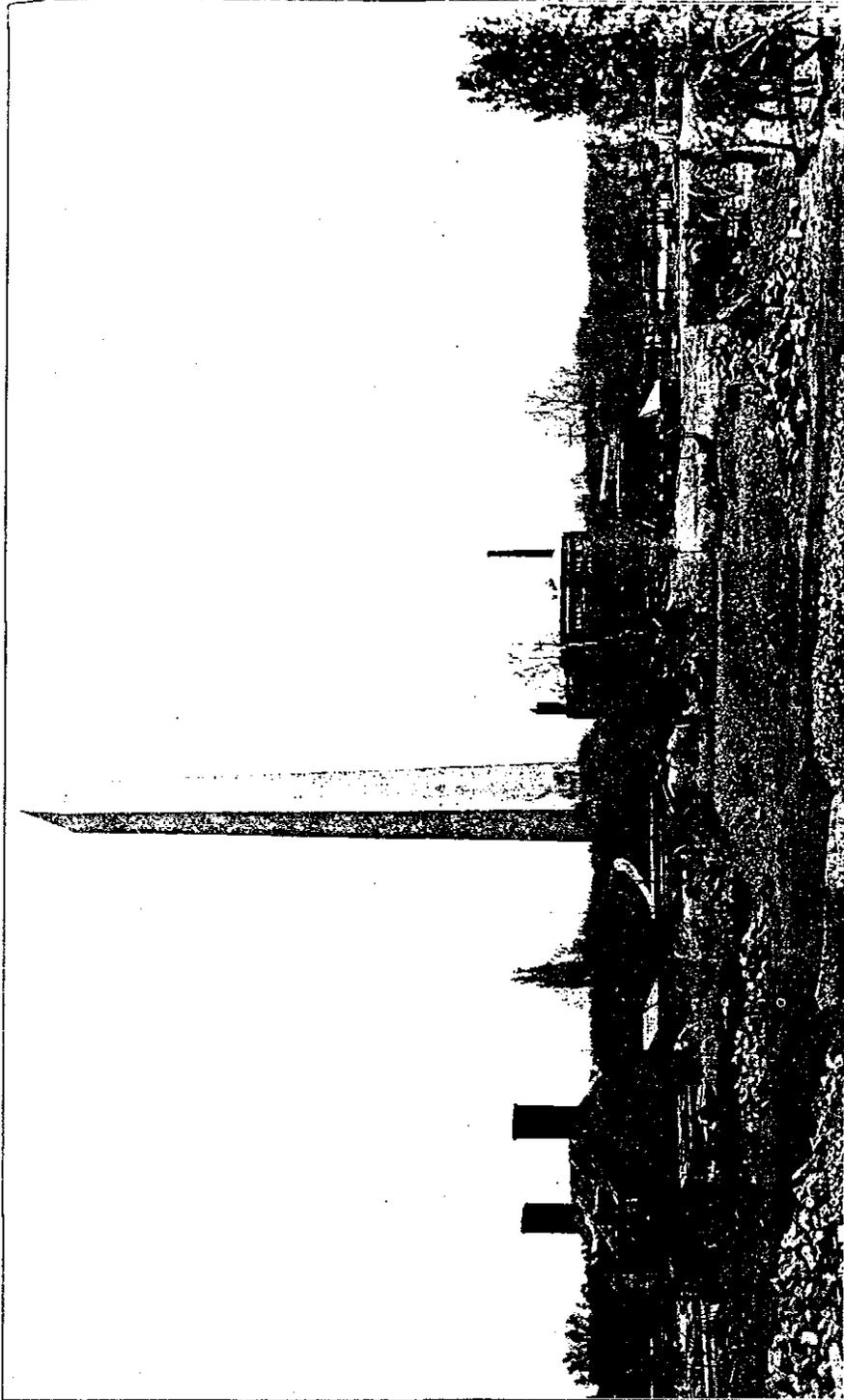
The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund

monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

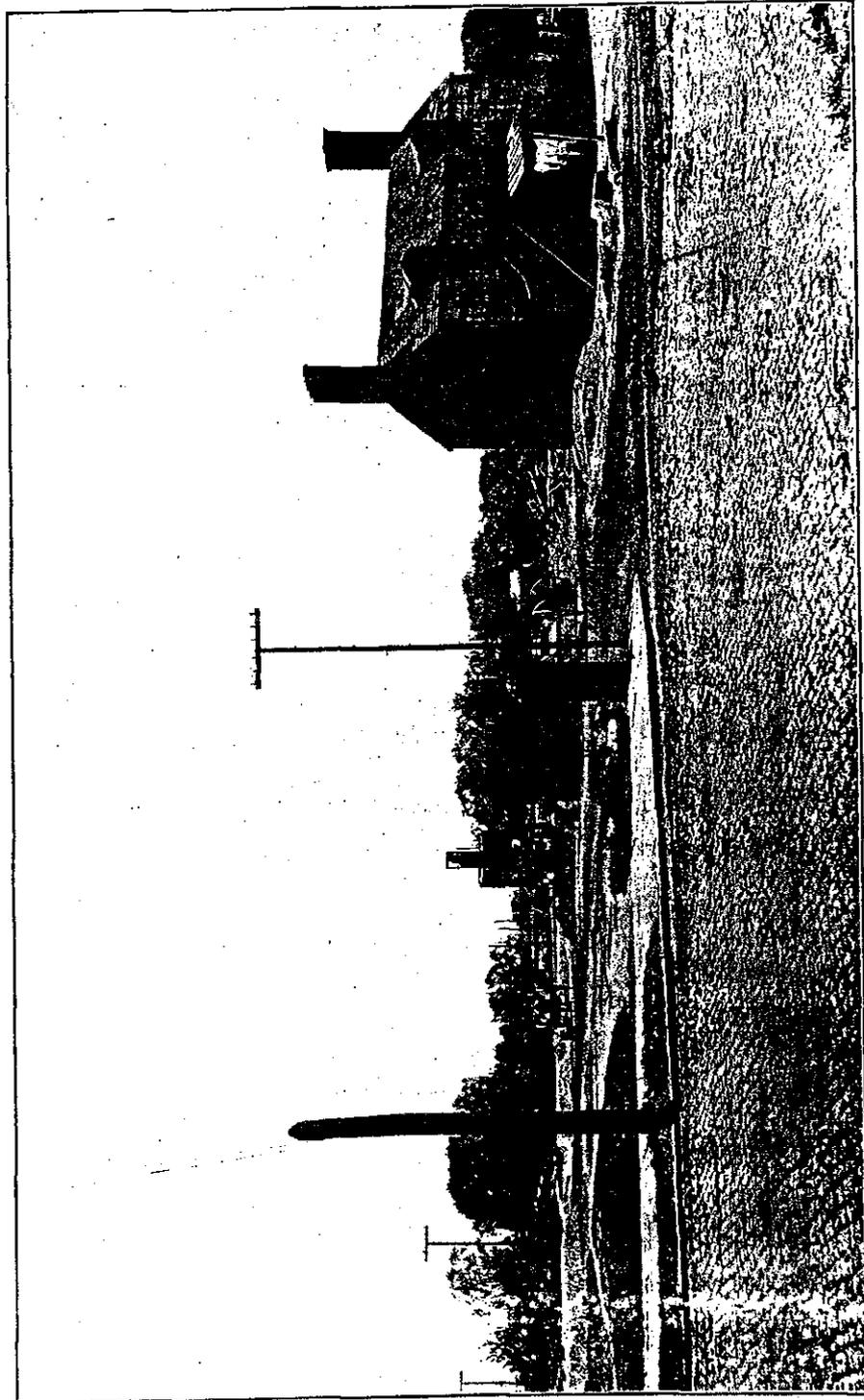
HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.

PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

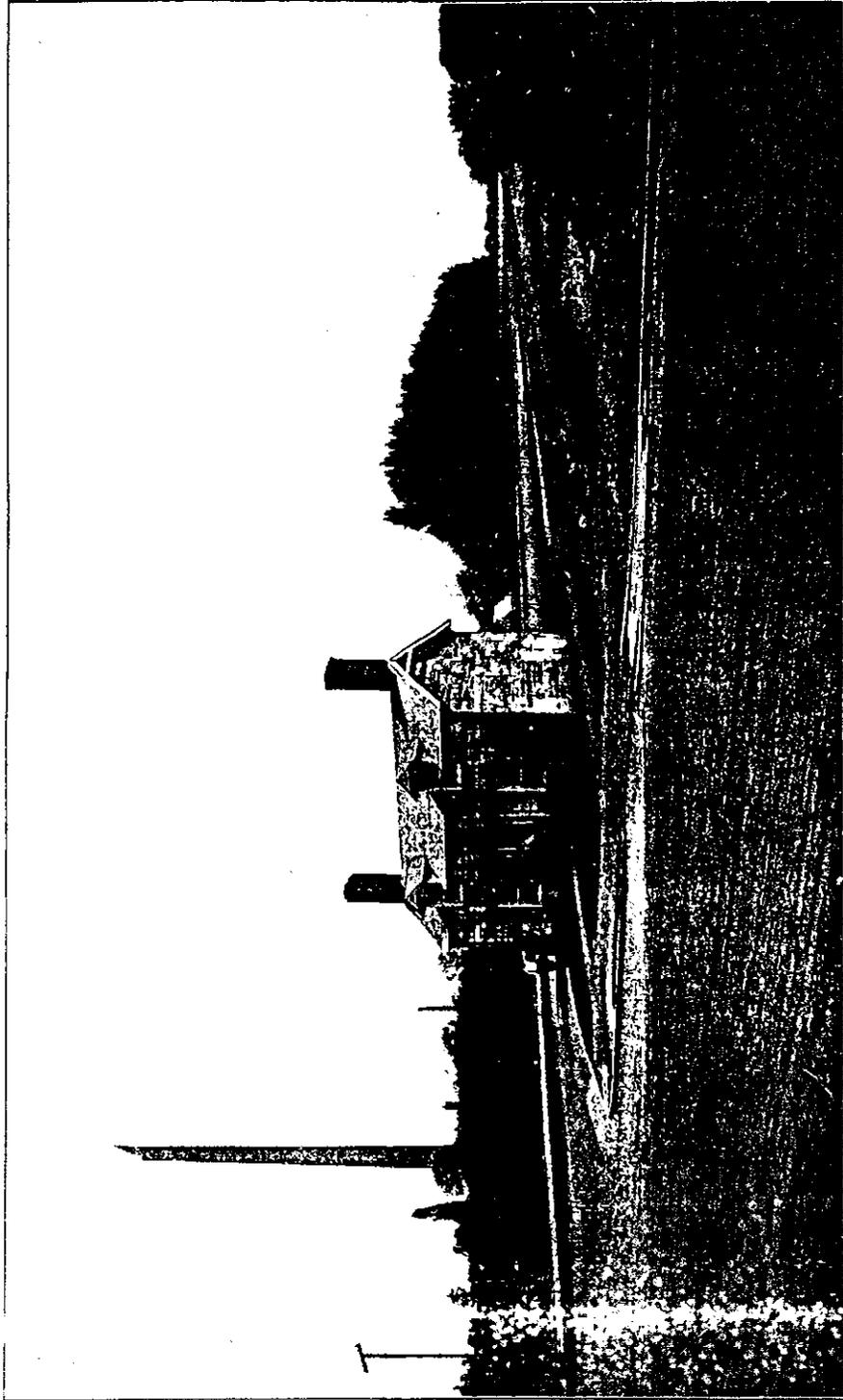
- Pages 18-20 1903: Photographs showing park entrance at 17th and B streets before and after improvements (Annual Reports . . ., 1903).
- Pages 21, 22 Undated postcards of West Potomac Park.
- Page 23 1926: Aerial photograph looking northwest from above 15th Street, SW.
- Page 24 1927: Park diagram with survey of park features (NPS Reservation Files).
- Page 25 Undated aerial photograph looking southeast from above the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.



VIEW OF OLD CANAL LOCK HOUSE AT SEVENTEENTH AND B STREETS NW, ENTRANCE TO POTOMAC PARK, LOOKING SOUTHEAST (BEFORE THE IMPROVEMENTS), MAY, 1902
(Lock house built in 1857.)



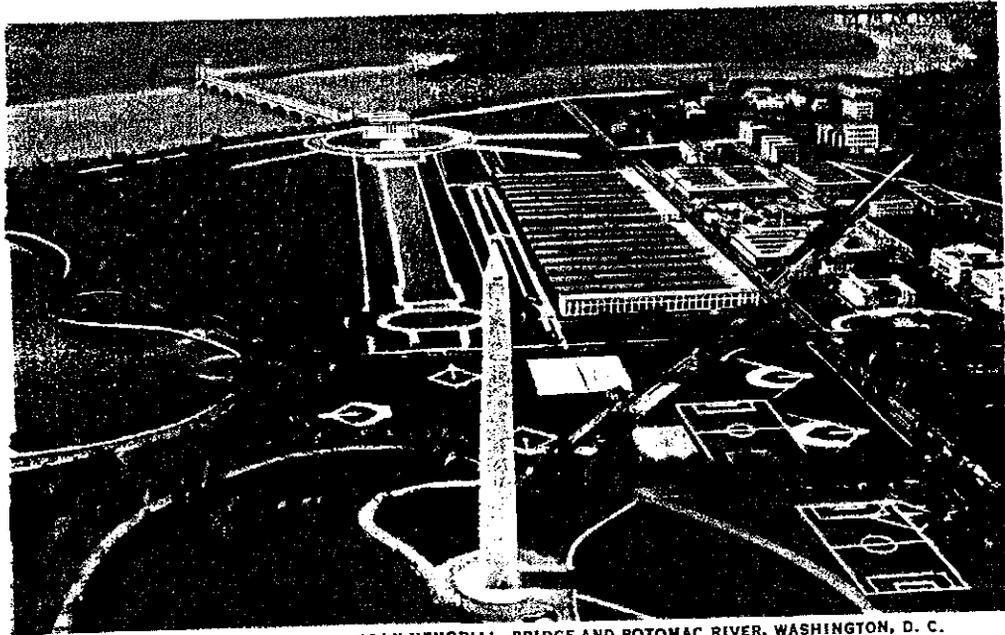
VIEW FROM ENTRANCE TO POTOMAC PARK SEVENTEENTH AND B STREETS NW. (BEFORE IMPROVEMENTS). WITH OLD CANAL LOCK HOUSE IN



VIEW OF OLD CANAL LOCK HOUSE AND ENTRANCE TO POTOMAC PARK AT SEVENTEENTH AND P STREETS NW, LOOKING SOUTHEAST (AFTER IMPROVEMENTS).

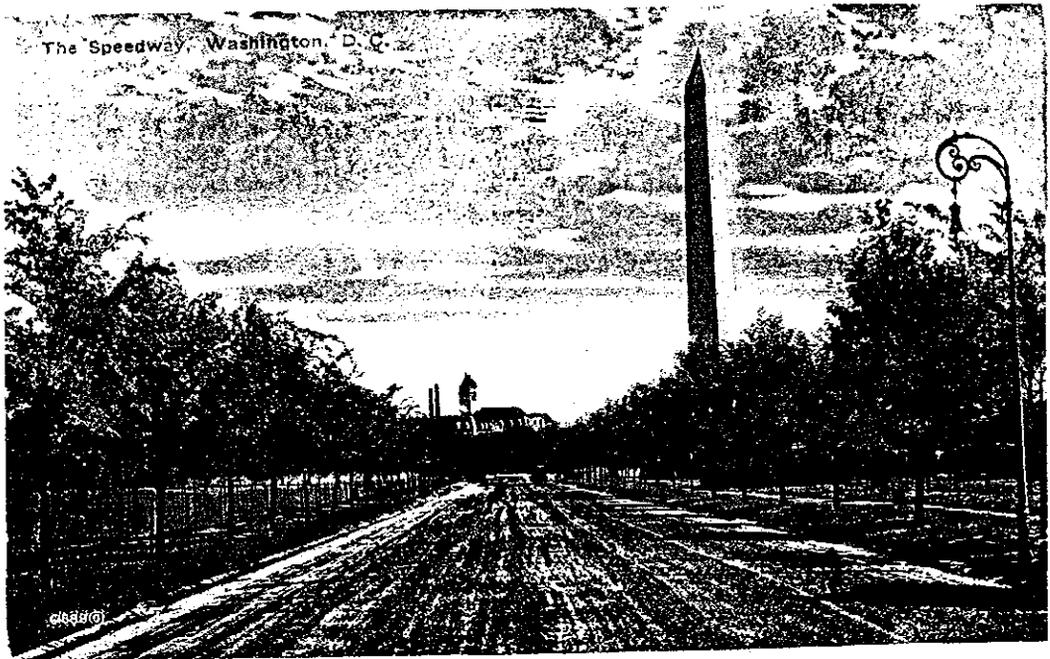
(Lock house built in 1837.)

PHOTO BY BLAKE



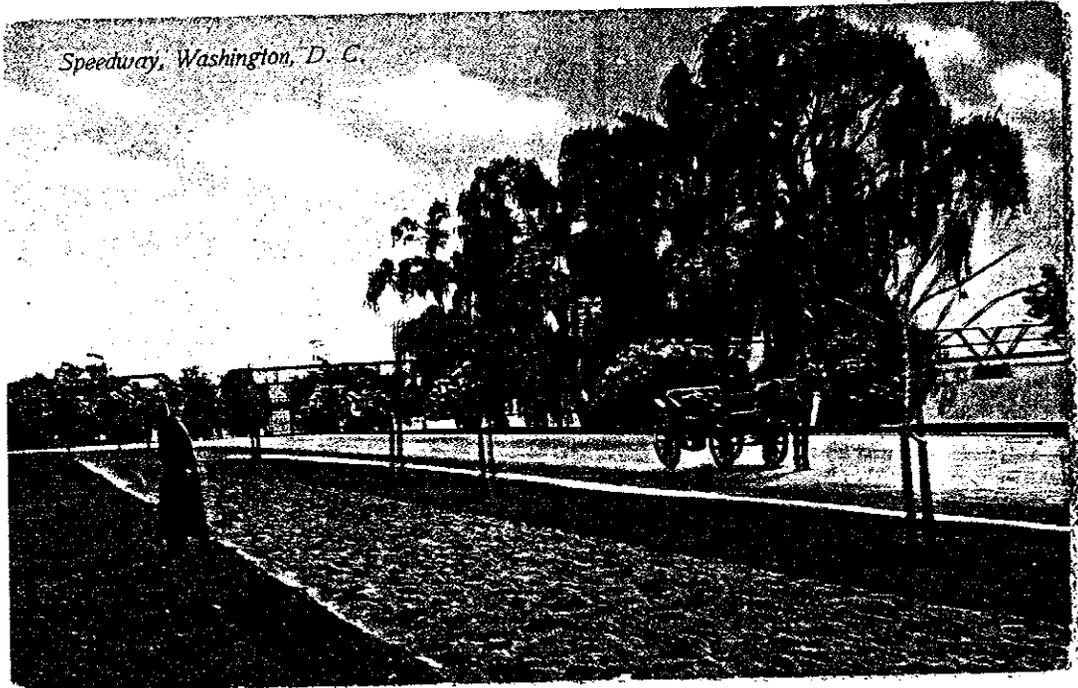
24-4970

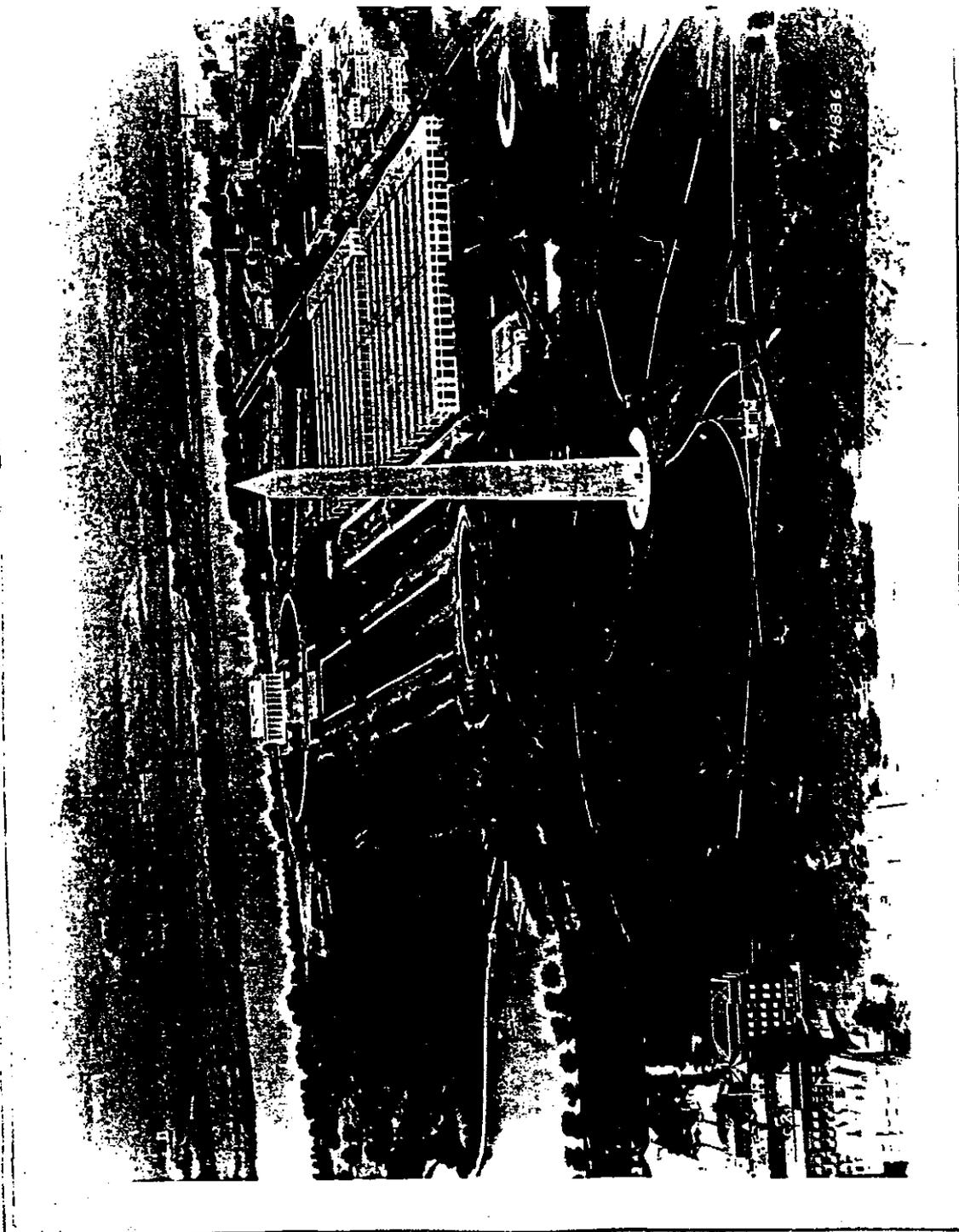
131 WASHINGTON MONUMENT, LINCOLN MEMORIAL, BRIDGE AND POTOMAC RIVER, WASHINGTON, D. C.



The Speedway, Washington, D. C.

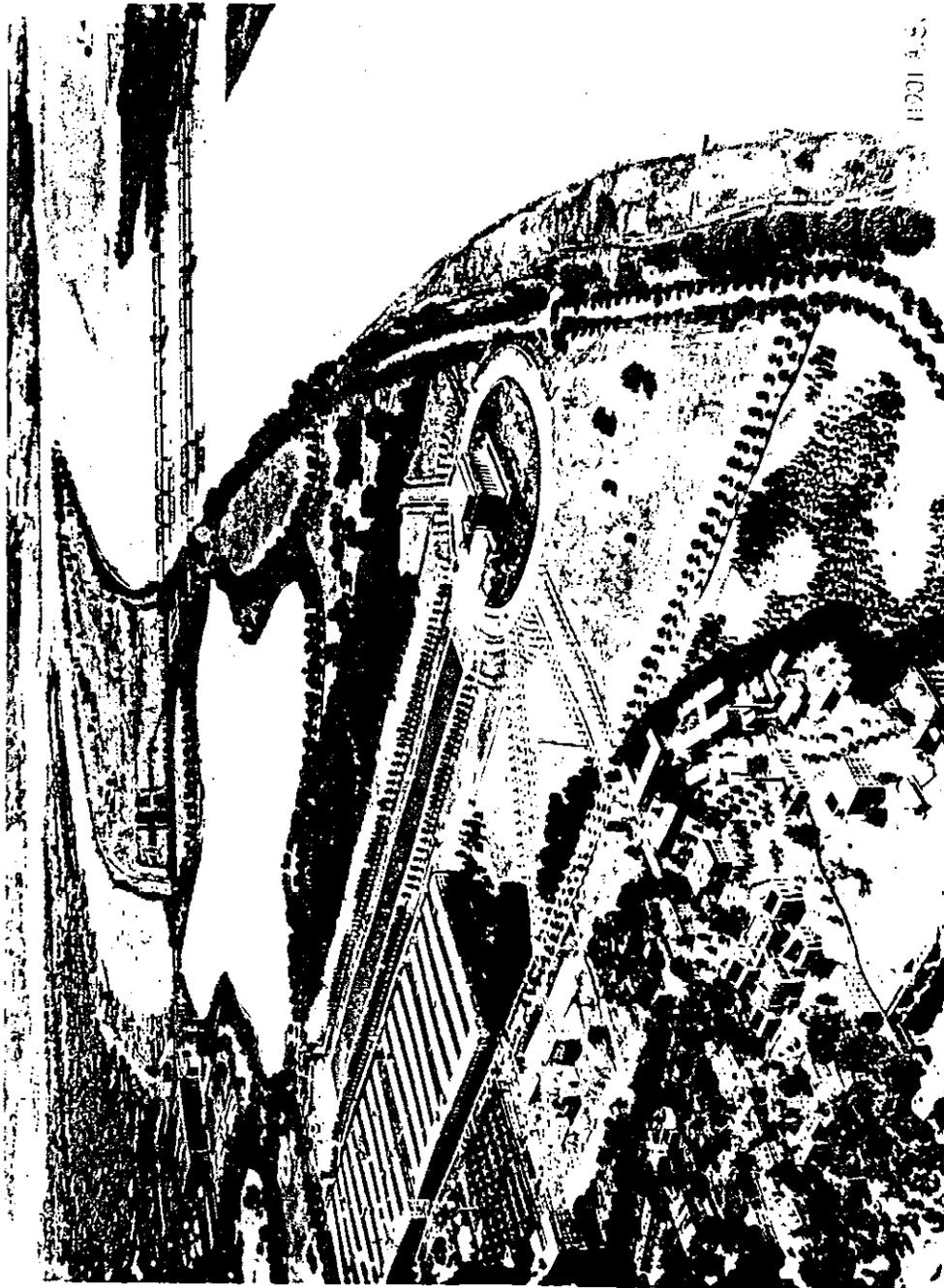
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~ VIEW OF WASHINGTON MONUMENT ~
FROM AIP.

8/11/



1901 A.S.

~ WEST POTOMAC PARK ~
INCLUDING TIDAL BASIN